

Ephesians 4:1-16 PM

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[0 : 0 0] pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Yeah, please grab a seat, grab a seat. Folks, if you're new, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm one of the ministers here. We are in the middle of a sermon series where we're sort of doing an overview of the whole Bible. We're looking at the key things, the big things, the big messages of God to us. What are the things that God really wants us to know? So can I just give you a bit of an overview of the last five weeks, really, really quickly the last five weeks. First, we learned that God creates. We also learned that God speaks. God is not silent, which means we can know God's thoughts. We don't have to, and this is amazing, we don't have to try and guess what God is like.

We don't have to make up what God loves or wants. We don't have to invent what God thinks. He tells us, which is wonderful. We've also learned that God makes promises, which is amazing. He makes these promises to us called covenants, and they're this beautiful mix of love and law. We've also learned that God loved us so much, He became one of us. God physically entered into the messiness of the world. There's no other religion that says anything like this. It's just completely wild, isn't it?

God says, I'm going to be with you in the flesh, and then He hands the world a baby. That's the incarnation. We've also learned that God deals with our rejection of Him through the cross, and last week we learned that God puts His very life into us, the Holy Spirit. So that's the story of God so far. This week, we want to talk about what does all of that mean on the ground for us, all of that stuff. How does that affect the way we live? How we want to be a community?

So this week, we're talking about the importance of church, and that's what Ephesians 4 is about, and it's an absolute cracker, and we're just going to just jump straight into it. We're going to start with one of the very first words of this chapter in Ephesians 4, the word therefore.

So chapter 4, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. The therefore here refers back to the first three chapters of Ephesians, and in those chapters, 1 to 3, Paul basically sort of outlines the gospel story to us. He outlines what God has done for us through Christ. It's kind of this soaring theology.

[2 : 3 9] It's great stuff. So that's the first three chapters. Then chapter 4, verse 1, we reach this kind of fulcrum in the book, this pivot point in Ephesians. And we know it's a pivot because Paul says, therefore. So Paul is saying, because of all of the stuff, I've just told you all this theology, because of all of that stuff, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Does that make sense?

I'll say it again. Paul says, because of all of theology, because of all that Christ has done, we should be a people that live differently. So Paul here is, he's welding together what we believe and how we do life, what we believe and how we actually do our lives. So let me read the whole verse again. I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, that's Paul, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Paul says, I've just unloaded all this mind-blowing theology on you.

But these aren't just ideas that I want you to ponder, to muse on. This is not just theological ear candy. Christianity is, it's a belief and it's a way to live. It's a way to be in the world. It's a way to be with each other. And that's what this chapter is about. And I think this is good for us to hear, particularly around here, because St. John's is a bit of a brainy church. And that's a compliment, kind of a compliment. It's a bit of a brainy church. And it would be a mistake for us to think that thinking right theological things equals spiritual growth. It would be a mistake to think if I can just go, you know, get into the church fathers and read tons of stuff, that means spiritual growth. Thinking right things is good.

But that doesn't mean you're a mature Christian. Maturing means those right beliefs become right actions. And this is kind of a major concern for Paul here. Maturing, maturing is what he's about in this little chapter here. He mentions maturing the word actually a number of times. And what he does is he says, I want to tell you what maturing actually looks like and what it doesn't look like. He says, here's what maturity, Christian maturity looks like, and here's what Christian immaturity looks like. And that's basically the structure of the sermon.

We're going to look at what maturity looks like in a community. And we're going to look at what immaturity looks like. So, ready to go? Here we go. First point, what does spiritual maturity look like in a church community? Well, first, we see that it looks like unity. Unity in the gospel, unity in what we're doing, trying to achieve what we're about. And it's interesting because he talks about maturity as something that we have to maintain. In verse 3, it says, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

[6 : 04] So, maintaining implies that there are attitudes that promote unity, these things that we can do that make unity possible, and these things that can get in the way of unity. So, let's talk about them. And he mentions a few here in verse 2. So, I read verse 1 again.

I, therefore, prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

So, if our community wants to be a mature community, it's going to look like unity in what we're about, and that unity will require us to be humble, gentle, patient, and bear with one another.

