

Growing Together

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Date: 22 September 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Well, a couple of years ago, I played soccer with some of the boys from my old church. It was towards the end of the season, and we made it into the finals, which is pretty exciting for an old guy like me.

We had a good team. We had one guy who was a great goalie, a couple of guys who were really good at defence, and a few guys who were great up front. In fact, one guy in particular was so good up front, he scored 80% of the goals.

That wasn't me, just to be clear. In fact, at this stage, I hadn't scored a goal all season, all three seasons, actually. It was pretty bad, so bad that the boys in my team felt sorry for me, and during this game before the finals, they were yelling out, give the ball to Pricey, give the ball to Pricey, and so I did, and here is the ball at my feet, so I took off towards the goals, and as I ran towards the goal, a defender ran towards me, so I lined up the goal just beside him and tried to bend it like Beckham.

Only it shot off in the opposite direction. Another team member got the ball, dribbled it in, and scored the goal. After the game, one of my mates came up to me and said, oh, you're such a team player, Pricey, passing the ball instead of shooting for goal.

I was shooting for goal. It's just not one of my gifts, you see. We all have different gifts or strengths on the team, but the thing is, when we work together with these different gifts, we play well and score goals.

[1 : 3 0] Now, my soccer team isn't a bad picture of what Paul is talking about in our passage tonight. He's talking about one church made up of different people with different gifts, but working together to grow.

I like teamwork, where everyone plays their part to help. But before we get to that, Paul starts off in verse 1 with a very key verse. In fact, this verse summarizes the rest of the letter.

It's like the topic sentence for the next three chapters. So have a look at your Bibles, verse number 1. It says, As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

See what Paul says? He urges them to live a life worthy of the calling they've received. But what is this calling? Well, it's the privileged position that we have received.

People used to sometimes talk about their job or position in life as a calling. They'd say, well, being a doctor is my calling in life. It's my position.

[2 : 3 7] That's what Paul means here. God has given us a calling or a position in life in Christ. And it's not to be a doctor or a lawyer or a garbage collector. It's to be one of God's precious people with every spiritual blessing.

In fact, Paul has spent the last three chapters telling us how amazing our position in Christ actually is. So as we heard from chapter 1, we do have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Blessings that last for eternity. We also heard that instead of being far away from God and excluded from God's people, we've been brought near to God and included as his people.

We've heard that we are God's prized masterpiece in chapter 3. We've heard that we can bathe in the unsearchable riches of Christ. Also chapter 3.

This is the privileged position that we as Christians have. And so now, chapter 4 verse 1, Paul urges us to live a life worthy of this privileged position.

[3 : 40] As I said, this verse is like the topic sentence for the rest of the letter. Because the rest of the letter tells us how to live a life worthy of our position in Christ.

And the first thing is to maintain the unity. Point 1 verse 2. So he says, Paul wants us to keep or maintain the unity we have between one another.

And that's why he starts there in verse 2 with some of those characteristics of being humble and gentle and patient and bearing with one another. Because these are the things that help us to keep the peace, to keep the bond of peace, to maintain the unity amongst us.

Of course, being humble and being patient and so on are all easier said than done, aren't they? I heard a minister once talk about patience, which is one of those qualities listed in verse 2.

He said this, he said, I used to pray for patience, but then I stopped because God was taking too long to answer. Now, he did say it as a bit of a joke. But we can relate, can't we?

[4 : 56] Because it is sometimes hard to be patient, to wait, particularly with one another. It's hard to bear with one another sometimes in love. I mean, I can bear with frustrating people through gritted teeth, but in love?

It's easier said than done, isn't it? But we are to practice these qualities, he says. And by the way, that's how you grow in these qualities, is by practicing them.

We grow in patience by practicing patience. We grow in humility by practicing humility. And we must practice these things, because we are told to make every effort to keep the unity.

Not some effort, not when I feel like it effort, but every effort to keep the unity. Which means practicing being patient, humble and so on.

But why? Why should we make every effort to keep the unity and the peace amongst one another? Well, because we are unified. We do have peace amongst one another.

[5 : 58] Have a look at verses 4 to 6. Verses 4 to 6. He says, 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. Now, apart from the word all, what other word gets repeated the most?

