

Session 2

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[0 : 0 0] So Ephesians 4, where we are this morning, the first 16 verses, begins with an exhortation in the light of who we are as God's church, and again, it's a very big we, it's us as a body, it's not just take it home individual, this is me, this is us as a body, and for us here, the body of Christ who meet here at St. Paul's.

And it begins with an exhortation to walk in a way which is worthy of what we have received. So the church is the expression of this brand new humanity created in Christ, and Ephesians 4 begins by exhorting us to be that humanity in the relationships that we have with one another.

And so the very first words, or verse 2 says, so be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love.

So I'll say it again, be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. We could spend a lot of time on this and we're not going to, but humility was something which was just a shameful thing in Greek culture.

We are called to humility because it is something that Christ has modelled for us. In Mark chapter 10 verse 45, Jesus said, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[1 : 3 0] And so when he says humble and gentle and bearing with one another in love, he is calling us to things that Christ himself has modelled for us beforehand.

I had a delightful time in my small group the other night. I've asked for permission to share this. Cecilia was there and she told us the story of last Sunday at the international service, 11.30am.

And it was a pretty special and important occasion for that congregation because it really was, I think in Cecilia's words, it was the last meeting of hope in a sense before we go into our new, you know what I mean, hope as in big H hope, hope, not small H hope.

And she said it was a bit of a circus. I don't think she used that word, but it was a bit of a circus. Brian was running from Cantonese to international and between the two preaching. They were doing things that were out of order.

They were stopped for a while in the middle with nothing to do while they waited for him to come back and preach. And then at the end, both congregations solved the communion problem. Well, I might not have got this in order, but near enough, they solved the communion problem by coming into here, into this building and having communion together.

[2 : 4 6] And I said, sounds a bit chaotic. And I asked if people were offended. And she said, no, we laughed. We laughed. And I actually think that's an example of bearing with one another in love, showing gentleness and patience with complete humility, being able to laugh at ourselves and laugh at the mistakes that we make sometimes.

Now, it can save a lot of angst. You know, you know, it happens something goes wrong, we miss something, we don't do something quite right, and then we've got our knickers in a knot and we're saying it shouldn't be like this and no, no, no, no, no, no.

Sometimes it's just good to laugh, to bear with one another in love. We are called to a particular quality of relationships and our worthiness in Christ will be seen in the way that we relate to one another in church.

I had a moment of huge encouragement a few years ago. I was down at Lane Cove National Park in the conference centre there. It was our Western Region Ministry Conference and a man came up behind and put his hands on my shoulders from behind and he said, how's it going, my friend?

And I turned round, it was the Archbishop. And one of the things I said to him, because it was where I was at at the time, I said to him, I feel like there are people in our congregation who push me around on the basis of who they are in their job and their workplace or how they are regarded in wider society.

[4 : 13] And I feel like they come into church and because of the significant places and positions they have outside, they bring that sense of who they are into the church.

And sometimes, perhaps without even meaning to, they push me and other people around. And he said to me, I know exactly how you feel, my friend.

It was a moment of marvellous encouragement for me. Didn't have to solve the problem, but just to have somebody like that understand what it feels like to stand in the shoes.

See, this is not a place where we are to push one another around. We are called to walk in humility and service in the same way that Christ did.

And I think a practical outcome of this is that we can enjoy each other and we can enjoy the relationships that God has given us. And so I think I want to say at the beginning of chapter 4, it's saying relationships are key and the qualities with which we relate to each other undergird everything else that is said throughout this passage.

[5 : 34] Pretty easy to summarise Ephesians 4. I'll do my glib summary and you can pull me up on details later. But I think it's saying as we walk worthy of Christ, there is a unity.

There is unity and there is also difference. And there's a God-given reason for both. And in this talk, I particularly want to get to God's reason for them both.

So we'll go through both, reason for unity, reason for difference, but push beyond that for the reason why. You see unity which is expressed in verses 3 to 6.

It says, Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. 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. And you start to see that when you talk about things like unity, we don't set the boundaries.

