

# Seek Unity and Maturity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our reading this morning is from the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 to 16. If you have Bibles with you, then please go to Ephesians 4.

! There are Bibles at the back as well if you need some. The text is also here on the screens and in your bulletin. Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 16.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

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

[ 1 : 1 3 ] In saying, he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is the Holy Word of God. Amen. One year ago, we looked at Ephesians 1 to 3, and here we are a year later, the return of Ephesians, Ephesians 4 to 6.

We're going to look at from now till the summertime, till July. This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. It's called a circular letter. The scholars will say that.

[ 2 : 4 9 ] That means that Paul wrote it to Ephesus in the early 60s, but it was meant to be spread around so the Ephesians would have received it, and they would have made copies, and then they would have sent it to all the churches they knew about.

And in some manuscripts even, there's a blank where it says, a letter written from Paul to the Ephesians. In later manuscripts, there sometimes is a blank there, meaning put your church's name in the blank.

So because God wrote this letter through Paul by the Spirit, you can read in Ephesians 1.1, a letter written by Paul to the church in Edinburgh, to St. Columbus even.

It's to any church. It's from God to us right now. So this letter is for us. It's for today. And what you get in Ephesians, we spent a few months on this last year, you get God's perspective on all that's going on in your life and in the world and in all of history.

So it's a God's eye view of everything. So you, for example, you might have become a Christian, and you might ask, what happened to me when I became a Christian? Like, how did it actually happen?

[ 3 : 53 ] And he says, well, Ephesians 2, you were dead, and the Spirit came and made you alive in Christ by giving you the gospel through faith.

So he explains what happened to you, or even back up to chapter 1, he says, look, let me take you back to even before history ever began, time ever began, God knew you in Christ and blessed you and redeemed you before the foundation of the world.

So it's this God's eye perspective. It's things that you could never know unless God pulls back the curtain and tells you how it all happened, what's happening. And really the heartbeat of it is to say, Jesus Christ makes sense of all of human history.

Everything from beginning to end is all focused on what happened with him in the middle of human history. So that's really the heartbeat. But last year, we looked at it from a broader lens.

One of the questions that it really focuses on in the first three chapters is, who is the church? What is the church? And in Ephesians, you get, I think, I think the only moment in the whole New Testament where there's an actual definition of the church.

[ 5 : 01 ] So in Ephesians 1 verse 22, it says, the church is the body of Jesus, the body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Now that is not an easy sentence to understand.

The church is the fullness of him who fills, feels, fills, all in all. What does it mean? I used this illustration last year. This is the best thing I can think of, I think, to make sense of it.

Imagine that there is a king and he's ruling the land and he's got a meeting with his council, his advisors, and they're sitting around the table and the king is a great king and he is filling the land through this meeting with wisdom and with love and with justice and with power.

He's filling up all things in the kingdom through this meeting and then all of a sudden the doors to the meeting room burst open and his little kids are there and they've completely interrupted it and what does the king do?

The king doesn't say, get out of here little kids. You know, we're in a very important meeting. No, he scoops them up in his arms and he gives them a big hug and he says, you know what? You fill me up.

[ 6 : 11 ] And what is he saying? He's saying that his kids in that moment fill him up with joy as he fills the whole kingdom with joy, with love, with justice, with power, with wisdom, right? So, what is the church?

Ephesians says, you, Christian, the church are the very joy of Jesus Christ, his body. Somehow, somehow, you fill him up as he fills the world, the kingdom of God with wisdom and justice and power and love and that's the definition we get that's a beautiful image.

There's a lot of beautiful images in this book. There was a theologian named John Mackay who was born in Inverness in 1889 and he moved over to America in the early 20th century and he became the third president of Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

But later in his life, he was invited back to Scotland, to Edinburgh, to give a series of lectures at the university and he talks about Ephesians in those lectures and in them, he tells the story of how he came to follow Jesus, how he came to faith in Christ and he says that he was 14 years old and he was walking through the highlands north of Inverness and he was reading the book, this letter, Ephesians and he says, he says, to this letter I owe my life.

