

Bunch of grapes

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[0 : 00] So, in Ephesians chapter 4, beginning at verse 1, now hear God's word. 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 and 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 into 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.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles and the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, 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 in deceitful schemes.

[1 : 56] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow, so that it builds itself up in love. Well, may God bless this reading to us and also to our memories, which would be the blessing I would ask for.

I'm only teasing. Well, probably not teasing, actually, thinking about it. So, I want to be able to prime this message this evening, if I can, with just a few words, but they're necessary words.

I hope, having prayed, and hopefully you having prayed, that every word that is included is a necessary word, and that we're not wasting time using unnecessary phrases or words, but that we get to clarity.

Someone might look at me and say, well, one of your problems is, Pastor, is that you always want to fix things. And the answer is, is yeah. I think the way God made me is to fight and to fix.

[3 : 34] And I can find parallels in scripture where that's possibly true, to fight and to fix things. I do want to fix things because I don't like things being broken. And the reason I'm motivated to fix things is because I'm fixing them out of concern for what they should be, being that we're witnesses of God on earth.

So, if you're thinking, what goes through the pastor's mind is that I fight for things that are God's because I can't help it. And I can't help but trying to fix things.

And this means that I'm like a dog with a bone. I'm willing to let it go until I've found a solution. Now, this gets me into trouble all over the place because sometimes I think I should have arrived at solutions a lot quicker than I should have.

And I have to come before the Lord and say, no, patience is required here. It doesn't mean that there's not an answer. It doesn't mean that there's not a solution. But what is needed right now is patience.

So, this message does three things this evening. Firstly, it highlights my desire, which I believe is the desire of scripture. And that is that the church is to be like a bunch of grapes, not like a bag of

marbles.

[4 : 50] And the key distinction between the two, of course, is that they're both united, but they're united in completely different ways. They're both united, but united in completely different ways.

If you drop both bags, okay, one gets scattered all over the place because they're not joined together. And the other drop and they get bruised, but they are together because they're joined by the common vine.

So, that is what the church ought to be like. We ought to be like the bunch of grapes, recognizing that there's a tender side to us, but also recognizing that we're not meant to be in there like marbles, okay?

We are meant to endeavor to keep that unity rather than be sort of those grapes that just float around all over the place, you know, like when you buy them from the supermarket.

You lift the bunch out and there's normally half a dozen in the tray below. That's not a biblical picture, okay? The biblical picture is the bunch of grapes always together.

[5 : 55] So, the way this message goes is firstly, I highlight that which I've just done and I'll highlight again as we go through. Secondly, the problem stated.

And the problem stated is what causes the church to be like a bunch of grapes? Sorry, what causes the church to be more like a bag of marbles rather than a bunch of grapes?

What causes that individual gathering rather than a gathered people of God as described in scripture that are united? Why is there a difference at all?

Even though there is clearly a difference. And then thirdly, this evening, why the problem hasn't been solved? Why the problem hasn't been solved? And then over the next coming weeks is how to solve the problem, okay?

So, just this evening, the desire of why unity is absolutely a must. Why the problem stated of why disunity is currently there.

[6 : 56] And more importantly, why it's never been fixed. And the reason why that's an important one is because if you can identify why it hasn't been fixed, you can identify what's needed to fix it. Now, the joy here is any of the answers that I come up with are God's answers.

Because God has already told us that the church can be like this. We've read that the church can be like this. We've read 16 verses out of Ephesians 4 that teaches that the gifts that God has given us don't divide but actually unite.

And the body is able to work properly. And when it works properly, it builds itself up in love. And therefore, and there you have a church that is like a bunch of grapes rather than a bag of marbles. Why is this important? Well, it's not just important for the church, but it's important for marriages. It's important for families. It's important right across the board. Okay? Anywhere where you've got, perhaps not in an employment situation because that's a different dynamic.

But you can understand how it's similar to marriages and families that the church is one big family. So thank you for your prayers over this last week. But please continue to pray over the next coming Sunday evenings as I spell out the answers.

