

The Church is One Body

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[0 : 0 0] our passage. Wow, Ephesians 4, what a cracker, eh? It's kind of described as a purple passage, meaning it's just, it's glowing, it's fantastic, it's incredible, it's a passage you want to keep coming back to you because there's so much more. So we're just going to get straight into it, all right? Looking at one of the first words, therefore. Chapter 4, verse 1, therefore. It's an important word in the Bible. It's right at the beginning of our passage, and it refers back not just to the previous line, but actually to the previous three chapters of Ephesians. So Paul has spent three chapters outlining the eternal purposes of God, lots of attention given to the church, and it's soaring, soaring theology. He talks about God bringing about a new society, a new humanity, a new family, all under his heavenly reign. Great stuff. And at chapter 4, verse 1, we reach the fulcrum of Ephesians. Therefore, Paul says, because of all that stuff I've just told you, three chapters worth of stuff I've just told you, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. And this is classic Bible logic. Here's who God is and what he has done. Now, here is what we are to do.

In summary, you could say our ethics come from who God is. They're two sides of a coin. We have the first three chapters, dense theology. And then we have the remaining chapters, a lot of action, a lot of do this, be like this. Now, some of us, of course, will be drawn to just the theology part, right, of Ephesians, these first three chapters. Some of us prefer Christianity in action.

The problem is if we just focus on theology, we can become prideful. When you study theology, you meet people like this. You become people like this sometimes. I remember early in my studies, armed with a couple of academic books under my belt, going on Facebook and kind of mildly rebuking my friends. Your eschatology is over-realized. They've just put some kind of lovely thing about, God is great and he's with me and I'll get through that. Your eschatology is over-realized, son. Here's some books you should, you know. If we focus on theology, we can become prideful. But if we focus just on the morality, just on the action stuff, the last half of Ephesians, is, well, we can become legalistic. You know, you need both of these things.

So with that, therefore, Paul makes the connection between these two things, doctrine and duty, to say it in another way. Therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. So Paul says, I've just unloaded this mind-blowing theology on you, but, you know, I don't want you to just tick some theological boxes and say, yes, I know that, yes, I know that, yes, I know that. Because Christianity is not just an idea to think, it's a path to walk. And so our passage here becomes quite practical. And there are three main sections in these 16 verses. We'll call them a section on unity, a section on diversity, a section on maturity. Okay, let's have at it. Unity, verses one to six.

So in verse three, Paul says, he goes, I want you to maintain the unity of spirit. It's going to be helpful to have your Bibles open here. Paul says, I want you to maintain the unity of the spirit.

[4 : 0 1] And in verse two, he talks about how we're going to do that. He goes, so, you know, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Very practically, verse two, this means humility and gentleness with patience, bearing with one another and love. And they're very relational things, aren't they?

Do you notice that? And that's because a life following God is a life lived in intentional relationship with other Christians. You know, if our community is to be marked by unity and the peace, you know, verse three there, we will need to be with each other, humble and gentle and patient.

We will need to bear with one another and we will need to love each other greatly with cost. Let's look quickly at these words that Paul uses here, humility, gentleness, patience, etc.

Humility. We need some of this. Now, this is the concept actually despised in the ancient Near East. People use the word to describe slaves.

Importantly, in spite of what we might think about this word, humility is not actually thinking bad thoughts about yourself. Humility is actually thinking big thoughts about God.

[5 : 20] And it's recognizing the God-given intrinsic value that people have and treating them well based on that. And of course, it's a quality that's going to be essential for us as a community if we are to thrive spiritually.

Because behind every discord, behind disunity, there is always pride. And humility is the foil to pride. The next characteristic Paul mentions is gentleness.

Such an interesting one, eh, gentleness? It's a rather forgotten trait. But Paul mentions it a bit. Easily misunderstood, like humility.

Gentleness is not weakness. It is not, gentleness is not lack of conviction. It is the, described here, it is the gentleness of the strong.

Who have their strength under control. In the ancient world, they used it to describe a number of things. But one of the things was like domesticated animals.

[6 : 29] Where I used to live, there was a small woman who had an Irish wolfhound. Which I don't know if you know those dogs. But they're horses, basically. They're enormous, right?

