

# God Gives Unity

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's a great joy to be back at Holy Trinity tonight and to see many familiar faces and many that I don't know.

And my name is Paul Barker, for those who have forgotten, and for those who I haven't met. And it was my joy and privilege to be Senior Minister here for a few years until late last year.

And now I'm teaching based in Malaysia at a seminary, but also teach in other countries around Asia, in Pakistan and India and Thailand and Myanmar in particular so far this year.

And I do encourage you to come along this week for the young adults on Thursday night or others on Tuesday night and women on Monday night and men on Tuesday morning.

And hear a bit of what I've been doing. And I want to thank you for your support and encouragement. Certainly the strongest support and encouragement I get is from people at Holy Trinity. And I value that very much.

[ 1 : 01 ] And if you don't already get my monthly prayer letter or newsletter, then there's a little table out here and you can give me your email address and we'll send it to you through CMS each month.

And there's a few brochures sitting on the table there. So if you don't have the prayer card for me and the CMS information and literature, then please help yourself after church tonight and take that as well.

Well, we're in the middle of a series on Ephesians, which I must say we have done before at Holy Trinity. And I mean, it's a bit sad. You're just repeating yourselves over and over again.

We did it in 1996. Although I realise some of you may not have been born then. It's a good thing to keep reminding ourselves of God's word.

Let's pray as we come under God's word together. Lord God, your word is living, sharper than a two-edged sword.

[ 2 : 04 ] And we pray tonight that it may pierce our hearts, changing us, teaching us, correcting us, rebuking us, equipping us for good works, for the glory of Jesus Christ.

So that his church may grow in unity and maturity under him. So this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Theology is very practical.

And many people don't like theology because they think it's sort of airy-fairy, philosophical. We don't need all this theology. Let's just do. But it's not the Bible's approach to the Christian life.

Theology is very practical. It's interesting how the epistles of the New Testament, which are all written to urge Christians to live more godly lives in some form or other, are all thoroughly saturated with theology.

Ephesians is, in effect, three theological chapters followed by three practical chapters. A bit like the epistle to the Romans, although that's longer. But the other epistles are, again, intertwining theology and practice.

[ 3 : 22 ] And that's what the epistle or the letter to the Ephesian church is all about. The whole purpose of what you've looked at in recent weeks, the theological argument of chapters one through chapters three, is all about how to live the Christian life.

And we get to a hinge point, in effect, in the letter tonight, at the beginning of chapter four. The hinge point is the first word, or maybe second word in this translation.

I therefore. That is because of chapters one to three. Therefore, chapters four to six. Paul has made sure that this Ephesian church, which he planted, as we read about in the Acts of the Apostles, for example, in Acts 19.

He's wanting to make sure that this church in Ephesus, a key strategic city in what was then called Asia Minor in modern day Western Turkey. He wants to make sure that they fully understand the

gospel.

It's the basic gospel that leads people to be converted. But this is a church already. He's wanting to make sure this church is grounded in the fundamental, elementary, but profound gospel of Jesus Christ.

[ 4 : 41 ] Not as an evangelistic enterprise, but as a practical exercise that is grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They will live lives worthy of Jesus Christ. That's because right belief leads to right living. Not absolutely and in every way, but there is a fundamental connection in the Christian faith.

That we get our thinking right, we get our theology right, and we are more likely to see the fruit of godly living as a result. We should never divorce the two and think that only what matters is practice or that only what matters is right belief.

Certainly the Bible sees a thorough integration of the two. And here tonight we flip through the hinge of this book from the theological foundation. It's purpose in Ephesians is now what follows. In one sense, if we were preaching through this book, you could actually preach chapters 1 to 3, but merely apply each of those sermons in chapters 4 to 6. Although having gotten out of chapters 4 to 6, it's important that we keep grounding these chapters in the theology that you've already seen in the last few weeks of chapters 1 to 3.

[ 5 : 58 ] To put it another way, we must be very careful to be sure that if we are to obey the commands of these chapters, to live a worthy life, to be humble, not to let sun go down on your anger, all those sorts of things, that we must recognize that we are doing that as a response to a gospel of grace.

So this is a turning point in the letter.

