

Building Up the Body of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Well, please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we come to it together. Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks and that you have spoken to us in your words.

We pray that you would speak to us now through it by your Spirit that we might be made ever more into the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Well, 142 years ago, on the 19th of March, 1882, ground was broken on a plot of land a couple of miles north of the center of Barcelona.

Right, 142 years ago, builders started laying brick upon brick in order to create an enormous and beautiful building.

Right, if you've ever been to Barcelona, probably even if you've not been to Barcelona, you'll probably have seen the Sagrada Familia, a vast and beautiful Roman Catholic church that dominates the skyline for miles around.

[1 : 1 7] At least what you can see of it is beautiful, because you'd also see large sections of it are still covered in scaffolding.

142 years later, they have not finished. Right, not yet. The building is beautiful, but it is also still growing.

That is the kind of picture that Paul, I think, wants us to have of the church in Ephesians. Something absolutely beautiful, but also something that is still growing.

We saw a bit of that back at the end of chapter 2. I'm just going to read those verses again, because they are, I think, really key to understanding what Paul is saying here at the beginning of chapter 4. Chapter 2, just look there with me, reading from verse 19.

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[2 : 4 3] In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. The church is a building, not made of bricks, but of people.

It is, as I hope we have seen through the opening three chapters of this letter, it is a beautiful building. It is also a growing building.

And the growing, the building up, the maturing of the church, is what Paul turns his focus onto here at the beginning of chapter 4, which really marks kind of a turning point in the letter.

So far in chapters 1 to 3, there's been one instruction through the whole thing, back in verse 11 of chapter 2, and that was, remember. One instruction in chapters 1 to 3, remember.

Right? There are 38 coming in chapters 4 to 6. And we see that shift, don't we? In the very opening verses of this, words of this chapter, we are now moving from the what of the church to the how.

- [3 : 59] Right? What is the church, chapters 1 to 3? How do we live out life as the church? Chapters 4 to 6. That is why Paul begins there at verse 1 of chapter 4.
- I, therefore, because of everything we've been looking at marvelously up to this point, now, he says, I, therefore, as a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk.
- Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called. I remember in school, I'm sure you had a similar experience.
- Whenever, right, we were kind of going anywhere as a class, even if it was just across the road to the swimming pool, the teacher would kind of sit us all down beforehand and would say, right, people are going to be watching.
- Remember, you're representatives of the school. Does anyone else kind of ever get that? Right? It was an instruction, wasn't it, that was intended to make us behave. Obviously, the flaw in the system was thinking 14-year-olds cared what other people thought about their school.
- [5 : 07] But the point stands, doesn't it, that we make assumptions of things based on how we see the individuals connected to them live out their lives.
- If a bunch of school kids are particularly unruly, it shapes how we see the school. If employees in a shop are really unpleasant, it changes your perception of the business, doesn't it?
- Chapters 1 to 3 have shown us that we in Christ have been brought into God's family in order, we saw in verse 10 of chapter 3, in order to make manifest, to make known the wisdom of God to the heavenly places.
- So, Paul is now saying, live out your new identity in a way that faithfully reflects who you are in Christ Jesus.
- So, what does that look like in practice? Well, that's what kind of Paul's going to unpack for the next couple of chapters. But initially and primarily, we see here in verses 1 to 16 that it looks like maintaining unity and attaining maturity.
- [6 : 23] Maintaining unity and attaining maturity. So, let's just go through those two points. Our first point this morning, Paul's first call to the church is to maintain unity through other-centered humility.
- I don't think anyone would disagree that peace and unity is a good thing, but Paul doesn't think it's just a good thing. To him, and therefore to God, who is speaking through him, unity is a necessary thing.
- It is not an optional extra in the Christian life. It is at the very heart of our witness to the world, but also to the heavenly places, the heavenly hosts.
- We'll see a little more at the end of this passage why unity is so necessary. But before we get there, Paul turns his attention to the how of unity.
- Verse 2, just look there with me. How are we to maintain unity? With all humility and gentleness. With patience.
- [7 : 35] Bearing with one another in love. Thinking more of others. Humility is not about thinking less of ourselves, but more of others.
- Being gentle with others. Being patient. Bearing with one another. That sounds like hard work, doesn't it? Because it is hard work.
- Right? Unity is not something we can expect to just come naturally to us. It is something we have to commit ourselves to and work on.
- If we are united, which I trust most of us are, right? Praise God. But if that's you, Paul's instruction is not kind of irrelevant for you.

It's actually directed primarily to you. Work at maintaining the unity you have. And maintaining unity does require constant input and effort, doesn't it?

[8 : 40] Right? If I thought my marriage was in a good place, that makes it sound like it's not. I do think our marriage is in a good place. Right? But thinking it is, if I then kind of went home to Mary and said, right, well, we're in a pretty good place right now, so I think we can take our foot off the gas.

