

Moving Forward

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[0 : 00] Find your way to Ephesians chapter 4. And so this is the second time that we're looking at it. This evening I won't have opportunity to go back over everything that I said last week, because that would be to preach that sermon.

But these sermons are building one upon the other. And so if you feel a little bit left behind, then we have the opportunity here through the recordings to listen to last week's message.

I'm only going to be reading this evening the first seven verses of Ephesians chapter 4, because this will be our focus this evening. So now hear God's word.

Ephesians 4, beginning at verse 1. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling, to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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 of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.

[1 : 30] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Well, may God bless both the reading to our hearts and minds, and of course, the message upon it after we...

Some of you may have already picked up on last week, from last week's message, that it has a trajectory.

And so, some of you would have recognized what this is leading to, and where it's going. Fair enough, it may be a long way ahead, but I've put enough...

I've put enough points in there to show you roughly what it's going to be looking like as we move forward. So, this evening, for the purpose of continuity, that is, picking up from where we left off, it would be good if I just restated ever so briefly the issue.

And the issue is this, that what you do when you have unified disunity, and you have the unity-disunity conundrum, something that needs to be addressed, and therefore, you begin to notice immediately just how difficult it is to manage to address, to sort out.

[2 : 58] The reason being is because if you address the situation, you create disunity, but if you don't address it, you're left with the disunity you already have. The temptation, then, is to do nothing and just choose which type of disunity that you want.

And the trouble with that is, is that one of them means not doing nothing, it actually means doing something. And as I said, it's always the same when a new pastor comes in, even though I've been here for eight years.

If a change that a new pastor brings in was never introduced by anyone else before he came, everybody knows he's the one doing it. Okay? Because if it was going to be done by other people, it would have been done by other people before he got there.

And this just adds to some of the difficulties in moving forward. I like moving forward slowly, but I do like moving forward. Okay?

I am, hopefully, or was, the new brush that swept clean, but very, very slowly. And the reason for that is because I think that slow process is more necessary for the church rather than a short, fast sweep.

[4 : 16] However, from my point of view, if I don't start brushing a little bit more vigorously, okay, we're going to be moving backwards rather than forwards.

And that's important because any room where toys are dropped and not picked up, the room, at some point, when people can't face it, just close the door. Okay?

And I can't close the door. I have to go in and start picking up. And this is part of the calling of what it means to be a pastor-teacher.

So, the preference is not between which type of disunity you want. The preference is we all want the unity that God promises and the reason we want it is because we want to be a body that works properly.

And therefore, I don't consider the disunity that we have as conflict. I don't believe we're at conflict even for a moment.

[5 : 20] I do believe, however, that we're not necessarily functioning as well as we could be as a church. And someone might say, well, you could say that about any church.

And I'm sure you could. But I'm not the pastor of any church. I'm the pastor of this church. Okay? That's a bit like saying, well, every marriage goes through that. Okay. But I'm not in every marriage. I'm in this marriage. Okay? Okay. And that's the issue. The issue is not that it's not true anywhere else. I'm sure it is true anywhere else. But I'm not anywhere else.

I'm here. And because I'm here, I feel it necessary to address it. So the difficulty is this. If we begin to do something, we create disunity because people like it the way that it is.

But if we do nothing, we're left with the disunity that we already have. So where do we begin?

Okay? What I want to address this evening is where to begin and how to begin.

[6 : 19] That's all that I'm going to be doing. Where to begin and how to begin. I want the church to endeavor to keep the unity and the bond of peace. I want the church to work properly so that it grows and that we're a benefit to each other and benefit to everybody else who comes into here or anyone that we meet out there.

And the only way that can happen is if we are spiritually fit, if the church works together properly. So this is what I want to address and I want to address it by putting down a non-negotiable.

Okay? So whatever else I say this evening, this thing that I'm just about to say now is non-negotiable if we're going to move forward. And it's that we have to, according to scripture, bear with one another in love.

That is the necessary grace for moving forward. That is the necessary conviction that we must all have and the necessary contribution that we must all have in order to move forward to the church becoming more united, working properly, growing better, just becoming more like Jesus.