The big word, therefore, stands as the hinge and a beacon for us in view of the blessings that are ours in Christ, as chapter 1, the first half, talked about.

In view of the fact that we Christians have received every spiritual blessing in Jesus. In view of the fact that we are adopted into His family. That we can call God our Father.

In view of the fact that we've received God's Holy Spirit as a seal and a guarantee of our eternal destiny. In view of the fact that we've been saved by grace. That's not our own doing.

[ 7 : 12 ] Completely the work of God's grace. That we contribute nothing to it. That we're helpless in God's sight and yet He saved us in Christ. But not merely us as an individual saved in Christ.

That we who are perhaps Jewish or Gentile of background, near and far, whatever our background, have been brought together by grace and being built as living stones in Christ, on the foundation of Christ and the apostles and prophets.

In view of all of that, how should we live? That's really what's being said in this opening hinge.

Therefore, because of this glorious and wonderful, astonishing gospel that has as its destiny bringing all things together under Christ the head, how now on earth do we live?

as church. Not fundamentally, how now do we live on earth as a Christian? But how now do we live on earth as a church?

For basically, that's our identity. Our identity, in a sense we could say fundamentally, is that we belong to the church together. Now, saying that may be slightly overstating it, but because we live in a, or you live, in a Western society, I no longer do, but still an individualistic society, there's an element in which we need to overbalance the emphasis, to recognise that we belong fundamentally together as church.

[ 8 : 46 ] That's the image that's used in the second half of chapter 2. Building on the individual being converted, we're brought together in Christ as church. How now do we live together as church?

Because the fundamental emphasis here, at the beginning of this ethical section of the book, is an emphasis on unity. Therefore, I, Paul, a prisoner of the Lord, beg you, to lead a life, worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

But what follows is not simply an individualistic ethic, but rather a corporate way of living as church. To lead a worthy life, literally it's to walk the worthy life.

And you'll see next week, and in subsequent weeks, the reiteration of that image of walk. To walk this way, not that way. To walk this way, not that way. And the emphasis and contrast that runs through chapters 4 and 5, on this theme of walking the right way, is that it's not like the pagans and the Gentiles.

It's to walk a distinctively Christ-like way. But not simply as an individual, but as the church. And the key is unity.

[10:05] Firstly, it's a unity expressed through godly character. We often underplay, I think, character. In our ministry training, in church life, we're often looking for things to do, and people to be gifted and equipped to do things.

But Paul rightly here, as always through the Bible, places character first. So he says, in describing this worthy life, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, maintaining the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace.

Godly character is essential, if we are to lead, worthy lives. And he gives five marks, of Christian character.

Humility. Humility is not a sort of, false modesty, of pretending that we're unimportant. But humility is counting others better than ourselves, as it's defined elsewhere in the New Testament that way. You see, humility is a relational idea. If you are a monk by yourself, never interacting with anyone else, or if you live on a desert island by yourself, you don't practice humility.

[11:30] You need other people to be humble with. It's a relational idea, counting others better than yourself. And that's how we're meant to be, on the model of Christ himself, as the New Testament makes so clear.

This is very much against the way that our world walks or lives, just as it was in Paul's day. You are to walk this way, not that way. The humble way, not the proud way.

But in our society, pride is regarded as a virtue. We're told to be self-assertive, rather than humble and meek. But Christ's way, the worthy way, the way we are to walk, as in habitual practice, of character, is to be humble.

In my experience as a church minister, as in my experience as an archdeacon here for many years, churches are often riven, asunder, divided, because of a lack of humility, in the ministers, and in the lay people.

Humility is fundamental to Christian character. But of course the gospel makes us humble. That's why Paul makes it clear what the gospel is. We are saved by our good, no, not by our good works, we are saved by grace.

[12:55] We do nothing, contribute nothing, to our salvation. He made that so clear in chapter 2. Therefore that's the theological foundation for being humble.

That is, salvation and being a Christian is not an issue of pride, but of grace. And therefore how we live our Christian life is to be a humble way, not a proud way. Secondly, he says, gentleness, gentleness, which is not weakness.

