



# THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

## EPHESIANS 4:1-16

### Walking Worthy of our Calling, part 1

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

Ephesians can be divided into two sections. In chapters 1-3, Paul described in detail our calling. Paul praised God as the blessed God who gives amazing blessings to his people. Although the Ephesians were formerly far from God, God brought them near. Then, in chapters 4-6, Paul urges the Ephesians to walk worthy of their calling.

This is Paul's main overarching idea for the rest of the book. In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul explains that walking worthy of our calling means that we do everything that we can to maintain our unity.

Let's read the word of the Lord and commit to living out this truth today. Read Ephesians 4:1-16.



## WE MUST MAINTAIN OUR UNITY (EPHESIANS 4:1-6)

“ *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

The Ephesians are saved in Christ, by grace, and through faith and each person of the Trinity works toward this salvation. These amazing truths are enough to woe our hearts out of darkness into light and our powerful enough to raise the spiritual dead to new life. Now, Paul wants the church to know that this truth changes everything including their lifestyle. The Ephesians are commanded to walk worthy of their calling. In short, grace motivates obedience. Our obedience will never be perfect, but grace reorients our hearts to desire obedience and to delight in walking worthy of our calling.




Paul describes walking worthy of God's calling as maintaining the unity of the church. Paul tells the Ephesians "to bear with one another" (4:2). The idea here is that the Ephesians are to tolerate one another with love despite their differences (Hoehner, 509), and what is needed to achieve this goal is gentleness, humility, and patience. Paul is not calling the Ephesians to mere toleration where Christians begrudgingly "put up with one another," but he is calling them to loving forbearance. Isn't the way Jesus lived with his disciples? We constantly see Jesus lovingly bearing with his disciples' weaknesses. Likewise, isn't this the way Jesus deals with us. Paul makes this point in Colossians 3:13 when he connects the need to "bear" with one another to forgiving one another. He then says that we should forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Church family, the gospel is not only the introduction to the Christian life, it is the heartbeat of the Christian life. We have already learned this. Paul told us that the gospel motivates praise (1:3-14), prayer (1:15-22), and good deeds (2:8-10). Now, we learn that the the gospel motivates lovingly toleration.

Moreover, we should be eager to maintain this unity (4:3). There are several reasons for this. 1) As already mentioned, when we lovingly tolerate one another, we picture the gospel to one another. 2) When we lovingly



tolerate one another, we experience more deeply the gospel itself. 3) When we lovingly tolerate one another, the lost sees new creation now amid this old rotting creation. 4) When we lovingly tolerate one another, the angels rejoice in the wisdom of God and the demons shutter. Overall, the pathway to our joy and God's glory is us lovingly tolerating with one another's differences. Therefore, the next time you see a difference in a brother or sister, do not let it be an opportunity for frustration, annoyance, or avoidance. See the difference as an opportunity to love by maintaining unity and friendship. As you do this, you will have increased joy and God's glory will be more clearly visible. And oh, our world needs to see this glory now.

Church family, a failure to maintain unity is anti-missional, anti-Christ, anti-Spirit, and anti-our salvation. In short, it is against everything we confess and hold as precious. Notice what Paul says in verses 4-6: 4 "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." The sevenfold repetition of the word "one" emphasis the unity of our faith and reminds us that unity is essential to our identity as Christians. Our mission, our salvation, and our Lord demands that maintain our unity.



## CHRIST EQUIPS US TO MAINTAIN UNITY (EPHESIANS 4:7-16)

“ *7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”[a]9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?[b] 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[c] and teachers,[d] 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,[e] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 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. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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.*

The exhortation to maintain unity with eagerness and love is not easy. Moreover, knowing that working against this unity is working against the mission of God and God himself can be intimidating. Thus, verse 8 is incredibly comforting. It is incredibly comforting that Christ gives us the grace to maintain this unity! The grace to maintain this unity are gifts given to the church.

Christ gave these gifts to the church after completing his mission. Paul describes his mission as a process of descending and ascending. Christ came to this earth and lived the life we were called to live, died our death, and then ascended into heaven. In doing this, Christ defeated our enemies – sin, the devil, and death. Then, upon ascending into heaven, Christ gave gifts to his people.

