

Sermon – 8-5-2018
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – Ephesians 4
By
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Today's New Testament reading from Ephesians is discussing some internal business: the operation and working of the church. Most of the reading is Paul showing the church how it is to run and behave, but today, I want to start later in the passage, in a place that probably shows us why Paul has to write this section in the first place. That passage is verse 14. There are three *negative* characteristics of the church that Paul lifts up in this verse, but he places them all under the headline of being infants. Many of you have been around infants a time or two, probably cared for a few of them yourselves. They are precious. They are cute. They return us all to a simpler time. But, they don't really do much, do they? When I was at camp two weeks ago, I got to hold the 3-month old of a pastor friend. He would push some with his legs, and maybe grab on to a finger, but he couldn't really do much.

That's what Paul is comparing parts of the church to, and he's got some specifics. The first description is "tossed back and forth by the waves." Infants get handed, hopefully not tossed, from person to person. But the infants don't have any say in the matter. There'll be some crying, but they just go where they're handed, mostly. The unhealthy church gets pushed around by the waves, going wherever their handed, too. These are the cultural dynamics that come to play in a congregation from outside, non-Scriptural forces. Every group of people has a culture, their way of perceiving, living, and acting in the world. Every culture has parts that go against the teachings of Scripture. So, if there is a culture of isolation, or self-separation, or constant excitement, or building, or almost anything, it can work its

way into the church and push it in one direction or another. Well, we're not supposed to be isolated. We need quiet times. Church is not about the building. We need to recognize the waves of outside culture and not mistake them for true church culture.

Paul then says that we could be blown here and there by every wind of teaching. Infants believe what you tell them. Too often in the church, so do we. We believe that just because someone claims to be a Christian, that they know what God wants for them, and especially for you. And I can harp on the prosperity and popular preachers here, but I've done that plenty. Let's look at it from a different angle: those who are in our congregations. Of those who claim to be "born again" Christians, 81% believe that this statement is Scriptural: God helps those who help themselves. I hate to break it to you, but that is found nowhere in the Scriptures. We have plenty of doctrines that we've created in our minds that we think are Scriptural, but really aren't.

Third, Paul talks about the "cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming." LCMC's Service Coordinator, Mark Vander Tuig, likes to say, "As long as we gather sinners, there will be trouble in church." There are those within congregations all over the world who cause people to turn away from faith and reject Christ and Christianity. They often take two forms. One is the person who doesn't care if they step on anyone's toes, because they know exactly what the congregation is supposed to be and do. The other is the one who is convinced that they know what is right, but they are unaware of what their convictions are doing to the other members of the congregation. It's not on purpose, but it happens. And the latter can easily become the former.

So, if we find ourselves in one of these categories, what do we do? How do we grow up? What does it look like? We're going to work our way back up the pipeline to understand. Verses 11 and 12 say that

apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have been given to the church. Now, all of those people can fall into the same issues as verse 14. But what is their ultimate, true purpose? "To equip the saints for the work of ministry." That means that the leaders of our congregation, myself included, are to give you the tools and understandings necessary to do your work for the sake of the world and for the sake of the body of Christ. We have varying levels of success with that. But the same goes for all of us, because what's the equipment we're looking for? What do we, what does Christ, want to see in our congregations, in our communities, in our lives? Verse 2 has it: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another. These words fall into two categories. Humility and gentleness come from words meaning littleness, meekness, submissiveness. But this is not in relationship to your fellow Christians. This means being humble and meek in the face of God. It means following him, because he knows better. It means realizing that the second category, patience and bearing with one another, is something that we are actually powerless over, because of the sin that lives within our lives. We'd much rather be back in verse 14. But now is when we get to the top of the pipe.

Paul brackets this passage and our actions. In verse 2, and verse 15, he declares that we do all these things in love. It is in love that we can be humble, meek, longsuffering. But that love comes from the top of the food chain. That love comes from the head of the body. That love comes from the work of Jesus Christ, himself and alone. It is the love that he showed to us by laying down his life for our sins, for all our times of chasing after or getting pushed by culture or false teaching or belligerent people. He showed us ultimate care, ultimate love, ultimate humanity. That love comes to us and changes us. That love gives us humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and the ability to speak the truth in love. Those gifts are stirred up in us by those God gives us to lead us. They eventually work their way out in service, to each other and to neighbor. But it all starts in his work. Therefore, let us

**turn our will and our lives over to him, that he may pour into us,
work in us and through us, and grant life to this whole world. AMEN.**