Gentleness, in fact, is a Christian virtue, is strength, not weakness. And yet again, our society encourages not to be gentle, but to be strong and assertive. But gentle is the way of Jesus.

Gentle is to be our way. The worthy way is Jesus' way. A gentle way, on the model of Christ, who is gentle and lowly of heart, as he himself said, quoted in Matthew's gospel.

To be gentle is to perhaps waive your own rights, not to be self-assertive. It's related, of course, to humility, and we ought not try and distinguish each of these as totally separate marks of character.

[14:04] They're all intertwined in a way. And again, the gospel that Paul has enunciated at length in the first three chapters, ought to encourage us to be gentle, to put other people first, to waive our own rights, to recognize that we're submissive under Christ as well.

And thirdly, patience. A way of translating this in Old English would be long-tempered. Not meaning that you've got a temper for a long time, but that unlike short-tempered, that is, it takes a long time before your temper might be aroused.

That's patience. But notice what it is not. Sometimes we think that patience is a bit like, or we define it in terms like indifference. But patience is not indifference.

Patience will erupt sometimes into a hot temper. At right things, it should be. But if we're always indifferent, that could be misunderstood as patience.

Jesus, of course, was patient. Patient even under provocation. And yet there were times when it was clear that his patience was running out. And God, of course, is long-suffering.

[15:18] The Bible reiterates verses of the character of God that originate in Exodus 34, that he is in effect like patient God. But that doesn't mean that we can always presume on his patience.

His patience at times will end. So we need to make sure that we understand what being a patient Christian is. That we're patient for Jesus' return. We're patient in the face of injustice.

We're patient in the face of oppression and persecution and mockery and so on. It doesn't mean that we're indifferent. But we're waiting for God's justice to come.

And then forbearance. Because the worthy life recognises that church and Christians are not perfect. Becoming a Christian doesn't make us instantaneously perfect. We have to be forbearing. We have to put up with each other. We have to make allowance for each other. Forbearance is perhaps the first step before forgiveness. So we have to bear with one another when it may not be somebody else's sin, but it might be other people's habits that irk us a bit.

[16:23] Isn't it fascinating how we're all thrown together here because of the grace of the gospel? We don't choose who we sit with. We don't choose who are fellow Christians with us.

Most of the rest of our life we can sort of opt out if there are people we don't particularly like. But we're all thrown together. That's the grace of the gospel at work. We're living stones or stones being built into Christ together.

Just as if you were building a building, the stones might need trimming to fit, so it is in effect for us that we might grate against each other.

But in rubbing against each other as church members, belonging together, we have to forbear with one another, but in effect our own rough edges will eventually be made smooth, more like Jesus. Again, forbearance is a mutual relational idea as all of these are. You can't particularly be forbearing if you have nothing to do with any other Christian.

[17:24] The presupposition here is that we belong together. We're in relationship together. We're in ministry together. We're growing together. And we're having to forbear with one another because we're not all picking who we can grow with.

That's not our right. And then love. We're bearing with one another in love. Perhaps the preeminent Christian virtue so frequently mentioned in the epistles in particular in the New Testament.

Love is an active term. It's not something that's merely emotional. It's certainly not something that is merely sensual in the biblical way of thinking.

Love is costly, giving, sacrificial. It's proactive. It's seeking out other people. It's proactively responding to other people, not simply a reaction.

And we're to love all. We're not to choose the lovely people to love. That's too easy. Jesus loved us, of course. That's the model of the gospel that Paul has expounded in the first three chapters.

[18:32] He didn't save us by grace because we're lovely. He saved us anyway as an act of love. And that again is the model of the worthy life.

So notice here firstly, unity expressed through character. The ethics that are in the second half of the book are largely about unity as a theme.

But unity requires the growth of godly character. In our attitudes, in our thoughts and motives and so on. Before any actions take place.

This is not an optional extra for Christians. Paul says in verse 3, Make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

We do that by practicing those godly characteristics he's just said. But there is an urgency here. Make every effort. Strive.

[19:31] It's a present participle which means an ongoing effort. It's not something you just do once and achieve. But something for all time. Every day. From now to the last breath we breathe on earth.

Make every effort. Notice that it's to maintain the unity. We're not creating unity. The gospel that creates the unity. But we are to maintain the unity in our relationships with other Christians as members of Christ's church.

