

# Attaining the Unity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] to God we pray that your word will live in us and bear much fruit for your glory for Jesus sake we pray amen you may find it helpful I think to have the passage from Ephesians 4 open in front of you you'll find it on page 951 in the pew bibles a few weeks ago we've had a series on Ephesians chapters 1 to 3 of sermons and today we begin the second half really of the letter and over the next six weeks looking at the chapters 4 to 6 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians theology is practical the study of doctrine is practical many times we probably think that studying the Bible and so on is fairly impractical and not all that useful but that's not a biblical view the biblical view is that theology the studying of the Bible or doctrine is of immense practical importance because what we do and how we live flows out of what we think and believe

Paul has made sure in chapters 1 to 3 that the Ephesians know what they should think and what they should believe he's made it clear about the Christian gospel about the blessings that are ours in Christ and why Christ died for us and now he wants them to know how to respond to that it's very clear in the letter to the Ephesians that what we do as Christian people is not in order for God to accept us or for him for us to please him but rather is to be fundamentally our response to what God has already done for us in Christ it's because of what God has done which Paul explains in chapters 1 to 3 that we must respond in a particular way of living and course of action so Ephesians 4 verse 1 is the turning point of the letter up until this point

Paul has been explaining what the gospel is what Jesus has done what it means to be a Christian and now he begins to say what we must do in response to that so notice at the very beginning of the chapter he says I therefore this is not something completely new this is deriving from and arising out of the preceding chapters therefore in view of all the spiritual blessings that are yours in Christ in view of the gospel of Jesus' death for you in view of the unity that you have Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians together in the gospel and in the cross of Christ in view of all those things which you should believe therefore lead a life worthy of the calling to which you've been called because of all that God has done therefore live this sort of life and it's very important that we bear this in mind today and in the weeks to come this is not just telling us how to live for the sake of how to live this is telling us how to live for the sake of what God has already done for us we need to keep that perspective in mind when we look through the last half of the letter literally he says

I want you to walk worthily he uses the verb to walk because that sort of conjures up the notion of an ongoing life for our Christian people and a few times in this chapter and the next chapter the same word is used the word to walk meaning the way of life the way we live because this is the summary really of how we are to live in the chapters that follow and there are probably in today's passage at least two key words that sum up all that Paul is on about here one is unity and the other is maturity unity and maturity and firstly unity which should not surprise us as being a key word because it's been the key idea of the preceding chapters as well there Paul was at pains to point out to the Christians in Ephesus that they were united in the gospel of Jesus Christ Jewish Christian

Gentile Christian united in Christ therefore he says live a life of unity in your day by day living he begins by listing some characteristics of how they should live marks of human or godly character he says live worthy lives with all humility humility is not putting ourselves down or thinking low of ourselves rather it's thinking right of ourselves but putting others higher thinking of others as more exalted than us counting others better than ourselves the model of that of course was Jesus who counted others so important that he died for them secondly gentleness gentleness is not weakness it's not weak character as though we're we can get used as a doormat by anybody and everybody but rather gentleness is the preparedness to waive our own rights to not assert ourselves for our own sake but rather to look for the rights of others it's not a mark of weakness but actually a mark of strength that we can give up our own rights for the sake of other people's rights and again of course

[ 5 : 55 ] Jesus is the model of that the one who said come to me all who labor and are heavy laden for I am gentle and lowly or gentle and humble the third character mark of character is patience not a patience that's indifference as though it doesn't really matter but a patience that is really active in the face of provocation or aggravation a patience which is long tempered that is prepared to endure provocation aggravation irritation etc long tempered not short tempered as though we we jump off at the first sign of any provoke but rather being prepared to endure provocation or irritation that's patience not indifference it's not a blasé sort of attitude to life and what's going on but it's an active control of temper again Jesus I guess is a model for that he was angry at times but he restrained his temper in the face of provocation most notably at his trial before his death fourthly it's forbearance

