

Christ's Body United and Mature

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, thanks for doing those readings, Brendan and Sharon.

! If the rest of you could leave your Bibles open there and have your outline with you as well. Well, many of you here today may have joined our church recently. And my question to you is this, what made you choose HDD?

Or perhaps you're still deciding. The question is, what are you looking out for to help you decide? Good community? A great band?

Good Bible teaching? Because we're Anglican? Chicken and chips and cheap community meals?

[1 : 03] Or dare I say it, potential to find a life partner? Or maybe your parents chose and you're here by default? Or even if that's so, what do you think makes for a good and healthy church?

And how does HDD measure up to it? Well, as Rhianna said, we begin the second half of Ephesians today. And the first half, as I said last week, Paul focused on teaching us what God has done for us.

Rhianna used a much bigger word like doctrinal teaching. But that's essentially what it is. Paul now then turns to what O means.

What's the practical application? In other words, how does chapter 1 to 3 translate into Christian living? And that's why we read in verse 1 today, As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Paul had already explained in the first half what this calling is. Chosen in Christ, made alive by grace, united Jews and Gentiles, created for good works, called to one hope, or as Paul would say in verse 4, or he does say, called to the one hope of a glorious inheritance in Christ.

[2 : 19] And so from here on in, to the rest of the letter, Paul will concentrate on how to live this worthy life. We've been called to this rich life, you know, seated with God, seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

How do we now live a life worthy of this calling? And today's passage focused specifically on what it looks like to live together as Christ's body.

Two aspects to this. The first in your outline is unity. So in verse 2, 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. Now these specific actions here listed, I don't think are exhaustive, because the catch-all phrase there is make every effort.

Do whatever it takes to keep the unity, including things that Paul did not mention here, because it's a long list. But based on those that are here, in that very first sentence, the picture we get is that it requires members to put others and Christ's body ahead of themselves.

[3 : 35] It's having the mindset that says, not what I want, but what's good for others. Humility, patience, forbearance. These are doing things for others, even if it's costly to ourselves.

And make every effort means, don't do it half-heartedly. Put in 100% and more. Go all out to keep the unity.

So for example, don't just do it on Sunday, from 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock, or if my servant's too long, 6.30, when we are at church. But no, do it over chicken and chips afterwards, or even when you hang and chill outside of church.

It means thinking carefully, so that we don't undermine the unity unintentionally, by what we say or do. Now, we can do that quite easily, so take an example, later on maybe, something as innocent as who we sit with for dinner.

Very naturally, we like to sit with people that we think we can have a good conversation with, or we like. That's very natural, but we can subconsciously do that, by doing that, communicate something,

doesn't it?

[4 : 55] That our unity is based on other things, other than Jesus. Or when we eat, and I know some of you will be very hungry, particularly you growing boys, it's easy to just grab what you want.

But that doesn't help unity, does it? Because what if some go without? Now, food is a very funny thing, isn't it? Because we love, eating together is a very strong sense of belonging, isn't it?

That's why we make an effort, for example, to cater for allergies, because imagine if someone can't eat the food that everyone else can. It's exclusionary, isn't it?

So instead, later on, we could take less at first, can't we? So that when others have enough, then we come back for a second. Or, if you can't do that, then go last, when everyone else has taken what they need, and then, yeah, you take all that you want.

Now, why does Paul care so much about unity? Well, because it's been bought by the precious blood of Jesus. We are united at the cost of Jesus' death on the cross.

[6 : 06] Right? That's why he cares. But here's the good news. We actually don't have to create this unity. Jesus has already secured it for us.

All we have to do now, Paul says, is make every effort to maintain, not create, which is too hard, maintain this precious gift. And so, Paul now, in verses 4 to 6, reminds them of the basis for this unity.

It actually summarizes all that he's spoken about in chapters 1 to 3. But the word he uses repeatedly is one. Reina read it already earlier. 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 and through all and in all. All these things that you've just read is ours through the costly death of Jesus.

which means the wonderful thing is it cannot be taken away from us as a church. Jesus' death and resurrection has secured our unity forever.

[7 : 17] Thus, actually, even if individual members are divisive or disruptive, they cannot jeopardize the church's unity. Right? But what they risk, however, is their place or their part in it.

Because if they persist in this unity, they show that their faith is not genuine in the first place. And so, they risk being cut off from the body by God.

And so, if you truly love Jesus who died for you, then we will cherish this unity and make every effort to maintain it through the bond of peace. And that means putting others first ahead of our own self-interest.