Spare no effort is another way of translating that. There will be times when you get frustrated and tired by church life. We don't have any option to give up, take a break or anything like that.

We fundamentally belong. And it's frustrating belonging to a church. I can say that as a pastor of a church and now a member of a church. Although I don't go there very often because I preach in so many other churches.

It's very frustrating being a church member. There's lots of people that we find irritating. There's lots of church practices and hierarchies that we don't like. We are to maintain or make every effort to maintain the unity in the spirit in a bond of peace.

[20:45] So that's the first general point. Unity through godly character. But a unity that's given, not one that we create.

A unity that's given in the gospel, as Paul has made clear in the three preceding chapters. But again he reminds us, he summarizes those early chapters in a way with this sequence of one in the verses that follow.

In effect he's drawing the threads of chapters one to three together here. When he says there is one body. That is the church. The church which he's talked about in chapter one and especially in chapter two, the second half.

There is one church. There's not a church for Jews and a church for Gentiles. There's not a church for each sort of type of person. There is one church. Christ's church.

And we belong to that. There is one body. There's one spirit. The one spirit that's mentioned in chapter one. That is the guarantee, the seal or deposit of our eternal destiny.

[ 21 : 49 ] The same spirit that he spoke about in chapter two, verse 18. For through him both of us have access in one spirit to the Father. Not many spirits, but one.

And whether Jew or Gentile, whoever we are, we have access to God the Father through the same and one spirit. And we were called to the one hope. The theme of hope has occurred a number of times in Ephesians 1 to 3.

In chapters 1 and 2 in particular. The Holy Spirit, the one spirit given as a guarantee for our future hope, for example. We share the same one hope together.

We might express that as chapter one, verse 10 said, The hope of being brought together under Christ the head. Of all things being brought together under him. There is one Lord.

That is the one Jesus Christ through whom we are saved. There is one faith. Faith. In some ways, Paul has summarized in a glorious statement of praise in the first half of chapter one.

[ 22 : 52 ] What that faith is in essence. But he's expounded again further in the rest of chapter one through to chapter three. There is not a multitude of faiths, but one faith. The content of faith is what's meant here.

There is one baptism. He doesn't mean here whether it's lots of water or a couple of drops. Whether it's a drought or a flood. In the mode of baptism. But rather there is one baptism by which a person is publicly and visibly seen to be a Christian.

Whether it's lots of water or not isn't the issue. But only one baptism. There is one God and Father of us all. Unlike the pagans who thought there were a multitude of gods.

And therefore unity was never a theme for them. You see, because there is one of all these things. One body. One spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father.

We have a fundamental unity. Paul in a way is summarizing his argument from the first three chapters. One, one, one. Seven times. The perfect number. As so often in the Bible.

[ 24 : 00 ] The complete number. The worthy life contributes to church unity. Unity maintains that unity. The question then is what sort of life are you living?

Is your life a worthy life? Is it worthy through godly character? And is it maintaining the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace?

The second theme in this section. Building on unity. And also contributing to it. Is a theme of maturity.

Paul's writing to a church, remember. Not to non-believers. So he's not writing to convert people. But rather to grow them in maturity. From being younger Christians to being mature Christians.

Do not think here. That maturity is about the length of time that you've been a Christian. You may have been a Christian 40 years. But may not be a mature Christian.

[ 24 : 57 ] You may have been a Christian one year. And be relatively mature as a Christian. Maturity is not chronologically measured for Christians.

I'm saying that because I want you all to see that this is addressing you. Whether you've been a Christian 40 years or maybe more. Or just one. Or maybe less. And Paul wants to make it clear firstly.

That maturity is coming through ministry. He's also wanting to make sure people don't misunderstand. His emphasis on one, one, one, one. Does not lead to a uniformity.

We're not all clones of each other. We're all different. There's a great diversity among Christian brothers and sisters. Unity is not uniformity. And so having emphasised one, one, one, one.

Now and the word all as well. So one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all. Now the language becomes each in verse 7.

[ 26 : 04 ] To each was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The emphasis is firstly on the giver. The giver is the ascended Christ.

