

Key Text: 1 John 2: 12-17, Ephesians 4: 1-6, 11-16

What is our responsibility to our family? As Christians, it has to be that we become more like Jesus and grow into His likeness. We need to become His disciples. This will help us make better decisions within our families and guide us into making better decisions for ourselves. **How does this happen?** It is not easy and there is no quick fix. Within the reading of 1 John we find three levels of spiritual maturity. **The child**, has accepted Jesus and their sins have been forgiven. This is the beginning of discipleship for each person. As the child grows, becoming “sanctified,” he grows into a spiritual young man/woman. **The young man/woman** becomes strong in the Word of God, to the point the Word lives in them and they, through Christ, overcomes the evil one. They are no longer slaves to sin as Paul states in **Romans 6:18**: *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

The next and highest level is the **spiritual father/mother**. Just to make sure we understand the growing and understanding of Jesus never stops, this is a lifelong process that never ends. The spiritual father/mother knows God intimately and is growing in their understanding of the character of God. The word used for intimate in this verse is the same Greek word used to describe the intimacy between a husband and wife. God really wants to be close to us. This is what the spiritually mature person should look like, which results in reproducing the next generation of believers. **Are we doing a good job at this?** I would say we are not, because we are losing membership within the Methodist church as well as other denominations within the United States. Here is the problem, in most churches the spiritual young man and woman is the vision of a mature Christian. We need a way for us to evaluate how our church is producing mature disciples. We need a process for everyone to become the spiritual fathers and mothers Jesus is calling us to be. This process is found in Ephesians chapter 4. This is why the round table ministry team has chosen this vision statement: Striving to become an Ephesians 4 church.

But first, we must understand **what is God’s primary mission for the church?** The Great commission? **Then is this the church going into the world or the church gathered together?** If it is the church scattered in the world, this is correct, we need to fulfill this mission given to us by Jesus and go into all the earth. But if we don’t have mature disciples to send, we will never be able to fulfill this mission. We cannot send immature Christians into the world. We need a place for everyone to grow up or mature in Jesus. Based on this the church must have another mission and it has to be when the church is gathered together.

What is our mission within the walls of the temple? This mission is found in Ephesians 4: 11-16. The primary mission of the church is to transform men and women into the likeness of Jesus (Disciples) and become spiritual fathers and mothers. Men are oriented towards “life giving” and women are oriented more towards being “life nurturers” and “life sustainers”. Both are necessary in order for the church to be fully re-productive. We need to gather together and grow into spiritual maturity, so we can go out and be spiritual life givers. In order to make mature Disciples, everyone must journey through the three levels of spiritual maturity.

How is this accomplished? In Ephesians 4: 1-3, Paul gave us the virtues each Christian should possess. We need to understand what Paul’s instructions to the church at Ephesus was trying to accomplish. This letter had two purposes, and the first purpose is found in the first three chapters. Paul is dealing with the great eternal truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How these truths connect

us with each other in our own generation, and how we are connected with all the previous generations, all the way back to the original 12 disciples. If we are to be an effective Church, everyone must recognize our own role and function within the framework of this community of fellowship.

The second purpose is found in the last three chapters. Paul tells us what each member is responsible to be and do in order for the Church to carry out this plan. Paul wants all of us to know that Jesus has made a way for us to live in unity with each other in a world that is very much in disunity. Our job is to proclaim this message of truth and unity to the whole world. Paul gives us the virtues every Christian must possess in order for the Church to fulfill this task of being the light of Jesus to the world. This will also bring unity and reconciliation within our families and the Church, which will draw those outside the church to this unity.

Ephesians 4:1-3: *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble (Humility) and gentle (Meekness); be patient, bearing with one another (Long-suffering) in (love). Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of (peace).* The first three virtues, Humility, Meekness, and Long-suffering are what Jesus does within us. As we humble ourselves Jesus gives us a new heart and new desires. We live out the first three virtues through love and peace. This is how each person must strive to live when we enter into this Christian community. Let's look at each virtue individually.

Humility: I believe this is the most important virtue of the five used by Paul, because we cannot come into the faith of Jesus if we don't humble ourselves before Him and repent. When Paul wrote this letter, the Greek society had no word for humility. Some societies in the ancient world looked upon being humble as something to be despised, looked down upon and was **not** considered a virtue. But, Christianity has placed it at the top of all the virtues. Without humility, every one of us would not be able to see our own unworthiness, our own sins as filthy rags, and come to the self-knowledge of who we truly are, **sinners**. (This is the purpose of the Law in the Old Testament.) This can only happen when we see ourselves for who we really are in His presence. When we set our lives beside the life of Jesus in His glorious light and the demands of a perfect God, we realize God is pure perfection. We understand we cannot satisfy this perfection in our own strength, and we are in desperate need of Jesus our savior. If we compare ourselves to our neighbors, we may get the wrong impression of just how good we think we are. We must remember that we are all created beings, and when we are in the presence of the creator the only reaction for any of us should be to humble ourselves. Our only response should be repentance.