Right? We can probably stop seeing each other. We don't really need to talk anymore. Maybe catch up once a month. Well, what's going to happen? We're not going to remain united, are we?

We're going to drift apart. Maintaining unity is hard work. We need to devote ourselves to it.

I think it's a credit to the Ephesian church that Paul doesn't have to encourage or instruct unity amongst them, but he does say the unity that you do have, make sure you don't lose it.

Work hard at keeping it. That, I'm really glad and thankful to be able to say, I think is a message entirely appropriate for us to be able to do it.

[9 : 49] We're not a perfectly united church, are we? But we are united. Praise God for that. But don't, please don't sit back and think, great, it will stay that way if we don't do anything about it.

Unless we continue, right, continue to think more of others, continue to invest in relationships, continue to be humble and gentle, to bear with one another patiently when people rub you up the wrong way or frustrate you.

Like, keep going with that. Think about what it looks like in your own life to be patient with people in the church family, to bear with them.

And if, if there is disunity between some of us, the instruction here, isn't it, is that for all of us are to strive for unity.

Our tendency, isn't it, is to wait for other people to strive for unity, especially if we think someone else is in the wrong and I'm in the right.

[10 : 59] But Paul does not want you to be thinking right now, I'm really glad that person over there is hearing this. Or, man, those two people really need to take this on board.

Paul wants you to take this to heart. You strive to maintain unity. These words are written to the church, everyone.

I think that means, right, even if you feel you have been wronged by someone and there is division because of someone else's actions, you should be actively pursuing unity with them. So let me encourage you to maintain the unity that you have and let me encourage you if you know of any disunity in the church family to humbly and gently and patiently move towards unity even if you don't think you're the cause.

So Paul calls us to maintain unity and then in verses 4 to 6 he shows us, doesn't he, why anything other than unity just doesn't make any sense in the life of a church.

It flies in the very face of the gospel. For Paul writes, there is one, right, one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.

[12 : 25] What do you think Paul's main point is? One. We are one body. How can you divide a body? It is one spirit through whom we all together have access to the Father.

We all share one hope together. There is one Lord. We all submit to the same Jesus. There is one faith that we all confess together. There is one baptism.

We are brought into one covenant family with one Father who is Lord over all. We share one identity. We have one testimony.

We are one family. You cannot, right, in Christ be anything other than united to your brothers and sisters in Christ. So Paul says, live it out.

Make it known. Show who you are to the watching heavenly hosts. Display the unity that does exist among you.

[13 : 27] So let us make sure we are faithfully representing the God who has saved us to be one united family in Christ. So Paul first calls us to maintain unity through other-centered humility.

And secondly, in verses 7 to 16, we see that the church is to attain maturity through word-centered ministry.

Just look there with me. We're going to start at the end here and kind of jump about through it a little bit. Hopefully it will make sense by the time we're at the end. Just look there with me at the last two verses of this section so we can all kind of see what direction these verses are all heading in.

Paul writes, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into the body from whom the whole body joined and together, 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. As many of you will know, we've just been blessed with the arrival of another child into the family.

[14 : 50] And one of the very first things to happen when a child is born is that they get weighed, don't they? Right, so when Finn's lifespan was still measured in minutes, the midwife took him and placed him on a set of scales and then asked us if we want to take a photo.

I don't know when that was relevant. We did, because we felt like she was telling us to. But then, right, another couple of days later, the midwife comes around to your house and they weigh him again.

And then a few days later, they come again and they weigh him again. And then, I can't remember the name of the person who comes after that, but someone else comes and they weigh him too and again and again. Right, why?

Why do you keep on measuring the weight of a newborn? It's not, is it, to see if they need to go on a diet and put on a few too many pounds. No, you keep weighing them because you want to make sure they are growing.

Because a healthy body is a growing body. A lack of growth is a sign of something wrong. So too with the church, Paul says.

[16 : 02] If we want to be a healthy church, we must be a growing church. With that in mind, here are just three questions we're going to ask and answer with the remainder of our time this morning.

What does maturity look like? What does Christ give the church to help us mature? And what are we to do in order to mature?

Like I said, we're going to jump around the passage a little bit, but hopefully it will begin to fall in place as we go. So first of all, what does maturity look like? Right, when we, I wonder what comes to your mind when you think of growth, growth as a church.

I imagine numbers is kind of the first thing that comes into our minds, probably because it's tangible. You can measure it and we like that, but that's not the kind of growth that Paul has in mind here.

I don't think that's certainly no bad thing. We'd love it, wouldn't we, if the pews at the side here were absolutely filled every Sunday? That would be great. But Paul here has something slightly different in mind. Just look there, verse 13 with me.

[17 : 09] What does maturity look like? Not until there are loads and loads of us, but until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood.

