

Ephesians 4:1-16 - Becoming the Church we are meant to be

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[0:00] Good morning. Today's reading is Ephesians 4, page 1175. As a prisoner of the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

! Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. 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 be one, then when you were called one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and the Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, When He ascended on high, He took many captives and gave gifts to His people. What does He ascended mean?

Except that He also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers to equip His people to work, to work of the 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.

[1:58] Then we will no longer be infant tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and the craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head that is Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself in love as each part does its work. Amen.

Thank you for reading, Abhi. It's an absolute privilege and delight to open up God's Word together this morning. Do keep it open, but before we get stuck in, let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this faithful gathering of your people here today. Father, give us ears to hear, minds to understand, and hearts to accept what you have to say to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.

[3:46] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[6:47] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. from one another, Jews and Gentiles have been made one. And have a look at the result in verse 19 of chapter 2. It says, consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of this household. That's an extraordinary description of the church, isn't it? We're not simply a group of people who happen to be in the same time and place every single week. This isn't just a hobby or a club. No, God has made us members of his household. He has made us family. And then, amazingly, in chapter 3, verse 10, Paul says that God's intention is that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Just let that sink in. Is that what you thought you were part of?

Is your vision of church big enough for that? You see, through the church, through West Kilburn Baptist Church, God is displaying his wisdom, not just to the earth, but to the heavenly realms. And it's an awesome calling. We'll see as we get into chapter 4 that this isn't about intellectual wisdom or about being smarter than the people next to us. No, it's a wisdom in how we live. It's a wisdom in where we get our strength. And we should take care not to copy the pattern of those impressive organizations in the world, but to follow God's design for the church. God's vision for the church is awesome. People brought together under Christ, made members of his family, displaying God's wisdom to the universe. Friends, do we want West Kilburn Baptist Church to be a church that reflects that grand vision? Well, our passage today has some pointers. Let's look down at chapter 4, verse 1.

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. That little word, then, is really important for us to really understand this chapter. Paul is saying, no, he's urging us, in light of everything I've just told you, from chapter 1 to chapter 3, this, then, in chapter 4 to 6, is how you should live. And it's quite a clear pivot point in Ephesians.

[9:55] Chapter 1 and 3 are all about gospel truths, what God has done for us, and who he has made us in Christ. And chapters 4 to 6 show us how we should live in light of those truths. And Paul starts that section in verses 1 to 16 with how we should live together as the church. And that's particularly relevant for us today, as we consider elders and deacons. And these verses give us a bit of an insight on how to think about the role of leaders in the church. But we'll see that this passage isn't mainly about leaders. It's about the role that each and every one of us has to play in the body of Christ.

And if you're visiting today, or perhaps you're not yet a Christian, I hope these verses will give you a window into what church is supposed to be, and why Christians believe that this ordinary-looking gathering matters so much. So then, in light of our salvation and what Jesus has done for us, how do we bring about God's vision for the church here at West Kilburn? How do we become the church that we're meant to be? Well, firstly, it is by keeping our unity in love. The sort of unity we're to have as a church requires a radical sort of love. Have a look down at verse 2.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. I love how realistic this verse is. We're not perfect. We've already confessed that today, haven't we?

Put sinful people together. And we're going to need humility, patience, and a whole lot of love. It's also interesting that when Paul talks about how church should be, he doesn't start with leadership structures. He starts with love. And that's where we too should start, with love. At the same time, I want us to see that this idea of love isn't calling us to be fluffy pushovers. No, being completely humble. This is all about valuing others above ourselves and looking to their interests rather than simply our own. Jesus humbled himself, becoming a human, taking on the nature of a servant, and becoming obedient to even death on a cross. That required immense strength.

So how too can we have the same strength to look out more for the interests of our brother or sister rather than our own interests? It's easy to be self-interested. How do we be other-interested? Being gentle. This isn't about weakness. Each one of us has God-given gifts and strengths.

[12:44] Gentleness is refusing to use those strengths or influence or God-given gifts to tear other people down. Instead, it's thinking, how can we use those gifts to look out for the interests of others and for the good of others? Then we have patience and forbearing. They very much go hand in hand.

If we're a church community that's living closely along each other, as we should be, then we will probably get to know one another very well. And when that happens, we will probably get on each other's nerves. And that requires patience and forbearing in love. We can choose elders and deacons later on, but if we do not have love, it will be of no use. Many of those worldly organizations with power and resources are not marked by love. They can become marked by politics, with people doing what they can to get ahead. They can be marked by self-interest. You know, what can I get out of this organization?

