

## **Walk Together with Christ: Unity and Maturity**

Ephesians 4:1–16 | 11.12.2017 | More Than We Can Imagine @OBC

After college . . . I moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee to join a college ministry and go through a two-year training program in a local church . . . AND as it turned out . . . I became a janitor at that church.

During that season of life . . . the church was growing and was even working to move to a new location . . . where their three services could be brought into one.

And often . . . after cleaning up crumbs and crayons in the children's building . . . I would go to the new property and run . . . and as I ran I would pray . . .

Often I'd pray for that church – both for the people and for the new building to be a place where the Word would be proclaimed.

Yet, throughout that first year . . . there was no visible proof that any building was being built.

For months . . . they filled the ground with concrete to shore up the foundation and make sure this building would be a solid home for the church who would gather there.

Finally . . . the foundation was laid. The construction began above ground . . . and the church meets there today . . . ONLY on the inside . . . some 15 years later . . . construction continues.

While they are in a new building . . . half of the space is still unfinished.

There are good reasons for this . . . as God has continued to work in the lives of the people . . . hence delaying the completion of the building.

Still . . . the already and not yet features of this church . . . along with all the time and attention given to the foundation . . . is a fitting parable for our study of Ephesians.

In Ephesians 1–3 . . . we have seen Paul lay an extended foundation . . . on which he will build.

In fact . . . as we have observed . . . there's only be one imperative in all of chapters 1–3.

This stresses what God has done for his people . . . not what they must do.

And now as he shifts gears from what God has done (Ephesians 1–3) to what God calls us to do in Christ by the Spirit . . . we still are a sermon away from Paul's imperatives beginning in 4:25

Therefore, our context in Ephesians 4:1–16 . . . continues to be a transition phase from God's work to our work . . . or better said . . . it is a transition from God's WORK to our WALK.

As we have seen . . . Paul has sought to ground the Ephesian church in the power of the gospel.

In the first 3 chapters . . . we've seen how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have brought salvation to the demon-filled city of Ephesus.

And in Ephesians 1 and 3, Paul bookended this explanation of the gospel with prayers for God's church . . . to know the power of God, the love of Christ, and the wisdom of the Spirit.

Now . . . in Ephesians 4 . . . as Paul turns from the foundation to the construction of the building . . . figuratively speaking

We see that the same principles which laid the foundation – God's power, love, presence – are going to be at work in the building of the church.

And even more . . . using this imagery of building up the body of Christ . . . we see how Ephesians 4:1–16 is going to focus on the construction of Christ's body.

Even more we see in this section . . . the beginning of Paul's instruction on how to walk

Whereas in chapter 2 . . . he told us that all those created in Christ Jesus must WALK in the good works prepared for us by God the Father . . .

Now . . . he's going to specify what WALKING with God looks like.

In Ephesians 4:1 . . . he calls us to WALK worthy of our gospel calling

In Ephesians 4:17 . . . he tells us no longer WALK as the gentile did . . .

In Ephesians 5:2 . . . he commands us to WALK in love

In Ephesians 5:6 . . . he commands us to WALK as children of the light

In Ephesians 5:18 . . . he concludes by cautioning how we walk, urging us to WALK wisely

So . . . this is where we are headed . . .

But before we can get WALKING . . . we need to see the body Christ is building, unifying, and maturing . . . through the Holy Spirit . . . who empowers our WALK.

So this morning . . .

We are going to walk through this passage . . . sketching the way in which the body of Christ IS unified in Christ.

And because these verses don't give us any imperatives . . . but explain how Christ's body is unified . . . we will see what we need to learn about unity in the church

Indeed . . . UNITY is a vital concept for the church . . . because the commands to walk . . . are not individual imperatives . . . they call us to walk together in unity. . .

But because calls for unity . . . are often misunderstood . . . we need to see what Paul says . . . and what Ephesians 4 teaches us about growing up together in Christ.