We'll remember that it's our common faith in Jesus that unites us. Not the colour of our skin or whether we're male or female, young or rich, meat-loving or vegan, Donald Trump fan or not.

No. Jesus is the only basis of our unity. Remember that. Whenever you feel like you need to gravitate just to people that are like us.

[8 : 37] Now, let's turn to the second aspect of Christ's body which is about Christ's body being mature. Second point. Having united us through His death, Jesus' aim then is for His body to be like Him, the head.

And for this maturity to occur, Jesus gives grace and gives. The grace is in verse 7 to each of us. It reads, but to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned.

And here the but contrasts with the unity we all share which is common. The grace, however, is different given according to how Christ apportions it to each of us.

Now, let's be clear here. Paul is not saying that the difference is in the amount of grace because in chapters 1 to 3 we saw how God's grace has been lavished on all of us equally.

We have every spiritual blessing in Christ and the riches of Christ is boundless to each of us. So it's not the amount of grace. Instead, the diversity is in the types of grace because each of us has a different role uniquely given to us in the body.

[9 : 49] but Paul explains what Christ is doing by then picturing Christ in the next few verses as a victorious conqueror.

And that's the image he draws from Psalm 65 where in that Psalm, and it was introduced a bit earlier, God is the victor. And so in the few verses that we read, what we have is a picture of Jerusalem as the envy of the nations.

It's a mountain, Mount Zion, heaven is God's eternal dwelling place, heavenly dwelling place, but on earth he chooses Mount Zion on which to descend and sit and throne in victory on earth.

Now of course, back in chapter 2, Paul has already told us that with Christ's victory over death, remember, God's dwelling place is now actually not Jerusalem, but in the church, Christ's body, in whom, he says, God dwells by his spirit.

Now in ancient times when a king returns victorious from war, he brings spoils of victory, right? So in Rome, for instance, there are victory arches like this one on the next slide, this one's the Arch of Constantine which commemorates such victory.

[11:07] So you can't see it but if you go there or if you go and look on the internet, on the facade of this one, you can actually see the general bringing the captives back as trophies of the war and then along with that, he brings back other goodies as well like gold, silver, and other precious items.

So Paul writes now quoting from Psalm 65 on the next slide, this is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. 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 all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe. Jesus now fulfills this psalm ascending to heaven, having descended to earth to win the war against sin.

And as he does, he brings his accomplishments to the Father. Thus, Psalm 65 speaks of God receiving gifts from the victory. But in turn, Christ, the victorious king, also distributes gifts to his people.

That's what generous kings do, right? They bless the people with the spoils of victory. And in Jesus' case, what he does is he pours out his gifts through his spirit, shares them with us as spiritual blessings.

[12:27] But the aim of these gifts, as Paul now goes on to say, is to build the church up to maturity. And here, the gifts are actually not spiritual gifts, as we read off in 1 Corinthians, for example.

the gifts are people, not given to individual Christians, but actually given to the whole body. Thus, verse 11, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers to equip his people for works of service, 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.

Now, there's a whole sermon that could be preached in these few verses, but let me just say a few things. Firstly, there's some debate here, but for me, the apostles are the OG apostles, right?

Peter, John, Paul, and the others who were eyewitnesses to Jesus. Only they had the opportunity to bear witness to Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises.

And likewise, for the same reason, the prophets are those who foretold the Messiah in the Old Testament. Together with the apostles, they establish, if you like, the content of the faith, revealing the truth about Jesus on which the church is established.

[13:50] Now, there's a slight complication with my view in that the prophets would then actually precede Jesus' victory, almost as if Christ gave them to the church before he was victorious on the cross, but I think that's a minor detail.

I get support for this, though, from Ephesians 2, verse 20, where it says, the apostles and prophets laid the foundations for which Christ is then the chief cornerstone of the church.

So, the idea here is that the prophets and the apostles established the faith, all of which is handed down to us in the Bible, right? Old Testament prophets, New Testament, largely, apostles.

And then after then, in every period of the church, come the evangelists and the pastor teachers. They do the work of building the church to maturity. And in general, what the evangelists do are draw people in, and the pastor teachers then help them to mature.

Now, it's not hard and fast, but in general. And so that's our role here as pastors of the church, you know, whether it's Michelle, Jeff, Steph, or myself, kids, youth, or adults.

