

TEXT: TOPIC: THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH (Eph. 4: 1-16).

I. INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

The Gospel has been preached for more than 2000 years. However, the mission of the Church is not yet completed. In fact the mission of the Church is crippled due to various internal and external factors. There were times when the Church influenced the world by keeping her integrity. The past millennium was the time when Christianity was abused and the Church began to lose its prophetic voice. Slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism etc. used Christianity as a vehicle to oppress the poor.

Throughout the Church history God raised certain people who gave their lives to keep the Church on the right track. Martin Luther and the other reformers were among those who did their best to speak out the prophetic messages so that the Church keeps its integrity and fulfil her mission. Is there any thing which the Christian Church of today be reminded to accomplish her Mission in the new millennium? Let us see what the word of God speaks to us in Paul's letters to the Ephesians in chapter 4:1-16.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

No passage describes the Church than Ephesians 4:1-16.

This passage can be divided into two major sections.

In the first six verses the writer says **Live Your Call on Unity (4:1-6)**. In the second section he speaks that **Each Person Received Grace to Build the Body of Christ (7-16)**

1. LIVE WORTHY OF YOUR CALL FOCUSED ON UNITY

Paul calls the Christians to live a life worthy of calling they have received. Such life is marked by **humility, Gentleness, patience, tolerance of love, and keeping the unity of the spirit.**

Humility is translated as being completely humble which focuses on one's thinking or lowliness of mind. The best meaning of humility is given in Phil 2:5-8 which is self employing mind of Christ.

Gentleness (in Greek *prautes*) is a desire not to harm also concerned with the same Christian ethic. Gentleness is also a characteristic of Christ.

Patience is defined as the exercise of a largeness of soul that can endure annoyances and difficulties over the period of time.

Love (*agape*) is enjoying the other person, but does not exist for enjoyment. It is not a feeling or emotion but an act of will. It exists in relation to people and it is always costly. It is first the love from God, also the love for God and for other people because of God.

Unity of the Spirit: Living worthy life also requires to have eagerness to keep the unity of the Spirit. So living worthy life embraces all the above mentioned ethical lists.

According to this text Unity is motivated by theological oneness. One is mentioned seven times in this portion: One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God father of all. All of the seven oneness express the reality that there is only one gospel and to believe that gospel is to enter into the Unity it creates. Christianity is a shared faith.

2. Each Person has Received Grace to Build the Body of Christ (4:7-16)

Grace according this context does not designate saving grace but grace for ministry that all Christians are given to build up the Church (4:11-16). The most important gift that God gave to the Church are people. All Christians are gifts given to build up the Church. (Eph. 4:16,20). To build up the Church the Christians need to grow in maturity or growing into Christ. The Christian living is about: truth, love and continual growth into Christ in everything.

The Semitic concept of truth focuses on that on which we one can rely. It is primarily a relational term for covenant loyalty and is sometimes translated by faithfulness. A truthful person is one who lives out her/his covenant obligations which includes both what is said and

what is done. Truth involves a true assessment of the facts and a consideration of what is real as opposed to illusion. Truth is much more holistic and includes what is done with the mind.

III. APPLICATION

The question we need to ask ourselves is what does this text tell us today in the new Millennium?

What is the significance of Paul's ethical lists? What is the work of the Church?

In former days parents, schools, and society teach what people should do or not do. In modern societies the effort is now a failure. Christians and non-Christians all lament the collapse of ethics at various level. Crime, Abuse, and violence are common. Social crises are no more the agenda of the Church. Ethical problems are unspoken issues in many Christian Churches. We live at the stage where the meaning of right and wrong is confused. We are at the stage that the world tells the Church that nothing is wrong as long as your conscious tells you right. There is no language as such called ethics for many people. Ethical values are missing from the world. We all might have heard the interview in one Television. One man who ate human being was asked why he ate human being and answered "I ask the person whether he or she wanted to be eaten by me then I eat them". We live in such a world where eating human being seemed right as long as the person wants to be eaten. Where is ethics here? This and many other similar things show the disappearance of ethics in the society.

The lost ethics needs to be restored. Theologians and theologies need to support ethical values. Christian ethics are by necessity ethics of response. Rules and regulations never motivate ethical behaviour, but awareness of God does. Pastors, teachers and theologians should not give list of do's and don'ts. They must give direction convey a theology that motivates life. Theology in this sense is not a subject of academics; but is a basic training in

understanding the Gospel so that we all know how to live. Our problem is people do not know how to live.

What do we mean by living? Here Living should be understood as **Relational**. Good and healthy relations are missing between individuals and individuals, between husband and wife, between, children and parents, between neighbours and neighbours, among communities , between tribes, between nations, nationalities, countries, between religious groups, between Christian denominations, and between the same denomination itself etc. So this is the situation we have carried in the past millennium and brought to the new millennium. If we speak about it may take lecture of many hours. But I want to say two things about Relation mentioned in Ephesians.

