

“A life worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1-10)

4:1-16 is one section. As the content is very rich, we will divide this section into two. We will study from v.1 to 10 today.

1. Calling of God

4:1

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” This is the main message of today’s section.

Believers in Ephesus were called by God, and gathered by Him. And they responded to Him. Paul urges them to live a life worthy of the calling they have responded to. It’s the same for us.

Let’s look at how and from what situation we were called.

Eph. 2:1-3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

We used to be dead in our transgressions and sins. We had no power to say “NO” to sin. We were at the mercy of sin. Those who are dead in sins will follow the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, that is Satan, and follow the evil spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient, and follow their own sinful desire. They are at the mercy of the way of this world, the power of the evil spirit, and the sinful desires of themselves. In short, they are not following God.

Their condition shows under which authority this person is, and which

kingdom he belongs. He doesn't belong to the kingdom of God, but he belongs to this world. He doesn't come under the kingdom of Holy God, but is under the rule of Satan. He is not making God as his king, but he is making himself as his king.

Is there any king who allows his country, people in his kingdom to be destroyed? I don't think any king likes it. God is the king of God's kingdom. If the people who belong to his kingdom are to be destroyed, God will be angry against the destroyer.

Man was made in the image of God. God created humans as the expression of His glory. It is only humans among all creation that was made in God's image. It is only humans who can fellowship with God.

But now they are following the way of the world, ruled by Satan, bound by sin. Instead of making God their king, they are the king of themselves. God cannot leave this situation as it is. God loves humans. They are supposed to be in the loving fellowship with God. They were created as expression of His glory. But now they are deprived, destroyed. God is angry against it.

The complicated thing is: We humans are the ones who are being deprived, but at the same time, we are the ones who are destroying one another. We are the ones who are bound, but at the same time, we form this world where we bind one another. That is the complication!

The point is this. We were dead in our sins. As we were dead, we had no power to say "No" to sins. And this condition shows what we are following and which kingdom we belong to. We couldn't do anything by ourselves, because we were dead.

What did God do for us, who were so powerless, helpless and weak?

Eph. 2:4-6

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

We were called so that we might live with Christ. We were raised up with Christ. And moreover, we were seated with Him in the heavenly realms. We are called as ones like that. Amazing! This is our calling.

Eph. 1:4-5 NLT

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

We were chosen before the creation of the world. God called us to be adopted as his children. This is God's election, his calling, regardless of what we are like.

Eph. 1:11 NLT

Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

We were chosen as heirs of God's kingdom.

Eph. 2:21-22

²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

We are called out from destruction and slavery for this purpose. This is our calling. And the Bible urges, "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

Then, how can we live the life worthy of the calling?

2. Union with the Holy Spirit

4:2-3

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Humility, gentleness, patience, love and peace. They are all the fruit of

the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). So they cannot be achieved by our human effort. We cannot live a life worthy of the calling by our human hard work. We can live like Christians, we can act like that. But that is only the outward appearance. It is not until there is the rule of the Holy Spirit and the unity with Him that we can truly live a life worthy of the calling.

The Holy Spirit calls us into truth and give us strength to practice it, live according to it (John16:13; Rom.15:19). We choose to listen to the Holy Spirit. And by faith, we practice it. The Holy Spirit testifies for Jesus and brings glory to Jesus (John15:26, 16:14). So when we walk by the Spirit, He will testify Jesus and bring glory to him through us.

As we are joined together and built as the body of Christ, when we use the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit will be shown. As we receive the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can live and work bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

"The Spirit of God is working out the will of God to make the children of God like the Son of God."¹

God desires each one of us to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29). He wants us to be transformed by the Spirit into Christlikeness day by day, year by year (2 Cor. 3:18). That is for each one of us to grow in the Holy Spirit, and also for all of us to be joined together, knit together to grow as one body, a temple of the Holy Spirit, the church (Eph. 2:21-22).

The Holy Spirit is already given when we believed in Jesus. As a result of believing in Him, we were marked in him with a seal, we received the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). We will keep the unity with the Holy Spirit given to us. We will not achieve the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is already given. And we walk with the Spirit.