Right now, this world is in chaos. The virus is spreading; the health of many is threatened; the economy is unstable; and there is much political unrest. Despite this chaos, Christ has won. He has descended to this earth and defeated our enemies, and he has ascended into heaven and given us gifts! After battle, only the victorious kings gave gifts to their people, and we have been given gifts. Therefore, we should have complete confidence that we win.




Church family, if we win in the end, we should act like winners now, not losers. It is possible for us to forget amid the chaos that Christ has won. When we forget this, we act like losers and the world does not see new creation in us, the angels only see a blurred picture of God's wisdom, and the demons only hear a faint whisper that they lose. So how can we act like losers in this situation? Complaining about the government's response to COVID, speaking without grace about our authorities, and letting our differences of opinions about this virus divide us are all loser responses. Church family, I understand that our government's restrictions are discouraging, I have been discouraged. I also understand the view that some people hold – that we are being persecuted. Although I do not agree, I understand the inconsistencies. Regardless though the Christian response is not one of complaining, speaking without grace, and not addressing one another with loving toleration. Complaining, gossip, and anger is the response of losers, not winners. After a championship game, it is the losers who complain about the refs; it is the losers who gossip about how the game was fixed; and it is the losers who walk away angry. The winners are celebrating and reliving the moments of the game! We are the winners, so amid this difficult season, let's act like it. Let's walk worthy of our calling even amid this difficult season. We can do this because Christ won and so we win. How do we know? He has given us gifts.



Now, there are several gifts mentioned in Scripture; Paul mentions four or five here: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. The idea of shepherds and teachers is probably one idea, shepherd-teachers, since no article is found before teachers.

So what are these gifts. First, an apostle referred, first, to the original 12 disciples and one requirement for apostleship was they had to see the Lord (Acts 1). The church depends on these original apostles since the Scripture depends on large part on God using them. Still, the term can refer more broadly to Christians who have the gift of being sent into frontier locations – places where the people have never heard about Jesus. These people have the apostolic gift. Second, a prophet is someone who has the gift of communicating biblical truth and applying biblical truth in a unique way. Third, although everyone is commanded to evangelize, some have the unique gift of speaking the gospel to the lost so that the gospel is especially clear. Fourth, some have the gift of being shepherd-teachers. The gift is the ability to lead God's people through the good times in life and the bad times according to the Scripture.

The purpose of these gifts is to equip the saints for ministry (4:12). Saints does not refer to a select group of Christians; rather, all Christians are saints as evident in Ephesians 1:1. The purpose of these gifts is to equip the saints: that is, train and strengthen.





If you have one of these gifts, you have this gift to equip God's people to serve. When the search committee hired me here, they asked me about my philosophy of ministry, and I said, "My role is to equip the church for ministry." This is vital for us to understand. Ministry is not reserved for only a select few Christians; minister is the privilege of every saint, and it is the role of those who have these four gifts to equip the church for ministry.

Church leaders are the means that the Spirit uses to build up the church (12b). Previously, Paul told the church that they are built together into a temple for God by the Spirit (2:22), but here, Paul explains that gifted individuals equip the church. This means that the Spirit uses gifted individual as the means to mature the church.

Church family, how do you know that the Spirit is leading your pastor and his ministry? One way is this: does the pastor equip you to do ministry or does he just do all of the ministry himself? I am not making this up. When I help you identify your gifts (this is why we identify our gifts in our new members class) and then I put you in a situation to use your gifts, I am the means that the Spirit is using to mature our church. If I simply did the ministry myself, I would be walking contrary to the Spirit. Thus, be ready church family, walking worthy of our calling means that we get to work!



Now, God will continue to equip his church with these gifts until the realities of verse 13 are achieved: that is, until we 1) attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, 2) to mature manhood, and 3) to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (13).

