

A Healthy, Maturing Church

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. The reading today is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 16.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who was over all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

[1 : 37] In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. First things first today, I want to wish you all a happy birthday.

Happy birthday, Christ Church. Our church was born on April 16, 2006, after about a year of raising funds and moving the Garrett family and the St. Clair family here and gathering a core team.

[3 : 19] Our little church startup began in the Marsh Theater, the Gaia Arts Building in downtown Berkeley on Shattuck and Alston. And by God's grace, we're still here.

And we survived till our 18th birthday. So thanks be to God. After Easter each year, if you've been here for a couple of Easter's, you'll know that our preaching shifts from the four Gospels, Gospels, and we moved to the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of the New Testament, and we go basically from celebrating the resurrection of Jesus to then thinking out together the implications and the consequences for what it means to be his resurrection people.

So just as a reminder, the risen Jesus spent 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension, and he was training and teaching his disciples for church planting and church development.

And then the day of Pentecost came, which he was preparing them for, and the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the gospel was proclaimed, and many people were converted, and the first church was born, the church in Jerusalem.

And it launched this church planting movement that would go out throughout the Roman Empire through these appointed people that Jesus gave to the church, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers.

[4 : 45] And so over the next three Sundays, we want to be thinking about the nature of this movement. We want to look at some New Testament texts that lay out some of the basic manual and fundamental instructions for being the church that the resurrected Jesus launched by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And our hope is that we can equip you with a New Testament vision of the nature and the purpose of the church, and that you can see the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to each one of you for building up that church, and you can think about the ways that your time and your talents and treasures might be stewarded for the mission of the church.

The apostle Paul uses many different analogies for the church. He calls the church a bride, a building, a commonwealth, a family, a flock of sheep.

But his favorite analogy that he uses more frequently than any of the others is the body, the body of Christ. And he mentions it four times in Ephesians 4. So that's what we're going to be looking at today and the next couple weeks.

And if you want to open those Bibles in your pews, you can do that. Page 946 is where we're going to be looking. And the apostle Paul's writing to this little church plant in the city of Ephesus around the year 62 A.D.

[6 : 11] while he's in prison in Rome. And he's basically saying to these friends that here's what it means to be the resurrection people of God. Here's what it means to be the body of Christ.

And I'm going to attempt to just unpack this statement over the next little bit. That Christ's body is called. Christ's body is triune.

And Christ's body is maturing. Three things we want to think about the body of Christ. It's called. It's triune. And it's maturing. So let's start with the Christ's body is called.

And you can see here in chapter 4 verse 1 it says, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

A key to the exposition of the latter half of this epistle is this word therefore because it points us back to the first half of this letter and emphasizes that the church, the body of Christ, is something which follows as a logical conclusion of what's gone before.

[7 : 20] And what is that? Well, Paul says, therefore, because of the outline of God's eternal plan of salvation that I gave to you in Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, you are to walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

So look back with me, if you will, at Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1, 3 says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And he goes on in verse 7 and he says, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. Wow.

Wow. So why did God choose to bless us and redeem us and forgive us by his grace? Well, he goes on and he says in verse 10, He did this as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth.

So what he's saying is that the church, the body of Christ, cannot exist apart from the Lord Jesus Christ himself and apart from his work of atonement and redemption through his blood.

[8 : 33] But then the question arises, how do we enter into the church? How do we enter into the body of Christ? What's necessary for that to happen? And the apostle goes on in verse 12 of chapter 1.

He says, We who were the first to hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. And in him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

This is how we enter into the kingdom of God. You hear that word of truth. You hear the gospel of salvation. And as a result, you believe it and you place your hope and your trust entirely in Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul means when he says, The calling to which you've been called. Ephesians chapter 2 is basically an elaboration on this. It's who is this apostle?

Who are the people that this apostle is exhorting? Well, he says in chapter 2, verse 1, You all were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

[9 : 48] That's what you all once were. You were dominated by sin. You were slaves of the devil. You were spiritually dead. He says in verse 3 that you were under the wrath and condemnation of God.

That's what the church is. The church is a gathering of people who know that they could do nothing for their salvation. A people who are completely helpless and hopeless to bring about your reconciliation to God.

But thanks be to God that now you are members of Christ's church, his body, solely because of what God has done to you. You are the calling to you in Jesus by the spirit.