We must fervently keep the unity with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to us, leads us, and works through us. If we don't lose his work, we don't treat him badly, and don't extinguish the work of the Holy Spirit, then naturally we live a life worthy of the calling we have received.

3. One in Christ

¹ Siang Yang Tan & Douglas Gregg, "Disciplines of the Holy Spirit" Zondervan, 1997, p.227

4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

As we keep the unity with the Holy Spirit, we will be led to live a life worthy of the calling. Naturally we are joined together and built as one dwelling of God.

It is easy to say. But for the Jews in those days, it was an unbelievable message, it was as if someone said “the sun rises from the west.”

Let’s think about the situation when this letter was written. It was Paul who wrote the letter. He was a Jew. He understood how Jewish people would think. In general, the Jews never thought Jews and gentiles can be together. It was unthinkable for the Jews to visit gentiles’ house nor eat together with gentiles (Acts 10:28; 11:1-2).

But in reality, for believers in Christ, Jews and gentiles are one in the Lord. Because they are joined together into one body of Christ, being built together to become a holy temple, welcomed together into the kingdom of God, being the citizen of God, as sons and daughters of God. One Lord, one faith, one baptism or covenant; and one God.

It is still the same for us today after 2000 years. Those who are in the Lord are made one. We are joined together into one body of Christ, being built together to become a holy temple, welcomed together into the kingdom of God, being the citizen of God, as sons and daughters of God. “Let’s think about how we can be one. Let’s try to be one.” It’s not like that. We are already one in Christ.

4. Grace for each one

We live in the unity with the Holy Spirit who lives in us. That is the life of Christians, a life worthy of the calling. And we are one in Christ.

Then, we have this question. If they are all just one, then all the Christians will be the same, won’t they? What about my personality, my uniqueness? Does transformation into Christlikeness mean uniformity?

4:7-8

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why

it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

It is not just "us" in general. It is to "each one of us." God's eyes are on each one of us, individually. And at the same time, he looks at you alone. He looks at you alone. God looks at me alone. God made me as I am. God made you as you are. It is only I who can live my life. It is only you who can live your life.

When God looks at each one of us, he doesn't see one superior to the other nor one inferior to the other. There is no one who is not needed, there is no one who is not precious. For God everyone is equally precious.

God gave each one of us his grace, so there is no one who was not given grace. Really? Yes, that's right. How do you know? Because the same cost of redemption was paid by Christ.

The gift that was given to us is Christ. The grace that was given to us is Jesus. God gave us Jesus as our Savior. That is how great the grace God has given us. "He [God] gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). Jesus is God himself. He is the greatest one, the holy one, the only one who is worthy to receive all glory. This Jesus himself is given to us as a gift. God's showing the greatness of his grace by his open-mindedness and his generosity.

Sometimes we face a situation where we wonder, "Why this thing can happen if I'm loved by God?" Our faith may be challenged by this question, "Has God really given me such great grace? Then why am I in this terrible situation?"

4:9-10

What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

What does the Word of God remind us here? Jesus is the one who has descended. He belongs to heaven, and is worthy to receive all honor and glory. He is the one over all dominion, authority and power. But this Jesus has descended to the lowest. He has descended to us in order to give us this grace.

Jesus became human and lived in this world. He had the unity with the Holy Spirit. His life on the earth shows vividly how abundant the life in the unity with the Holy Spirit is. His life on the earth shows how abundant it is to live in the

fellowship with God the Father.

Jesus has descended to us in order to give us this grace. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, He did the will of God the Father. We can have the same unity with the Holy Spirit. That is the grace for us! Jesus has descended to us.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. He is the Lord. They are his disciples. But the Lord got up from the meal, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' dirty feet, and dried them with the towel one by one. To wash their feet, he had to crouch, he cannot do it standing. So the Lord knelt before his disciples. Among them were John and James, who were also called Boanerges, which means sons of Thunders because they were short-tempered and easily angered. There were also doubting Thomas, and Peter who would say great things, but would deny Jesus. And there was also Judas who betrayed Jesus for money. But Jesus washed each disciple's feet carefully. No one can escape from His grace!