Therefore . . . as we long for Christ to glorify himself in his church . . .

which what Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:20–21

we now look to see how unity and maturity are necessary for bringing glory to Christ

So to see that let's WALK through these sixteen verses . . . and then make a few applications.

To begin with . . . we see in verses 1–3 . . . **A Well-Tuned Heart (vv. 1–3)**

In verse 1, Paul begins with the word **therefore** indicating its connection to the first 3 chapters.

He begins this section . . . by urging the Ephesians to walk in a manner consistent with the gospel they've believed (Eph 1:13) . . . this is the gospel he's described in chapters 1–3.

Then . . . in the first 3 verses of ch. 4, he explains what such a gospel-driven walk should look like . . . and he lists 4 things all believers should strive for . . .

In order . . . he urges us to walk with all humility, gentleness, patience, and enduring love.

Really . . . we could say . . . all of these traits reflect a hearts filled by God's love—again the very thing he prayed for in chapter 3. **Don't miss that connection.**

And he indicates with these four traits that . . .

. . . a heart full of love . . . has nothing to prove . . . and can walk in humility / not pride

. . . a heart full of love . . . doesn't need to fight back . . . and can be gentle / not harsh.

. . . a heart of love . . . is full / not empty . . . so it can give patience / not demand results

. . . a heart full of love . . . is not producing its own garments of grace . . . rather, it is being fed by a heavenly source . . . and so it doesn't burn out.

### **Do you see why now . . . Paul's pray matters so much?**

Only when we are filled with his love . . . do we have grace to walk in unity.

When God pours out his love in our heart . . . then we have resources to be gracious / loving

And this graciousness is of first importance for seeing a church grow in unity and maturity.

Without such grace . . . there will be no such growth.

Significantly, Paul doesn't begin with doctrine . . . or a series of programs . . .

Rather . . . he begins with a heart tuned by gospel grace . . .

Grace . . . that comes from believing, meditating on, and growing up in the gospel.

Truly . . . that's why the gospel is so vital . . . b/c it tunes the heart to be gracious.

Still . . . a gracious heart needs strong truth . . . to keep it from collapsing.

Which brings us to the next truth . . . a unified church needs . . . **Well-Ordered Doctrine (vv. 4–6)**

In **verses 4–6** . . . Paul uses the word ONE seven times. He writes . . . READ

In these verses, he lists seven doctrinal truths that give shape to the unity he is describing.

**Paul is NOT calling for unity as an end in itself** . . . . He's not pursuing unity . . . the way liberal arts colleges & progressive churches do.

For Paul . . . unity happens when a people saved by the grace of God come to understand the gospel as revealed in Scripture . . . and walk accordingly.

As Jesus prays for unity in John 17 . . . he prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Biblical unity then . . . is the result of the Spirit of Truth convicting people of sin, pointing them to Christ, giving them faith to believe the gospel . . . and uniting them in a common salvation.

Importantly . . . this is what we find here.

Paul tells us there is one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father . . .

**IOW . . . unity requires an agreement on WHO God is** . . . If you deny the deity of Christ, or the omnipotence of God, or any other doctrine related to WHO God is . . . you cannot have unity . . . or at least . . . you cannot have Christian Unity.

Likewise, the other central elements . . . one hope, one faith, and one baptism . . . all relate to the gospel

**There is no other hope** . . . but X's sacrifice for sin & his resurrection that defeated death & devil

**There is no other faith** . . . but the one revealed to the Apostles and Prophets written down in the New Testament . . . which stands in agreement with the Old Testament.

**There is no other baptism** . . . but the Spirit Baptism which comes when we are born again.

Now . . . there are gospel churches who disagree on how to apply water baptism . . . and this explains why our church doesn't assemble with those who sprinkle infants . . . but we pray for them and encourage them . . . and are truly united in the gospel, even if they're wrong about B

But that's not what he's talking about here . . . baptism here relates to be indwelt with the Spirit, when Christ baptizes his people and brings them into his Church.