Okay? So whatever disagreement you might think along the line, let's agree on this non-negotiable. That whatever we agree or disagree on further down the line, we have to do it in a way where we are going to bear with one another in love.

[7 : 56] Okay? Now that may be more difficult sometimes than others, but it is the one thing that has to be there. Because if it isn't there, the moment you lose love, you only have conflict.

Okay? The moment you lose love, all you get is conflict. And it's quite easy for love to disappear in conflict to appear very, very quickly. Okay? It doesn't take long in any situation.

So because we're not at conflict, and I don't want us to ever be there, the way to protect ourself against that is with bearing with one another in love as we make our way, as we make our way forward.

The other thing that we need to consider is boundaries. And this is where it does get a little bit touchy. Okay? So there are two points.

Number one, bearing with one another in love. And the second thing is boundaries. Now the reason I choose the word boundaries is because of what we understand about sanctification.

[9 : 02] Sanctification is where you are being made more like Jesus Christ by the grace that God gives you. That's sanctification. It's quite an impressive word if you like it, but if you want a simpler way of understanding, it is simply the grace that God gives you to make you more like his son.

Okay, what's difficult about that? Well, here's the difficulty. God's gift of grace is measured. That means that while it's true that God is at work in every Christian's life, it is not the case that God is at work in every Christian's life in the same way or to the same degree, to the same measure.

God, in his grace, gives a different measure of grace to some than he does others. Now this doesn't mean that we can sit back and go, well, I am the way that I am because God has given me a smaller amount of grace than what he's given that person.

That would be tempting wouldn't it? But as William Perkins once pointed out in his book *The Golden Chain* and you'd have to go back into the 1500s to be able to understand the framework he's speaking in, makes the point very, very clear.

That becoming like Christ and maturing is a complete act of God's grace. And God's grace is in different measures for different people.

[10:30] Well, what does that mean? It means that we cannot expect something from another person to the same degree we might expect it from a different person. If God is making distinctions amongst people with different measures of grace, then we have to understand that's true as well.

That means that as we look out into a congregation, while it's tempting to expect the same thing from everyone because we're all Christians, that's not the way God has organized the church. Okay? That is not, God has not distributed that measure evenly. It is distributed according to his purposes and plans.

Therefore, what that means is that as we grow together, we have to take this into consideration, that we're all going to mature differently because of the measure of God's grace that he has given to us.

We're all going to do different things in the church because of the measure of God's grace that he has given to us. So the only reason I am a pastor is because of the measure of grace that God has given me.

[11:35] That's the only reason. I'm not more qualified than you. I'm not any better than you. I'm only here because the grace gift is put me here. And it's the same for you in your contribution where you are.

This is good reason for none of us ever being jealous at anybody else. Okay? Because I can't be any different than what I am in God's eyes and neither can you.

I don't need to be jealous of what God has given you because I understand entirely that God gives us different things in different measures. And you don't need to be jealous if I have more than you and I don't need to be jealous if you have more than me because we have what we have according to the measure of the grace that God has given to us.

Now that is crucial. Absolutely crucial. Because as we bear with one another in love now we begin to realize that the same level of commitment of service of giving cannot be expected from everybody in the same way.

It just can't. Because as it says here in verse 7 the grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

[12:52] there is a distinction, a clear distinction to be made. And so as we bear with one another in love, as we move on and understand the boundaries that we live within, we also understand that we have what we have and we don't have what we don't have in the church as a direct result of God's grace.

Okay? Therefore we don't become jealous of one another because we understand this is God's doing. All of God's doing. So if we're going to begin, wherever we begin, we have to begin with the non-negotiable.

And that is we have to bear with one another in love. Okay? Because we're all going to make different decisions and we're all going to mature differently and at different speeds.

So bearing with one another in love. If a Christian or Christians, the church, is told and taught to become mature in Christ, it's because they're not already.

Now think that through. If a Christian is told to become mature in Christ, then it's easy to figure out that they're not mature already and therefore neither are their decisions.