It's the calling to which you've been called. You following me so far? I know this is a lot, but you've got to understand the therefore. So look at chapter 2, verse 4.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

[10 : 54] You're a people who've been quickened and who've been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That God has come and he's put new life into you and he's given you the ability to see the truth in Jesus and the ability to then put your trust and your weight upon him.

Verse 6, and he's raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The church is a people who realize that you've actually been united to the living Christ.

And you realize the implications and the consequences of the resurrection of Jesus for you. That you're alive and you're raised up with Jesus. What Paul is saying is that you are what you are as a result of what God has done for you and what he's done to you and what he's done in you.

It's the calling to which you've been called. So when the apostle writes, therefore, he's pointing us back to these great doctrines that he's elaborated in detail and he says, you are a people who've been saved by the precious blood of Jesus.

You're a people who've been regenerated by the Spirit. You're a people who've been given access through Jesus by the Spirit to the Father, he says, so that you can go there whenever you want.

[12 : 13] You've been brought into God's kingdom, into God's family, into God's church, into this body of Christ on the basis of trusting in it and living by these truths.

It's the calling to which you've been called. Therefore, Paul says, walk worthy of that calling to which you've been called.

Therefore, walk worthy of that calling to which you've been called. God's gracious calling bestows upon us high privileges and also high responsibilities.

You've been called into these incredible blessings of salvation, so now there's a standard way of life that corresponds to that calling. To walk worthy of it means to walk with an equal weight and an equal balance, that you've received this calling, so now balance out that calling with your character and with your conduct.

And listen again to what he says. I therefore, this is chapter 4, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[13 : 32] The apostle's writing to people who've been called into Jesus Christ, and what's his appeal? What's his exhortation to them? He says, you ought to be a people who are eager, a people who make every effort, a people who strive diligently not to produce a unity or to create a unity or to achieve a unity, but you're to be eager to maintain the unity and to keep the unity and to guard the unity and to develop the unity that the Holy Spirit has created among those whom God has called into Jesus Christ.

So there is a unity that is already in existence among those who've been called. There's a unity of all those who've experienced the calling into this glorious reality of the gospel message that Paul has just unfolded for us in Ephesians 1-3.

Now if you look around this room, and I encourage you, you can turn and look around and see who's seated around you. If you look around, everybody's afraid to look around. It's okay. You can look around. You can move your head.

It's okay. If you look around this room, you probably see many people that you don't know yet or don't know well. But what I want to help you see is that many of those people, most of those people have been called into Jesus Christ.

And if that's true, then there's a unity that already exists among you, whether you like it or not, because you share a mutual calling into Jesus Christ.

[15 : 11] Now the Greek word for the church is ekklesia, which means the called, the called out. And that means that the church are the called out ones, people who've been called out from your old life into a new life in Jesus Christ.

People who, as Paul says elsewhere, have been called out from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son that He loves. And so when the apostle says, walk worthy with humility and gentleness and patience and forbearance and love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, what he's saying is don't allow anything to disrupt the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Don't let anything interfere with the spiritual unity into which you've been brought by the calling of the Holy Spirit. So friends, our task, our task is to do no harm to the unity of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to be eager to make this invisible unity of the Holy Spirit a visible and tangible reality in the life of the church. Now what does that mean for so many of us who do not yet know one another?

Well the apostle is exhorting us to be eager and make every effort and to strive diligently to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. And so the first step is that we just need to get to know each other.

[16 : 46] And we need to get to know the other people that have been united together because of their shared and mutual calling into Jesus Christ. And here are some of the opportunities we have to maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, I want you to know we gather here every Sunday and you are encouraged to come every time. And in fact, many of you came at 10.15 on Easter Sunday.

You can do that every Sunday of the year. And I want you to know that you are welcome to not sit where you normally sit. You can sit by someone different, somebody you don't know.

You can look for people before, during, and after the service and you can go talk to them. You can talk to them. Secondly, do not run for the exits at the end of the service but plan to linger.

Plan to make yourself available to know and be known over our coffee hour, over our lunch time on a monthly basis. And when you gather around those tables later today, you can talk about the weather, you can talk about the warriors, that's great.

[17 : 51] But ask questions. Tell me about your spiritual journey. Tell me how I can pray for you. Third thing is I would encourage you to engage in opportunities this spring like our dinners for four and our Saturday morning work day and our loaves and fishes ministry, our second Wednesday prayer meeting.

Third thing is if you're not yet part of a ministry team here on Sundays where you serve once a month, you can join one today. If you're not yet part of a community group that's restart in August, plan to join one.