It goes on, doesn't he? 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 and deceitful schemes.

Maturity looks like growing in our faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Maturity looks like knowing the truth, knowing what the truth is so that we can speak it in love.

Maturity looks like a church family that is firmly established in its faith and so is not blown about by every wind of doctrine. It knows what it believes.

It knows why it believes it and it knows how to speak that truth into the lives of others. That is the kind of maturity that Paul has in mind here.

[18 : 25] So, second question then, what does Christ give us to help us mature? Let's look back now to verse 7 where Paul moves from the unity of the church to kind of the diversity within the church and it's a diversity rooted, you'll see there, in Christ's gifts to the church.

Now, remember what we've just seen, right? Why are those gifts given? Well, we've just seen that the whole body might be growing in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

That's the purpose of the gifts. That's what direction the gifts are to be heading in so it makes sense, doesn't it, that the principal gift Christ gives His church is teachers.

Those who speak His word to His people. Verse 11, He gave the apostles, prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. Now, we could spend ages on each of those things but let me just say two things quickly.

First, what they all undoubtedly, indisputably have in common is that they speak, don't they, God's word to God's people. Christ has given to His church people to speak and teach His word so that the church might grow in faith and knowledge and so be equipped for ministry.

[19 : 54] Secondly, I think it is just worth saying as well, we've already learned in Ephesians that the apostles and prophets are the foundation on which the church is built.

Saw that back in chapter 2. So, in one sense, right, their work is done. We don't need new apostles and prophets because the foundation is set and the building is going up, right?

We don't need more foundations. In another sense, though, their work is never finished because they are now and always the true foundation of every true church, right?

A church that is not dependent for its strength on the inerrant word of God spoken by God through the apostles and prophets, a church that is not built on that foundation is really no church at all and it will not stand for long.

It is a house built on sand. So, the apostles and prophets set the foundation. The evangelists, pastors, and teachers or pastor teachers are those God gives to, well, what do you maybe think comes next, right?

[21 : 10] Fill in the sentence. The apostles and prophets are the foundation. The evangelists and teachers, what might you say next? Right, the obvious place to go and this is what I kept on finding myself saying this week, the evangelists and pastor teachers build the structure.

Right, it's neat, doesn't it? It sounds logical, it's a nice picture, apostles lay the foundations, pastors build the structure, it sounds like it works and it makes for a kind of great tidy illustration, but it actually goes against the crane of what Paul is saying here in Ephesians 4 because look now at verse 12.

Who is building up the body of Christ? Not just the pastor teachers, is it? All the saints, that is, every believer is to be equipped for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The building is building the building. The building is building the building. Let's go back now to try and make sense of what's going on there.

Let's go back now to verse 8. Verse 8 is a quote from Psalm 68 which describes God as a triumphant king ascending his holy mountain with the spoils of war kind of falling in his wake.

[22 : 56] And Paul recognizes, doesn't he, that that is talking about the Lord Jesus. And we've actually seen this, I think, already in Ephesians.

Jesus, who ascended on high, chapter 1 verse 21, far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.

Jesus is the one who has ascended on high. And who are his captives? Who are those that he has taken from a foreign land once living as his enemies in enemy territory?

Well, actually, it's you and me. Chapter 2 verse 2 who were once following the prince of the power of the air. You and me, chapter 2 verse 12, who were once separated from Christ, alienated and having no hope, far off, we have now been brought near and so are, like Paul, in verse 1 of chapter 3 and verse 1 of chapter 4, a prisoner, captive of and for Christ Jesus.

And because we are his captives, he can give us where he pleases. He can give us to whom he pleases for his purposes.

[24 : 17] I think Paul kind of dips into this parenthetical comment in verse 9 and 10 just to remind us, okay, about the nature of Jesus' victory. He won, right, he ascended on high by lowering himself to the earth, humbly putting the needs of others above his own so that in him we might have redemption through his blood.

The great conquering King Jesus whom we are captives to is the same Jesus who descended to earth in order to shed his blood on the cross for us. So with all that background in mind, right, we are captives of Christ Jesus.

The building is built in the building. Who are the pastor teachers in verse 11? Well, they are, first of all, aren't they, as we all are, Christ's captives that he gives to the church that all the saints might be equipped for ministry.

ministry. And this is, I think, so, so important to all of us for our understanding of the church and what a healthy church looks like.

Right, if you got a bit lost in the last few minutes, come back to me now, okay? We, the pastors, are given to you, not as exceptionally kind of gifted individuals as if the gift was our quality.

[25 : 48] The gift is our service. We are given as captives of Christ to you to serve you and equip you through word-centered ministry.

So, it is not the job of the congregation to serve the minister so that the minister can go about building the church. church. No, it is the job of the minister to serve the congregation through the teaching of the word so that the congregation can go about building the church.