[6 : 43] God does. He defines it. And if you pull out the elements of this, it talks about things like one body, verse 4, one spirit, verse 4, one hope, verse 4, one Lord, verse 5, one faith, verse 5, one baptism, verse 5, one God and Father.

He is everything, verse 6. And if you extract a little bit from that, you actually see that our unity is built around who God is, himself.

One spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. So God is a God of relationship and God is a God who is in relationship.

And our unity, the body of Christ, we are a body created by Christ himself. We have a common hope and faith which he has brought to us.

So everything is of God in terms of unity. Who he is and what he has given to us. And the only thing that we do in terms of a unified response to what God has done is we get baptised.

[8 : 0 0] But even there, the proper understanding of baptism is it's God's work. He has inwardly brought us into his family through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is something which has happened inside us.

So our unity is all of God. And we don't make the rules for unity, God does. Now Christians sometimes seek unity with all sorts of people.

And we could go into a long discourses and we could talk about denominations and other religions and all sorts of things. But let me say sometimes we even seek unity, say, with Muslims. And that doesn't matter if we want to be bad friends.

But we seek a unity with them, say on family issues. I think there's a family day coming up at the moment. Either this weekend or next weekend. And part of the unity around that day is a unity with Muslims.

And that is because we both have mutual concerns about gay marriage. So we organise ourselves around the issue or denominational preference or whatever it is.

[9 : 0 8] That's one of the ways we seek unity. That sort of unity does not glorify God if it downplays or minimises the exclusive lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so this passage says that Christian unity is found in God himself. And that means declaring him for who he is, Father, Lord and Holy Spirit.

Now there's difference. And there's this list of gifts which begins at verse 7. It says, What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to lower earthly regions?

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, etc., etc.

We'll come back there. So we've got a list of gifts here. And I think four or five in particular are listed. We've got apostles. We've got prophets. We've got evangelists. We've got pastors and teachers.

[1 0 : 3 9] Or we've got pastors and teachers. I mean pastors and teachers together or pastors and teachers separate. It doesn't matter how you count. It's not an exhausting list of gifts. You could go to other passages in the New Testament like Romans chapter 12 or 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and you could see other gifts which are named and which are listed.

So if you take a broad view of scripture, you find that the people of God have many different gifts which are given out by the Spirit of God. And 1 Peter chapter 11 and 1 Peter chapter 12 and 1 Peter chapter 13 says each one should use whatever gift he has received in the service of others.

So it's not an exhaustive list but it is a focused list. It's a list of particular gifts which are expressed here and these gifts are all about the ministry of God's word there's a wonderful illustration which he throws into the text here he talks about ascending and descending going up and down what's all this mean talking about ascending on high leaving captives in his train and what he's actually doing is quoting Psalm 68 and when he quotes a little bit of it it's fair to presume that he's actually quoting perhaps the whole sense of what Psalm 68 is about and Psalm 68 is a psalm which apparently was used for worship by the Jewish people in association with Pentecost and Pentecost for them is different from Pentecost for us because Pentecost for the Jews was a time in particular when they would commemorate the giving of the law so the picture here in Psalm 68 is an illustration from the Old Testament the Lord Almighty scatters the kings of the earth in verse 14 he wipes everything away and God comes from Sinai to the mountain from which he where he chooses to reign and there's this enormous display of God's majesty and God's strength and God goes up on his mountain mountain he carries his captives in train and he begins to distribute the spoils of war to his followers and God hands out what's he hand out on Mount Sinai to his followers?

the law of God the means by which his people were to live in relationship with him and so there's now this movement in the New Testament in the way that Paul uses this psalm here to explain what's going on here it's as if it's almost a picture of Jesus now embodied in this image of ascending on high and carrying his captives with him and now passing out distributing the gifts upon his peoples giving us the gift the Holy Spirit into our heart which helps us to understand the law of God in fact I will put my what is it?