It's interesting how often we talk about the gifts of the spirit. Fair enough. Because that is the language elsewhere in the New Testament. But here it's the gifts of the ascended Christ. The same Christ quoting from the Psalms. Psalm 68 that was our first reading. Who ascended but having first descended.

Now I'm just going to skip over in effect the argument of those verses. But what it's basically saying is that the Christ who was in heaven. And descended to earth incarnate as a human being. Has ascended. Resurrected from the dead. And then ascended into heaven in glory 40 days after the resurrection. That Christ is Lord of all. Now supreme in heaven.

[ 27 : 00 ] And that ascended Christ through his spirit. Has poured out gifts onto his church. So that the church may grow in likeness of him. And in maturity of him.

And under him the head. In effect the gifts in the Psalm. That's quoted are gifts of victory of battle. And so the idea of the ascended Christ.

Is of a triumphant Christ. Who's defeated all his enemies. And now in effect rather than accumulate gifts for himself. Bestows gifts on his body.

The church. And the gifts. Are people. It's very striking. The gifts are not what we often think of as spiritual gifts. But are actually people.

I wonder if you've ever thought of yourself. As part of the gift of Christ to his church. For some of you that may apply. And I wonder if you've often thought of some people.

[ 27 : 57 ] As being gifts. For the church. But that's the case. The gifts he gave in verse 11. Were that some would be apostles. Not the gift of apostleship.

But the gift of apostles. And prophets. And evangelists. And pastors and teachers. Pastors and teachers in fact belong together. As one. Pastor teacher.

Some. Are apostles. Some. Are prophets. Some. Are evangelists. And some. Are pastor teacher. And the addition of all those sums. Doesn't mean everybody.

That is there will be some who are not. Any of those things. And we'll come to them. In a minute as well. There's debate about exactly what these. Officers were about.

Whether the apostles applied only to the original apostles. Who were witnesses of the resurrection. For example. Or whether it's apostle as in the idea of sent. Whatever we say.

[ 28 : 56 ] All of these are ministries of the word. The apostles who were. Originally the. Proclaimers and testifiers to the resurrection. Or those who are sent.

Because that's what the word apostle basically means. To be sent. Proclaiming the word.

Evangelists. Or prophets rather next. Mediators and speakers of God's word.

In the line of Moses. Through Jesus. On to others as well. Who are speaking God's word. To God's church. The evangelists who are speaking the gospel. To unbelievers.

And the pastor teachers who are. Week by week preaching and teaching. In various ways. To big congregations. Or small. Or house churches. Or one on one. The ministry of God's word.

All of them are about the ministry of the word. And God's gift. The ascended Christ's gift. Are these people. To teach and preach the word of God.

[ 29 : 51 ] It's one reason why I'm doing what I'm doing now. And why I did what I did here as well. Let me say. As a pastor teacher here. For nearly going on 14 years. 13 and a half years or so.

To try and grow the church in maturities. We'll come to. And now what I'm doing is. Same sort of ministry in a way. In a very different sort of context. The purpose of it.

The purpose of it. Is what verse 12 tells us. To equip the saints. For the work of ministry. Notice that. The gifts are not the ministers.

But the gifts are those word ministers. For the saints. To be equipped. For ministry. So that all Christians. Are ministers. Not just some.

All the saints here. Doesn't mean the specially holy Christians. We've got into bad habits. Of using saint in the wrong way. Never in the New Testament. Is saint a singular word. It always is plural.

[ 30 : 53 ] And always refers to all Christians. That are. In whatever church is being addressed. So you're the saints. We're the saints. And some have particular gifts.

Of the ministry of God's word. As verse 11 said. For the purpose of equipping. All the saints. For the work of ministry. The work of ministry. That all the saints will do.

Will be very diverse. In the serving of other people. In pastoral care. Maybe in evangelism. As well. In encouraging each other.

Maybe it's involvement. In Bible study groups. Or practical work. Or youth or children's work. Whatever it is. A whole range of stuff. Some of which will involve. Teaching God's word. Others may be. More practical love.

And ministries of mercy. And so on. But notice that all the saints. Are to be involved with ministry. What about you?