And it's an amazing thing to interact with a beautiful, big dog that is very gentle.

Knowing that this thing, it could bite your neck off, your head. It could kill you. But it doesn't. Well, it might.

But it probably won't do that. The gentleness of a dog that's incredibly powerful. It's a wonderful thing. So gentleness in this paradigm here, as applied to people, is it's talking about someone who has mastered themselves.

In order to be the servant of others. These first two words, gentleness and humility, are a couplet. They're a natural couplet. And Christ actually uses these words in Matthew 11 to describe himself.

[7 : 33] In case you're still thinking, it may sound like weakness. Christ says, it's when he says, come to me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you'll find rest for your souls.

Next, we have these ideas of patience and bearing with one another. Again, a natural couplet. They mean, there's a bit of a continuum of what they mean. But they mean things like endurance in suffering.

And slowness in retaliating. And they use in the Bible to describe God's attitude towards humanity. And the kind of attitude we should have towards each other when we're wronged.

And also this kind of general tolerance, right? Just a general tolerance towards each other. Because we annoy each other. I'm assuming.

We do. People annoy each other in a community like this. Obviously, these qualities are essential if we're going to get along and be the church of God in a way that glorifies them.

[8 : 37] The last quality is love. Goodness, there is so much to say about love. And it's said last because it's the linchpin of all of these things. And so I'll just say it in one sentence.

Love is constructively seeking the best for others. Now, verses 4 to 6.

It seems to jump into this, you know. So it talks about humility and gentleness. And then it goes, What's all that about?

Do you remember a few, I don't know, gee, maybe it was like three or four weeks ago we talked about the invisible realities? Yeah, it was maybe three weeks ago. We talked about the invisible realities of the church, that some of the best things about the church are invisible to the world and are not immediately obvious.

Well, this oneness that it's talking about here is one of these things. Paul is saying, Folks, you are really, really unified already by virtue of Christ.

[9 : 53] You have one spirit. You have one Father. You have one faith. There is one baptism. You have one hope. We are one body. You are already really, really unified because that unity was brought on the cross.

And people don't see that immediately. But Paul says, Make it visible. Make that invisible reality visible. How? Through humility and gentleness and forbearance and being patient and through love.

So the invisible reality is that the church is one body. And so let's let the way we relate to each other reflect that constructively, visibly. Okay, let's move on.

That's unity. I want to talk about diversity now because that's the next section. And you'll see there is a natural transition in the passage. Paul goes from talking about things quite collectively, oneness and rule together in one church, etc., etc., etc.

The church as a whole. And then in verse 7 he jumps and he goes, But grace was given to each one of us. So he goes from talking about all of us to individuals.

[10:58] From unity to diversity. That's the second section. Diversity. That's because he wants us to know that unity in a church, which is what we're aiming for, does not equal uniformity.

We are not a colorless, mass-produced group of replicants. We are different. And we are different not because of different temperaments, although that is true. We're different because the Holy Spirit has given us different gifts.

Different people, different gifts for the enrichment of all of us. Let me read 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, So the reference in verse 8 there, which is the, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives.

Not immediately intuitive. It's referring to Psalm 68, which is kind of referring to this. The background is like a conquering king who's coming back to his castle, his palace, his whatever.

[12:12] And he's returning with bounty. And he's sharing that bounty with his people. So Christ has won for himself a people, and he's giving them gifts. Paul mentions five here.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Who are these guys? Very quickly, apostles. Words, a word normally used to describe the 12 disciples, foundational members of the faith.

Prophets, someone who hears from God and speaks the truth. Evangelists. We're all called to evangelize, but some people seem especially gifted in making the gospel clear to people.

Lastly, shepherds and teachers. Those things sort of go together as synonyms. Mostly about teaching the word of God. People who are gifted in teaching God's word. Now, it would be easy to think, right, that makes sense, Aaron.

God gives a few people gifts for ministry, so the rest of us can just, you know, have lunch or something. Or go to the movies. No. Look at verse 12.