And the last thing I'd say is be proactive and take initiative to invite people to dinner, go for a walk, grab coffee, so that spiritual friendships can form.

These are some of the small ways that we can walk worthy of the calling to which we have been mutually called. And these are really simple ways that we can be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Christ's body is called. You with me? Christ's body is called. I don't know if you're with me. Okay. Stop now. Alright.

[19 : 03] Christ's body is called but Christ's body is also triune. Christ's body is triune. Now you really got to buckle up for this part. Okay. The apostle goes on to describe the nature of the church's unity that's produced by the Holy Spirit.

And here's what he says in verse 4. He says, there is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Now notice the exalted way in which the church, the body of Christ is described. It's not just a question of our friendliness or our fellowship or our desiring to hang out with one another and do life together but rather life together in the church is lifted up into this realm of the blessed holy trinity, spirit, Lord, and Father.

The church in her unity is not to be conceived in merely human terms of our own organic relationship or our own organized structures but rather the church is to be seen in terms of the God who is three persons yet one being.

And we are to have a God-centered, God-focused vision of the church. Observe that this word one is used seven times in these three verses.

[20 : 28] There is one body produced by one Holy Spirit. Now the unity and the oneness of the body and the church is like what we find in the physical body, Paul says.

My body is not this loose grouping of mechanically attached parts. You know, my head's not stapled onto my neck and my arms not sewn on to my torso like Frankenstein.

No, the marvel and the mystery of the human body is that while it consists of many different parts with all these various functions, they're all one. They're all bound together in a vital, organic union. It's not that I have fingers stuck onto my hand and then hands stuck onto my arms and arms stuck onto my shoulders. It's that all these parts came out of an original cell, one germ of life and all of these parts of me are extensions and manifestations of the life and the vitality of my head.

Of my head. So to what does the apostle compare the life and the unity of this body? He says, the unity of the body of the church is like the unity that characterizes the blessed Holy Trinity.

[21 : 51] The oneness of the body is like the oneness of the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father. This mystical union between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity, three in one, one in three, that is the unity that exists in the body of the church.

Each of those three persons and the one Godhead play a part in creating the life and producing the unity of the church.

And look at what Paul says in verse four. He says, there's one body and one spirit just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call. The Holy Spirit calls us into the unity of the body by convicting us and regenerating us and enabling us to believe and he gives life and power to the body and he enters into us and he gives us that one hope that belongs to your call.

That one hope is that the Lord Jesus is going to come again, that he's going to judge evil and sin in the world, that he's going to renovate the world, he's going to raise our bodies, he's going to set up the kingdom of God finally and fully and we are going to reign with him in glory.

That's the one hope of the one spirit that he creates in the one church. And he goes on and he says there's one Lord and there's one faith and there's one baptism.

[23 : 19] The unity of the church comes from the conviction that there's only one Lord of this world and that's Jesus. As the apostle Peter preaches in Acts chapter 4, he says, salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.

That's how you know you're part of the church. When you're gathered together with people who believe that the absolutely unique son of God is the only mediator with God and that he saved us by his cross and he's been raised from the dead and that's what makes him the one Lord.

And then there's one faith. Justification by faith. That our Lord took our unrighteousness onto himself and he took his righteousness and put it onto us and the way that we receive that is simply by faith.

And then there's one baptism. That we're no longer in the realm or in the kingdom of Adam but now we've been taken out of that realm and we've been baptized into the kingdom and into the realm of Jesus.

One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

[24 : 41] And he says that God and Father is exalted over the church, his life and power is at work through the church and his presence dwells right here within the church.

Whoa. Now you might be saying my goodness why is our pastor giving us this high flying theology today? I only had one cup of coffee. But here's the thing.

Most of our troubles and most of our problems in life arise chiefly from the fact that we persistently start with ourselves. And one of the main results of sin is that we put ourselves at the center and we spend time thinking about ourselves and all of our personal and individualistic interests and pursuits.

But what the New Testament does is it pulls us right out of ourselves. And it says that you've been called into the mystical spiritual eternal body of Christ himself of which each one of us is just one tiny little part.

And all as the three blessed persons of the glorious holy trinity are one so we who worship and belong to the triune God are likewise of necessity one and we better do nothing to damage that oneness.