[8 : 12] Okay? But in order to spell out the answers, I first need to spell out the problems. One elder said to me as I was tackling this that it may take me another three years to write all this down.

And I thought, well, that's fair enough, but I don't want to be rushed. So what I'm going to do to you this evening is explain to you why it's a slow process. When you hear what I'm about to say and I've said it, you're going to go, now I can understand why it takes so long.

Okay? And it's not because people are necessarily slow in their understanding or anything like that. It's because of the complexity. So I know that there are many children amongst us this evening, and thank you very much for being here, and I know that you're often here.

But this is a grown-up message, and it doesn't mean that you won't be able to understand it. It just means that the adults might be able to help you out with it as we go.

So I want to begin with the motivation for why someone at all needs to fix it. Why do you have to have a pastor that needs to fix it?

[9 : 20] Okay? Can we not get a different one who wants to leave it just as it is? Okay? Things would be a lot easier, right? Well, let me explain to you why I can. Over in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul explains his motivation for ministry, and this will help us understand Ephesians chapter 4.

Over in 1 Corinthians 9, from about verse 6 onwards, verse 7 onwards, if you keep reading, Paul explains why he's motivated to preach the gospel. He says, because this is a calling that God has

given him, and therefore he must do it.

He says in verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 9, that he preaches the gospel because necessity is laid upon him. And it's laid upon him so heavily by God that he feels it absolutely necessary.

The necessity of the gospel is something that he has to go out and do. Now, this raises a couple of issues after this, which he highlights. He goes on to say in verse 17, that if he preaches the gospel out of his own will, that is, if he does it willingly, because he wants to do it and he does it willingly, then he has a reward.

But then he says, if I do it and I'm not willing to do it, I'm entrusted with a stewardship. So if it's of my own will, I get a reward.

[10:48] And if it's not of my own will, that is, I don't really want to do it, but I'm doing it anyway, because I'm entrusted with a stewardship. Meaning this, that Paul preaches the gospel because he is willing to do so.

And if he's willing to do so, then great. But even if he's not willing to do so, he still has to, because the obligation has been laid upon him. Whether he feels like it or not, he still, he has been entrusted with the gospel, and therefore he is necessarily obligated to make sure that he takes care of that.

He is a steward of the gospel. Well, what does that mean? It's an overflow. Well, all ministers then, of the gospel and of the sacraments, as it's often put, have to do evangelism.

Okay? We have to do the things that we are called to do, because it's not just a willing necessity, but we're also under an obligation to do it. Meaning that we can't let it not be done.

This is why you'll hear, perhaps often, or not so often, certain pastors throughout history says, only become a minister if you cannot do anything else. And the only men who cannot do anything else are those who understand that they're obligated to do this.

[12:13] Okay? It's not that I wasn't a very good roofer. Trust me. As far as I'm, they still keep out the rain, as far as I'm aware. Okay? Back in the day.

But now I can't do anything else but this, because of the obligation that I'm under. Okay? Now, I willingly enjoy that obligation, but it is an obligation nonetheless.

Which means that if something gets dropped, I have to pick it up. And if something gets dropped over there, I have to tell you to pick it up. This means that things have to be dealt with.

And this is Paul explaining himself to the church at Corinth, and it sets the model for other ministers in the gospel and in the church.

Ephesians 4 says this, that when God gives ministers into the church, and he gives a number of other people into the church, the end result is so that we would all be mature in Christ Jesus.

[13:12] That we would all be united in the faith. That we would all be engaged in the ministries that God has given us. That we would all be equipped so that the body, the church, would work properly.

And you'll know whether or not the body, the church, is working properly, because it will begin to grow. It'll build itself up in love, and it'll grow.

And that's how it finishes in verse 16. When every joint that is held together, which is when it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow, so that it builds itself up in love.

So, here's the first point. What we have here is the privilege of unity. Okay, the privilege of unity. But at the same time, that unity has a direction. So, it's a privileged direction, if you want to put it that way. Most of us here will know that we have been saved by grace through faith, and all of this comes from God.