In it, I saw a new world. Everything was new. I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ, when I read this letter, he became to me the center of everything.

[ 7 : 47 ] I have been quickened. I was made alive. I was really alive. Then he writes, this letter is pure music. What we read here is truth that sings doctrine set to music.

That's the letter to Ephesians. I hope that as we go back through it again, the back half, you feel like you get that experience too. There's a piece of music in it at the very end of chapter 3.

If you have a Bible, you can see this. We didn't read this piece but chapter 3 verses 20 and 21 is a doxology and he says here, all glory from the church be to God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit.

Then it feels almost like that's the end of the letter. This doxology, letter done. But then chapter 4 starts. The reason that last year we stopped at chapter 3 is because there's a very natural break there with the doxology.

Praise be to God for all these things. Now, then he says in chapter 4 verse 1, I therefore, Paul, write the next thing to you. The therefore in chapter 4 verse 1 is pointing back to everything he's already said in chapters 1 to 3.

[ 8 : 58 ] One of the ways you could think about it, we've got to have a little bit of a longer introduction today to get back into the letter we've left for a year. One way to think about it is scholars will call this the indicative and the imperative split.

The credenda and the agenda as it's often put. What does that mean? Indicative statements are statements of fact. So chapter 1 to 3 is statements of fact.

You were dead, but the Spirit made you alive. You were lost, but now you're found. You were Jews and Gentiles that hated each other, but now you are one church.

Facts, declarative statements, indicatives. And then chapter 4 to 6 are imperatives. Now, what could you do in the light of that truth? You were called, now, here's commands.

Right? And so if you look at the very first thing he does in chapter 4 verse 1, he says, I therefore call you to live in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. So the very first thing you get is a command.

[ 9 : 59 ] So chapters 1 to 3, who's the church? What happened to us? How do we become Christians? What is God doing in all of world history? Chapter 4 to 6, what should we do now in the light of who we are?

So chapter 1 to 3, who are we? Chapter 4 to 6, now what do we do? How do we live? How do we go forward? How then shall we live? And so we begin with this command, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called and that structures the whole of the last three chapters.

If you were here in January, I know, I see guests here today, I know some of you weren't, but if you were here in January, one of the things I said is that if there was a unifying theme to the whole semester, this spring semester, it is spiritual formation, it is how can we grow together?

And if there's one sentence that unifies the whole of this semester and all the different series we've looked at, it is this, that true discipleship, true formation, growing by the Holy Spirit as Christians, is just this command, become who you already are.

Be who God has already made you in Christ. And here, what he's saying in this argument in chapter 4, 1 to 16, is he's saying, let me summarize all of 1 to 3 for you, you have got the life of God in you.

[ 11 : 21 ] You've got the Spirit, you've got the triune God with you, blessing you, redeeming you, you've got the life of God in you, now be, grow into who you really are in that light.

And we've said that, this is probably the 10th sermon that's been the thesis this semester, but that really is what the New Testament says over and over again, become who you already are in Christ. You've got everything, you've got all the treasures, you've got the life of God, now become that.

Two ways today, every week, for the next couple months, we'll ask the question, what does the church do, what are we to do? The answer today is, seek unity and seek maturity.

So Paul, in these 16 verses, says, be one, be unified, and seek spiritual maturity. Let's take him in reverse. He does unity, then maturity, I want to do maturity, then unity.

All right, so first, seek spiritual unity. That's what we're told to do here. If you're a believer today, God has saved you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, by faith, in Christ, by grace, God made you alive, you're saved.

[ 12 : 29 ] Here's the church, that's what the church is, here we are, right here. What are we to do? Verse 13, if you look at it with me, he says that the big goal, he's talking about the goal here of our Christianity, and he says, we strive after unity until we attain the unity of faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, and then here's the clause, unto mature manhood.