Jeremiah 30 I will put a new heart and I will write my law on their hearts and there's this image of God giving his law in the Old Testament and now Jesus giving his spirit in the New Testament and helping us to embody the law of God in our very being there's also the pictures there of what we read in Philippians chapter 2 and places like that the humiliation of Jesus as the descending and the ascending and being exalted to the right hand of God on high but I said before that these gifts that Christ has distributed these ones which are named in particular in Ephesians 4 are all about the ministry of God's word and the people who exercise this ministry so apostles not just sent ones in a wide sense but in a narrow sense they're the eyewitnesses of the risen Lord Jesus Christ and they're the authors of the New Testament and hence apostolic witness prophets

[14 : 41] I take that to be the forth telling of God's word it's the apt application I think we do prophecy happens in a formal sense I think it often happens in a very informal sense so you're talking to a Christian brother or sister you're bringing the word of God to bear you're referring to something that God's shown you and just in that moment God opens up for them something that you didn't even know about where the word that you spoke actually bears on them in a way which is really helpful to them in their life and their ministry and their witness in that moment it's like God speaks through that word sometimes in a way that you never even anticipated but it comes from the word of God being shared and expressed between us evangelists bringing the word of God to unbelievers pastors and teachers certainly shepherds who watch over God's flock and who feed God's flock in teaching steady nutritional diet versus a memorable meal so you know sometimes we get a bit ho-hum about church and I don't think you should get ho-hum about church but you ask somebody what was the last what did you have for dinner last Monday night?

Can anybody tell me? Can anybody tell me? but I know one thing you did all eat I presume it unless you were fasting okay?

so we eat all the time don't we? and it nourishes our body and we don't necessarily remember one moment from another in a bigger or more astounding way but we're doing something that keeps us alive and so it is in Christ with the word of God occasionally we have a moment of great clarity in Revelation where we go wow look what God's just taught me but the more important thing is that we be being fed constantly that we be taking a nutritional diet from the word of God and being fed we've just named some pretty significant gifts in terms of God's church and we've named them because it's what's named in this passage and it's easy sometimes to look at gifts like that and to stop and to glory in the gifted one and that would be a huge mistake because you get wrapped up in your own celebrity or the celebrity gifted one that our church happens to have or whoever we are rather than being focused on the work that the gifts produce one of the things

I find I have to do for myself in preaching is that I won't be overly worried about my performance and sometimes I do and I pray and ask that God would help me to focus on him and on his word producing what he wants to bring about in people's hearts including the heart of me the preacher see the gifts listed in Ephesians 4 about equipping all of God's people for ministry not everybody's got the particular gifts I think there's a particular centering around the leadership at church but it's not exclusive to the elders some of us have these gifts formally others have them informally some are recognised some aren't they're recognised through things like ordination but whichever way we've got them they're not given to us to glory in they are given to equip the people of God to do ministry and that brings us to the purpose of the difference and it really is just about a memory verse it's verse 11 through to 13 it was he who gave some to be apostles some to be prophets some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's 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

I don't know if you can see it I think standing in the shoes of an ordained minister which is what I am I think I have felt the pressure over many years to be everything to everybody to be the all conquering super gifted one and it's a distortion of what the passage is teaching we don't have to excel in things that God hasn't gifted us in we don't employ people to do the work of ministry on behalf of the congregation we work with one another in Christ I felt the tension sometimes between doing and equipping there are certain things I think I know for myself that I do well I think I know there is a strength for me in terms of visiting people and particularly people in crisis it's something I have experience in something I'm gifted in but if I just leave it as me the person who goes out and visits everybody and holds hands and meets people in crisis the ministry will stop when I stop so one of the things that I have to learn and I want to learn and I want you to pray for me in this is I want to learn how to multiply myself with some of the things that God has given me