[14:11] Okay? It's not as if we can be immature and make mature decisions. No, because that's not the way maturity works. Mature people can make mature decisions.

Okay? And you may just hit an off one if you're immature and think, well, that was a good decision, but it may have come from someone else. The way maturity works is that it's a process that affects everything that we do.

And so if we're not yet like Christ, we're unable to serve like Christ yet. We're unable to love like Christ. We're unable to do a whole load of things that are like Christ.

And what we've got to be careful of is not picking and choosing some more than others. So, for instance, when Jesus turned out the money changers in the temple, because that's not what it was meant for, it was meant to be a house of prayer, and they turned it into a den of thieves.

Okay? The temptation is if someone's like that in the church, we need to be more like Jesus. Well, Jesus was like that. The problem that we have is not that we cannot be like Jesus in that kind of way, but when we do it, we do it imperfectly because we're not yet mature.

[15 : 24] And so the same applies to loving Jesus. We cannot do it with him, we cannot do it in the church perfectly, because we're not yet mature perfectly.

So when we bear with one another in love, the thing that we're taking into consideration is that we're told to do this as we mature. And the reason we're told to do this as we mature is because the marks of immaturity can cause conflict, can cause us to fall out.

We need to be able to look at one another and go, okay, we all have to do a bit of growing up.

We're all going to have to grow up a little bit there. And this may take time. And the only way to get through it, the only way to get through it, is to love the person that's winding you up.

You've just got to love them. Now, you may want to love them and separate yourself from them for a time being. That's fine. It's not a problem, okay?

If you've had enough of them for the day, and you just need to clear your head, then you can still be loving towards them and do that at the same time. But what you cannot be is unloving.

[16 : 35] Now, your loving to them may come across in different ways, but it cannot be unloving. Anybody can walk away from anything. It's not difficult. It's not difficult for things to go wrong or for people not to have their own way and walk away.

I can do that. In fact, I think many of you, perhaps over the years that I've been here, thought that I might have done it on a few occasions, but I haven't. And the reason I haven't done it is because, as I said last week, I'm under obligation.

So, whether I want to be a pastor or not, I don't even have a choice in the matter. Okay? Imagine living with that. So, whether I feel like preaching the gospel or I don't feel like preaching the gospel, whether I feel like loving you or don't feel like loving you, whether I feel like pastoring this church or not feel like pastoring this church, none of those things matter because necessity is laid upon me in such a way where I understand that when God tells you to do something, you've got to do it.

Okay? And that, you need that kind of pressure to bring you back into repentance. Okay? You need to know the right thing to do and do it even when you don't feel like doing it in order to start feeling like doing it.

Okay? I want to say that again. the reason why the Ten Commandments are so necessary and other commandments are so necessary is because sometimes you need to know the right thing to do even when you don't feel like doing it because it's the right thing to do.

[18 : 05] And you keep doing it until you feel that it's the right thing to do. You have to make your way back there because we're immature. And that's how you bear with yourself in love.

That's how Christ bears with you in love as you are maturing to become like here. Now the only place where we don't bear with one another in love in that particular way but in a different way is when there's sin involved.

Then we have to tell the person to repent of their sin and return to the Lord Jesus Christ. Okay? Repent of their sin and come back. And so as we live in the church there's going to be massive differences all the time.

And those differences are caused by the different measure of grace that God has given us. Different levels of maturity are always going to be there and therefore the non-negotiable is you have to love one another.

That's the only way you're going to make it through. That's the only way each another is going to be mature in the body of Christ. So I live under the expectations of God and so do you.

[19 : 16] But I don't live under your expectations and you don't live under mine. We all live under the expectations of God according to the measure of grace that he has given each and every one of us.

Okay? The only person who has any right to expect anything of us is God. Now of course that works through in relationships and therefore there are responsibilities and commitments and convictions.

Of course there are. but ultimately okay we are to meet God's expectations not each other's which may be right they may be accurate but they could also be incredibly inaccurate.

Over demanding or under demanding. So we understand what God has given us and we meet those and we do it by bearing with one another in love.

Okay? Having gone that far then we move on to the issue of boundaries. Now in a church and in the family and even you as an individual we all have boundaries private, personal, church, work.