Now, he puts that in the masculine, that's just the way people talked in the first century. You could translate it like, until we grow up, all the way, until we become adults. So, he's talking here about the big goal of the Christian life, and he says it's spiritual adulthood, spiritual maturity, that's the big goal of the Christian life.

When you become a Christian, you start out as a spiritual baby, a spiritual infant, and Paul says the goal in the Christian life is to grow up and to become a full-grown adult in the spiritual life.

Now, we have a baby at my house right now. It's our baby. The baby we have at our house is our baby. And, she can't do very much.

She's very needy. She's very dependent. Right? So, she cannot talk. She cannot walk. She cannot feed herself. She can grab a little bit and feed. But a couple weeks ago, she did start crawling.

[ 13 : 52 ] She started, you know, the baby scoot across the room. You know, the scoot. And, she probably about a week and a half ago was the first time she was able to make it across the whole room.

And, you know what we said to her that day when we saw that? We said, Isabel, little baby, you know, scooting across the room is nice, I guess, but all the other kids can run.

You know, we said, scooting, crawling is okay, but walking is far superior. And, even better than that is running and even better than that is sprinting. And, most of our kids can sprint.

No, right? It's good to be a baby when you're supposed to be a baby. And, if you are a new believer, if you are an early Christian, it's good to be a spiritual baby.

It's not bad. You're supposed to be. You're supposed to become a Christian and then learn to crawl and then learn to walk and then learn one day to sprint.

[ 15 : 00 ] And so, it's a very good thing to be exactly where you are when you come to faith in Christ. And, Paul says here, the goal is to grow in spiritual maturity unto full adulthood, manhood, womanhood, as Christians, right?

So, it's good to be a spiritual baby if you are a new Christian. Christian. And, if, if I came back up here and we looked at this passage again in three years and I said, Isabel is still crawling.

She hasn't quite gotten to walking yet. You see, it's a beautiful thing for Isabel to be crawling right now, but it would be a terrible thing if in three years she can't walk, right? We would be searching out help for that.

So, it's very good today if you're a new believer to be a spiritual baby and it's not good to stay that way. We've got to grow, Paul says. So, the Christian life is all about starting out as a spiritual infant but growing.

Now, how do you know if you're a spiritual infant? He tells us here in verse 14. He says, grow up from spiritual infancy to adulthood so that you may no longer be tossed to and fro by the waves of deceit and cunning and doctrine and Bible teaching from all over the place.

[ 16 : 11 ] So, he says, he says that when, one of the ways you can know am I a spiritual infant is that you're still struggling to tell the difference between teaching that comes directly from the Bible and false teaching.

So, you still are in a place where you can be tossed to and fro by false teachers, by cunning, by deceit, by schemes of people. You might turn on the TV and you watch TV preaching which is usually false preaching and you're sort of mesmerized by it and he says that's when you sort of know that you're not yet, you haven't yet grown into spiritual maturity.

You can't yet tell the difference between good teaching and false teaching, biblical theology and false theology. You know, Isabel, Isabel tries to eat Legos so we could put food in front of her and we could put Legos in front of her and she just, both, they're equally good to her, right?

That's an issue of discernment. That's being a, you know, a spiritual baby cannot discern good and bad all the time. What are the details underneath that? It'd be something like saying you might, you're not expected to.

When you just become a Christian, you shouldn't yet be able to discern exactly because you haven't yet put all the pieces of the Bible together. And I don't mean just knowing the Bible stories, I mean being able to put the theology of the Bible together in your head, in your mind, in your heart and being able to know who is God, what is a human being, what is wrong with the world, all the different pieces of theology together, right?

[ 17 : 41 ] That's an issue of discernment and time. It takes time. Nobody should be at the finish line on that. If you're a new Christian, you shouldn't know very much about it. But he's saying here, but it is time to grow.

It's time to take the next step. Another aspect would be that you're just now learning to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. So you don't, you might not even know what's happened to you yet.

