Ephesians 4:1-16

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[0:00] Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning.! In Christ's name, amen. Please, yes, be seated.

Good morning, everybody. It's really nice to see you all. If you're joining with us for the first time, my name is Aaron. And it's also probably helpful to know that we're in a series looking at the book of Ephesians.
So today I'm going to preach on Ephesians 4, 1 to 16. Let's begin with verse 1, which I want to spend a little bit of time on. Verse 1. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.
So the first thing to look at is this word, therefore. I, therefore. So what's the therefore referring back to? And often when we're studying Scripture, you'll go, okay, well, that therefore is referring back to the, you know, the previous couple of verses just immediately before this.
In this case, though, it's actually referring back to the first three chapters. The first three chapters of Ephesians. Here's what I mean. Chapter 4 is a pivot point in Ephesians.
[1:19] So if Ephesians is this, if this is Ephesians, the first half is all theology, dense, beautiful, wonderful theology. And the second half of the book is the application of that theology.

First half theology, second half application. We are at the pivot right here. So the first chapters, chapters 1 to 3, Paul's outlining the gospel and what God has done for us through Christ.
And it's magnificent. And one of the key words in here is riches. Riches. Chapter 1 talks about the riches of His grace. The riches of His glorious inheritance.
And chapter 2 talks about, says that God is rich in mercy. And chapter 3 says, that talks about the boundless riches of Christ. And there's a promise that God will strengthen us according to the riches of His glory.
It's riches, riches, riches that God has poured out on us through Christ. And now chapter 4 pivots and it says, because of all of that, live accordingly.
[2:26] Paul says, because of all the things I have told you, walk in a manner worthy of that calling.

So I'll say this again. Paul says, because of all the theology, because of what Christ has done, we should be people that live differently.
And Paul here, he's welding together what we believe and how we do life. Let me read that whole verse 1 again.
I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. You can think of it like this.
We are therefore people. We're therefore people. See, the Bible doesn't say, you know, love your brother and your sister because it's just like a nice thing to do. Just sort of, you know, it's a nice thing to do.
[3:30] The Bible says, God loves you. Therefore, you should love one another. Our behavior is therefore behavior. This is Bible logic.

I'm going to read verse 1 again. I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.
We've looked at this word therefore. Let's think about this word urge, though. Why is that there? Why is he urging us to do this? I mean, isn't it just sort of logical?
Isn't it just sort of makes sense that we should live it out? Why is he have to sort of almost beg us to do this? It's because some of us prefer theology over practical application or the other way around.
I think some of us, it's a great temptation to stay in chapters 1 to 3, to stay just thinking about stuff. It's great to think about stuff, right? I love to think about stuff.

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[4:33] But I don't have to do anything. If I just think about it, that's awesome. There's lots of Christian online forums out there.

Don't go to any of them. It's often terrible. Like, there are these forums and people sort of talk about their things, you know, like theology.
There's lots of very sharp people theologically on these forums who are awful, just awful. My wife's banned me from going to them. There was an Anglican one.
I'm not allowed to go to it anymore because I go to bed too angry with people. Look, theology and how we live should be welded together.
They should be one thing, and sometimes they're not. So Paul has to urge us to live out what we actually believe. Because he knows we can have good theology and we can have bad behavior.
[5:35] So, chapters 1 to 3. They're not just ideas to ponder for us to muse upon. It's not just theological air candy. It's Christianity as belief that leads to a way to live, a way to be in the world, a way to be a community, a way to be with each other.

You know, you could be, you could have a theological degree. You could be 75, 80 years old and gone to church your whole life and you could know a lot of stuff.
Friends, I am urging you, continue to grow in how you live out all of the riches of the theology you know.
God has called you to live a certain way. Keep growing in that. Keep growing in the way you relate to each other, the way we be a community together.
Okay, that's verse 1. Let's get into the rest of it now. Okay, so the rest of it. So we've got 15 verses. It's dense. And there's a number of ways you can sort of carve this up and explain it.
[6:47] I'd like to talk about it under the umbrella of maturing in our faith, maturing in our faith. I think that's a good umbrella concept because verse 13 does talk about, just says, mature in your faith.

And verse 14 says we shouldn't act like children. And verse 15 talks about growing. So I think maturing in our faith is a good umbrella idea to capture what is 15 verses of dense theological ideas here.
So let's do this. So Paul here, he's done three chapters on theology. He wants us to live it out. He's looking for maturing in how we live because we can be immature theologically and we can be immature in how we live it out.
He wants to mature us in how we live. And so what he does here, I think, in these 15 verses is he said, here's what maturing looks like and here's what it doesn't look like.
Or he could say it like this. Here's what Christian maturity looks like. It looks like X, Y, Z. And here's what immaturity looks like. It looks like X, Y, Z. So that's the structure for the next sort of 10 minutes here.
[7:48] What maturity looks like a community. What immaturity looks like in a community. So first point. What does spiritual maturity look like in a church community?