[15:03] We help the body to mature through teaching God's Word and equipping the body, all of you, for works of service. And so clearly it says there, doesn't it, that every member has to do the works of service.

Not just the pastors, not just the evangelists. We, the pastor teachers, are almost like internal organs in the body, if you like. We're the ones pumping the oxygen, right, and the blood, whatever is needed, the nutrients, so that you, every part of the body, can then function to do your part. We equip the rest of the body so that they can do the work, which I think incidentally also ties in with Ephesians 2, verse 10, when Paul says that God saved us for good works.

Christ. So, actually, the body of Christ doesn't just exist wonderful though it is, you know, we are the body because Christ saved us, but it also has an aim to grow in maturity.

The body needs to mature to be like the head, Jesus Christ, to whom we are united. We don't want to be stunted, do we? Having a grown-up head in Jesus, but then all of us like a baby's body, right? [16:24] The goal is maturity, hence, the body attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We've got a perfect head, we've got a mature head, the body now needs to grow to be like the head.

And so, in verses 14 to 16, Paul paints an image of what this maturity looks like. And so, we read, then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching, by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become, in every respect, the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

And as you look at the outline there, I've divided this last bit here into three points. Number one, not being tossed around by false teaching like infants. Number two, speaking the truth in love and lastly, every part doing its work.

So, firstly, maturity comes in the form of sound teaching. Here, infants are contrasted to a mature adult. As members of the body, we need to grow in our knowledge of what is right and what is wrong according to God's word, and grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus.

[17:55] And that is true, not just for individuals, but for the whole church. Thus, we don't want to be tossed around by fancy teaching that's on the internet.

In fact, we want to train you so that when you get on the internet, you can look and you can go, you can smell the rat immediately if something's not right. God's word doesn't change.

Truth doesn't change. We want to train you so that you will not be tossed around and get enticed by what someone on the internet may be promising you about God's word. Now, remember what we said before about the need for unity?

Well, it matters what we unite around. It's Jesus, but it's also the gospel. It's God's word. They're all sort of the same thing.

The truth about Jesus is what we also unite around if we are to unite around Jesus. Sometimes people just want to concentrate on unity. They say, let's just stick together.

[18:57] Let's not fight. Why does it matter what we believe? As long as we're sticking together, let's just pretend we agree, even if some of the others are believing in false teaching.

But friends, that is not the picture that Paul paints of unity and maturity, is it? Because verse 13 talks of reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

It matters what we unite around. But when we unite around the truth, verse 14, we're not going to be tossed around by every false wind of teaching, particularly as those people who do that often are doing it out of deceitful motives.

So truth matters. Jesus and the truth about him is the basis of our unity. And so when we speak against false teaching, that's not being divisive.

That's actually safeguarding the basis of our unity. But then in verse 15, Paul goes on to say, how we speak the truth is also important. That, too, is a sign of maturity.

[20:07] It needs to be motivated by love. We're doing it for the benefit of those who are speaking the truth to. Not to show off, not to let people think how smart we are because we know the truth.

Instead, the love that arises from the desire to see each member whom God loves and has saved, to stand firm in the truth and not be led astray, that it should be our motivation for speaking the truth.

And so, love also means how we speak matters, not just the motivation. We should do it, as it says back in verse 1, gently and humbly. Now, that doesn't mean we're not firm in what we say, particularly if someone's not listening, but we should consider always how we go about it, that we do it for their benefit, to most allow them to hear us, rather than in the way that suits us.

And the aim here is not just about head knowledge, is it? But as we mature in our understanding of the truth, we're speaking the truth in love, so that then every member can put it into practice, doing their part, as it says in verse 16.

Because if you consider yourself mature, then it needs to translate into works of service. Not for your own spiritual growth, actually, but actually for the growth of the body.

[21 : 40] Of course, when you do that, you keep growing too. But the image here, actually, is of the maturity of the whole body, not just individual members.

God does not just want mature Christians, but He wants mature body. But of course, we need to have mature Christians to have a mature body. But sometimes you can't have mature Christians without having a mature body.

And that means every member, every member, if I had the time, I would name every one of you, but every member has to do their part. Because see how verse 16, Paul goes down even to describing the ligaments and the joints, every connective tissue that's needed for the entire body to mature. And so really, if one part fails to do its work, the whole body suffers. We would lack something in our maturity if one part, even just one part, does not do its work.