This is not rhetorical. One, thank you, you're all awake, fantastic. Okay, yeah, one. One. There is one body of Christ. There is one spirit that we all share.

There is one Lord Jesus we all follow. There is one Christian faith we all confess and trust. We are united as one because there is only one, you see.

If there is only one family of God, then we are all in it together. We are united because there is only one. We saw this a couple of weeks ago, didn't we, when I tried that experiment on you.

[7 : 01] Do you remember that experiment where I chose Drew, I think, to be Jesus? I noticed he is sitting over in the wing, not smack bang in the middle, just in case anything else happened. You know, he stood up as Jesus.

And as we come to Jesus, what happened? You came to each other, didn't you? You were united with each other because you're all coming to Christ. And so Paul is saying here, keep the unity because you are unity in Christ.

You are unified as one in Christ. And so we are to show the world visibly what we are spiritually. So can I ask you then, how are you going at keeping the unity with one another?

How are you going with being patient and humble? How are you going with bearing with one another? I can certainly work at being more patient, especially with my darling children.

What about you though? What do you need to make every effort in so that you might keep the unity we already have in Christ? Of course, being one family in Christ doesn't mean that we're all the same, does it?

[8 : 11] To quote the song made famous by Qantas, although we are one, we are many. They did that song, didn't they? Qantas? No. No idea. Forget it. Let's move on. Okay.

We're at point two, diversity. Okay. Verse number seven. But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

This is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. Paul here moves from unity with words like one and all to diversity with words like each and apportioned.

And what he's saying here is that Christ has given different gifts or abilities to each person. He has apportioned his grace differently. Paul uses the word grace to describe gifts, probably because these gifts are examples of Christ's grace or generosity.

But notice, no one misses out. Verse seven says, to each one of us, grace or gifts are given. Everyone has been given something.

[9 : 24] But before we get to what some of these gifts are, Paul reminds us of who the gift giver is. So let's pick it up at verse eight again. 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.

Now, these few verses are a little tricky. Paul is quoting from Psalm 68, which Christa read for us earlier, which speaks of God's victory and praising God and so on.

And he applies it to Jesus's victory. For Jesus is the one who descended to earth, died on a cross, rose again and then ascended back to heaven, victorious over all his enemies.

And so it's Jesus's victorious rule that fills the universe. Just as Paul said back in chapter one, verse 20. In other words, Jesus is Lord over everything and everyone, whether they realize it or not.

[10 : 36] And it is this risen and ruling king, Jesus, who gives gifts. So what are some of these gifts? Well, verse 11 tells us some of them. Verse 11 says, so Christ himself, this ruling king, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.

Now, obviously, this list here in verse 11 is not a complete list of gifts. There are other lists in the Bible, one in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

And there we see gifts like serving, encouraging, giving, even the gift of doing administration. Yes, we all need them. And we have heard from 1 Corinthians 12 last year that whatever gifts we have or don't have, we shouldn't compare ourselves to the other person and think we're less or more because we have different gifts.

As I said at the start, when I played soccer, scoring goals was not my gift. In fact, after three seasons, I had scored zero goals. But you know what I was particularly gifted at?

What I excelled at? Being the substitute. I was brilliant at it. You know, I'd happily come off, take a rest. And then when I'd, you know, then I'd go back on and play and then I could tell that our team was losing.

[11 : 54] So I didn't go off and get a good player back on and help the team win again. We all have different gifts. And we shouldn't think, a substitute's important. You laugh, but it's an important role, all right?

We're all equally as important. It's just we have different gifts to contribute. But I want you to notice something else here too. Notice in verse 11, the gifts Christ gives are people.

Do you see that? It says he gave apostles, prophets, pastor, teachers. You see, Christ gives us people who have different gifts.

And so you are Christ's gift to us. The person sitting next to you is Christ's gift to you. We are Christ's gift to one another. Now, this tells us something about why we come to church.

We come to church not just for ourselves, but to serve one another. Because we are God's gift to one another. To serve them. That's why God has saved us and gifted us and given us to each other, you see.