[14:19] And we are the church. We are the body, the church. We belong to each other. We love each other. And we're following what God wants us to do as best we can. But we need God's spirit every single day to make sure we do this in the way God wants it done.

We know that because it says here in Ephesians 4 that when Christ ascended, he gave gifts according to the measure of Christ's gift. Grace was given to every one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Verse 7. And it goes on to say in verse 13 that this is given so that we would all attend or all attain the measure of fullness, that we would become complete, full in Christ.

What does this mean? It means that unity has a direction. Unity goes somewhere. Unity doesn't just stay still, but it moves in a direction, and that direction is maturity.

It means that we grow together, we grow stronger together, we love each other, and this just gets better and better the longer the church is in its situation.

[15 : 30] The problem, however, is what you have here in a church is that there are differences. But these differences from God's point of view are not a problem at all because one of the ways that God creates unity in Ephesians 4 in the church is by making us all different.

So let me say that again so that it settles in. We do not want to flatten everything out so that everything becomes the same and therefore you have unity. unity. No, we want to affirm that the only way to create unity in the church is to understand the way God did it.

And the way God creates unity in the church is by making us all different. That's how God creates unity. It's not the way that you would have done it, I'm sure. It's not the way I would have done it. But the way God does it is by making us all different. However, the clarity here that we need is that those differences don't cause disunity. unity. Those differences cause unity.

They endeavor to keep the unity and the bond of peace. So the differences here found in the church are not problematic. They're actually very providential.

[16 : 40] They add to the unity and the blessing of the church. So let me give you a quick illustration of how this works. Imagine for a moment you ask a five-year-old how they turn the light on in a room.

And they go, well, you just go over and flick the switch. Okay. And then you ask the electrician the same question. How's the light turned on in a room?

Now he could say exactly the same thing as the five-year-old and be absolutely right. But if he's going to wire your house, you want a better answer than that. You're going to want a much better answer than that.

You're going to want him to say, this is how it is. Why? Because this is how it needs to be so your house doesn't burn down. But what you'll notice is that the five-year-old's answer doesn't contradict with the electrician's answer.

And the electrician's answer doesn't contradict with the child's answer. Both their answers, though at different levels and are different, fit together well.

[17 : 44] And that's the unity of difference in a church. You can have different people saying different things as long as they contribute to the unity of the overall issue, the unity of the church.

So whether we give different answers or not, the difference here is whether or not we can spot if they're unifying differences or disunifying differences. And that's the issue at hand.

This is not about us not being different and about us all being the same, but rather it's about us all being the same on the issues that unite even if we give different answers.

The five-year-old is saying this right answer as well as the electrician. I want us to understand then, for us to understand, that there is a difference that unifies.

But there are also differences that disunify. And the unity that God creates by making us all different is the differences that unify, not the ones that disunify.

[18 : 47] Imagine it like this, the other way around though, where the child is giving the correct answer and the adult doesn't know. Imagine a child, nine years old, who's being taken to the park in the car by their dad.

But their dad has never been to that park before, but the child has and the child knows how to get from the home to the park. Even though the nine-year-old child can't drive and can't tell his dad how to drive, he is able to point out to his dad when he's turned left, when he should have turned right. He's able to point out to his dad because he knows the direction that we should be going in when his dad has actually gone in the wrong direction. This doesn't mean for a moment that the child is somehow automatically qualified to drive the car, but it does mean that the child is taken notice of because he knows the overall direction.

He knows how to get from A to B. So this isn't about age either. This is about a level of maturity and maturity is knowing how to get from A to B, knowing how to get there.

Whoever says it, whether it's the nine-year-old or the electrician who knows how to wire a house.

The issue isn't the age of the person, but it's the maturity of the person.

[20 : 09] Being able to spot right from wrong differences from differences, those which unify and those which disunify. Now, when a church is learning how to do this, Paul says here in Ephesians 4 that we have to bear with one another in love.

Why? Because we're going to get it wrong sometimes. Okay? We are going to get it wrong sometimes. But getting it wrong sometimes isn't a reason for never trying to get it right.