It's a bit like professional athletes, which you've seen on TV sometimes, or maybe you're one yourself, or like to think you're one. Whenever there's a small tear in a muscle or ligament, immediately they can't compete.

[22 : 52] You physios would understand this. You know, ACL, whatever, just a small part. They have to be taken off the field, go through a six-month recovery process before they're allowed back to training.

Well, that's no different for Christ's body, is it? You may think you're just that one small part. You're only new, you're only young, it doesn't matter. That's not true.

Even the most mature Christian in our church needs you in order for the entire body to be mature. Without you, the body suffers.

So, let me ask you this question. Can you see what part you play in the body? What work of service are you being equipped to do?

You may not know the answer to this question, and that's okay. But I hope after today, if you love the Lord Jesus, you'll make an effort to find out and start getting involved so that you can do your part.

[24 : 02] So, I don't know if unity and maturity were what you were looking for when you chose HDD, and to be honest, I'm not really sure whether we rate highly when it comes to these two things.

In a sense, we're not trying to, you know, be these things in order to attract people. Instead, what's more important is for you to know that the pastors here see their jobs as being to build a healthy church.

That is, working hard to keep the unity of the Spirit, but then also equipping every member to do their part so that the body can mature. And we do this primarily through teaching God's Word.

I'm sure there's always room for improvement. But hopefully, after today, every member here will understand this so that they too can do their part.

All right. There's one more little thing at the bottom there, a question. And what I want to do actually is come back to this after we've sung.

[25 : 07] So let's almost wrap up the sermon as it were. Let's sing our response song and then I'll come back and if you like, I've got a 5pm special pastoral note for you.

Let's rise as we sing Oh How Good It Is. When the Good It When the family of God Drums together in spirit, in faith and unity Where the bonds of peace, of acceptance and love

Are the fruits of His presence here among us So with one voice we'll sing to the Lord And with one heart we'll lift out His word Till the whole earth seems the Redeemer has come For He dwells in the presence of His people Oh how good it is on this journey we share To rejoice with the happy and weep with those who mourn

For the weak find strength, the afflicted find grace When we offer the blessing of belonging So with one voice we'll sing to the Lord And with one heart we'll lift out His word Till the whole earth seems the Redeemer has come For He dwells in the presence of His people Oh how good it is to embrace His command

To prefer one another Forgive us He forgives When we live as one We all share in the love Of the Son with the Father and the Spirit So with one voice we'll sing to the Lord And with one heart we'll lift out His word Till the whole earth seems the Redeemer has come For He dwells in the presence of His people I guess if you've been paying attention

[29 : 31] You have looked at the verses today And you've seen that there is one body And so the question may be Well what is this one body? Is it just here? HDD 5pm?

Or is it HDD? Or is it HDD and St. John's? Or is it HDD and St. John's 5pm? So I want to just unpack that a bit Because I think there are very practical implications of this Firstly, what I've said so far Of course HDD 5pm is the body of Christ So as a congregation HDD 5pm we should be keeping the unity of the Spirit We should be growing in maturity as a body here We wish every member here to do their part To serve this congregation But we also, if you like As the diagram shows Part of a wider body of Christ That is HDD and St. John's And of course we can keep going Further till we get to the global church But let's just stick today With HDD and St. John's Because that has the most practical Kind of application And so as the picture shows It's almost like a nested body of Christ The inner HDD 5pm

Is the body of Christ But then there's also the wider HDD St. John's Body of Christ Still one body of Christ Now many churches don't have this They only have one congregation Particularly if they're smaller Everyone gathers on a Sunday at one time Young and old It's an all age service And that's normally in the morning And so we have some of these all age services At HDD and St. John's They're at 10.30pm And 1pm or 1.30pm For the Chinese and Persians They're all age in the sense That anyone who comes there Can be matured and nurtured well In those congregations Young or old But that's not the case here At 5 o'clock Right?

There are a few others So the 7.45 of the 8.30am services Also don't do that And that's primarily because They don't cater for kids We could run an all age service Here at 5pm Some people have asked me to But it doesn't work Alright?

We've tried it And it doesn't work Why? Well all the people find it hard To come out During the dark Or in the night time Dinner time is not the best time For young children to learn And grow in their faith You can't remember it But some of us who are parents Know it There's the witching hour So you can't do effective outreach To families for that reason These are just realities of life Okay?