There are a couple new believers in our congregation right now and talking to them, I know that they say, I don't quite know what has happened to me, but I know that I was lost and now I'm found. And then Paul says, well, read Ephesians and it can explain to you a bit more about what the Spirit did in your life and exactly what happened, but you shouldn't necessarily know the full of that on day one, not at all.

You're a spiritual baby. That's okay. But you may find, what does he say right after? Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called by putting on humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, bearing with one another sins, love, he says.

So you may be in a place where you're looking back and thinking, I have yet to kill the sins that I really, really struggled with before I became a Christian. And that's okay.

[ 18 : 52 ] That's the process of sanctification. So you might say, you might look up and say, I have yet to put to death the impatience that I really had before I was a Christian. And that's because you're a spiritual baby.

It's okay. It's a process. Sanctification is a long road. Or you may look up, and I think this is one that's subtle in the text, but a little bit hidden, but there and really important.

How do you assess your own spiritual immaturity? Are you a person who is tossed to and fro week in and week out by experiences and feeling more than anything else?

In other words, is your spiritual life and the health of your spiritual life conditioned on whether or not today, this Sunday worship service was good for you or not? So do you walk away thinking, you know, I enjoyed that today.

I got something from that today. My feelings were struck today. I liked the music. I liked the sermon. Or I didn't. And if that's sort of the primary way you're assessing your Christian health, you're a spiritual baby.

[ 19 : 59 ] You're still in infancy, right? Because you've yet to learn the ordinariness of the Christian life, which is to come week in and week out with God's people, worshiping under the command of God that says, come and be with God's people.

Take up the duty until it becomes a delight. And you know, sometimes it won't be a delight. Of course, sometimes the preaching is not good. Sometimes the music, well, that's rare, but every once in a while, right?

Of course, but if your Christian life and your spiritual health is judged based on experience of feeling, so in other words, if you don't have a mountaintop moment, if you feel a little bit in the valley, you don't know what to think about your Christianity anymore, you're at spiritual infancy, right?

So you've yet to learn that Christianity is actually a long obedience in the same direction, slow, a marathon, right? Not a series of mountaintops, but more like a series of valleys that you're working through.

And so one of the things I think that I've seen is when people in our community become Christians, sometimes one of the experiences that they have is six months in, maybe there'll be a season of I don't know, I don't even know if I'm a Christian anymore because I'm struggling to read my Bible, I'm struggling to pray, and what you're just doing is entering into that first valley after the mountain peak of coming to faith in Christ, right?

[ 21 : 22 ] A long obedience in the same direction. Lastly, verses 15 and 16, he says, what is the goal to grow up together in maturity, in deep community, the kind of community that says, I can speak the truth and love to my Christian neighbor and we're okay, we're walking together in the same direction.

And so another sign of spiritual infancy is just sort of a lone wolf mentality, an individualism, where maybe you've yet to come to see the real vibrancy, the depth, the reasons that you need the spiritual community, you need the community of faith deeply, you can't walk alone.

There has to hit some point along the way in your Christian life where you realize, boy, the church has been sort of peripheral to me, I go, but I'm not deeply embedded in the community of faith until that moment where you find out how much you need it.

And then you grow, you come up out of spiritual infancy into maturity. Now, will you ask this week the question I'm asking me, I hope right now you're willing to ask yourself, am I a spiritual infant?

And when you look at that list, the answer is, of course. You know, in some sense, yes. In some sense, every single one of us in here have not grown into full adulthood in some of the ways I've just talked about.

[ 22 : 46 ] And we've yet to grow into the mature manhood and womanhood of the Christian experience in a way that we could have, of course, right? So let me, I've culled together a list of questions for you.

And I've taken these from three different authors on spiritual health. And I just want to ask them to you, it'll take one minute, ask yourself these questions. I'm asking myself these questions.

Number one, do I have more theological and biblical understanding today than one year ago? Number two, have I overcome any patterns of sin as of today that were very present in my life one year ago?