So, the reason that we are to bear with one another in love is not to stay there, but rather that is the necessary grace amongst each other as we travel along the road.

So, when the child says to the dad, the nine-year-old child, you've gone the wrong way, the father should have enough grace to not think that his nine-year-old doesn't know what he's talking about. But there could be something to learn here.

Okay? The issue here, as I said, is about maturity and about understanding differences. We bear with one another in love, not as a means for people to continue in sin and not as a means for people to do whatever they want to do.

[21 : 19] That is not the reason we bear with one another in love. And that is not the thing that ought to be promoted. We bear with one another in love for the purpose of endeavouring to keep the unity and the bond of peace, to move in that direction.

Now, if you're not moving in that direction, what you have is you endeavour to keep the unity or you're trying to keep a unity that doesn't exist. You're trying to endeavour with one another by loving them and as much as you can.

The trouble is, is you get to the position where it's never going to change. Okay? And so what becomes, what then becomes an automatic accusation is you're not loving.

You're not loving. Okay? Well, no. Love, endeavouring to love each other in unity is to move along the road not to be there to cover up all the times I want to do what I want to do.

That's not what it's there for. We are to bear with one another in love to move ourself into the direction of unity not to continue as we are.

[22 : 31] That's why Paul puts that at the beginning or near to the beginning. Okay. What about the current problem then? Well, the current problem if you were to identify it would be this that what you have is unified disunity.

Unified disunity. That's the problem stated. Now, it doesn't sound like this should exist but it does exist. How can you have unified disunity?

It's an oxymoron. It shouldn't be true. It cannot happen. And yet it happens in many homes throughout the country. Okay? Husbands and wives who have children who are pleasant enough to each other while the children are around but who are not.

And when the children leave home guess what happens to the marriage? They go their separate ways. Okay? What do you have leaving up to that point? You have a unified disunity.

Okay? In other words, we're together because we recognize that there's reasons to be together but we're disunited in our unity. Okay? Our husband and wife that sleep in separate rooms.

[23 : 41] Okay? Now, there may be medical reasons for that. There may be other reasons for that. Unified Disunity. And the same thing happens in the church and we shouldn't marvel at this as though it's something that we've never come across before.

So what do you do? Well, the problem is this. That if you touch it, there's the risk of it falling over because it's so delicate. Because it's unified disunity, the moment you begin to mess around with it, it's wobbling.

So what do you do? Nobody touches it. And this is why it never gets solved. Nobody touches it. Now, in a spiritual sense in the church, when the elders are smart enough to realize that that's happening, okay, the elders can't do anything.

Because the moment they do anything, someone's going to get blamed for knocking it over. Okay? Ever play Jenga? Who knocked it over? Someone, okay, someone's going to move the piece that knocks the whole thing over.

That's the same in a family. It's the same in the church. It is unified disunity. It is not unified unity where people are becoming mature in the faith, but it is unified disunity where you are caught between a rock and a hard place.

[24 : 58] If you do something, you're in trouble. And if you don't do something, you're left with the trouble that you already have. What do you do? What do you do?

Imagine it like this as an illustration. You have seven people sat around the tea table. Okay? Five of whom are children. Okay? And it's more or less very, very likely that we all like different things.

Okay? All our appetites are different. But someone has to decide what we're eating for tea.

Someone has to decide it. And so what the family ought to do is bear with one another in love and

have this meal tonight which I may not like as much as the one I would have the next evening. And then the next evening I get to enjoy the meal that I like and others get to, okay, well, we had what we wanted last night. Okay? You think, well, that's a happy bearing with one another in love. That seems to work. Does it? Does it? I understand. I understand. That there ought to be the necessary movement towards becoming united. But when you're talking about food, we're talking about tastes and opinions.

[26 : 05] When we're talking about the church, we're talking about something much higher, much more glorified, much more beautiful and much more important.

So what you have in unified disunity would be this. You'd have the whole family sat around the table eating whatever they wanted to eat every night of the week.