[20 : 19] I want to learn how to teach and equip other people of God with some of the things that God has taught me and the end result I hope will be a whole body of people who can do it better than me and who discover the gifts that God has given them in the process so I want to train a team of people who are able to represent Christ in situations of great human need I'd like to feel like our community group pastors are equipped like that that whether they do all the work or not that's another question but that they lead a body in terms of their community group who really does care for one another and in crisis moments in life but not just holding hands and saying how sorry I am and emphasising which is all part of it but it's also about bringing the word of God to people's life situations so for me when I go and see somebody in hospital or go and visit somebody who's just died or not the person who's died but the family of the person who's just died

I thought I'd better be clear about that I don't do resurrections by the way but when I go and see somebody like that without forcing myself I am always looking for the opportunity to pray with the person and also to read the word of God or try to read an appropriate passage from the word of God so I'm bringing the tools that Christ has given us to the situation as I seek to represent him so I want us to be better than just nice visitors I want us to be people who are able to bring the word of God to one another in a way that grows us in Christ and helps us to understand what God's purposes are for us in different situations pray for me but see it me doing it one by one or a wide body of people multiplying the work of Christ in our church family I think another thing that we have on our plate and that is offered to us let me read the verse again

I think as you go through that verse you see that it's to prepare God's people for works of service the purpose of that is that the whole body will be built up I think there's the notion of qualitative growth we've said that at the beginning quality matters here how we relate to one another matters it's really really clear but I think you also ought to see that there's the idea of quantitative growth as well the New Testament church was growing numerically it was growing in the word it was growing in number it was growing under the blessing of God and so this notion of the whole church being built up by a whole body of people who are equipped and their gifts being exercised to grow the church and multiply the church I think carries with it the notion of quantity as well as quality the quality seen in that there's a maturity which is being sought here and attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ and you ask well what does maturity look like and he tells us in the passage it's so that we're able to stand firm we're not blown around here and there by every wind of doctrine every craftiness of people scheming every novelty that somebody brings along they're doing this down the road at that church we ought to be like that too no it's able to stand firm and feel like what we're doing is substantial and Christ honouring without being taken off track at every point with every person who's got another new good idea even though it might be a good idea and it also says speaking truth in love speaking truth in love and I think I just want to say to that

I think what that is I think it's being able to speak directly to one another but with regard to the other so being able to speak very directly but with real regard for the person that we're speaking to I think one of the things that we do here and we do it in other places as well is that we use subtle messages don't use subtle messages with me because I just don't get the subtlety sometimes and you'll be disappointed or we use a bleak talk we don't talk directly about what's really going on for us we shift and we move I think the truth in love is a great word there is directness but there is also love had a friend sort of got a friend but a few years ago

I was mentoring him and he was theologically trained and he was involved in the ministry with his church and other places and Kerry said to me one day in a really kind way do you think he realises that that bit of skin that hangs off his nose is actually really distracting nothing he had control over and it was said by her with real concern for him because it did you'd be talking to him face to face and it looked like a bit of boogie it's sort of hard to eyeball one another when you've got it coming off the Indian nose so how do you raise that with a person well I did get the opportunity one day because we had a one to one relationship we love one another in Christ I didn't do my wife in sorry I did this morning but just one to one in the context of relationship there wasn't an opportunity one day to say

[26 : 21] I don't know if you realise that that bit of skin sitting there is a bit of a distraction sometimes and I'm wondering is that something that you can deal with and the person said straight off actually I'm going to see the doctor about it next week he's going to snip it off and deal with it that's a silly illustration in a way but it's quite hard to speak directly to one another sometimes about things that matter and the qualification which is here in this passage is that when we do this is not where we put our boots on and march in and thump one another it's done with a great deal of love it is done with regard to the other person there's a couple of other places I'd like to go I'll go there very quickly I think Acts of Service you know what Acts of Service is it's a sheet that we've distributed in recent weeks and with the congregational reconfiguration it's a place where we're able to indicate some of the places where we might serve one another the whole notion of the Acts of Service sheet it's weighted towards building others up it's carrying the load in terms of our church family now you come to a sheet like that and it's really easy to ask what do I want to do