Paul says in verse 2 bearing with one another that's a recognition of others failures and faults we don't seek perfection in other people because we know that we foremostly are imperfect people but rather we make allowance for others shortcomings and failures we tolerate other people's imperfections their irritations and so on that's a mark of Christian character again of course Jesus is the model for forgiving and forbearing with the failures of others and fifthly love bearing with one another in love that's not a passive thing it's an active thing to love somebody is to be active about it in our attitudes and in our actions and again of course Jesus is the model of perfect love in his death on the cross notice that in those characteristics there is an acknowledgement of people's failure this is not the perfect picture and though it's a picture of unity there is a recognition that there is failure and imperfection and our task is to tolerate that and accept it and bear with it notice also that at the beginning of Paul's description of a worthy life is not a series of actions that we must do but rather marks of

Christian character for all the activism in the world is invalidated if it's not accompanied by godly character Paul begins with character something our society knows little of these days but something which we must be prepared to pursue our character is important to god our character as people is important to each other within the church and yes Paul will go on to talk about action and doing things in service of god and accomplishing good works but without godly character that will all come to nothing notice also how these five marks characteristics of character all encourage unity they are all characteristics which encourage unity between people in the church there will be unity when there is humility and forbearance and love and tolerance and so on this is a unity that's marked by looking out for others ahead of ourselves putting others first rather than ourselves looking for others rights rather than my own rights forgiving other people's failures and not expecting them to be perfect and bearing a grudge when they fail these are all marks of character that will feed christian unity so paul goes on to say in verse three making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace the unity is given he's already discussed that in the preceding chapters he'll remind the ephesians of it in the next few verses so he says maintain that unity that is already yours but it's stronger than that the translation we have before us says making every effort it's a very strong verb the older translation had be eager to maintain and that conveys something of it as well as a matter of the utmost priority and urgency maintain unity in the church that's how important it is we must do everything possible to maintain christian unity in the church not leave any stone unturned that's how important unity is in the church of god so not only be eager but spare no effort there is an imperative here and the verb sense has got is the sense of keeping on doing something it's not just once but all the time keeping on day by day eagerly as a first priority as a matter of urgency to keep or maintain the unity that is ours in the church the worthy life then is a life that is marked by these five characteristics is yours the worthy life is a life which seeks as a matter of priority to maintain unity in the church is yours

Paul in verses four to six reminds the Ephesians of why unity is important because there is one body that is there is one church it's not really an Anglican church and a Roman Catholic church they're denominations there is one church of Christ there is one body there is also one spirit we are joined together by the spirit not by lots of spirits but by one holy spirit we are called to one hope that is one hope of eternal life through one gospel there is not a whole lot of gospels it's not a pick and choose type affair there is one and therefore there is unity in that one hope in the gospel there is one one Lord in verse five one Lord Jesus Christ not a lot of Lords but one there is one faith that is there is one central gospel faith it's not what I believe and what you believe and what somebody else believes as though they're all equally valid they're not there is one faith and we must make sure that we believe it and have unity in it there is one baptism and not meaning whether you get sprinkled or thrown into a river or a swimming pool or something there is one baptism into

Christ doesn't matter really how it's done but there is one so therefore we are in unity together as Christian people because we have one baptism in common and the seventh of all these ones that Paul mentions is one God and Father that's a fairly radical statement for him to make in his age because in the Greco-Roman world there were pantheons of gods but Paul says there is one God and one Father of us all therefore we have unity it's not that we choose to serve this God and others choose to serve another God and they're all equally valid gods there is one God and we must believe the truth about him so that's why there is unity in the church because of all these things and Paul says keep it or maintain it the unity that is already yours if unity is the first key word the second is maturity and that comes in the remainder of the passage that was read for us firstly maturity comes through ministry verses 7 to 12 but each of us was given grace according to the measure of