Number three, am I more patient, long-suffering, and gentle with people that I struggle with regularly than a year ago? Number four, am I more of a refreshment, I think this is the most important one, am I more of a refreshment to the body of Christ than I was a year ago?

Number five, I think I've got ten, do I love the saints? Do I love the church more than I did a year ago?

[ 24 : 03 ] Do I love the body of Christ, my local church body? Number six, do I have Christian friendships that exist to help me grow by being able to speak the truth and love to me?

So do I have a real Christian friendship where somebody can, verses 15 and 16, speak the truth and love to me because I want to grow up in the Christian faith, I want to put on humility and gentleness and patience?

Do I think about God more on a daily basis than I did a year ago? Do I pray and do I delight in prayer more today than I did a year ago? And lastly, am I more aware of my need of grace today?

Do I know my neediness, as Ryan preached on last Sunday, do I know my neediness today more than I did a year ago? So as I've grown up in the faith, I'm more aware of my need of grace.

So some questions. Now let me say this before I move to the close, the second thing. One writer puts it like this, if you've really done that assessment, probably it breaks you a little bit.

[ 25 : 12 ] And the most important thing that this passage is saying at its core is you are not saved by your spiritual maturity, but by Jesus Christ. You don't come into the faith because you're strong.

You come into the faith because you're weak, right? You're not saved by spiritual maturity, but by Jesus. And so at the very center of this passage is the idea that you're not saved because of maturity, but unto it, unto it.

And at the heart of the passage, if you look at the center with me, verses 4 to 10, I can just briefly summarize the argument here. At the very middle, he puts the grace of Jesus Christ in this passage from Psalm 68 that Christ ascended and he led captives out of captivity.

We just sang it in Psalm 68. But you look at verse 4 and following, he says, you are one church, one people, one faith. Jesus is the one object of your faith, one baptism.

So if you've been baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you share in the one baptism of the church, of Jesus Christ, right? No matter where that happened. You have one faith, one people, one spirit. There's only one Holy Spirit.

[ 26 : 18 ] So if you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. So you're united by the Spirit with all the other Christians. There's not multiple spirits. So you can be Baptist. You can be Christ. You can be Presbyterian.

You can be Pentecostal. You can be any of it and there's still only one faith. And he says, why? Because Jesus condescended. He came incarnation. He came down and when he ascended, when he went into heaven, he gave all the gifts of grace to the church.

Meaning, you're not saved by what denomination you're in. You're not saved by your maturity. You're not saved by any of it. What is the condition of being one of the captives that the Redeemer is set free?

The condition? Being captive. It's being weak. It's being imprisoned. It's being in darkness. It's being dead, right? You're not saved by your strength. You didn't get out of captivity because you're strong.

You got out of captivity because of your immaturity, your weakness, your deadness, right? And now you've been set free to grow into maturity. So today, no, I'm not saved because of my maturity just like I'm not cast away because of my immaturity.

[ 27 : 27 ] So if you look today and say, I am a spiritual infant, that's a wonderful thing to realize today. It's so good. You're not cast out by your infancy and no more than you're brought in by your maturity.

Instead, you are saved unto taking up the call to the full stature of Jesus as he puts it in verse 14. Now secondly and finally, that means that we're called then as part of our maturity to seek unity.

That's the second and final thing. All right, now for Paul, maturity and unity are deeply connected. So maturity breeds unity and unity breeds maturity.

They're completely intertwined here in this passage. So he's talking here to Jews and Gentiles and they hated each other truly far more than we can understand.

And he's saying, but now you are one church, one people, by one spirit, one baptism, one faith. Jesus is your savior. So you've got to actually pursue that and be eager to maintain the unity Jesus has created in the bonds of peace.

[ 28 : 32 ] You've got to take that up. You've got to actually be one. Imagine, imagine a family, put it like this, imagine a family. Maybe you get invited over to somebody's family home and you don't know them very well but you go and you visit the home and you observe how the family functions and you go to dinner and you're kind of there for a few hours.

And one of the things you notice is how tight everybody is in the family. Parents and kids and there's a lot of respect and love and it's just a really warm environment.