1. Relational ethics

Humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance love are lists of relational ethics described in this passage. These ethical behaviours are missing among the modern societies. Then the question is what can be done to bring this values?

Humility: In order to have humility, we must renounce self-centredness. Proper self understanding is the most crucial ingredient for life. The problem is human beings are intending to become something great and in this process human being becomes self centred and self seeking. As humans we seek respect, we want recognition, honour, and authority. We look for superiority and intend to be number one. This self seeking evolves jealousy and disparagement of others. That was why Hitler, Idi Amin, Mengistu Hailemariam, Saddam Hussein and similar world Dictators killed as many lives as they could. Today in many African countries the dictators who are only self-centred are killing many defenceless people and no body is paying attention to such ill mannered activities. We Christians need to recognise that individualism and self assertion are foes of Christian maturity.

We need to give up self importance and honour. We are important but we are not to seek importance. We are not centre, but God is the centre. Thus we need to develop the habit of humility, which is lowliness of mind. As Christians we should be the first to learn and exercise humility.

Gentleness: In order to have gentleness we must renounce harshness and violence. Healthy relationship can not exist under force and treat which is the case of modern society today. Gentleness conveys sensitivity, a desire not to harm, and a valuing of other person who was created in the image of God. Gentleness should be exercised in the family, community, tribe, country and in the entire world.

Patience: In order to have patience, we must renounce the Tyranny of our own agenda. Our society has taught us “to have it now” and expects to get it. We should not wait is another form of self-centredness. A lack of patience reflects a narrowness of soul.

Tolerant love: In order to have tolerant love, we must renounce our rights. The problem here is no body is willing to give up his or her right. That is why there are so many commissions for “rights” but they themselves are not genuine. The country that advocates for human right is the first to deny human right in practice. That is why the developed world do whatever they want on developing countries. Love to humanity is lacking in our world. Love is a choice, the act of caring enough to give attention to people. Humility, gentleness, patience and love are the things missing in all societies in general and also in the Christian Churches. Christian Churches should take a leading roll in being good example to the other people.

2. Relations among Christians

All life is relational. Christianity is a relational religion. Positive relations are based on several factors. They are: a shared identity in terms of family culture, subculture, and race. It is shared experience, shared values, and respect.

Egoism is the disease that destroys the relations among people. It is self idolatry and the failure to realise that God is the pattern of life. It divides the body of Christ. The mission of

the Church is being crippled because of the division in the Christian Church. The Church needs to abolish the artificial walls between the parts of Christ's Body. What the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran World Federation began is a good start. The Ökumenischer Kirchentag in Berlin and the good working relations between St Antonios Gemeinde and Petrigemeinde shows Christian maturity and such things needs to be promoted.

At the end I would like to summarise in four points what the work of Christian Church in this millennium should be.

The Work of the Church

1. **The Christian Church must work hard to restore the lost ethical values, to abolish her artificial walls,** bring unity within diversity both in Churches and in societies.
2. **The Church must train people at various levels** so that all members be involved in the ministry. Ministry includes nurturing individuals, working with small groups, addressing problems in society, and providing care to the suffering and distressed people. The entire body of Christ needs to involve in this ministry.
3. **The Church needs to be part of the society not for the society.** When the society is suffering due to lack of injustice, the Church needs to feel that suffering because the body of Christ in this planet is suffering. If the society rebels against social and economic structures that condemn human being to poverty and human degradation, the Church must participate in that struggle. Otherwise the Church becomes irrelevant in the society as late President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere said.

Unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn men to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the Church will become irrelevant to man and Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful (In Shorter Alyward African Christian Spirituality 1978:83).

If a Church needs to be relevant to all societies of today, it needs to address the issue of poverty which is the result of Dictatorship and Globlization. It is not enough to focus only on charity and piety. The Church must help the poor in the process of creating self-confidence

and take control of their own lives. One way of controlling their lives is reconstructing their cultural values so that they have their own identity. It is through their culture that the poor nations be encouraged towards self promotion.

4. The Church needs to speak Truth in love: Worship is speaking the truth about God. Confessing, is telling the truth about ourselves, counselling is a process of helping people to deal with the truth. We need to live the truth. Living the truth is not abstract, but personal, practical and all embracing. But today's problem is people do not want to live truth and want to live delusion, try to hide from themselves thinking that they are better than what they are. In other word human beings lye to self, to each other and to God. This is what need to be corrected in the lives of Christians and in the wider societies of our planet. The Church members need to live truth in speaking truth and take a lead in making others to speak truth. Speaking truth may require confrontation which many people do not want to do because of personal security or to avoid conflict. However, the church needs to speak truth in love and confront individual, social, political, economic and ethical corruption in the society. Then it is possible to see the Church in the world not the world in the Church. The Church has to take the leading role in keeping unity within diversity, maintaining justice, in speaking against all form of oppressions and in bringing peace to our world in this new millennium. May God help us to do so and accomplish the mission that God entrusted to us. Amen.

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Sermon delivered at Hannover International Worship at Petri Church Kleefeld

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