That's unified disunity. From the outset, it looks, well, they're all sat around the table. They've all got knives and forks in their hands. They're all eating off the plate. Yeah, of course they are. But it's still a mess.

It's still unified disunity. In other words, the reason that happens, okay, it may be a treat night where you've got a takeout and you planned it that way.

But when it's not that way and it's just that's what you've got all the time, it is because no one's made the decision that this is what we're having and that's it. And the reason why a person doesn't want to make that decision because the moment they do, guess who the baddie is?

[27 : 08] You. The one who makes the decision is the baddie. Why? Because now you're deciding what I'm going to eat. Now you're deciding what I'm not going to eat. Okay? And that's a problem.

That's a big problem. So the problem stated should be a fairly easy one for all of us to see. If anyone stands up the front and proposes a way forward, what is he doing?

He's deciding what everyone's going to eat. This is a metaphor, of course. It's a picture. It's an illustration, so don't take it too literally. And of course, he recognizes that when he says this, he's saying it to a group of individuals that all want to eat different things.

What do you do? Well, you're back to the rock and the hard place. How do you solve a problem like that when one person is deciding what everyone should be eating?

And even worse than this, the one up the front understands that he's under obligation to get to the unity of the faith. He's the one who has to give an account before God for all the people sat in front of him.

[28 : 17] This doesn't apply to anybody else. It just applies to him. And God doesn't give him any let off. What is he going to do? The elders are in the same position.

But what happens is that this issue is nullified a little bit in the eldership because they're an eldership. There is no direction to any one person. It can be spread out amongst the many.

So if the pastor mentions it to the eldership and the eldership tries to mention it to the church members, you have the same problem in a church that has unified disunity.

And the problem is this. If you do nothing, if you do something, you create disunity. And if you do nothing, you're left with the disunity you already have.

Okay? You get disunity if you address it and you're left with disunity if you leave it alone. So what are you supposed to do? What are you supposed to do?

[29 : 18] So I'm going to conclude with this. I'm going to conclude with this. If the church wants to be mature and the church wants to grow, then we ought to bear with one another in love, but bear with one another in love on our way to maturity.

Not as a way of staying the way that we are. Okay? Not as a way of deciding what I want around the kitchen table every night of the week. Okay? Neither is this about giving in to any one person's choice.

But this is about following God's choice for his church and God's desire for his church. The reason why a tower with missing bits all the way up cannot be built upon is because they're all wise enough.

Whatever we put on top cannot be supported by anything that is beneath it. If you keep touching it, it's going to fall over. Why? Because there's a unified disunity.

Nobody knows how it manages to stay together. But everyone knows if you touch it, it's going to fall over. So someone here might say, well, perhaps the only thing that we can hope for is unified disunity.

[30 : 29] Perhaps that's the very best that we can have. No, it isn't. Because Ephesians 4 verses 1 through to 16 says that the way that the church is to move throughout its life together is to become more and more mature.

To love one another the way God wants them to love one another, to serve one another the way God wants them to serve one another, to work properly, to build itself up in love. And if you think, well, I'm not quite sure how to solve this problem, well, I'm going to be bringing those answers over the next couple of weeks as we go.

But let me just restate as we close what the actual issue is. There is a massive difficulty here. there is a massive difficulty here.

Firstly, we need to recognize that what God has given us in the church is worth fighting for. It's worth fighting for. It's worth fighting for the very thing that God has given us.

And it's worth endeavoring to keep the unity and the bond of peace so that we can work properly.

But here's the problem and here's why it never gets sorted. because anyone who begins to recognizes the inherent problem attached with a problem like this.

[31 : 46] And that is, you get disunity if you say something. But you're left with disunity if you say nothing. Okay? You get disunity if you say something.

Someone's going to leave. Someone's going to say something. Someone's going to say, it's not like it used to be. You get disunity if you do something. But then you're left with disunity if you do nothing.

And so this is applicable not just for this church but for every marriage, for every family, for every type of relationship. It's thoroughly, thoroughly important. And so we'll begin to answer how to solve it from God's word next time.

Amen.