And it's very interesting, I think. The first thing he mentions is surprising. So what's his priority? After three chapters of incredible theology, what's the first thing for us to aim for?
It's unity. It's unity. We see that in verse 3, and I'll explain this more in a second here. But it's unity. It's not niceness. It's not mission. It's unity. With all you know about God, knowing all you know, be unified, Paul says here, which means being together and aligned in the purposes of God.
And it's interesting because he talks about it as something we need to maintain. Verse 3, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Maintaining implies that there are things that we can do to promote unity and things we can do which actually get in the way of unity.
So what are some of these things? What are some of these postures? What are some of these ways of being together that maintain the unity, which is a priority for Paul, and the first big example of maturity?
[9:04] It's in verse 2 and 3 here. So again, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

So if our life is to be marked by unity, we need humility and gentleness and patience, and we need to learn to bear with one another. So we're aiming for unity. That's the big goal. And we get there through these things he's mentioned.

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So let's have a look at some of these words. Let's think about this word humility. There's a lot of great definitions out there. Lewis, you know, has one of the classics.
True humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. I think that's brilliant.
Here's another idea. Humility is not thinking bad thoughts about yourself.
It's thinking big thoughts about God. I think that's a really good one. Humility is not thinking bad thoughts about yourself. It's about thinking big thoughts about God.
[10:11] The more we have God in our mind, the more Jesus-shaped our thinking is, the less we're worried about things like prestige and power and always getting our own way in every situation.

Things which obviously disrupt unity. Can I suggest if you're on a, if you have the privilege of serving in some way in this church, on a ministry team, on a committee, for example, think big thoughts about God when you go to those meetings.
Think big thoughts about God. If you're thinking, how can I get my way here? How can I promote my particular agenda? That creates disunity.
Gentleness is another word here. Gentleness. It's kind of a forgotten virtue, but one Paul mentions quite a bit. What does it mean? Well, it's not weakness. It's not a lack of conviction. Gentleness. Back in the days, the idea behind this word was, it was strength under control.
So gentleness, in a sense, is someone who's mastered themselves in order to be the servant of others, in order to help others. They've mastered their ego, for example, in order to do things which other people might say is beneath them.
[11:31] You might think humility and gentleness, these are not very exciting ideas. This is not that interesting. Can I remind you that these two words, in Greek, are the same words Jesus uses to describe himself in Matthew 11, when he said, Come to me, I am gentle and lowly.

That's gentle and humble. And you'll find rest for your souls. Paul is saying, in our community, let's be more Christ-like in the way we interact with each other.
Next, we have these two words, patience and the little sentence, bearing with one another. I think there's synonyms here. I think they're supposed to go together. Basically means a slowness in retaliating.
So, in the Bible, these words are used to describe God's attitude towards us. And for us, it means our general tolerance of one another. Because we're going to, we'll annoy each other.
There's a lot of people here. We're going to annoy each other sometimes. Let's treat each other with the patience of God. Bearing with one another. I like this word, because it's like a word picture. Like, you're literally carrying a heavy weight here.
[12:46] Sometimes our relationship with another person, it's like we have to bear with them, because they're having a tough time. Let's be patient with one another.

I heard the other day somebody say this. They said, sometimes I do random acts of kindness, like not punching someone in the face. Because, you know, most people are idiots.
And I thought, that's just great theology in action. That's what that is. That is awesome. All right, let's keep going here. So we are talking about how to maintain unity, humility, patience, gentleness. And then we get to verses sort of four and six. And he makes this big point here. This is the bit where he says, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So what does he go there? What does he sort of insert this idea?
I think what Paul is doing here is he's saying is that, look, you're already unified. You're actually already, you're spiritually unified. You share a faith in Christ. You are his.
[13:56] You'll be together for eternity. You're spiritually unified. Let's make that spiritual reality visible. You know, sometimes just out in the world, you'll meet somebody and it turns out they're a Christian.

And you have this fantastic conversation with them. And it's wonderful. People could be looking at you from the outside, you interacting with the stranger.
And what people don't see is the invisible reality of the connection that you have. And Paul is saying, let's make that invisible spiritual unity visible.
And how do we do that as a community? Humility. Gentleness. Forbearance. Patience. Ephesians. Okay, let's go big picture once again. Because this is dense, I know. Let's go big picture once again. Ephesians 1 to 3. Theology. 4 to 6.

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[15:02] The application of that. Now, it's not quite as clean as that, but that's the basic idea. Paul wants us to grow in the application of our theology.

He says right at the start, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. He wants to see us mature individually and as a community together.
And the first signpost of that is unity. And unity strives where there is gentleness, patience, and humility. All right.
What else does maturity and faith look like? It looks like us working for one another in lots of different ways. It's serving one another in lots of different ways. Look at verses 7, 8, 11, and 12.
But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. Verse 11 and 12.
[16:03] And he gave the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, and shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ. So he gives the church people with different gifts to serve one another.