So, let's look at these words really quickly. Humility. Humility. There's some great definitions out there. One of the best is probably C.S. Lewis. He's got a classic one. He says, true humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. That's a good one.

That's a great one. Here's another one. Humility is not thinking bad things about yourself, it's thinking big things about God. I really like that one. Humility is not thinking bad thoughts about yourself, it's thinking big thoughts about God. The more we have God in our mind, the more we're thinking about Christ, the less we're going to be thinking about things like prestige and power plays and getting our own way in every situation. I mean, those kind of things disrupt unity, don't they? Gentleness is one of the other words that's used in our passage, and I feel like it's a bit of a forgotten virtue. It's not something we talk about a whole lot, gentleness. But Paul mentions it quite a bit, actually. Gentleness here is not, it's, gentleness doesn't mean weakness, it doesn't mean a lack of conviction. Back in the days, the idea behind the word was strength under control, strength under control. So it's, the gentleness here has a sense of, it's someone who has mastered themselves in order to serve others. Like, for example, they've mastered their ego, for example, in order to serve. So I had a mate who, a friend of mine, who was extremely successful in their professional career. Big money, everyone knew them, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[8 : 39] And when he, I think I've told you it was Paul, he went to a, he went to a new church and joined the church, he was there for a little while, and then he wanted to help out, and he basically went to the pastor and he said, um, what is the most difficult thing that, what is the hardest thing to get people to volunteer to do? And they said, oh, it's helping people in the car park find a car park. And he goes, oh, I'm happy to do that. Signed up for it. So this was a person who had mastered their ego.

They didn't need to be, they weren't like, Jones had to be like a trustee or on the board or have very important jobs. Happy to do the job no one else wanted to do. Humility and gentleness. Those are the words we've talked about so far. And in Greek, actually, those are the words that Jesus uses to describe himself in Matthew 11, when he says, come to me, I am gentle and lowly at heart. You'll find rest for your souls. Paul is saying, let's, let's be more Christ-like. We want unity. Let's be Christ-like. Okay, next, next couple of words here. Patience and bearing with one another. I think these are synonyms here. So the word means just slowness and retaliating. So in the Bible, those words are mostly used to describe God's attitude towards us. God's slow to sort of, punish. God's slow to judge. So it's a general tolerance towards one another is what it's talking about here. Because people, you know, we annoy each other. People are annoying, right?

It's a general tolerance. Let's treat each other with the patience of God. This is theology in action. And we need these things if we're going to be unified. Now, let's look at the next verses, because what Paul does is he kind of double clicks on this unity. So let me read it and I'll tell you how it relates, okay? Verses 4, 5, and 6. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father over all, who is over all and through all and in all. So Paul, he double clicks on this idea of unity. One body, one Lord, one faith, and one grace. So what's going on there? He's just sort of said these things which make sense to us. Generalist humility. And he's like, one, one, one, one, one. What's he talking about? Paul here is saying, I know I'm saying I want you guys to be unified, but he's also saying another thing. He's saying, you're actually already really unified. You're actually already unified.

You share a faith in Christ. You have the Holy Spirit in you. You are his. You'll be with him for eternity. He's saying, you're already really spiritually unified. Now, let's make that visible. Let's make that invisible reality a visible thing. Does that make sense? I'll say it in a different way. I don't know if you've done this, but if you've traveled and you meet a Christian on the other side of the world, you've got something with them, don't you? You're connected with them in a really, really special way. You share something. You are one. So my family traveled to Thailand a couple of years ago, and we were playing mini golf, and we met a couple on their honeymoon who were a Palestinian couple, and we started chatting to them. Turns out they're Christians. Turns out they work for these Christian non-profit there, and afterwards we're just getting on like a house on fire. We went out for lunch afterwards. Just had this fantastic discussion.

It was wonderful. People in the restaurant around us, looking at us, would just see like, we're just seven people sitting around a table eating some wonderful food. That's all they see. But there is invisible, this invisible reality that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. And Paul is saying, that invisible spiritual reality, make that visible. How do you make that visible? By being a community marked by humility and gentleness and forbearance and patience. Okay, let's talk about the big picture, because I don't want you to be lost about what I'm talking about. Okay, big picture, really big picture.