[13:10] Here we go. I'll read from verse 11. He gave the apostles and prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers. Yes. So he gave these people as gifts to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

So these unique jobs are not the sum of all the gifts God bestows. No, shepherds and teachers, et cetera. They are to equip you guys for ministry. This is your ministry.

Jordan and I, who are paid employees at the church, we're not the only people doing ministry in church. The work of the ministry is the work of the saints.

It's you. People like me and Jordan are going to, we're going to come and go. Like, we'll leave at some point. Like, you know, I'm not saying we're going to leave, but we, you know, like, we will, do you know what I mean? We'll go. Ministers will leave the churches and do something else.

The real ministry actually belongs to you guys. I hope you know that. That's really, really important. The real ministry belongs to you guys. And that ministry looks like this. It looks like building up the church.

[14:17] And it looks like all of us playing a part in building up the church. Again, I'll read it again. Okay, so you don't believe me. Verses 11 and 12. And it gave apostles and prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers.

All important stuff. All good stuff, right? For what purpose? To equip the saints for the work of ministry. God gives diverse gifts to a diverse people.

To build a unified church. Okay, unity. Diversity. I want to talk about our last section now. Which is about maturity. That's verses 13 to 16. I think our passage reaches a high point here.

In here we see the ultimate goal of being unified. And the goal of all the diversity and giftings in the church. Here we go. Verse 13. Until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of Christ.

To mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That's the goal. Maturity in our corporate faith. The fullness of Christ.

[15:18] Be mature it says. Don't you want to do that? Don't you want to be mature? We want to be mature. Corporately we want to be mature. Not like little kids.

Whose opinions are so easily changed. It describes them here in verse 14. Don't be like kids tossed to and fro by the waves. And carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning.

By craftiness. And deceitful schemes. But rather be like a body that works really well. Verse 16. Each part doing its bit.

When each part is working properly. When you have that you have a growing body. That's what we're after. So do you see something really important here? I want you to get this. Spiritual immaturity.

According to this passage. Can look like two things. You can be immature in knowledge. That's the little kids tossed to and fro.

[16:19] Not with sound doctrine. You can be immature in service. And so there's a very challenging call here I think. For our roots to go deep into both God's word.

And God's people. Serving one another. So then. If as a congregation we want to grow. We want to be mature. How do we do that? We do that in two ways.

In our knowledge. And in our service. And the passage summarizes it in a lovely way. It says in verse 15. It talks about speaking the truth. In love.

Speaking the truth. In love. You might have heard that phrase before. And you might have misused it before. I have. It's. It's not. It doesn't mean you can say anything to anybody.

You know. Like. You're funny looking. Truth and love. I'm trying to help you out. You need to do something with this. You know. Like. That's not. People often. Have said harsh things to people.

[17:19] With the caveat. I'm just. Brother. I'm just. I'm just. Speaking the truth in love. That's not what this is. You can't use. Don't use it like that. Stop it. Um. The. The. The truth it's talking about here is what?

It's the gospel. So you can't use it as an excuse to. You know. Be mean. Truth. And love. Equals maturity.

Understanding the gospel. And love. That equals maturity. There are people in the Christian world today. Who thank. Thank God. Uphold biblical truth. Right. Fantastic.

But some of them. Always seem to be jonesing for a fight. For an aggressive dialogue. I'm all up for dialogue. But sometimes people throw scriptures at each other on blog sites.

Like they're grenades. Trying to belittle other people. Trying to show off. Love. That's truth. But it's not love. Truth becomes hard.

[18:19] When it's not softened. By love. And there are other people. I guess. In the Christian family. Who. Who want to maintain loving relationships. At all costs.

And in the process. Sacrifice. Gospel clarity. Both positions are unbalanced. Both of them are unbiblical. No. We need. We need both. We need. We need truth.

And we need love. If we want Christian maturity. So. Finishing up. Folks. We covered a lot of ground here. And I just skimmed the surface of a ton of stuff.

But. Here we go. Paul's vision for church life. Is. Expansive. We are to be a society.

A group. A gathering. Marked by unity. And marked by diversity. Of truth. And of gentleness.

[19:17] And in the words of verse one. This. Is a life. Worthy of our calling. And it's a life. That Paul. Urges us. Begs us. To walk in. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.