Meekness: How would you describe Meekness? Meekness is not Weakness! Meekness also translates to gentleness. Here is the best way I have found to describe this word. You have two extremes of an emotion and I will use anger, this works with whatever emotion we put in here. We have someone who is always very angry, and someone who never gets angry. These are the two extremes. A person who is meek is a man who is always angry at the right time and never gets angry at the wrong time and does not get angry about what happens to himself. A person who is meek is a person who is kindled by indignation at the wrongs and the sufferings of others but is never moved to anger by the wrongs and the insults he has to bear.

Jesus is the only person who was totally under self-control of all his actions. I don't think we can be in total self-control all the time in all aspects of our lives, but we can be God-controlled. A person who is meek is a person who is God-controlled and always gets angry at the right time, and never gets angry at the wrong time. This gives me a better understanding of Jesus' words spoken in Matthew 5:
5: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

Long-suffering: In Greek this word has two directions of meaning. The first describes the spirit which will never give in or give up. This kind of spirit will endure to the end and will reap huge rewards for never giving up. The army of the Roman Empire may have lost a battle, but they never admitted defeat in the war. They were persistent and never gave up. In the same manner Christian patience is the spirit which never admits defeat. It is a spirit that will never be broken by any misfortune or suffering, or by any disappointment or discouragement, and will always persist to the end.

The second meaning is even deeper and more meaningful as it means *patience with men*. In Christianity it is defined as the spirit that has the power to take revenge, but it never does. It is a spirit which refuses to retaliate. The best analogy would be a little puppy with a big dog. The puppy is yapping and biting at the big dog and the bigger dog could annihilate the puppy with one bite. But he bears the puppy's impertinence with forbearing patience and dignity. For us, this is the spirit which bears insult and injury without bitterness and without complaint. It is also the spirit that can suffer unpleasant people with graciousness and fools without irritation. ***Best of all, long-suffering is used in the New Testament to describe God/Jesus.*** As Christ's followers, we must be willing to show this kind of patience toward our fellow man, just as God has shown to all of us. The way Jesus lived His life revealed this virtue of God. Now, let us look how we are to live out in action what Jesus has been working in us with the first three virtues.

Love: The kind of love Jesus showed us was so unique to the culture that Paul and all the Christian writers had to use the most unusual Greek word **Agape**. Having different words for love is great, because in English we say we love cake and we love our family. The words used for Love in Greek are: **Eros:** This is the word that is used to describe the sexual passion between a man and a woman, (this should be within the bonds of marriage) and from this word we get the word erotic. **Philia:** This is term used when there is a warm affection between individuals. This is someone who is not my brother, but he is like a brother to me. Philadelphia, PA is named after this Greek word and why it is called the city of brotherly love. **Storge:** This term in Greek is used to describe the love within family relationships.

Agape: We translate this into Love or Charity. The best meaning of agape is **unconquerable benevolence**. It literally means there is nothing a person can do to make the person with agape love them any less. Agape is the ability to retain unconquerable good will to the unlovely and the unlovable, even towards those who do not love us and even towards those we may not like. Agape is the quality of heart and mind that compels a Christian to never feel any bitterness, or desire for revenge. But this person always seeks the highest good toward everyone, no matter how another person is treating us. Agape is how God loves us, but this word does not help us to fully understand the height, depth, length and width of God's amazing love towards us. If all of us would agape each other, our families and the world would be a different place and our churches would never be same.

Peace: The world tells us we need to live in peace and harmony, so we can all live as one. This is part of a song written by John Lennon, "Imagine". Peace can be defined as a right relationship between men, which is the concept that John Lennon wrote about, but he was missing the most important part. What Paul is saying to us in Ephesians about peace, is for all of us to be in **"scared oneness"**, which is the right relationship for Christians. This is the only way for us to be the true church Paul is describing, which is the church the world needs to see. This right relationship or **"scared oneness"** can only be preserved in one way. We must place ourselves before the cross of Jesus, and we need to obliterate our own selfishness. The only way for this to happen is for us to decrease, and for Jesus to increase in our lives. This sacred oneness should characterize the church. This unity of our hearts, minds and spirits as one with Jesus, will show the world true peace. Living in true peace is when we nail ourselves to the cross and let Jesus be the Lord of our hearts and lives. This is the only way true peace will break forth. Then and only then can the church be the

beacon of light and hope in this broken world. **How important is it for us Christians to live out these five virtues in our lives?**

Again, I ask you, **what is the primary mission of the church?** As we have seen today the church has two missions, but we find the primary mission in Ephesians 4. First, we need to make mature disciples within the walls of the temple, helping people know Christ at an intimate level, becoming spiritual fathers and mothers. We all have to do our part in helping everyone grow into full maturity and become Disciples of Jesus Christ. This is the only way we can fulfill Jesus' calling in Luke 9:23: *"If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."* Then with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can go into the world as mature disciples for the transformation of the world. We cannot change the world until we allow Jesus to change us from the inside out and we possess these 5 virtues, which is what separates us from the world. Once we build up mature disciples (Spiritual Mothers and Fathers) we as the church can complete the Great Commission that Jesus gave us in Matthew 28: 19-20: *19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* When we have this process in place we will be fulfilling the mission of the Church.

Watch this ministry moment video of the men from WBB Generation 8. They are now ready to step into the ministry Jesus has called them into and are on the journey of living out the mission of the church inside and outside the walls of the temple.
Prayer and altar call.