[ 14 : 06 ] Christ's gift unity does not mean uniformity it doesn't mean that we're all clones of each other that we all respond in the same way to the same thing that all our desires are uniform but rather within the unity of the gospel there is actually a rich diversity and Paul acknowledges that in this verse he's been talking about all all all as a sort of total unity of the church in the preceding verses but in verse 7 he says but to each one to each individual in the church grace is given not just grace to all as a sort of blanket but rather to each individual grace has been given he goes on to talk about the giver of this grace being the ascended Christ he refers to Psalm 68 when he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive he gave gifts to his people that the picture of this Psalm is of a victorious conqueror who takes the spoils of war from the defeated peoples or armies and he shares out the spoils of war with his own army his own people and followers and the picture here is of

Christ the risen and descended Christ who is the victor who is taking the spoils of war metaphorically and giving them out to his people to his followers that's the picture here in this Psalm the descent that's mentioned in the next verses 9 and 10 it says when it says he ascended what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth he who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens so that he might fill all things probably it's referring to Jesus descent in his becoming a person in his incarnation when he was born in Bethlehem coming from heaven to earth and then later after his death and after his resurrection 40 days after the Easter day he ascended to heaven and from there sent his spirit giving gifts to his church that's the picture here interestingly this psalm was used on the Jewish day of Pentecost at the time of Jesus and of course Pentecost is the day when the spirit came bringing gifts to Jesus church but fundamentally here notice that the gifts are gifts of the ascended Christ they're not gifts of the spirit the spirit actually gives gifts that are Christ's to give they are Christ centered gifts notice also in verse 11 that the gifts are not something that so much that's given to people but are the people themselves he his gifts or the gifts he gave were not something given to someone but his gifts were that some should be apostles some prophets some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for and we know that Jesus appeared to 500 at the one time and to various people at different stages in that 40 day period between Easter day and ascension day those to whom he appeared who are followers of Jesus they it seems were apostles they included Paul because he had a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus and they include people who were not part of the 12 andronicus and Junius are mentioned in the letter to the Romans James Jesus brother is mentioned as well as an apostle but he wasn't one of the original 12 and their job was to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus

Christ the prophets we don't have a job description in the New Testament of what a New Testament prophet was if it's like the Old Testament then they received words directly from God which they would speak to their situation and current time but but probably there was also a sense in which they were really applying God's word to their current situation preachers of the word evangelists are those who speak the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ to people who are not Christians and then lastly pastors and teachers probably the way the Greeks written it's it's the one group of people the pastor teachers and I take it that that's what I am that's my job I'm a pastor teacher and they are the people who are the shepherds of the flock and who feed the flock by ministering the word of God to them in common with all these gifts in verse 11 is the fact that they are ministers of the word that's what sets them apart from other gifts that are given to the church they are ministers of

God's word which as we have it now is the Bible old and new testaments together they are all word ministries and the function at least of the pastor teacher is in verse 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry I take it that that's my job description as vicar of this parish to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the model of ministry which is biblical and right is not a model like a pyramid where the vicar is on the top and all the people are on the bottom nor is it a model of a bus where the vicar is the driver and everybody else is a passenger being driven along the model that the Bible uses of ministry is of a body where every person has some role to play some aspect of ministry that they're involved with and the job of the ordained ministry the pastor teacher is to equip everybody for their own special ministry so to encourage others to minister not to do all the ministry themselves that's impossible anyway but rather to encourage and teach and equip others to be involved in ministry in the life of the church that's certainly my hope for this parish and it's certainly as I understand it my job description not that I'm here to do everything far from it but rather to equip everybody as best I can by the ministry of the word for their work of ministry so the worthy life is a life that contributes to the ministry of the church does yours