The first goal of God giving gifts to the church is to attain unity in faith and in Jesus. This reality is amazing, and Satan hates it. Remember, when the church experiences unity in Christ amid God-glorifying diversity, a powerful message that we are new creation is proclaimed to our lost friends and to the demonic powers. Satan hates this so he works against this. This is what I mean. It is very easy for people to see gifted church leaders as an occasion for division. Paul addressed this problem in 1 Corinthians 3. The people of Corinth were creating division by pleading allegiance to one church leader: Some said, “I am of Apollos,” others said, “I am of Paul,” while others said, “I am of Peter.” Finally, some said, “I am of Christ.” Church, we should not view church leaders this way. Church leaders have the purpose of creating unity, not division, and we do this by teaching about “faith” (the gospel) and Jesus.



The second goal of these gifts is to mature the church. Church family, the maturity of our church depends on everyone using their gifts to serve one another. Are you using your gifts right now in the life of our church? This is an important question to ask. If not, please email me and we will begin to discuss how you can do this.

The third goal of these gifts is to lead the church to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The idea here is that church leaders equip the saints for ministry, and when the saints use their gifts, the church reaches the fulness of Christ. Think about the powerful picture of Christ that we can portray to the lost! Oh, as we each serve according to the grace given to us, the lost will see Christ in us. So, I must work hard at teaching you about theology, identifying your gifts, and giving you opportunities to serve for when we grow in maturity, we all see Jesus more clearly.

The goal of the gifts are to equip the church for ministry – to be mature. The opposite of maturity is described in verse 14. The opposite of being mature is being a “child.” Spiritual children do not have doctrinal stability; rather, they are easily confused, easily persuaded, and easily deceived. Moreover, they are easily divided.



Church family, the unity we experience is not naïve. The unity we experience is based on true knowledge of God. This is why I must teach you theology and show you all of the beautiful truths of Scripture. We need deeper preaching, more Bible Study, and more discussions on who God is, not less. Knowing who God and our salvation more deeply will compel us to prize unity even when it is difficult because the reason for prizing unity is the sevenfold oneness of our salvation and our God (Ephesians 4:5-6).

Interestingly, Paul identifies one characteristic integral to unity – speaking the truth. Church family, when we speak the truth, we grow in Christ because he always speaks the truth. This is an important point for us to understand. Lying is at its core divisive because it is a false picture of Christ. Remember, John calls Jesus the word of God, and the Father created the world with his words. We learn in John 1 that God created the world through Jesus, his word. Thus, when we lie, you and I do not picture Christ to one another, but we picture Satan who is himself the Father of lies. Integral to our maturing in unity is speaking the truth to one another.

Finally, notice something significant in verse 16. Paul tells us that our maturity depends on each part working properly. God has given you gifts so that the church



might be built up. Your gift is not meant for you, but for the maturity of the church. We must remember that the maturity of the church is God's goal in creation; his goal is to create for himself new creation. Thus, your gift has an important role to play in the plan for the universe! Did you know that? God's plan is to unite Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and your gift has been given to you so that this mission is achieved. Let's not miss what Paul said in verse 13, "all," and what Paul said in verse 16, "every joint." God has decided in his sovereign freedom to use every Christian to achieve his cosmic plan, and that means you have the responsibility and privilege to use your gifts to mature this church for the glory of God, for the joy of one another, and for the salvation of the lost.



## CONCLUSION

Church family, God has decided to use you, not just me, to mature this church. The witness of our church depends on you, not just me. The cosmic proclamation made to angels and demons is most loud when we all use our gifts to build up this church. Church family, for the glory of our God, for the maturity of our church, and for the sake of the lost, let's use our gifts to build up this church. Will you be thinking actively and creatively this week about how your gifts might be used for maturity of our church?



## LET'S PRAY

Oh, God mobilize us at 11th Street so that we all use our gifts for the sake of your cosmic mission. We want you to be exalted as God and we are thankful that you decided to be exalted through our maturity. Give us grace to maintain our unity and to work hard at lovingly tolerating one another. As we do this dependent on your grace, please let the lost all around us see Christ and let them bow their knee to him for your glory. Please let the angels rejoice as they see your wisdom on display in our church and let the demons shudder as they know that there time is limited. Motivate us now to use our gifts for your glory, in Jesus name we pray, amen.