Which gets to the other point of unity . . . **there is one body.**

Paul reminds us that with one Spirit, there cannot be a body for Jews and a body for Gentiles, a church for rich and church for the poor . . . rather there is one universal church . . . that conjoins all nations into one church where Christ is Lord of all.

Putting all this together . . .

We learn that love without truth lacks form and strength ~ like pile of flesh without bones

And . . . truth without love lacks compassion and grace ~ like a skeleton with no skin

In both cases . . . the body of Christ fails to display the glory of God's wisdom . . .

Oh . . . but when the church grows together in love AND truth . . . as Paul will stress in verse 15

. . . THEN God is glorified in the church . . . and his people will grow in grace and truth.

. . . And that's why Paul is writing about unity in these verses six verses . . .

. . . AND . . . why he turns to diversity in verses 7–16.

. . . Which begins with Christ as the well-supplied head of the church in vv. 7–10.

### **Well-Supplied Head (vv. 7–10)**

Look at verses 7–10 again . . .

In v. 7 . . . Paul turns from God-given unity of the church to its God-given diversity.

He writes . . . **But grace was given . . . READ**

Then Paul explains where these gifts come from . . . in verses 8–10 . . . **READ**

In some ways, vv. 8–10 could be taken out of Paul's argument and it would make perfect sense what he is saying . . .

Christ gave a diverse set of gifts to the church (v. 7) . . . and these diverse gifts include A, P, E, P-Ts (v. 11) . . . and these ministers of the word are given to equip the rest of the saints to build up the body of Christ (v. 12ff) . . .

That's Paul's argument in its simplest form . . .

But Paul does include verses 8–10, . . . and thus we need to ask WHY.

What is Paul doing when he quotes from Psalm 68 and talks about Christ's ascension and descension?

There are lots of rabbits to chase here, but I'm going to try to stay on the path . . .

In v 8 . . . Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18 . . .

In the context of Psalm 68 . . . this verse comes at the end of section recalling God's victory over Egypt, his enthronement on Sinai & gifts coming into his holy mount.

In the context of Ephesians 4 . . . this verse is being used as an explanation for how Jesus gave gifts to his church . . . and WHERE these gifts come from.

In context of Ephesians . . . with its argument against the demonic powers . . . he's going to connect the building up of the church . . . to Christ's ascension and his temple-building – **ch. 2**.

The trouble is . . . in quoting Psalm 68 . . . Paul appears to have changed the word "received" in Psalm 68:18 to "gave" . . . and we need to ask why?

- Did he cite the verse from memory and make a mistake?
- Do we have a faulty manuscript? – there's some evidence certain manuscripts had "gave"
- Or, did he intentionally change the word? And if so, why?

You can see why scholars debate the verse.

In short . . . I believe Paul knowingly changed the word to fit with Christ's ascension to glory.

From vv 9–10, we know Paul is thinking about X's ascension and descension . . .

And from the simplest reading . . . Paul seems to be saying that the Son who was exalted to God's right hand – **ch. 1** – had to first descend to the lowest parts of earth – best seen in his Incarnation

That is . . . before he ascended to highest glory . . . he descended in lowest humility . . .

And now . . . because of his descension . . . which led to his humiliation on the cross . . . he has now been raised and exalted above all things . . . so that from the grave to glory . . . lowest – highest . . . he has authority to raise the dead to life – **ch. 2**.

That's what verses 9–10 communicate . . . but still . . . **what about the word change?**

If we learn from Paul that Psalm 68 is in speaking prophetically about Jesus . . .

Then . . . we learn that from the vantage point of the Psalms . . . these words are looking forward, to a time when Christ will defeat his enemies, be raised in glory, and received gifts.

In the Psalms . . . this was all future . . . but not for Paul . . . and not for us.