You kind of feel like, have I stepped into a hobbit hole? It just feels so wonderful. You're like, this is exactly where I want to be right now. The food is great. The company is great. You've maybe had those hospitality experiences with people like that and you've noticed with the kids, you think the kids are so mature for their age.

What does that look like? It looks like humility. There's not a lot of pride. Gentleness. Even one kid tries to start a fight. You know, they say something and you think, boy, that could be fighting words.

But the other child is forbear's patience and just swallows it and lets it go. Why? Because they're mature enough to think, I'm not going to start a squabble right now and they let it go.

[ 29 : 50 ] And you have this experience and you say, what is it that made them so mature? What is it that made them like this? And you realize it's their unity. Their love for one another is based on a deep bond and unity and that unity breeds maturity and that maturity breeds unity.

And he's saying here that unity and maturity are so hand in hand that the church, this St. Columbus, we ought to look, ought to be like that. This family where people come and say, boy, they're so for one another that they're also spiritually mature and they're so spiritually mature that they are for one another.

They really love each other desperately. You see how those things fit together for Paul? In other words, he's saying, a church that is truly unified is desperately serious about discipleship.

And a church that is desperately serious about discipleship exhibits in unity in avoiding faction and really being for one another and that's all born out of a killing pride, being humble, meek.

The word here, gentleness, in this passage is the Greek word for meekness. It can be translated either way. And meekness is not weakness. Meekness instead, this Greek idea that Paul attaches here is the strength of a lion but self-controlled.

[ 31 : 10 ] The strength of a lion that's a person that's so strong they're gentle. Right? A person that underneath their gentleness has unyielding strength knowing when to exercise strength in the right time.

Right? And that's the word he uses here, not weakness but meekness. Right? And he says that the church should look like a family that has those virtues, has those things. Now there's an interpretive tension here and it's in verse 4-6 and related to verse 3.

In verse 4-6 he says you are one. Radical unity, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, all these different denominations and factions of the church we see all throughout our city and the world.

He says but there is only one faith, only one baptism, only one people. And he says but in verse 3 be eager to maintain the unity of love and the bonds of peace.

Now what does he say? Which is it Paul? Are we one people that can never be divided or is it that we have to fight to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bonds of peace?

[ 32 : 17 ] And the answer of course is yes. Right? What is he saying? He's saying that our calling here is to maintain visibly what can never be broken invisibly.

So in other words the invisible church is the one church of Jesus saved by the gospel no matter where people go to church. There are true Christians all over the world in all sorts of churches of course.

And he's saying that invisible unity can never be broken. That's called the church organic the organic church the living body the organism. It's invisible to our eyes right now because right now we're here and Charlotte Chapel is over there and Chalmers is over there and Becloos over there and Corubbers is down the street and so we can't see the unity of the church visibly today right here but he's saying in your local church and in your mind and your heart you've got to fight to maintain the invisible unity in a visible way as much as possible until you see it all come together visibly one day when the king comes to establish the kingdom.

Right? So he's saying you've got to have the spirit in your heart but then to the local church to us today as we close you've got to fight be eager to maintain the unity of the church and the bonds of peace right here in our little visible community of unity one faith one baptism one people right here united together on this Sunday.

So look what does that look like practically? Let me be practical don't don't let the sun go down on your anger today towards somebody else in the room. Don't don't let anger and little tiffs separate and schism the church at all.

[ 33 : 58 ] What else does it look like? Don't let factions in here of friend groups get in the way of including people who are new. Don't don't create an inner ring where nobody else can get into your friend bubble within the local church.

What else does it look like? It looks like being a person who speaks the truth and love in other words we've got to fight to avoid flattery with one another meaning we're just a place where everybody's nice to each other.

Really what does what does Christianity do for you? Well it made me really nice. No it made you into a person who's meek meaning strong as a lion but knowing when to use that strength.