I wonder how I can be used in this church family moving more broadly into gifts at the moment but a better question would be what can I do that this church needs what are the holes where is a hole that I might be able to fill and exercise ministry for the benefit of everyone you know when you get a church and five concert pianists we haven't got five concert pianists but we do have one if we had five concert pianists we got a problem haven't we who gets to play how do you work that out well you've got the other sort of person and I've had to engage this in ministry many times and I'm thinking of other places but a person who is very confident about their own gifts and they're not necessarily confirmed by others and they bring themselves forward and they say why don't you use me this is my giftedness and because I'm a gatekeeper I guess in terms of my role and my responsibilities within God's family I have to make a call on it what do you do with that great stress in sorting that out sometimes why aren't you using me

I can remember one parish I went to a woman was on my doorstep in the first two weeks she wanted an appointment with me she wanted me to know that she was the parish evangelist she was very gifted and I needed to use her and then she was on my door six weeks later saying she was leaving the parish because she wasn't using her let me tell you in that case it was probably a blessed departure but it's not easy to deal with the other place I wanted to go is right at the end and it's coming back into our 2020 booklet and that is the whole notion of core membership do you understand what that means when we talk about core membership in this church family give us a hand if you've got some idea of what that means all right staff have got an idea because we've been working with it for a while and hopefully leaders are picking it up and owning it over time but but core membership the idea of core membership links into service and service means using our gifts and being the person of

God within our church family it's pretty simple it's just saying to us all that we want the church family to be living a life of personal devotion we want you to be reading the scriptures we want you to be praying we want you to be nurturing your own soul in Christ it's why we've got things like the life journal and we've been encouraging to use it this year if you're not using one you haven't got one I'd be really happy for you to take one free from the foyer I think you're supposed to pay a few dollars but if you take it and use it that would be a great consequence the second thing that is a church family in terms of core membership we live in community Steve said it last night what he asked of us last night he asked us to not just think it's only church but to be devoted to it to come regularly and to also be part of a community group because we know that you can't do everything on Sunday that we might do in a smaller group in terms of relationship with one another through the week we're calling people to servant heartedness which is taking responsibility for a ministry I'm going to use the words out of here living a life of servant heartedness being personally involved in one ongoing ministry towards unbelievers according to one's gifts using the gifts that

God has poured out on you within this church family personally involved in ongoing ministry to unbelievers so number four is living a life of local and global impact by personally being involved in one ongoing ministry towards unbelievers unbelievers and the last one is a life of generosity and one of the measures of that within our church family is by personally pledging to ministry here at St Paul's putting our money where our mouth is encouraging each other in Christ by being committed to the work that is done here which costs a lot of money now we could be legalists in any of those and we could go through that and just tick the box yeah had my quiet time been to church attended small group did my thing for kids church gave my money boom I'm a core member and I think I'm

[32 : 18] I grappled with it this week for myself because parish council and staff pledged for 2012 at a meeting last Monday night and last year when I did it for the first time it was sort of like it was a joy and it was a delight and it was an expression of commitment to St Paul's and it was part of the thing that we do corporately joining together with one another in terms of the ministry that we plan to do from here and I think I'd confess to you that the other day I had to look at my own heart and think when I first came at it was more like ticking the box doing my duty doing my job and I think in a sense had slipped back into legalism so there's a whole lot of things here which are really good things in terms of membership at St Paul's serving one another exercising the ministries that God has given to us but it's an ongoing challenge and to be transformed looking at our own hearts are we just ticking the box or are we doing are we delighting to treasure the

Lord Jesus together I think I just want to come to a finish by saying taking us back to the verse and I'm wanting you to think about our ministry team it was he who gave some to be apostles some to be prophets some to be evangelists some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's 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 I think I just want to say to you please pray for us pray that if we are gifted with some of the gifts that God has given in particular for building his church as expressed here in Ephesians chapter 4 pray that we would use them to his glory pray that we wouldn't get cluttered by expectations of a wide lot of other things that people often bring to us not so that those things aren't done but so that we be properly preparing the people of

God so that the wide base would be covered with the exceedingly wide list of gifts which God has distributed to all these people Amen