

Trust: Do Your Job and Trust I'll Do Mine

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Pastor John Mars

Good morning, Church! I want to read a passage of scripture this morning from Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. Paul is speaking.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for good works, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

May God bless the reading of His Word.

When I first got started in ministry, I used to use a lot of football illustrations. I played a little football in high school. I was never good at it, but I enjoyed it. My friends were football players. We talked about football; we watched football. So, I used a lot of football illustrations. And I was told I used too many football illustrations! So I began, through the years, to wean off my football illustrations to the point where I very rarely use football illustrations anymore. But next Sunday is the Super Bowl! And I have dug down in the archives and brought out a football illustration from a long time ago. And when I say a long, long time ago in a land far, far away, this comes from 8th grade football. All right? 8th grade. On our team there was a young man we're going to call Alvin. I call him Alvin because, as far as my memory can tell, there were no Alvins on our team. Alvin was one of our favorite teammates. He was enthusiastic. He was always positive. He was always encouraging. He was the guy that, if you messed up, you could count on Alvin lifting you up. He was the best cheerleader we had. He was everyone's favorite teammate. In fact, at the end of the year, Alvin got the award for having the most team spirit. But Alvin battled a problem that he could not help; there was nothing he could do about it. In the 8th grade Alvin was maybe 4' 5" tall, and maybe 65 pounds. So, he didn't play much! Fast forward to the last game of the season. We are playing one of our rivals and they had a running back that was 6' 2" and weighed 245. Now, a 6' 2" and 245-pound football player is not a big deal, but did I mention that this is the 8th grade? I'm not saying the guy was too old to be in the 8th grade, but he did have a beard! Now, our plan for playing against this monster was, the coach said, "Now if you're the first there, don't try to hit him. Grab him and hold on for dear life." And then four or five or six of us would get on and bring the Beast down. Well, we did pretty good,

because that's all they had, and so that's what we did. And by the end of the game, the game was well in hand. It was the last game of the season, and the coach decided that everybody gets to play. That means Alvin, and so they put Alvin in, in the defensive backfield. And the whole team was excited. Everybody was up on the sideline cheering Alvin on, because this is the first time he had ever gotten on the field. And he got on the field, and it was the second or third play. I don't know which play. It wasn't the first play, but the second or third play, he was on the field, and the Beast breaks through the line and heads directly for Alvin. And there is a collective gasp on the sidelines. "Oh no, Alvin's going to die!" But not Alvin. Alvin did everything with enthusiasm. He did what he always did. He went, "Get him! Get him! Get him! Get him! Get him! Get him!" and he watched him run right by him.

We all have our roles to play. And what is true on a football team is certainly true in the family of God, in the Kingdom of God. We have our roles to play. We have our places. We count on one another to do our jobs. We need to know our roles. When apples are apples, and oranges are oranges, and everything is fair in the world, my role is a big-picture person. That's who I am. I see big pictures. I am a big-picture person by nature. I am a detail person by nurture. I grew up in the home of a Navy officer. And if I heard it one time, I heard it a million times: "The devil is in the details!" So, I can pay attention to the details. But when I'm operating at my peak, I am the big-picture person, and I'm surrounded by detail people who take care of me. But detail people need big-picture people, too, because without the big-picture people, detail people can get stuck playing Trivial Pursuit. They can't see the forest because of all of the trees. We need each other. We complement each other. We have our own roles to play in the body of Christ. That takes trust, and trust can be very difficult. Some of you had careers where you were taught not to trust. Others of you were the leaders, and it's hard to let go of that and trust somebody else to take care of it. As a pastor, my first 15 years in ministry, I was pastor of small churches where I was the chief cook and bottle-washer. I mean, if something was wrong in the bulletin, it was wrong in the bulletin because I made a mistake. If somebody didn't get called that needed to get called, they didn't get called because I didn't call them. When I began to pastor larger churches, I had to get used to trusting other people to do things that I normally did. I can remember the first time I drove by my church and the parking lot was full of cars, and I had no idea what was going on. My first thought was, "Did I forget something?" Trust can be difficult. We need each other. We complement each other. In the body of Christ, we need each other. We must trust each other. And for us to trust each other there must be common characteristics. If we are part of the body of Christ, if we call ourselves Christians, there needs to be a family resemblance. For there to be trust, there has to be commonality.