[20 : 29] All of these are different boundaries. Some of them overlap. Some of them don't. The issue here is to notice where those boundaries are and also to notice can they be overstepped?

Can they be stepped over? And the answer to both of those questions is yes we have boundaries and yes they can be stepped over. But the boundaries are probably not what you think they are. And they're probably not going to be stepped over in the way that you think they are. People in the church are entitled. Entitled? Blessed by God in order to have both personal and private boundaries.

And that's right that they should have those kind of boundaries. We all have them. But they should never ever be boundaries of contradictions. In other words I can cross the boundary in such a way where I can be a different person on the other side.

In other words where your life in the church looks differently different than your life does out there. And this is an apparent problem in scripture especially in the book of Amos.

[21 : 44] It becomes abundantly clear that because God is overall and in all he notices everything that we think do and say long before we get to church and then he has to hear us sing and pray.

And what do you think he's thinking? What do you think he's thinking? Well imagine it in different kind of scenarios where the husband has been off doing different things and he comes back into the house and he tells his wife that he loves her.

You think well do you? Because why didn't you come home at six o'clock when you could have instead of leaving at nine? These kind of things become apparent.

These boundaries of contradictions are dangerous. It would be a bit like a husband saying I'm only married when I'm in the house. Now we can all see why that's wrong.

The man is allowed to cross the boundary of the home. He's allowed to go out of the home. He's allowed to go to work. He's allowed to go anywhere that he likes. He's allowed to cross all those boundaries but the boundary he's not allowed to cross is the husband boundary.

[22 : 54] He's not allowed to cross the faithfulness into sin. He can cross every other boundary but he cannot cross that one. So there are boundaries and there are boundaries and the same is true for all of us here in the church.

You are a Christian. You can go out into the world, you can cross the boundary, the threshold of the church, of your home, you can cross all of those but the one that you cannot cross is the one that goes from Christian to non-Christian.

Faithfulness to unfaithfulness. Okay? That's a boundary you're not allowed to cross. And that boundary matters because it matters to your witness, to your spiritual condition, it matters to who you are.

So let me put it a slightly different way. Imagine for a moment a minister like myself, okay, who wouldn't marry two men in his church.

He wouldn't do it. And you know that I wouldn't do it. And imagine the same minister who wouldn't marry two women in his church. And you know that I wouldn't do that. But imagine that minister went to another church where that was happening.

[24 : 10] Okay? What would you think then? Well, if some of you haven't picked up on why it's wrong, you might be thinking through your head, is he doing it on his own time or the church's time?

That's not the issue. That's not the issue. And the reason it's not the issue is because there are boundaries that can never ever be crossed. What we do out there, the people we are out there, are the people that we bring with us as we come before the Lord.

It may not be the people that we demonstrate to each other, but it is the person that we demonstrate to the Lord. Because while I'm not with you out there and you're not with me, God is. God's with you. And so God sees you out there and he sees you in here. And he sees when you've crossed the boundary out there and that you're coming back in having pretend that you've never crossed that boundary.

That's not what should be happening. And the reason why it shouldn't be happening is because it leads to the disunity within the body. It comes out.

[25 : 17] You cannot help but for it to come out. So there's the boundaries that we have personally and external to the church. But what about the boundaries within the church?

The boundaries just within. Because a church is made up of individuals. It's made up of families. And every individual and every family have their own set of boundaries.

So to make the point clear I'm going to choose a very emotive and particular illustration. Children. children. The children in a church are under whose care?

We say well it's distributed on a Sunday. Okay? We don't mind sending our children out to the Sunday school leaders and helpers because they're very very good. Okay?

We don't mind handing that responsibility over them for the time because they love the children and they care for the children. And we know that whatever is going to happen to the children out there is going to be good for them.

[26 : 25] Okay? So we don't mind that boundary being crossed. Somebody else influencing our children because they're influencing them in the right kind of way.

But there we immediately recognize that children then are under whose authority? Well not only are they under the parents authority but they also come under the authority of Sunday school leaders, Sunday school helpers, elders, ministers, pastors.