[12 : 45] We're talking about maturity. We're talking about spiritual maturity. That looks like unity. And if we want unity around the gospel, gentleness, patience, humility. Okay, what else does maturity in faith look like? It looks like attending to one another. It looks like looking out for one another.

It looks like working for one another in lots of different ways. Let me read verses 7, 8, 11, and 12 to you. So if you could just have a look at that. Slide your eyes down those verses there.

By grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to them. I'll explain that in a moment. And he gave the apostles and the prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

Okay. What's going on there? Okay. The one where it says, on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to them. What's that about? That's referencing a psalm, Psalm 68. The background is this. Conquering king, a conquering king comes back into their city and they're returning with all of his bounty and they're throwing it. It's just like, you know, you get a car, you get a car, you get a car, you get a car. It's like sharing the bounty, right? Returning king. The bounty Paul talks about here with this reference, the bounty is people. God is saying, I have a treasure to give you. And the treasure I want to give you is people. God gives people to his people to help each other. People who the spirit equips with gifts to help us mature. And he mentions five apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers. I'm not going to go through those because actually emphasis on something else. Because we could read that and we go, okay, well, I'm not any of those things. So that's fine. God gives a few, because we could make the mistake of thinking God gives a few people gifts for ministry and the rest of us can just kind of get on with our lives.

Play pickleball, go out for lunch, do whatever you do, right? Let me, let me read it to you again. Verse 12, really carefully, okay? Verse 11 and 12. And he gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, shepherds, shepherds, to equip the saints, that's you, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. So who's doing the ministry there? It's the saints.

[15 : 33] It's you that is doing the ministry. It's the saints that do the ministry. That's you. The shepherds and teachers in advance. We're just, we're just there to equip you guys to do ministry.

ministry. This is really important. So Jacob and I, we are not the only people that do ministry in church. It's you that do most of it. We will come and go. People like us come and go. The real ministry of St. John's belongs to you. Ministering to each other. That is what maturing in faith individually and as a community looks like. And just as an aside, I think it's like, I think some people come to church to learn more. That's fine. I'm glad you learn more. The problem is you might start to think, you know what? The sermon wasn't very good tonight, so it was a bit of a waste of time going.

That's a terrible attitude. We should be coming to church thinking, how do we encourage one another?

And what would that look like? It's like after the service, like offering to pray with somebody, or like a thought, like a kind of a thoughtful word. Looking at somebody, they look a bit off. Are you okay? What's going on? Asking good questions. A dinner invitation. An offer to some practical help, some kind of encouragement. That's ministry. That's what it looks like for us to mature as a community.

Verse 15 kind of leans into this some more. Gives us a bit of an example. Verse 15. Rather, speaking the truth in love when we grow up in every way into him who was the head into Christ. So, the whole church grows and matures as we dig into Christ and our relationship with him, and we dig into our relationship with each other, speaking the truth in love to one another. Now, you might have heard that phrase. Have you guys heard that phrase before, right? Speaking the truth and love? I just want to speak the truth and love to you. Probably heard that. It's a phrase that I think sometimes we think means, I can say something kind of really harsh to somebody, but if I think it's true, it's okay.

[18 : 10] It's not really what it's talking about, is it? It's not really what it's talking about. Is that what it's talking about? I don't think so. Jacob, I love your preaching, but is there anything you can do about this?

That's not true. Look at him. He's a very handsome man, but if he wasn't, and it was true what I said, I should have thought about it as an example, but that's not what this is talking about, all right?

This is not what this is talking about. Gee, he's a good-looking guy, though, isn't he? Isn't he a good-looking guy? The truth, when it talks about truth there, it's not just any truth, like I don't like your clothes or something.

Like, it's not just anything. The truth it's talking about is the gospel. It's saying, let's speak the gospel to each other in a loving way.