In our passage, Paul lists four virtues that all of us need to cultivate. They are words that society sometimes demeans, but Christians are called on to embrace them. The words that are translated here, and translated differently in different Bibles, are: humility, meekness, long-suffering, and love. I was reminded of something that I had forgotten, that Christians were the first group to use humility in a positive way. In Greek culture, it was always used in a negative way. It meant cowering or cringing. But Christians began to use it in terms of: Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. And the reason we did is because we stopped comparing ourselves to one another and started

comparing ourselves to Christ. And that is a humbling experience. You may compare yourself to me and say, "You know what, I'm doing pretty good!" But when we compare ourselves to Christ, that's humbling, and we understand we have a long way to go. So, humility is a virtue all of us must cultivate. So is meekness, another one of those words that we need to reclaim from society. The word meekness in Greek means "trained," often used in Greek of animals. If a horse is broke, if a horse is easy to ride, if a horse can be guided without much effort, it is meek. If a ship can be controlled by the rudder, if it is easy to steer, it is meek. We are to cultivate meekness, trainability. Long-suffering is another one of those words. When we think of long-suffering, most of us think, "Oh, this is my cross to bear. I'll get through it somehow." But that's not the Greek word. The Greek word is a fierce word. It means, "I will not give up. I will not give in, and I will not quit." Roman soldiers, when they went into battle, they shouted in Latin the phrase I used to be able to quote, (time has robbed me of that) but it meant: "I will not leave the battlefield. I will leave the battlefield with my shield or on my shield." That's long-suffering. And love. Love is not an emotion but rather a decision. I will love, period. I will seek your greatest good even if you are my enemy. So, these virtues--humility, meekness, long-suffering, and love-- are to characterize all of us. And if they characterize all of us, that brings peace between us. And if there's peace between us, there is unity in the church. And if there's unity, you and I can trust one another to use our very different gifts.

Paul says, "There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God over all, but we have differing gifts. And the differing gifts in the body are essential for the building up of the body, essential for the health of the body, essential for the oneness. And I need to be able to trust you to use your gifts, and you need to be able to trust me to use my gifts. I need to be able to trust you. You need to be able to trust me. I can't do what you do. You can't do what I do. I have observed, in this congregation, there are a number of really good carpenters that have done some amazing things here. If you see me with a carpentry tool in my hand, you say, "John, stop! Put down the saw and slowly back away." You don't want me doing carpentry. You do not want me painting. I can't do what you do. You can't do what I do. But we complement each other. We need each other. And if we need each other, if we complement each other, if we trust one another, the body is built up. When we do our jobs, the church is built up; it is strengthened. We experience unity in the body. And I want to stop here for just a moment. There are few things in a church that are more important than unity. You can feel it. It's a feeling in the air. It's a spirit. When there is unity in the body of Christ, when there is trust in the body of Christ, the spirit is strong in the church. But when there's division, when there is conflict, it hampers the spirit in the church. It hampers the work of the church. In order for the body of Christ to be what God wants it to be, there must be unity and there must be trust.

Our aim, as the body of Christ, is nothing less than to produce Christians that embody Christ, and for the church to be the embodiment of Christ in the community. One of my favorite definitions of Christian is: one in whom Jesus lives again. Did you hear that? The definition of Christian is: one in whom Jesus lives again. That is our goal as individuals, and that is our aim as a church. We are to be Christ to the world. And if we are to be Christ to the world, we must, number one, cultivate the same virtues. There

should be a family resemblance. Number two, we must use our differing gifts to the best of our ability. Number three, we must trust one another. I must trust you; you must trust me. And if we will do those things, there will be unity in the body of Christ. And when the church is united, there is no force on the planet that can stand against us! Nothing. But if we are divided, we cannot stand. So, here's my challenge for you. It's going to be hard. It's going to be hard for me, too. Trust me. (That was supposed to be funny, but it's not!) And I'll trust you. You trust me to do what God has called me to do, and I'll trust you to do what God has called you to do. And if we will do that, there will be unity in the body and the gates of hell cannot stand against us. We will be a force here for the Kingdom.

Let's pray together. So, in the quietness of this time, ask yourself: Are you exhibiting the virtues of humility, meekness, long-suffering, and love? Do you trust your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you trust that they will do what they need to do, as you do what you need to do? During this quiet time, let us pray for the unity of the church, that we might trust one another. Let's pray.

Lord, as we trust You, help us also to trust one another. We pray, God, that there will be unity in this body. We pray that this unity will continue. And we pray, Lord, that You would cause us to be a force for the Kingdom in this community. In Christ's name, amen.