Paul then goes on to describe the mature church he acknowledges that a church becomes mature through the ministry of the word and through the gifted ministers that God has given all the ascended Christ has given to the church now he goes on to talk about that maturity from the end of verse 12 to the end of the paragraph for the purpose is not just to equip saints for the work of ministry for the sake of ministry itself but rather for the building up of the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to maturity to the measure of the full stature of Christ Paul talks in that verse 13 of the unity of the faith that is that we have an understanding that's unified of the gospel because there is one gospel therefore we have a responsibility to believe it and understand it so that we come to unity of the faith we are not unified because we come to Holy Trinity nor are we unified because we're Anglicans rather rather our unity derives from the gospel of Jesus Christ and therefore we will find that there are Anglicans who do not believe that gospel and therefore we do not actually have unity with them we may find even people belonging to the parish who do not believe the gospel and though we might come to the same building or be involved in some of the same activities there is actually a fundamental disunity because the unity that counts is a unity of the gospel of

[ 21 : 40 ] Jesus Christ and of faith in that gospel that's what brings us unity not Holy Trinity not the building and certainly not being an Anglican so let's be clear on that of where our unity derives Paul talks in terms in verse 13 of the church becoming like a mature person it says here to maturity it's really to mature adulthood it's got a personal sense about it in chapter 2 he talked about the fact that Christians when they become Christians become a new person Jewish Christian Gentile Christian together one new person now he's talking about that person becoming a mature adult growing to maturity and he's talking about a corporate identity he's not talking about Ian Slater a new person becoming a mature Christian adult and he's not talking about Helen Barker a mature Christian becoming a mature Christian adult he's talking about all of us together as one new person the church together becoming a mature adult it's a unified or corporate picture it's not a mature adult here and a mature adult there and a mature Christian out there and there and there but together becoming mature adult church he contrasts it in verse 14 with a picture of immaturity rather than using the one person picture he actually talks about children plural as though the individualism of lots of children is a sign of immaturity and that a sign of maturity is the corporate nature rather than the individualistic nature the picture in verse 14 is a very young children children who are still on milk rather than solid food and he says we must no longer be children tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine the image behind the words is of a small open boat on the ocean just blown about it hasn't got any rudder hasn't got any steering hasn't got any anchor and in that boat are small young children who are on milk can you imagine how effective they'd be in steering that boat around and getting to safety not at all and Paul says the immature church is like that tossed about and the winds of the ocean completely helpless at the mercy of wind and wave and and that's the immature church that's blown about by every wind of doctrine somebody gets up and speaks one message and we all go running because we think oh well this is right and then somebody says something different so we all go running there it's a church with the without the ability to test and prove what is true and right for us to be a mature church does not just require me to preach truth but it requires you all to be discerning about truth and falsehood so much of our modern church sadly is immature it's got long traditions but it's actually immature because it doesn't have the ability to discern what is right and true and therefore it's susceptible to being blown around by every wind of doctrine Paul says that's immaturity rather verse 15 speaking the truth literally it's truthing it's the using the word truth as a verb so it doesn't just mean speaking but doing and living as well truthing in love we might say we must grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped as each part is working properly promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love the picture here is of a church that is focused on

Christ it's head growing up into Christ who is both the head and the source of the means or the gifts by which there will be maturity attained it's a Christ focused church the mature church has Christ as his head Christ as its focus Christ as its source of growth Christ is the reason for the church's existence and its goal so then to conclude the worthy life is a life marked with godly character is yours the worthy life is a life which treats as of an utmost importance the unity of the church does yours the worthy life is a life in ministry in the church participating actively in the life ministry of the church does yours the worthy life is a life that has a firm foundation of faith in the gospel of

Christ does yours the worthy life is a life that is growing to maturity not stagnant or static but growing to maturity is yours and the worthy life is a life which has Christ as its head and its goal and its focus does yours Do it in the world it is the glory and ■ when trying to climb out the place but just planning to be the only one that has its elder enemies and fence you should use in the earth but just allowing you to realize that it will ensure that the own ■ nius origin of faith in the sobie of God is a youngders in the ■ ■ ois and humanhood are the ■ ■ and its interest to retain you to find your vision.

Talk about what we want there to do is need a patient failure. It's just let it flies with Christ gets rights and serbest Vic that time to stay there to be you to trouble ma thinking they don't sufficient take care of vs. Thank you to ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ you.