We all have different gifts. We all got different strengths. It reminds me of a story the other day. Somebody I was chatting to, I said, how long have you been at St. John's? They said, eight years. This was in the evening service.
And I said, why did you come? Why did you stay? And they said, you know, Aaron, I heard you preach. And I thought, this is the church for me. And I felt very good for about half a second because the sentence kept going.
And this is how the sentence went. It said, Aaron, I heard you preach. And I thought, this is the church for me. And if I ever wanted anything intellectual, I'd just come to the 10 o'clock and listen to David Short.
So, I mean, it's just great that someone's finally acknowledging that David's intellectual. I think that's good. What's my point? Look, we all have strengths, don't we?
[17:19] We all have something to offer. Let's keep going. We're talking about verses 7, 8, and 12. Actually, hold. I skipped 9 and 10.

I totally skipped it. This is the part in brackets which says, in saying he ascended, and what does it mean but that he also descended in the lower regions, the earth.
He who descended is the one who also ascended. I'm skipping that because I know Jordan is very keen to talk to you about that after the service. And he has carved out hours to do that.
And it will be exhilarating. Okay, back to verse 8. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to them.
What does that mean? What does that mean? Okay, here we go. It's a reference to Psalm 68. Okay, and that sort of tells the story. It's a picture of a conquering king returning back to his town or his city, and he's got all this bounty with him, all these treasures.
[18:27] So he's like walking through the city, this big treasure chest, and he's like throwing people gold goblets. And I'm making stuff up now. But you know what I mean. Like he's just kind of, he's giving out all these gifts to people. The gifts in this passage, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

The gifts here is people. Paul is saying God gives gifts to his people, and those gifts to people with gifts.
I know, it gets a bit confusing. He equips people spiritually with gifts in order to help you mature and us be unified as a community. And he mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.
And it would be easy to think from this, go, okay, there we go. This is good. God gives these few people extra special spiritual things. And so I don't have to do, you know, I can just have lunch, play pickleball.
I can do my thing. I can get on with my life. But if you look at it carefully, look what it says here. And he gave the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.
[19:35] You see what it says here? This list of people, our job is to equip you to do the ministry. That's what we're about.

We equip you to do the ministry. See, Jordan and I are not the only people that do ministry in the church. It's the ministry is yours. This is you. You do this stuff.

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People like Jordan and I, we come and go. Ministers come and go in the church. The ministry of the church belongs to you. And I think maturing in faith is acknowledging that and knowing that it's your job to do the ministry in the church.
That's God's desire for you, for you to be equipped to serve. Look, I think sometimes we come to church to learn more, and that's really great. The problem is you might come to church and think to yourself, you know what, the sermon wasn't very good today.
That was a complete waste of time. That's a terrible attitude. We should be coming here thinking, how do I minister? How do I be a minister for Jesus in the service today?
[20:45] How do I encourage one another? What does that look like? It looks like lots of things after the service, an offer to pray with somebody or a thoughtful word or an encouragement or a dinner invitation or an offer for practical help.

That's what it would look like for us to continue to mature as a community. Our job is to help you do that for each other.
So what have we been talking about? We're almost done here. What have we been talking about? We've been talking about what it looks like to mature as a community and as individual. What are the marks of maturity? It looks like unity, being about the gospel together, and that thrives where there's humility and gentleness and patience.
It also looks like the desire to serve one another. Okay, what does immaturity look like? What does immaturity look like?
We get one example in verse 13. It's straight after the part about unity there. It says, Paul here says, If you don't mature, you'll be like a baby.
[22:03] And babies, you know, babies are not discerning. Babies eat dirt. You know, babies do stupid things. Like real babies, immature Christians, it's hard for them to tell the difference between what is good for them and what's not good for them.

To good teaching and poisonous teaching. And they can get tossed about by, you know, faddish theology or really like progressive kind of podcasts and books and spiritual life hacks.
And our job with people that are spiritually immature, spiritually like babies, is not to go, Oh, look at the people. Come on, bunch of dumb people. No, it's to be patient and kind and serve them and teach them.
And in every congregation, there should be lots of spiritual babies. But the idea is we want you to grow. We want you to grow in your faith. The idea is growth. So as a community, we come around folks like that.
We offer things like catechism and small groups, etc. We help each other. Okay, folks, that's basically the gist of these 16 verses. It's Bible logic.
[23:12] You know something. You live it out. That's maturing. So let me finish with a bit of a challenge here.

Are you growing in humility and patience? Is the way you live out your faith in this particular community unifying?
Or are you bringing your own agenda to things? Are you having encouraging gospel conversations? I think there's a good questions to ask. I'm not trying to beat you up. But I think it's good to ask, am I growing?
Or am I settling? Am I just saying to myself, you know what? Just the way I am. I found my lane. Friends, just to remind you, you have the power of God inside of you.
Don't put up with bad attitudes. You've got to grow. You've got to apply these riches that are in your head so that we can grow together as a unified community, being about the purposes of God.
[24:16] The Bible urges us to do this. Amen.

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