

THE PERFECT CHURCH

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

It has been said, "If you are looking for the perfect church, don't join it because you'll ruin it. There are no perfect churches." This statement is true if we confine our meaning of "perfect" as sinless. In the first definition of "perfect" we are informed that it means conforming absolutely to the description of definition of an ideal type. Christ is our ideal and we all fall short of His glory. Nonetheless, conformity to Him is our goal. The second definition of "perfect" means excellent or complete beyond practical or theoretical improvement. And this would and should be the goal of the church, i.e., to come to the place of excellence that at any given time, nothing more could be done by the members to do better than what is being done already.

A key verse in our text is Ephesians 4:13: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The word "perfect" is from the Greek word *téleios* which means consummated goal; mature. One who has gone through the necessary stages to reach the end-goal, i.e., developed into a consummating completion by fulfilling the necessary process in our spiritual journey. This root (*tel-*) means reaching the end or aim. It is well illustrated by the old pirate's telescope, unfolding and extending out, one stage at a time to function at full-strength (coming to total effectiveness).

This is the goal of our Lord for us when He said in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Let's go there, or as I often hear people say these days, let's unpack that:

I. THE PERFECT PEOPLE

Ephesians 4:1-5

A. We should be addicted to our Lord. Ephesians 4:1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord..." This speaks of total dedication. Paul considers himself a happy captive of Jesus, as one who is "hooked." We usually think of addiction as something bad, but there are good addictions, such as the family of Stephanas as seen in I Corinthians 16:15: "I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.)" The only way to be addicted to ministry is to be addicted to the Lord.

B. We should be convicted to unity. Ephesians 4:2, 3

C. We should be dedicated to the Church. Ephesians 4:4, 5

II. THE PERFECT SAVIOR

Ephesians 4:7-11

A. The Victorious Lord

We observe a beautiful parallel in Ephesians 4:8-10. Paul is quoting from Psalm 68:18: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou

hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.” The reference is to David who has just defeated the Jebusites, who were controlling Jerusalem. As was the custom, the victorious general would ascend the highest ground in the captured land and then he would proclaim total and complete victory over the enemy while simultaneously proclaiming freedom to all who were held captive. These were the spoils of victory. This was also similar to the victory won by a Roman general in the days of the New Testament when Paul said in Colossians 2:14, 15, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” What a victor we have in Jesus!

B. The Victor’s Spoils

Ephesians 4:7: “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:11: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

When Christ ascended to the Third Heaven after His resurrection, He took with Him the Old Testament Saints from Abraham’s bosom to the dwelling place on High (Psalm 48:2; Hebrews 12:22). Then, as He promised, He sent the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower His Church. And in the descending of the Holy Spirit came unique corporate and individual gifting to the Church.

Back in the 1940s this story was written by George Reavis, the Assistant Superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools:

“Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a “new world” so they organized a school. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. He also developed a “charlie horse” from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well and also run, climb, and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful private school.”

The moral of the story is: Let the fish swim. Let the rabbits run. Let the squirrel climb. Let the eagles fly. We don't want a school of average ducks. And in the application of the gifting to the Body of Christ, let all of us operate in our gifts.

III. THE PERFECT MINISTRY

Ephesians 4:12-16

A. A perfect fit – Ephesians 4:12, 13, 15

Ephesians 4:12 tells us that this gifting is: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Our translation “perfecting” is from *katartismós*; it is the only time this Greek word is used in the New Testament. It is referring to the exact adjustment which describes how the individual parts work together in correct order, thus bringing to a condition of fitness or perfection.

B. A perfect faith - Ephesians 4:14

C. A perfect love – Ephesians 4:15

Notice the wording, “Speaking the truth in love...” (Ephesians 4:15a). Love is the bond as shown to us in Colossians 3:14: “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” As we come to the conclusion we see God's great desire for us to “...grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:15). What an awesome goal and privilege. Our responsibility to get to this place cannot be emphasized too much. Let us therefore grow up into Christ, our perfect Savior as a perfect people for a perfect ministry!

-Pastor Pope-