[12 : 59] I saw this video clip once. I'm going to see if we can play this video clip. Here we go. Imagine a church where every member is passionately, wholeheartedly, and recklessly calling the shots.

I have a busy work week, and by the time Sunday rolls around, I'm tired. So how about a church service that starts when I get there? Can do. When you arrive, we begin.

You know, financially, Sherry and I don't give a lot to the church. But we'd sure like to know who does. All right, if you join now, you'll know what every person gives in detail. When I'm in the church service, can my car get a buff and a wax?

Not just that, but an oil change and a tune-up. How about tickets to the Super Bowl? That's asking too much. I'm serious. If I'm going to join, I want tickets to the big game. All right, you join now, and we'll get you there.

I like a pony. Look in your backyard. MeChurch. Where it's all about you. Now, we know it's wrong, right?

[14 : 13] But it's amazing how often I've heard people over the years say things like, that part of church doesn't really suit me, or it's too hard to make it at church because the timing doesn't suit, or we had this family thing on, or whatever.

And when you hear that, it sounds an awful lot like meChurch, doesn't it? But you see, church is about serving one another. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, each person is gifted for the common good.

I've been saved by Jesus and given to you for your good. And you've been saved by Jesus and given to us for our good. Church is not about me or you.

It's about us. God has saved and given us to each other in order to serve, not ourselves, but one another. And it's been great, can I say, to see people here at 6pm doing just that.

You know, turning up and serving one another, getting and lending in hand. It's brilliant. Keep going. But here Paul particularly mentions special, Lord, not special gifts, but particular gifts.

[15 : 22] Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers. The last one I think is one role rather than two. And they have a particular job. See verse 12?

Verse 12, he gives these people, verse 12, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

You see, what Paul is saying here is that people like myself or Mark or Andrew are here to equip you for works of service. The word service there in verse 12 is the same word as ministry.

Same word as ministry. And the word servant is the same as minister, did you realise? So prime minister of Australia means number one servant. If only they would remember, of course.

And so in other words, my job, Mark's job, is to equip you to be ministers who do ministry or serve one another. You see, in the Bible, every Christian is actually a minister, a servant.

[16 : 22] And so if someone asks you who the minister here is at 6pm, you can say, I am. We are. The word minister just means servant. But how do we as teachers equip you to be ministers?

How do we equip you to serve? Well, it's partly through running training courses like the ones that I ran through Bible study groups this year. But it's primarily through teaching you the Bible.

You see, why do you think Paul lists these particular gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher? What do they all have in common? They all involve speaking God's word, do they not?

Because that's what grows people in Christian maturity. That's what equips our character. You see, people may have all the skills in the world to serve that church, but unless they have a mature Christian character, unless they have a servant heart, then they won't use those gifts to serve, will they?

And so my job is to primarily teach you God's word so that by it, your character might be equipped for works of ministry. As I said, it includes running courses to which teach skills as well, but it's primarily teaching you the Bible because in the end, that's what prepares people's hearts to serve.

[17 : 41] But why am I equipped to equip you to serve one another? Well, verse 12 said, so that we might be built up. And it continues. So verse 12 again, to equip the 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.

You see, maturity is the goal, but it's a process. So on the next slide, I think it is. Here we are. We're to be built up in two ways, in our unity of the Christian faith and in our knowledge of Jesus.

And that leads to being mature like Jesus, attaining the fullness of him, if you like, being fully like Christ. Paul is saying here, we are to serve one another so that we as one body of Christ might be built up in unity and in our knowledge of the Son of God so that we might be more like Jesus.

That's the goal, to be more like Jesus. He says the same thing in verse 15. Just scan your eyes and your Bible down to verse number 15. He says, instead speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him, Jesus, who is the head, that is Christ.

See, Christ-like maturity is the goal, isn't it? And that comes from growing in Christian unity and growing in knowledge about Christ because then we won't be led astray from Christ and away from eternal life.

[19 : 16] See, verse 14, if we grow up in maturity in Christ, verse 14, then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the winds and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

You see, maturity is not an optional extra. Our eternity is at stake because if we don't grow, then we could easily be carried away by the latest false teaching.