That's kind of one of the ways we grow and mature as a community. There's lots of people in the Christian world today who uphold biblical truth. They've got fantastic memories. They can read the church fathers, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[19 : 22] But they're just not nice. They're not good people. And so I don't go to Christian blogs or just don't look up Christian Reddit, reformed Christian Reddit sites and stuff.

Like, it's just, there's some people who, they're just throwing grenades at each other. You know? They're awful. They're awful to each other. They have the truth, but they don't have any love. And there are other folks who just want to maintain peace at any cost.

And so they sacrifice the clarity of the gospel in that. They don't take a stand on anything because they don't really want to offend people. They want to keep everyone peaceful, right? Lots of love, lovely, but they've lost the truth, right?

So both positions are not very good. We want to speak the gospel to each other, pure gospel to each other. And we want to do that in a loving way. That's what we do as a maturing community.

So, these are some examples of what maturing as an individual in a community looks like. Unity, rooted in gentleness and humility. It's serving each other.

[20 : 31] It's speaking the truth in love. Being invested. Going deep. Going deep in God's word. Going deep in the fullness of Christ. Going deep in our relationship with each other. So we can all grow in Christ.

Okay. So, that's maturity. I said at the start, we're going to talk about what maturing looks like. And what immaturity looks like. So let's talk about what immaturity looks like. And it just gives us one example.

Just one example of what immaturity looks like. This is verse 13 and 14. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

To mature manhood, womanhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children. Tossed to and fro by the waves.

And carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness and deceitful schemes. So Paul here is saying. If you're not mature, you're immature.

[21 : 25] And if you're immature, it's like you're a baby. It's like you're a baby. And real babies are not discerning. Are they? Real babies are not very discerning.

Real babies eat dirt. For example. Like if you have a baby. And you put like a bowl of dirt in front of it. It's just going to get stuck into it, isn't it? It's going to get stuck into it.

To real babies like immature Christians. It's hard for them to tell the difference between what's good for them. And what's not good for them. The difference between good teaching.

And poisonous teaching. Immature Christians. Baby Christians can be tossed about by. I can't think of an example.

But like faddish. Like faddish theology. Christian podcasts that are really sort of mystical.

[22 : 20] And a bit wacky. Spiritual life hacks. You know, these kind of things. And our job.

In this. As a community. When. Young Christians. Immature Christians. Go after kind of stuff that's a bit wacky. That's kind of attractive. Because it's packaged attractively.

Our job. Is not to go. Look at those guys. What a bunch of dumbos. That's not what we do. We speak the truth. In love.

We speak the gospel to them. We're long suffering. We're patient. We're gentle. We're humble with them. And again. We don't want to be. Don't be shocked by spiritual immaturity.

In a community of faith. All churches are filled with babies. That's. That's absolutely fine. But the goal of course. Is growth. Isn't it? We want to be growing.

[23 : 17] As a community. We want to come around. We want to. To. To come together. And help one another. Because friends. We've. We've got to just keep growing. Don't we? We've got to keep growing.

It's like riding a bike. You're just going to. If you're not moving forward. You're just going to. You're just going to. Fall over. Okay. Folks. That's the gist of it. That's. That's chapter 14. That's chapter 4. Sorry. That's it really.

God's plan. God's plan is that we mature together. And there's no growing into maturity by yourself. You've got to go deeper into the life of church land.

So you can't just drop in and out of church and expect to grow. So let me finish up here. With a bit of a challenge. I guess the question I want to ask you is.

Are you maturing? Are you growing in humility? Do you feel more humble? Do you feel like you're more in control? Do you feel more peaceful?

[24 : 17] Are you going deep in relationship? Are you speaking the truth in love? Are you having those conversations?

I think those are good questions. I don't want to. I don't like preachers that beat people up. You know at the end of sermons. I'm trying to beat you up here. I just think it's good to ask these questions sometimes. Am I actually growing?

Because sometimes we just settle. I think we just settle right. We kind of just go. It's just the way I am. You know. I'm just a bit grumpy. Not a people person.

Come on. You've got the power of God inside of you. Don't put up with that. Folks, we've got to be growing and maturing together.

Amen.