Therefore . . . based on the fulfillment of Christ's work on the cross . . . Paul understands those gifts which he received are now being given to the church – and these gifts are saints who he will describe next in verses 11–16.

Now . . . is that a little complex?!? **Yes!** Is it glorious?!? **Oh my heavens, Yes!**

This is all fantastic . . . and it brings us to the best part . . . **The Well-Developed Body (vv. 11–16)**

Putting this together . . . we see that a well-supplied head . . . did not enter into glory alone . . . rather, as Eph 2 tells us . . . he raised his church to life . . . and as Eph 4 puts it . . . he's led a host of redeemed captives in his train . . . so that he can give gifts to the church for their upbuilding.

In truth . . . right now, in glory, he is surrounded by his saints from every age.  
And on earth . . . he is giving gifts to the church . . . so that the body is built up in love.  
**Therefore . . . the building up of the body is possible b/c of the well-supplied head.**

Or to mix metaphors . . . the cornerstone who is the temple-builder himself . . . builds his temple by giving gifted saints to the church.

Indeed, this is the glory of the church . . . Christ is the one who builds the church, but he does so by giving gifted teachers and an army of saints . . . so that the church builds itself up in love.

**Again . . . building itself up in love is what verse 16 says . . . and let's see how we get there.**

First, in verse 11 . . . Paul enumerates four teaching offices – A, P, E, and P-T  
The grammar shows that pastor and teachers should be seen as the same office.

And according to what we've seen in Ephesians 2:20, 3:5 . . . **A and P** . . . are those unique 1<sup>st</sup>-Cent. men inspired by God to write Scripture and lay down the foundation of the church.

**Evangelists** may also be 1st Cent builders – men like Mark and Luke who proclaim the evangel.

**Shepherd-teachers** is the office defined in other places in the NT, that describes the teaching office in the local church . . . which is vital for the up-building of the saints.

And importantly . . . saints in this context is not a special class of Christians – they are the army of the Lord . . . whose gifts are used to build up Christ's church.

So we can say . . . men gifted to teach the word are called to equip all the saints . . . so that every member of the body exercises their gifts for the up-building of Christ's body . . . **that's vv. 11–12.**  
Then in v. 13 . . . we see the goal of the building plan . . . **READ**

In other words, the goal of the church is to look like Christ himself . . . so that the body takes the form of the head . . . and this happens by what Paul says in verses 14–15 . . . **READ**

So . . . leaving aside false, foolish talk . . . we speak, and do, and live the truth in love.

In this way . . . when we grow together . . . we see the goal of our salvation come into focus – namely a body of believers built up in truth and love, united to Christ and one another.

And in this . . . we have another word-picture describing what God's goal of salvation is.  
God is not just saving people from hell . . . he is creating one people that will display his power, love, and wisdom to the world . . .



## Striving for Gospel Unity

### That's the glorious plan of God for the church . . .

Honestly . . . few things are more important for Xian growth ... than learning how to walk in unity w/ others. ATST... few things are more confused than discussions about unity in the church.

Therefore . . . to help us apply Ephesians 4 . . . let me share 10 points of application

Time doesn't permit a full discussion . . . so I'll mention 8 . . . and draw out the last 2.

*If you want to consider this more . . . look at our website this week . . . and we'll list these.*

### 1. Unity is a gift from God . . .

As Ephesians 2 explains . . . unity comes from the work of the Father, Son, and the Spirit. Just as reconciliation with God is a gift us unmerited grace, so is unity among fellow Christians.

As Eph 2 taught us . . . J's and G's were made "one new man" by the death and resurrection of Christ.

In this way . . . unity among believers is not just a luxury item – like heated seats or entertainment system. Rather, unity in Christ . . . is what the church IS . . . a gracious gift from God.

### 2. Unity is maintained, not created by man.

Because is a gift from God, the church is called to maintain unity, not create it.

Verse 3 calls us to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Paul doesn't say . . . find . . . or create . . . or produce . . . but maintain.