I've seen this happen. There was a girl at my old church called Caitlin. She had a friend whose name I can't remember now, but I do remember that Caitlin's friend was a young Christian and before she had much of a chance to grow in her faith, she was persuaded to join a cult called the Christadelphians.

I'm not sure if you've heard of them. Now, this cult say they believe the Bible and they say things that sound true. In fact, there's many things that we would agree on. So this girl took the bait and joined them.

But because she had not grown in her knowledge, she didn't realize that they were also teaching things that were false. So I've put something from their website on the next slide. This is from the website.

[20 : 32] See if you can work out what's true and what's false from this statement. We believe that the Bible is quite clear in its presentation that Christ is a man, the son of God, but certainly not God himself.

So what's right there? This is non-rhetorical. Son of God, yeah. What's wrong? He's not God himself.

Now, this is a huge problem. It means you deny the Trinity, which they deny, but it also means that God is actually unjust because he's not taking the punishment on himself as Jesus the son.

He's actually dishing it out on another guy, poor old man called Jesus over here. Actually goes to the very core of God's character. But you see, because Caitlin's friend didn't realize this, she kind of went, yeah, he's son of God.

I've seen that in the Bible. She wasn't mature enough to see the difference. And so she was carried away by this craftiness of teaching, as it says there in verse 14. And she's blown far off course.

[21 : 38] In fact, so far, I think she's left that church as well and given up on spiritual matters altogether. Eternity is at stake, you see. We are to grow in maturity.

It's important, not just in knowledge, but in unity as well, that we might together be fully like Christ. This is God's goal for the church. It is the way in which we can stand firm in the truth.

And it's also the way in which we actually bring glory to God. For as Paul said back in chapter three, the more we reflect Christ, the more we bring glory to God.

And so Mark and I are to equip you to serve each other with your gifts so that we might grow more in faith and knowledge and become more mature like Christ. But it's not just gifts we're to use.

We're also supposed to do something else. Have a look at verse 15 again. Verse 15 says, 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.

[22 : 41] Do you notice what else we're to do to one another so that we might grow? We are to speak the truth in love. This doesn't mean tell the truth rather than lies.

It includes that. But the word of truth here talks about the word of God, the gospel. That's what it was called back in chapter one. And so speaking the truth in love means to lovingly speak God's word to one another, to encourage and teach one another.

You see, while it is primarily my job to teach the Bible, we are all to do it in some form or other. For example, when someone shares something, we might say, yeah, that's hard. But I guess in the Bible, we're reminded that God is still in control.

Or another example, you might say, I was reading the Bible this week and this verse really encouraged me and then share the verse with another person. Or another example, can I meet up with you one-to-one, you know, once a fortnight and we'll just read the Bible together.

You do it in Bible study groups as well too, don't you? We are to speak the truth in love and help each other grow in maturity. In fact, we see it clearly in Colossians 3 on the next slide.

[23 : 48] Next one, I think. See what we're supposed to do? Not just the paid staff, but we are to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

We're all to speak God's word in the gospel to one another, remind and encourage one another so that we might be built up because that's how God grows us through his word. And so each person here is to do two things to help the body grow.

One, we are to speak the truth in love. Two, we are to do works of service, which will look different for different people according to the person and gifts you are in the stage of life.

But we are each to do those two things so that the body would grow. So verse 16, our final verse, It's pretty clear, isn't it?

This is how we grow in Christ. And it's important so that we're not led astray, but rather reflect Christ's character and bring glory to God. And so I wonder what it is you're going to change tonight.

[25 : 03] Is there an attitude from the early part of patience and humility that you're going to work on? Is it trying to work out how you can serve here at 6pm? Is it how you're going to think about how you can speak the word of God more to one another?

I don't know what it is, but we need to keep working at maintaining the unity we have with the different gifts we have, building one another up in love that we more and more might reflect Christ and bring glory to God.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the unity we do have in Christ. We pray that you would help us to reflect this unity by the way we treat one another.

And Father, we pray that you would also help us to use whatever gifts you've given us, whatever understanding of your word you've given us, to encourage one another so that together we might grow more and more like the Lord Jesus.

It's in his name we pray. Amen.