And what is the minimum that I have to do to get the maximum rewards? Church should be radically different to that. And if we are, we will stand out in the world and people will be attracted to that.

After all, Jesus said in John chapter 13, by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. We move on to verses three to six, which show a radical sort of unity. Have a look down.

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. I want us to notice here that our job is not to create unity. Jesus has already made us one. Our job is to keep and protect the unity that he died to create. My wife and I, early on in our relationship, we met up with my sister and brother-in-law. And they asked us, what did we have in common? And there was a bit of an awkward pause because actually Amy and I are quite different. Amy's into arts and theatre and I'm a bit of a geek and nerd. Amy loves her music, but for me, Dua Lipa could walk straight past me and I wouldn't know who it was. Amy enjoys swimming. I enjoy running. Amy hates rice pudding. I actually quite like it.

[15 : 26] But Amy very, very wisely said, the thing we have most in common is our faith. There are, of course, other things, but our shared faith is the bedrock of our relationship and it allows us to enjoy our differences all the more. And the same is true of church. Our unity doesn't require uniformity, but it's not a unity at any cost. It's a unity based on shared beliefs and a shared experience of Jesus. If you look down at verses four to six, the word one is repeated seven times. Such is the importance of it. We have seven things in common as fellow believers. We are one body. In chapter two, verses 14 to 16, Paul talks about how Jews and Gentiles are called to be one body in Christ.

And the same is true of us today. I don't think there's any gathering that cuts across society in the same way that a church community should. At West Kilburn, we have all ages. We have all races and ethnicities. We have all economic backgrounds and we have a breadth of tastes. And we should continue to strive to reflect the community around us that is so diverse. There is one spirit, God himself living in us, the Holy Spirit who gives us new life, who lives within us, who helps us to become more and more like Jesus day by day. There is one hope of our calling. Ephesians 1 verse 18 talks of the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. That inheritance is the promise of renewal, of the whole world being made new and an eternity living with God. And that is our hope. There is one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And again and again in Ephesians, we see Jesus as the head of the church. We see him as the cornerstone of the building. Friends, if we are serving Jesus as our head and as our master and not ourselves, then we will already have made huge progress towards unity. There is one faith, one common experience. We all believe, Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1, that we were once dead in sin. And we believe, 2 verse 4, that because of Jesus's great love for us, by his grace, God made us alive in Christ. So that verse 8, for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. We all have this common faith.

It is quite different, isn't it, to British political parties. Over the last few years, they have been marked by splintering and division and bickering. They should have a common ideology, but they don't. They are all in it for themselves. But we at church are not in it for ourselves.

We have a common faith. And we are united on that common faith. There is one baptism. We have all been united in the same Christ. And baptism is the visible sign of that gospel reality. And there is one God and Father. We are all children of the same Father. And so we are part of one family of believers, the God and Father who provides for us richly in all of our needs. However different we might be, the deepest and most permanent things are things that we share. Amy and I felt incredibly loved when we joined West Kilburn Baptist Church. And while we might feel that we have some of this unity today, we cannot become complacent on this point. This unity creeps in subtly through gossip, through resentment, through cliques, through refusing to forgive, through turning a secondary disagreement into something more important than those gospel realities that we share. Can you see any of those creeping into our church life? If so, let's put a stop to them. Let's refocus on these things that we have in common. Secondly, we become the church that we're meant to be by recognising the diversity of Jesus's gifts. We've seen the call to loving unity. In verse 7, Paul immediately turns to what's different about us. Have a look down.

[20 : 02] But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. Notice each one of us. Jesus hasn't gifted us all in the same way. So that means that there's no room for jealousy.

There's no room for saying, why can't I serve like that person over there? But there's also no room for false humility. You can't say, I've got nothing to offer, because Jesus had given you a gift. He's given grace to each one of us. And notice where those gifts come from. Verses 8 to 10 might seem slightly out of place here, but they're getting at something really important. Paul quotes from

Psalm 68, which gives us a picture of a victorious king returning from battle and ascending in victory.

And Paul applies that picture to Jesus. Jesus came down to earth. He died and he rose again. And now he's ascended into heaven where he reigns over all. And what does this victorious king do? Well, he gives gifts to his people. We sometimes struggle to get our heads around the ascension. You know, surely it'd be better if Jesus was still here doing ministry, doing his own speaking. But Jesus himself said it'd be better that he returned to the Father. He ascended to rule over all things. And when he ascended, he sent his spirit to live in his people. In John 14, Jesus says, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. You see, amazingly, the ascended Jesus chooses to carry on his work, not by himself, but through his body, the church.