With the oneness found in the Spirit . . . we are to maintain the unity God gives us.

That is . . . in remembering the peace God has given to us as a gift in Christ, we are to pursue unity with the power God gives us by his Spirit.

### 3. Unity grows over time . . . and never arrives in maturity.

Or . . . at least . . . it should. Notice how verse 3 begins with stress on maintaining unity.

But verse 13 says . . . "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 unity is not a static thing . . . and indeed it is something every church should pray for and grow in . . . as it gives itself to the truth of the gospel and the love that comes from the triune God.

*So . . . this is what these verses are teaching us . . . and the fourth thing to see is . . .*

#### **4. Unity is most opposed by pride and self-interest . . . which unity grows where grace is rich.**

To put it positively . . . unity is maintained by humility, gentleness, patience and enduring love (v. 2)

Without those things . . . the best doctrine and the best structures will fail.

In fact . . . tragically . . . the richest doctrine and the best church programs . . . will result in disunity when God's people fail to adorn themselves with humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Therefore, we must behold with increasing wonder the gentleness, humility, and love of Christ . . . until those characteristics take root in our life . . . rooting out pride and self-interest.

Only then can attention to doctrine and ministries cultivate unity in the church.

#### **5. Unity is a uniquely Christian adornment . . . and not something the world can imitate.**

In truth, there are all sorts of things and causes that unify people.

Every four years . . . our nation is united around the Olympics.

Every Nov . . . politics unite people around various candidates, even as it divides opponents.

And every day . . . people join clubs, gyms, fraternities, and organizations BECAUSE of certain external affinities.

But this is what makes the church unique . . . our unity is not based on anything visible.

Christian unity is based upon the Triune God . . . and the work of salvation he has done in us.

Thus . . . when churches try to grow themselves by appealing to certain external factors – style of music, age, occupation, socio-economic status, etc. – they unify the church around worldly items.

Or at least, they unify the church around things that the world can also create – an often better.

By contrast, the unity described in Eph 4 is fundamentally different.

It is something the world cannot create, nor can it explain.

In fact, God's unity should not be explainable through pure sociological factors. If it is, it obscures the power of God's work.

Therefore . . . genuine unity comes from God himself . . . and churches should pursue that God-given, gospel-grounded unity . . . for this is what makes the church stand out from the world.

## **6. Unity requires a doctrinal center – which we find in the gospel.**

Look at v. 4–6. In this list, the word ONE is listed seven times.

In these same verses, each member of the Godhead is mentioned. And thus the unity of God is expressed in these core elements of the gospel.

There is one body . . . because there is one Spirit. There cannot be a division between Jew and Gentile, Israel and the Church . . . because they have the same Spirit.

There is one hope . . . because there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. That is to say . . .

There is one way of salvation centered on Jesus Christ.

There is one faith for all delivered to the saints.

There is one baptism in the Spirit . . . by which all men and women are unified to Christ.

There is one God and Father . . . who is over all, through all, and in all . . . thus bringing together one family.

Put this all together . . . and we find that the message of the gospel centered on Jesus Christ is the unifying doctrine of the church . . .

The more a church elevates this message and tests all doctrines by this . . . the more they will grow in unity . . . not to mention maturity – rightly discerning how to hold every doctrine.

## **7. Unity does not mean uniformity . . . but rather, Christian unity is a X-centered unity of diversity.**

As we see in verse 7, Paul stresses that the unified body has many various gifts – and here gifts = ppl

Indeed, B/C the gospel unites people from every nation, every race, every language and culture . . . It unites people that the world cannot and won't unite.

The gospel unites racist and racial activist . . . it unites the self-righteous and wanton sinner . . . it conjoins the churched and the unchurched . . .

In short . . . by confining us all in sin (Romans 11:32) and then uniting us to Christ by his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–6) . . . God fits us together with all of our protruding spikes and rough edges . . . so that in the church . . . unity might come through ongoing sanctification . . . as various learn how to fit together.