In other words you're able to speak the truth in love. You're not merely words of niceness and flattery. You're able to have such real Christian friendships that you can tell your neighbor the truth about their struggle because you love them so much.

Or avoiding mere bluntness. Words of truth some of us you see some of us flatter and we're too nice others of us we tell the truth too much.

[ 35 : 06 ] Words of bluntness without the real reason for that love right? And he's saying that's what maintaining the unity of the church and the bonds of peace actually looks like at a local level in the day to day true unity seek the bonds of peace.

The word bond there is the word sinew or muscle tissue. So he's saying maintain to be connected as muscle tissue to the ligaments and joints as much as you possibly can.

Be eager fight for it don't separate the only condition of separation is false teaching. That's it he says. Other than that fight to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bonds of peace.

I look up at St. Columbus and I think we've got pretty good unity around here by my perspective and I'm very thankful for that. I recognize it's not something that I created but I stepped into and received from many of you and from our predecessors.

Paul is telling us here the most dangerous position that we could be in is to be complacent about that. that either we are growing up in spiritual maturity or the weeds are growing and we're moving towards schism.

[ 36 : 21 ] One of the two. Either we're growing up together and saying I'm a spiritual infant I need growth in my life right now or the weeds are growing up and we're preparing for the next separation. One of the two.

And he's saying be eager fight to maintain the connective tissue. Make visible what is true and visible. One faith. One body. One baptism. One people. Now next week.

Come back next week. Because I didn't talk at all about spiritual gifts which are at the center of this passage. We're going to do a whole week next week on the spiritual gifts that God gives us to maintain this.

But I'll finish with this. Paul says in chapter 4 verse 1 I Paul am a prisoner of the Lord for your sake. Now that is the third time Paul in this short letter has mentioned already prisoner for the Lord.

He really, really, really wants you to know he's in prison when he writes this letter and he is. He's in prison in Rome when he writes this letter. One of the first times he says it he said I'm a prisoner to the Lord and this time he says for the Lord.

[ 37 : 25 ] In other words he's saying I am in chains as I write this letter because the Lord Jesus is my master. I am in chains as I write this letter because I'm willing to serve all the way to the point of imprisonment and death for the sake of my master Jesus.

Now let me translate that to as practical terms as I can say it. I think Paul because he said this three times is trying to get us to see this our greatest need at St. Columbus as a church family is not wonderful circumstances but Christ-like character humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love.

our greatest need is not great, beautiful, wonderful circumstances. When Paul says how do you maintain unity? How do you grow in spiritual maturity? There's nothing here about our budget.

There's nothing here about a great building. There's nothing here about how many people are coming today relative to a year ago. Nothing. He says you don't need great circumstances.

You need the character of Jesus Christ in your life. And how do you get that? How do you get his humility? The word Paul uses for humility in this chapter is a unique word for humility and it's used of Jesus in other parts of the New Testament for the fact that he did not consider equality with God something to be held on to but made himself nothing.

[ 38 : 54 ] That's the word. How do you grow? How do you kill spiritual pride that could divide a church? church you just gotta go and look at him and you've gotta be with him and you gotta sit with Jesus in order to become like him.

So it's as simple as that. What's the real secret of true unity? Be with Jesus. What's the real secret of spiritual maturity?

Be with Jesus. If you're not with him relationally sitting down with him you're not going to become like him. Be with Jesus and you'll become like him.

Let us pray. Father we ask for renewed spirit of a desire to seek maturity in the faith maturity in Christ and we pray today that the big thing that would happen is that we become more like you Jesus because we've got your grace and so we want your humility your patience your forbearance your love your gentleness your meekness and we want unity together in the light of that.

So Lord convict us in exactly the places we need to be convicted of a lack of maturity in Christ and then encourage us with the words of the gospel and then send us on to grow.

[ 40 : 21 ] Lord so I pray that each one of us in this room today would want to want to spend time with you would want to want to become more like you. That's my prayer for me it's my prayer for all of us in this room Lord we pray it in Jesus name Amen.