Jesus hasn't left his body to fend for itself. He gives the church what it needs. He gives us people. Have a look down at verse 11. Paul gives us some examples of some of these gifts.

[22:08] So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. Notice that the gift Jesus gives are people. We see the apostles and prophets. These are people who had a foundational role in establishing and revealing the gospel. Back in chapter 2, Paul describes the church as being built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And we have that teaching preserved for us in the Bible. Then there are the evangelists, those people who are particularly gifted in proclaiming the good news of Jesus, to bring more people into the body. And in some ways, that's really all of us. And finally, we have pastor teachers. That word pastor literally means shepherd.

And actually, there's a real connection between that word pastor teacher and elders. We see that in Acts chapter 20, where Paul speaks to the elders of this very church in Ephesus. He tells them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers and that they are to be shepherds of the church of God. Shepherd teaching is a key part of the role of an elder. And we're going to be thinking about that later on today.

These leaders themselves are gifts from Jesus to the church. We're not electing these elders simply because every organization needs someone at the top. No, we've already got someone at the top. That is Jesus, our head. Jesus is giving us these leaders. Jesus is giving us these elders to serve under him. And because Jesus knows we need these elders to teach us and to shepherd us. But if we've been given all these evangelists and teachers and pastors, surely that just means that all of the rest of us can just sit back and let everyone else deal, let them deal with the ministry. But no, that brings us to the third way in which we become the church we're meant to be, which is by serving one another to maturity. Jesus gives us these apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers so that verse 12, to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up. You see, the point of electing elders and deacons, though this passage doesn't explicitly talk about deacons, is not so that they can do all the serving and all the ministry. In fact, it should free up all the rest of us to do more ministry and to do more serving. The point of having faithful godly elders is that they can teach us and shepherd us and equip us for ministry. How? Well, by preaching faithfully from God's word, by showing us who God is and what he's done for us, by revealing to us how God wants us to live our lives. We all need equipping in that way. Deacons are recognized to take particular responsibility for areas of service within the body, but they too aren't appointed so that the rest of us stop serving. Their service sits within a church where every member has a part to play. Now, these works of service are many and varied, and the list that we have in verse 11 wasn't exhaustive. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see other gifts.

Serving, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy, helping, and many others.

[25:37] And even that list isn't exhaustive. We can think of music, we can think of administration, we can think of welcoming, cleaning, inviting friends, and so on. The point is, is that Jesus has given each and every one of us gifts, and those gifts are given to serve others. What are we aiming for with these acts of service? Well, it's for the body to be built up. And yes, that's in part about the number of people here, but the emphasis in these verses is on maturity. Have a look down at verse 13.

It says, 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.

The goal of our service is for all of us, not just a few, all of us, to reach maturity. And the mark of that maturity is somewhat ambitious, isn't it? It's for the church body to become just like Jesus.

The whole measure of the fullness of Christ. And we do that by reaching unity in the faith and the knowledge of Jesus and everything he's done for us. Notice as well that Paul says, until we all reach maturity. See, none of us is expected to show everything about Jesus on our own. I don't have every gift. You don't have every gift. Back in chapter one, Paul described the church together as Jesus's body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. And it takes the whole body together to show something of the fullness of Christ. And that's wonderfully liberating. You don't have to do everything. Verse 14 gives us another benefit. It says, have a look down, then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. You see, we live surrounded by competing voices telling us where to find identity, telling us where to find happiness and success. And all of that is amplified enormously by social media. As Christians who serve, we will be out there in the world with those influences all around us. But the mark of a mature Christian is being grounded in the gospel.

It's by recognising truth from error. And a big part of this is by being surrounded by fellow believers who are serving you by grounding you in the truth. And it's by you grounding your fellow believers in the truth as well. In fact, a lot of this building each other up happens outside of formal settings.

[28 : 35] It's beyond teaching from the front. Community groups are an excellent place for us to grow up together. If you're not part of one, then maybe think about joining one. But so is catching up with someone one-on-one and taking an interest in how they're coming along in their faith. When I think about my faith journey, it was people coming alongside me and helping me translate the teaching from the front into how I live my life. And that is where the growth really came.