Okay? And suddenly it's a broader environment. Okay, nobody's got a problem with that. But what about when a child prays? Well who's going to say how is a child praying going to lead to disunity? How would that lead to disunity? Well is the child saved or unsaved? Does God hear the prayer of an unsaved child or an unsaved person? Now you're getting into theology because where you stand biblically will then determine what you encourage as an eldership, as a Sunday school leadership, practically.

You can't help that. Prayer is a means of grace for God's people. What about baptism? What about the Lord's table?

[27 : 40] The question we're now faced with is who makes the decision? Do the elders make the decision on behalf of the parents? Or do the parents make their own decision bearing in mind that God will hold them accountable for their own children?

Who makes the decision? Now you begin to see that what looks like a fairly simple solution sitting that end is a very complicated one, my end.

Because boundaries are involved. And there is a story once upon a time of a minister who thought that his child should get baptized and the elders said no and he took her home and baptized her in the bathtub.

Oh, that happened here. Why did that happen? Well, because it's an issue of who makes the decision and when those decisions are made.

It's an issue of who makes it. And the only person who should be making it is the mature one. That's a little bit ambiguous. It's ambiguous because it's difficult.

[28 : 45] It's difficult. And so unless things are written down, which I don't think you ought to want to do everything by the letter of the law, though it's helpful, the issue that you have before us is that in a church where you have God's means of grace in prayer, in the Lord's table, in baptism, someone along the line has to make a decision.

And no minister in his right mind wants to stick an arbitrary requirement or an arbitrary age on any of those things. as if to say, you can only do it if this happens, that happens, or the other.

So who decides when children participate in the means of grace of prayer? Who decides when children participate in the means of grace for baptism? If you're in Anglican church, okay, no one's got a problem.

If you're in a Baptist church, no one's got a problem, okay? But when you've got different people from different backgrounds, then suddenly it's not so simple. And most churches, okay, in the UK, in fact, throughout the world, are not pure.

They're not denominationally pure, okay? As though they are completely all of the same mind theologically. And therefore, the decisions become much more complicated.

[30 : 07] And so what happens is no one makes the decision, okay? Or they're not there when the decision has to be made. That's quite a clever way of not having to make a decision or the decision you want to.

So what do you do when a child then wants to participate in the means of grace? Well, there's a few things you have to consider. Number one, that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. Period.

Period. The second thing you have to take into consideration is that are we in danger of causing little ones to stumble? stumble. Okay?

Are we in danger of causing little ones to stumble? I think a brief history of the church will show that the church throughout the years have caused many of its own natural branches to stumble.

Children brought up in Christian families in a Christian environment in the church who are then stumbled because the pastor or the elders haven't thought through these issues in such a way where they're not thinking through the issues to write down on a piece of paper but they're thinking through the individual issues because it's the child that matters.

That's why. Why does it matter so much? Because our only concern is whether or not we're causing the child to stumble or not before God. That's what matters.

[31 : 29] What's the other thing that we have to consider? Well, the other thing that we have to consider is that someone along the line has to talk through what the issues are. And so either the parents make the decision and the elders say we're going to put it into your best judgment, you're the parent, it's your decision to make, not ours, or the parent says no, I would like you to make the decision for me.

And so that means there's an additional question of do the elders have faithful children? I'm not qualified if my children aren't faithful. In fact, if my children prove to be unfaithful, and by God's grace that never is the case, I have to leave the pastorate.

Because that's how I read it. And therefore, it's a serious matter. So when we think about why doesn't someone just make a decision?

It's not that easy. It's not that easy. Hence why, when we're considering families, when we're considering children, and there's nothing more to get our emotions going than our own children, okay?

And what someone else tells us about this, nothing more that can get us angry or upset than that. You can see why the non-negotiable of bearing with one another in love is so vital.

[32 : 53] So very, very vital. Because we don't want to cause anyone to stumble, including the child. God. So let me bring the two together as we begin to wrap this up.

Because boundaries exist, it is therefore possible for those boundaries to be crossed. They can be crossed in a good way, but they can also be crossed in a bad way.