[ 31 : 47 ] What ministry are you. Serving God. And serving God's church by. Because there's no opt out here. It's for all the saints.

To be involved in ministry. And the equipment of that ministry. Comes through the gifts of. Pastor teachers. And evangelists. And others. Ministering God's word. Notice the connection again. That the word of God. Is connected to the ministry. And the practical life. That flows. How theology and ethics. Or theology and practice.

Belong together. And the theology serves. The practice. The model of ministry here. Is not a sort of pyramid model. Of some boss.

Ordering other people around. But rather in a sense. Of some within the body of Christ. Training. Equipping. So that all are involved in ministry.

[ 32 : 46 ] So that the whole body. Will function properly. So if you're leading a worthy life. It will be a life of ministry. Of service of God's church.

A service of God's gospel. In some way. In a whole range of ways. Is that your. Worthy life.

Or are you a receiver. Not a giver. Another way of. Looking at it is. That all Christians. Are to be givers. Ministers. In the work of ministry.

Very often there are Christians. Who are. Receivers only. We're to be both actually. The receiving. Enables the giving. But sometimes. In the channel.

Of receiving. The equipment. From God's word. Through God's. Teachers. Stops. Blocks.

Sometimes we need. To put a stent in there.

[ 33 : 45 ] So that our. Receiving. Leads to giving. Leads to ministry. Are you just. A receiver. What was your attitude.

When you came tonight. Just coming to receive. Slip out quietly. It's not an option actually. We belong together.

And all of us. Are to be involved. In ministry. And it may not be. That your ministry. Is fundamentally. Focused. On a Sunday night service. But for many.

It will be. And in many ways. This is our prime. Fellowship. Time. Of mutual encouragement. It's not just about. You receiving.

But also about. You giving. There's a two-way. Dynamic. When we gather together. As the body of Christ. And in my experience. Too many people. Are wanting to receive.

[ 34 : 46 ] But never think about giving. In whatever way. You're being equipped. For ministry. Of course. There's much ministry. That happens outside. The context. Of a gathering.

On a Sunday night. And of course. If the equipment. Of. Of hearing from God's word. Through a pastor teacher. Is equipping you. For ministry. In other places. Of course. That's great. But this is a fundamental.

Focus. Of not just listening. To a sermon. But of actually. Gathering together. So that. Corporately. We are. Working together. Growing together. Maturing together. And being equipped together.

For ministry. Together. What's the goal. Of all of this ministry. Paul gives a breathtaking.

Description. In the verses.

That conclude. This section tonight. Until all of us. Come. To the unity. Of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of the son of God. Correct thinking.

[ 35 : 41 ] Is an essential part. Of this maturity. Let me say. That is to maturity. To the measure. Of the full stature. Of Christ.

Which is a statement. About character. As much as anything. So getting our theology. Right.

Getting our character. Right. And then Paul says. We must no longer.

Be children. Tossed to and fro. And blown about. By every wind of doctrine. We've. Seen pictures. In recent years. Of boats. Of refugees. Coming to Australia.

And sometimes. Their engines. Have broken. Or whatever it is. And they're tossed. To and fro. On the waters. And sometimes. Rescued. Thankfully. By others. Tragically.

Not always so. Paul uses that imagery. Of being like a boat. That has no steering. And no power. And is merely. At the whim. Of the wind.

[ 36 : 36 ] And the waves. Tossed to and fro. That's an immature. Christian. There are many. Brand new Christians. Of course.

Will of necessity. Probably be. Immature. At first. Until they begin. To understand. And grow. In their knowledge. And thus. Begin to resist. The winds. That seek.

To blow. In the wrong direction. I remember. One Christian lady. Not here. That I spoke to. Many many years ago. Who said to me.

That whatever. Christian book. She read. That became the truth. For her. In the next book. She read. Which might be different. She was an immature. Christian. She recognized. That she was being blown around. By the latest thing.

That she read. Whether it was good or bad. But gradually. In the time I knew her. Began to. Become more critical. And thoughtful. And not just be blown around.

[ 37 : 29 ] By everything. Mature Christians. Have a. Firm. Knowledge. Of the truth. Which they grasp. That's changing them more. Into the likeness of Christ.