That is . . . unity does not mean that everyone looks the same, talks the same, or thinks the same.

But because we believe the same gospel . . . we can learn how to walk in humility, gentleness, and love.

And this why Paul talks about Christ giving gifts to the church . . .

## **8. Unity depends on grace and gifts . . . and must be supplied by Christ himself.**

Again verse 7 stresses the way in which the Lord personally and intentionally gives gifts to the church  
Christ is building his body . . . and he knows exactly how he has shaped each person.

Even more . . . we know he is working in our world to shape us . . . through the impact of others.

And yes . . . this means that our sins dent and damage others . . . but so do our God-given gifts.

And it is the church . . . we find local assemblies of gifted people committed to serving one another.

This is why . . . it seems Paul starts with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers.

He stresses the teaching ministry – first those men used by God in the first century to lay down a good foundation (A, P, Es) . . . and now P-Ts are those who build on that foundation.

Thus . . . the whole church is built upon God’s word . . . and the saints are equipped to use their gifts to build up the body as the pastor-teachers teach and explain the Bible.

In this way . . . the whole church is built up in love . . . as pastor-teachers speak gospel truth.

And the result is a body that grows together in maturity . . . as the gospel of Christ has its effect.

And this is why unity depends on Word of God . . . why churches can and should grow in unity . . . because together we are maturing as the Spirit of Christ continues to work in us.

*And this brings us to a ninth truth . . .*

## **9. Unity grows when it is stretched, pressured, even threatened . . .**

Now this may be the most difficult truth to get or embrace, but it is the most important.

In a world filled with devils . . . and in a church that is bringing in all kinds of people, . . . esp. new believers . . . church unity only comes through seasons of disunity and difficulty.

In other words . . . in the process of maturity and growth . . . unity is not a peace that falls on the church . . . it is a product of the church growing up in love – READ vv. 15–16.

Do you remember what puberty was like? I grew 12 inches in less than 3 years . . . and my back ached every step of the way. Growing pains . . . are just that – they PAINS associated with growth.

I think sometimes . . . we expect that because Jesus prayed for unity, anything that looks like disunity is a disappointment . . . and yet, this is why he prayed . . . because he is growing his church in unity.

So church . . . remember . . . disunity is a necessary step on the way to unity . . . Just like bodies grow strong when they push against heavy weights, so unity must always come thru resistance training.

## **10. Unity glorifies God and attracts unbelievers.**

When it is all said and done . . . gospel-centered, humble-hearted unity glorifies God

It glorifies God . . . because it can only come through the cross of Christ – the pinnacle of his praise

And it glorifies God . . . because it demands members of the body . . . to die to self too.

In this way, Christ gets the glory for what he did once and for all on the cross.

And the Spirit of Christ gets the glory . . . as he completes the work of Christ in the life of his church.

And this unity . . .

. . . when we wear the garments of grace described in vv. 1–3

. . . when we are shaped by the central truths of the gospel as described in vv. 4–6

. . . when the gifts of the Lord work together to grow us up in Christ as vv. 7–16 explain

Then . . . as the body of Christ grows in Christ-like maturity . . .

Then that church becomes an environment of sustained growth as it speaks truth in love

And that church also becomes a visible display to unbelievers of what the gospel does . . . so that they too might hear the truth . . . and be joined to God's body of Christ.

### **In truth, this is what the church is all about!**

Why do we spend so much time working on the foundations of the church?

Because like the church in Chattanooga . . . only when we give attention to the foundation, will we be a church where people gather . . . and grow in the Lord.

And like I said about that building in Chattanooga . . . it's still not finished.

It looks great on the outside, but there's still renovations going on within . . .

The same is true with our church . . . and every church . . .

In that . . . we ought not lose heart . . . but press deeper into Christ and one another, until the full measure of his love and truth is manifest in us.