The Ten Commandments is God simply writing down where the line is. Don't cross it, he says. Don't murder, don't steal, don't do the, right?

This is the boundary line. Stay on this side of it. However, when you get into the details of the church, then suddenly a few more things need to be talked through.

I've always said that I'm a big fan of denominations. But I'm a big fan of denominations in the pure sense. Because they are the church's attempt to say what they believe and why they believe it.

[34 : 03] The trouble is, is that over the years, those denominations are no longer as pure, if they ever were, as they originally intended to be.

Because there's such a mixture of people. And the reason they begin to fall apart is not because, is not because, that suddenly the issues have become muddied.

But it's actually because in muddied issues, they can't bear with one another in love. So they start another church elsewhere. Only for the same thing to happen to that one further down the line.

So I started out by saying that if any movement forward is going to be made, it has to be made with the non-negotiable. Which is to bear with one another in love.

Will you bear with me in love when I make a decision you don't like? And will I bear with you in love when you make a decision that I don't like?

[35 : 01] And the answer is, yes. Okay. Period. Yes. We have to. Okay. No excuses. Yes. But, but that doesn't mean that we don't get to talk about them.

In order to move towards a greater unity. So yes, we bear with one another in love, but we bear with one another in love in such a way that we become a body that grows together, not grows apart.

Okay. Because there is a type of bearing with one another in love where people just grow apart. It's called tolerance. I tolerate. And tolerance is a position of power.

Okay. I tolerate, but I'm not doing anything else. So here's the exhortation as we close. The church ought to have a confessional Christianity, not just a believing one.

Okay. A confessional Christianity, which means that we ought to say what we believe and why we believe it. We ought to say why we do what we do and why it matters for the body of the church.

[36 : 13] The challenge here is a fairly simple one. And it's one that I experienced in the first year of getting married. That it took me a whole 12 months to realize I was no longer an individual.

And yet for the first 12 months, I continued to live like an individual. What? I have to share the orange juice? I mean, suddenly these things became things that I'd never even considered. That I don't eat cereal, but I used to come down into the living room where Susan would watch the breakfast morning news and eat her bowl of cereal and leave it next to the settee. And I would walk in and kick it. And thinking, I'd never remember putting that there. Okay. And the reason that's so challenging is because God says you've become one. Okay. But it's one made up of two. What about the church? The church is considered as one. But we're one made up of how many?

[37 : 13] Hundreds. Thousands. Millions throughout the world. Now you can see that if a person who's just got married has to make that transition from thinking like an individual and behaving like an individual to being one with his wife than just what a challenge it is for a group of people in a church.

And yet that is the very thing that we're encouraged to be. One. Jesus prayed for it in John 17. So when all is said and done, whatever we agree on or disagree on, including what I've said in this message, at the end of the day, okay, the non-negotiable is we have to bear with one another in love.

If we're going to move closer to us becoming more like Christ and working together for the benefit of each other. We don't want the current disunity of not functioning properly to spiral out of control into conflict.

We don't have that and we don't want it. Okay? And to not, and to not, for that not to happen, we have to love one another because it's easy not to.

It's easy, it's much easier to fight in a damaging way than it is to fight to love one another. Okay? It's much easier to go the negative side than it is the positive side.

[38 : 40] So, we want to grow up but we want to understand that we're all doing this because we're all different. So, as we leave here this evening, as you go home and as you pray and as you think about what to pray throughout the next week, remember this, that your prayer is fairly simple.

Lord, help me as we mature in the church to become like Jesus, to bear with the people I sit next to in love. That's what we need to pray.

But as I sit next to that person or I have to sit next to that person because the other seats have been taken up, okay? But I wouldn't normally sit next to that person if there were empty seats elsewhere as I sit down I must remember that I'm doing it in love.

Okay? Now, I don't believe we have those kind of situations here. Well, at least I certainly hope we don't but I'm simply stretching the point to illustrate the point that after all is said and done the non-negotiable this evening or any of the evenings or any of the days is to bear with one another in love until or continually as we grow up into the maturity of Christ.

Amen. Amen.