A theme that Paul will pick up on. In chapter five. As well. We must no longer. He says. Be children tossed to and fro. And blown about. By every wind of doctrine.

By people's trickery. By their craftiness. In deceitful scheming. There's still plenty of that going on. And it was there in Ephesus. As well. As you see. In Paul writing to Timothy.

Who was later. The pastor of Ephesus. And as he warned the Ephesian elders. In Acts 20. Of the wolves. That would come to Ephesus. To lead people astray. And devour them. And our church is still under attack.

For all sorts of false teaching. Place by place. Year by year. Decade by decade. How important it is. That the church of God's people. Is mature. So that it's well grounded.

[ 38 : 26 ] And rooted. On the foundation of Christ. And the apostles. And the prophets. So that it's not blown around. By false teaching. Because when it's blown around. By false teaching. It ends up practicing things.

That are wrong. And not leading a worthy life. As you may be very aware. But rather speaking the truth. In love. Paul says. We must grow up.

In every way. Into him. Who is the head. Into Christ. Christ is the head of the church. Not Andrew. Nor was it ever me. It's not a bishop.

It's not an archbishop. It's not a pope. It is Christ. Who is the head of the church. And the whole goal. Of the gospel. As Paul said. Back in chapter 1. Verse 10. Is that all things.

Are brought together. Under Christ the head. And so here. He's coming now. To practically. How will that be accomplished? Through the gifts. Of ministry. That equip the saints.

[ 39 : 20 ] For ministry. To grow up in maturity. And unity. Under Christ. The head. From whom the whole body. Joined and knit together. By every ligament. With which it is equipped.

As each part is working properly. Promote the body's growth. In building itself up. In love. That's Paul's. Statement of praise.

In chapter 1. Fleshed out. In an imperative. Here. About living. A worthy. Life. How important it is. You see. To get our doctrine right.

If we don't. We will never be part. Of this growth. Of maturity. And unity. Growing up the church. Means.

As he describes it. In verse 15 and 16. That we will never have made it. We can never say. That we as a church. Are now mature. That we can put up our feet.

[ 40 : 16 ] And relax. Not until the day. Of Jesus return. Will that be the case. There will always be growth. And always a need. For growing ministry. And maturity. In the church of God.

On earth. Until the day. Of Jesus return. The church is always. To be growing. We will never have grown. Enough. The ultimate focus.

Of the church. Is Jesus Christ. Sadly. That's often lost. In church life. It's often lost. In programs. It's lost.

In personalities. It's lost. In bureaucracy. It's lost. In institutionalism. It's lost. In conflict. And division. It's lost. In petty arguments. About church life. The focus. Of the church. Of any church. Is Jesus Christ. He is its source.

[ 41 : 18 ] And its goal. He is its foundation. And its head. He is the reason. For the church's existence. As Paul made clear. In chapters 1 to 3.

And it's in him. Through him. And under him. That we are to be growing. He is its purpose. The worthy life.

Is focused on Christ. Sure. In faith. Building up the church. Demonstrating godly character. And maintaining.

Christian unity. And what about you? What about you individually. As part of that vision?

And what about you as a congregation? And what about you. Or we. As Holy Trinity Doncaster. Are we leading a worthy life?

[ 42 : 17 ] Are we growing in unity? Growing in godliness? Growing in maturity? Are we becoming sounder in theology? Are we growing in our understanding of the gospel?

Are we more humble? Are we more servant like? Are we seeing more ministry happen? All for the glory.

And to the praise of his glory. Of Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord God.

We thank you for Jesus Christ. The foundation of the church. Our Lord and our Savior. We thank you that he is our head. We thank you that by grace you've saved us.

And by grace you've brought us together as his body the church. Lord God. Help us to lead lives. Worthy of him.

[ 43 : 19 ] More and more like him in character. More and more in ministry and service of him. More and more submissive under him and his word.

More and more living for his glory. We pray this for Holy Trinity. Lord Jesus. We pray it for the church worldwide.

So that Jesus may be glorified and honoured by all. And we long for the day. When he returns. And his church is made perfect in his image.

And all things. On heaven and on earth. Are brought together under Christ the head. Come Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.