[32 : 11] So 5pm in a sense then Is a sort of a specialized congregation Which is targeted at a certain age group You guys Young people It doesn't cater very well For the very old Or the very young But on the plus side With a specialized congregation like ours There's an opportunity For targeted training Of young people And believe it or not This is now really your best time To grow in your faith To accelerate your growth If you like You have the opportunities To lead even When it's not so readily available In an all age service Now why am I saying all this?

Because I want us to have The right picture of things So that we can actually grow In unity and maturity Not just at 5pm But also Thinking about the whole church We can actually apply All of what I've said today Not just for this congregation But for the wider HTT body as well So our unity for example Should be expressed Across the whole church When we're encouraging you Like Rhianna said To come for Kingdom Grove Night Which many of you do come Praise God Or join events Like helping out With the working bees Or outreach events These are things We should make every effort to do To keep the unity of the spirit As part of this wider body Likewise We strongly encourage All of you to be serving In other congregations If you can In kids' church Or Sunday youth Because it allows you To be joined up To the wider body To contribute to the overall maturity

Of the whole church And not just HTT 5pm In fact I think that's The special contribution That we at 5pm Can make That the whole church Needs of us To be supporting them To help Young children Young teens To grow in their faith Or serving older members All these are actually Good signs Of healthy maturity In the whole wider body At the same time And I want to try And break this As gently as I can Because 5pm Is a specialised congregation Right sort of term Even the most mature Among you Are only Young adults Alright It doesn't mean That you're not godly Or humble But the spiritual maturity That we expect From young adults Is different To someone Who has been a Christian For 30 years Those people

Have just seen More of life Spent more time Wrestling with their faith Learn to be patient In discipleship They may know If they're married How to be faithful In marriage For decades Having raised children And learn how to do that So that they grow To love Jesus They spend many years Perhaps In the corporate world Facing the pressures Of what it's like To be tempted To climb the corporate Ladder or not They may have personally Gone through hard times In churches Where they're faced As leaders Schisms And heresies They may have sat With close friends As they face death Even seeing some of them Off to glory Now that's the sort of maturity That only comes with time So it's not your fault But it just takes time And so in the main A mature 5pm congregation Wouldn't be the same

As a mature all age congregation And that's nothing wrong with that Also because you're A young adult congregation Members on average Stay maybe 3 or 4 years And not sort of 10 to 20 years And again That's not a failure But a feature Of our congregation As people get married And have children As they just grow older Even if they're single The best place They find themselves To be in To be built up And served Is actually In an all age service And that's okay Because if they become Young parents That's where they will start The habit of their children Going to church With their friends Where they'll see Older parents Model Christian parenting All in the context Of a healthy church Now everyone's individual There are some rare exceptions But by and large That's the norm So we don't expect A mature 5pm Congregation on the whole

[36 : 58] To be like a full grown adult If I could use that image Because as older members leave And then the younger ones join It's almost in a perpetual state Of teenagehood If you like Working really hard Growing as God intended But still developing Into adulthood It's a healthy thing For 5pm Alright You get to make mistakes here Alright And not feel too much pressure And sometimes An older adult Might ask me You know Why do 5pm People tend not to Get to church on time Why don't they pick up The rubbish After church And that's why We keep reminding you Well firstly I say to them Actually the 10.30 adults Do the same But afterwards I say that The 5pm church Is still learning Right And as some of you Young adults Have shared this term With me You're still adulting So it's okay So the congregation

Matures At an appropriate Pace In an appropriate way To this congregation It may not be as mature When people look in As other congregations But we don't need to compare In fact It's so encouraging To be in this congregation Because this is where Growth spurts occur And that's normal For teenagers Isn't it And so Even though it may be sad From time to time When the older ones Move on Let's not see them As though they're Leaving the church Because they're not They're just moving To another part Of the same body It's for their good And ultimately It's for the good Of the wider body As well At the same time Many of you Will get then The chance To step up To lead Be trained And equip And do to the next cohort What the older ones Have done for you In fact Alex said to me I'm only still young Alex Caruana And I told him

Actually you're not In this congregation You're not Young anymore Josh and Michelle Might disagree But he's not Alright He's 23 He's one of the older ones Now I know I've taken extra time To share this But I thought It was important Because I want you To appreciate How this passage Actually can be applied Not just to us As one congregation The body of Christ But actually To the wider And the way This church Has been blessed We can play our part In that wider body So that's all I want to say for now But if you want to Chat more If you've got questions Then please Come and talk to me About it later Over dinner But let me then Close now And just pray And ask God To help us To be To live worthy lives To what we've been called