The Lord washes his disciples' feet, that alone is amazing! He is not just a master, a teacher. But he is God. And he came to each one of his disciples and washed each of their feet. He descended.

This truly shows the unity with the Holy Spirit. The proof of the fruit of the Spirit. The true love. The richness of the love that surpasses our human understanding. The work of the Holy Spirit.

My dear friends. That Jesus is now living in us. That Holy Spirit is now living in us. He is dwelling among us.

Let me share about my personal story. We moved to Yangon in July 2012 and began to serve at this church, NLIF. On 25th of October that year, I received an email from my family in Japan. My sister, Kiyomi was hospitalized late afternoon the day before, because of SAH: subarachnoidal hemorrhage, bleeding into the space surrounding her brain. She's been unconscious since.

The following day, she took surgery by four, five doctors. It was a bypass surgery in the blood vessels in her brain. We were told that there was 80 % possibility of her right half of the body become paralyzed because of the surgery, but there was no other way to save her life.

The surgery was planned for 7 hours but went long for 12 hours. It was successful. About 10 hours later, she came back to her senses. Step by step, day by day, week by week, she made an amazing recovery. On 6th of December, she was discharged from hospital. Her recovery was miraculous. She was very weak,

but she was able to talk and move her hands and legs. She had all five senses. She had memory. I don't want to make it sound too dramatic but it's a miracle.

Time passed. She got better little by little and then she could do some house works.

In the following summer, 15th of August 2013, I got a very short email from my another sister, Namiko. She said Kiyomi's husband passed away. It was a total surprise. Everyone was shocked. Actually just 2 days before I exchanged an email with Kiyomi, and she said all her family was doing fine.

Church allowed us to go back to Japan. We could attend his funeral. Later Kiyomi shared with me personally about Yoshio, her husband. He worried about Kiyomi's condition very much. And he was afraid of losing her so deeply. He used to be a workaholic champion, but he came back home as soon as possible. He gave more time for Kiyomi and their two daughters. Actually he was struggling in connecting with his church. So he stopped going there for years. But since Kiyomi's accident, he tried different churches and one Sunday, he said to her that he found one church where he could worship naturally and feel comfortable. He went there his last couple of Sundays. Kiyomi was so happy to see that.

The family became a real family. Then suddenly, he passed away. Why did it happen?

With our human understanding, we cannot understand it. It doesn't make sense to us. We cry "Why?", but get no answer. We can't see the light.

But even at the time like that, Jesus was with us. He has descended from heaven to the lowest place. And he went through all the "Why?" we could experience or even more sufferings than that.

And now the Spirit of this Jesus is with us. Parakletos, the one who stands besides us, the helper, the comforter, that is the Holy Spirit. He supports us, strengthens us, encourages us and he is surely living in us.

So Paul urges "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received." He is saying: Don't grieve the Holy Spirit inside. Don't extinguish Him. Walk by the Spirit. Keep the unity with Him fervently. Then, we can understand how rich the grace we are given. It will be the reality and it will be our experience. And through us the grace of God will flow out to this sorrowful world, the light of hope will shine in the darkness. Someone will experience the Life, Jesus and their lives will be changed by his love.

The life of faith, to live a life worthy of the calling. It is not that we will do

something for God, but it is to have God work in us, through us. That is how we come to know how rich the grace God has given to us. To know him and to make him known.

This new year, 2017, let us live a life worthy of the calling.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

- 1) What kind of disunity do you see in the society? How does it affect people?
- 2) Do you know of any case of disunity among Christians or churches? What is the case? What can you learn from it?
- 3) “A life worthy of the calling you have received.” Describe it by your words. What did and will God do for it? What is your part? What help do you need? Where will you receive it?
- 4) “Jesus has descended from heaven to the lowest place.” What does it mean to you? How does it encourage you?