[26 : 02] you see it's by looking at and it's by believing in and it's by being amazed by the triune God in his work of salvation that we will maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

And if we look at anything else that unity is going to get destroyed. You see the church and her unity is the consequence of our belief and of our participation in this great and glorious doctrine that God the Father has provided in his son the way of salvation and he mediates that salvation through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

And if we truly understood and we truly live by this doctrine of the triune God any idea of self-seeking of self-importance of self-interest which is completely lacking in God himself any of those things that would would disrupt and resist the unity of the church would be utterly unthinkable and impossible for us.

So Christ's body you gotta know that Christ's body is called and you're only part of that body if you've been called and Christ's body is triune and you're only part of that body if you believe in this God I'm describing to you.

But the last thing is that Christ's body is maturing. Christ's body is maturing and I wish we had more time for the rest of this text but here's the big idea.

[27 : 38] You notice these key words that are in verses 7 to 16 and the words are mature and grow. Mature and grow.

Now Jesus himself said in the gospel of John chapter 3 he said the way that we enter into the kingdom of God is that we're born again. We're born from above. We're born as he says of the Holy Spirit.

And when we're born again like that we begin as infants who drink milk. But we need to grow and become toddlers who eat solids.

And then we need to keep developing so that we're teens we're kids and then we're teens and we mature all the way up into full adulthood where we eat meat or a vegan substitute beyond burgers whatever.

But the stress here is on how important it is as the apostle says to no longer be children. We're to no longer be children.

[28 : 41] In fact we're to develop through these different stages into what he's describing as grown up Christianity. Mature Christianity. As an individual Christian and as different parts of the corporate body of Christ the apostle says we in verse 13 are to become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus Christ.

And he says in verse 15 that we're to grow and become the mature body of him who is the head that is Christ. So this body is to grow and to develop and to mature under and like its head.

And when each individual part of the body is spiritually healthy then the whole body will be complete and will be functional. It will be rightly aligned he says.

It will be properly adjusted. It will be fully developed and proportionally balanced and harmoniously coordinated under the head and conformed to the likeness of its head which is Jesus.

Now how does a child mature into the fully grown and fully developed adult? And how do Christians and how do parts of the body of Christ mature into the fullness of the head?

[30 : 09] In other words how do all the limbs and the organs how do all the fingers and the toes how do all the little parts of the body become filled with the life and the energy of the head?

Well Paul says the way to that kind of maturity and that kind of life and that kind of growth happens in the body through what he says in verse 15 speaking the truth in love.

We grow by speaking the truth in love. Now this has been so profoundly misinterpreted and misunderstood so just bear with me to put it negatively the apostle Paul is not saying you'll grow into the maturity of Christ by being kind being friendly being nice speaking honestly but lovingly. The apostle is not exhorting us to say kind friendly honest things and love to one another though you should definitely do that. This is not at all a vague or nebulous or amorphous sentimental notion of just be nice and you'll grow.

literally what the apostle says is truthing in love we grow. Truthing in love we grow.

[31 : 32] Let's say it together. Truthing in love we grow. That is holding on to the truth of the gospel. Professing the truth of the gospel. Discussing the truth of the gospel.

Walking out the truth of the gospel. That's how we grow up. It's how we mature as the body that has Jesus as its head. And he says we are to hold on to something particular and something definite. He says we're to hold on to the truth with a capital T. The truth revealed by God. The truth recorded in the scriptures.

We're to truth these things in love. We are to truth the inspired authoritative doctrines and ethics that have been given by the resurrected Jesus through his apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in that first generation of the church which God saw fit to preserve for us and record for us in the infallible word of the New Testament.

The apostle says do you want to be a mature person? Do you want to be a mature body? Get really good at truthing in love.

[32 : 52] Be about truthing in love about the person and the work of Jesus. Be about the truthing in love about his atoning sacrifice and physical resurrection.

Continue to truth in love justification by faith alone and nothing else. Be really good at truthing in love the ethical imperatives about money and sex and power and all the other things we find in this New Testament that shows us how to walk worthy of the calling to which the church the body of Christ has been called.

Sermon's almost over. Questions for you to consider. Are you growing in this truth of the New Testament? Do you have more of a grasp on that truth than you had a year ago?

Do you understand it better? Are you more able to truth the gospel and love to the other people here in this church? Does the truth of this gospel grip you more and more?

Do you have an increasing sense of wonder and amazement and astonishment that not only is this gospel true but it's true for you? And have you grown so much in your character and your conduct that your life aligns to and it conforms with the truth?

[34 : 21] The truth that comes straight from the head all the way down into his body. Brothers and sisters, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ.

May it be so in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.