And it's a journey that's continuing here at West Kilburn as all of you continue to build me up. Verse 15 gives us a really concrete way in which we're to serve one another. Have a look down. It says, Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. The phrase speaking the truth in love goes a bit further than what the translation suggests. More literally, the verb itself is truth. We're to do truth. We're to live truth.

We're to speak truth. All of those things. And you see, truth and love are a necessary combination.

For those of you who are keen gardeners, you will know that plants need both sun and rain to thrive. And this year's summer has been a particular challenge to keep plants thriving, hasn't it?

And it's the same here as we build each other up. We need truth and love in combination. Now, the reality is, if you search yourself, if you look at yourself, so I certainly know it's true for me, that we're all inclined to be one way or another. And it's so hard to have both in equal measure.

And our sin gets in the way of that. Some of us are truth without love people. We need to win the argument and be right. And it's harsh. It's cold. It's destructive. Others of us are love without truth people. We hate conflict. We avoid that difficult conversation. It risks being sentimental and it lets people continue in their wrongdoing. Instead, the call for us is for both truth and love, which Jesus embodied perfectly, especially at the cross. You see, the cross was profoundly truthful and even offensive.

God was saying that my sin, your sin, is such a problem that God himself needed to come down to earth and die on a cross for us to even have the chance of a relationship with God.

[31 : 15] But it's also profoundly loving, isn't it? God cares for us so much that he sent his son, Jesus, to die for us, to bring us back into relationship with him. And that's our calling, truth and love in equal measure.

And let us not lose sight of the fact that it is Jesus who is growing the body as each one of us plays our part. Have a look down at verse 16. From him, Jesus, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. Notice where the grace comes from.

It's from him. Jesus is the head. And notice how he produces that grace. It's as each part does its work. Remember when I said earlier that you don't have to do everything.

Well, here's the other side. You don't have to do everything, but you do have to do something. We are each called to play our part. Jesus hasn't given us every gift, but he has given us a gift.

So how are you going to play your part? And there's something bigger at stake here, rather than just whether or not West Kilburn functions smoothly and runs smoothly as everyone plays their part. No, we are Jesus's body.

[32 : 37] Together, we're meant to display something of what our head is like. We're meant to display his wisdom to the whole universe. So when a part of the body decides not to serve, it's not

simply that the church functions less well.

We give the world a poorer picture of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Our serving doesn't make Jesus glorious. No, he is already glorious.

But as the whole body serves together, we display just how wonderful he really is. The other thing this verse shreds to pieces is the idea of individualism.

We cannot hope to become a mature Christian on our own. Yes, personal time in prayer, personal time reading the Bible, personal time persevering through suffering and putting sin to death.

Yes, all of those things do help us reach maturity. But the maturing effects are amplified as we come together, whether that's by praying together, whether that's by reading the Bible together, whether that's by encouraging each other, or whether that's by lovingly challenging one another.

[33:47] I need you. You need me. We all need each other. So to each of you, I ask the question, what can you be doing to build up a brother or sister?

We can come up with lots of excuses, can't we, of why we don't or why we can't. But Jesus has given us gifts. So use them, whether you have a lot of time or a little time.

Can I encourage you to find a way to serve? And to each of you, I also say, are you allowing yourself to be built up by others? Pride often gets in the way of this, doesn't it?

I can handle it myself. I don't need you. But if you want to reach maturity, you need the church body to help you get there. When I was a new Christian, Kate and Michael encouraged me to join youth and serve there.

Without their nudge, I'd probably have just kept my head under the radar. But serving really helped me grow in the faith. Will you let other people build you up? So how do we become the church we're meant to be?

[34:51] A church that displays God's great purpose to bring all things together under Christ. A church through which God's wisdom is displayed to the whole universe. Well, it's by keeping our unity in love.

A radical love and a radical unity with a sure foundation. It's by recognising the diverse gifts that Jesus has given us. And electing elders and deacons is part of that.

And it's by serving one another as we live and speak truth in love with each other, becoming increasingly like Jesus. Friends, we are privileged to be part of this high and mighty calling.

And the wonderful assurance that we all have is that our ultimate dependence is on Jesus, our head, and everything that he has done for us. So in light of that, let us live up to the calling before us and be the church we're meant to be.

As the band comes up, let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the Lord Jesus and all that he has done for us. Thank you that he is our head.

[35:59] Help us to love one another radically. Help us to recognise the gifts you have given our community. And help us to serve one another to maturity. In Jesus' name. Amen.