The building is building the building. That is God's vision for his church, giving servants of the word to the church in order that the church might build itself up in love.

So, third question, what are we to do in order to mature? Verse 15, speaking the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love. the ministry of the saints that you, right, you are being equipped for is also a word-based ministry.

[27 : 14] So, church member, let me say clearly to you, right, your role as a member of this church is not to kind of stand still and be built up by the pastor.

The calling to which you have been called is that you be equipped by the pastors so that you can build others up by speaking the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love, right, that doesn't mean kind of just saying hard things in nice ways. It means speaking God's words to others because you love them and you want to see them grow.

That is, that is exactly right, why we do things like, like the Bible handling day that we did yesterday. And let me say what an encouragement it was to see so many of you there. That is, I think, Ephesians 4 in action.

The saints being equipped for ministry that they might build up the body of Christ. So let's just kind of draw things to a close now by seeing how verse 16 brings together everything we've seen this morning.

[28 : 27] Verse 16 again there, from Christ the whole body joined, right, and held together by every joint with it which it is equipped. When each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Right, for the body to grow, the body needs to be united, doesn't it? Individual bricks lying around a building site don't make a building. A dismembered body is not a healthy body but when the body is united, when each part is working properly, i.e.

every part of the body contributing to the healthy growth of the body, then the body grows as it builds itself up in love. Your role as a part of the church is to make the whole body grow.

I think for some of us that might mean a fundamental shift in attitudes towards church life.

I wonder, I say I wonder, most of us have walked out of a church gathering of some kind, haven't we, and said to ourselves or a spouse or a friend, I didn't get much from that.

[29 : 48] You ever said that? You ever thought that? Well, what does that say about our purpose in going? If that is what we come out thinking, then it reveals, doesn't it, that we went there not to serve, but to be served, not to minister, but to be ministered to.

The question we should all be asking, every one of us, right, even as we walk out that door this morning, is not what did I get, but what did I give?

What did I give? Let me actually encourage you, write that question down somewhere. Maybe every Sunday as you sit down with your service sheet, just write at the bottom, what can I give?

How can I build up the body today? How can I speak the truth in love to someone? And how might that attitude shape your attitude to other things going on in the life of the church?

Maybe you think, I don't go to life group because I don't find the study that fruitful. I don't go to the prayer meeting because I don't get much from it. No, Paul is saying in Ephesians 4. No, no, no, no, no.

[31 : 09] That's not church. That's not every part of the body working properly. None of our limbs go off on a Tuesday to do their own thing, do they? Body parts are not there to serve themselves.

They are there to contribute to the whole. So ask yourself how you can be involved in the life of the church in a way that builds others up. And let me just say there as well, perhaps you're sitting there as a young Christian or you feel like an immature Christian even if you've been a Christian for a long time.

Maybe you're thinking, I'm not really sure I have anything to contribute. Well, first of all, yes, you do. If you know the gospel, you have a wonderful truth to speak into the lives of even the most mature believer that will build them up.

But also, I just want to say, no, what an encouragement even just your very presence is. We are built up by you being present.

When someone who's been a Christian for two weeks shows up at the prayer meeting, no one's thinking, oh, I don't think they're ready for this yet, or can you believe they didn't pray? No, they go away built up and encouraged.

[32 : 33] They think, wasn't it great to see them at the prayer meeting? Wasn't it great to see that person who's been here for a month come to the Bible handling today? What a joy, what an encouragement.

We all have something to give, even if you don't feel it very much. There may be a challenge in that to some of us, but I hope we can all see actually how encouraging and exciting a vision for the church this is.

Right? How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity? unity. How good it is when brothers and sisters eagerly strive to maintain that unity amongst one another.

How good it is when people are humble and gentle and patient and bare with one another. How good it is when everyone in this church is more concerned for the needs of others than no one.

How great a thing to know that everyone in this church is building up everyone else. How good it is to grow in our faith and knowledge by having others speak the truth and love into our lives as we speak the truth and love into theirs.

[34 : 01] How good it is to be for one another. How wonderful it is to know we are not to go alone. We are not to try and do it alone. How good it is to grow up together in every way into him who is our head Jesus Christ.

This is a wonderful vision for a wonderful church. May it be our vision that we together grounded in God's Word, speaking God's Word might build up the body of Christ.

Let us pray for that now. Father, we thank you for the church. We thank you that you have made us one family in Christ, brothers and sisters, with you as our Father. We thank you that the church is a glorious building and a growing building. And Lord, we pray now that we as a church family here in Bon Accord would be united, that we'd be striving to maintain the unity that exists amongst us, and that we would be delighting to build one another up in love, being equipped by the work of teachers that we might all together speak the truth in love into the lives of one another, and so grow in our faith and knowledge of you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.