

One in Practice

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you'll open back to the passage we just read, we're going to hang out here for a few minutes this morning.

If you've been around this Ephesians study at all for any amount of time, and especially if you were here last week when Derek preached on the end of Ephesians 3, you'll have seen that there was a bit of a transition that took place. At the end of Ephesians 3, Paul gave a benediction, if you remember. He said, Now to him who is able to do far more than all we can ask or think, be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

So there was something of a full stop at the end of chapter 3, and then you pick back up in chapter 4 with I, therefore. I think that therefore is pointing us back to the first three chapters, and he's showing that there's a division in this book between chapters 1 to 3 and chapters 4 to 6. And we can describe the division in Old English grammar lesson terms, the divisions between the indicative and the imperative. So if you remember from school indicative statements, indicative voices, they're just simple fact statements. I am preaching indicative. You are listening, hopefully, indicative. Those are indicative statements.

But if you look at verse 1, in 4-1, he changes verbs into different things from just to be verbs. I, therefore, a president of the Lord urge you, you see that verb, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. The other word for urge is exhort you. I preach to you, he's saying. I'm telling you to do something. And so the transition is to the imperative voice, the command, right? So imperatives often follow after indicative like this. I am preaching, therefore, you should listen to me, right?

Or maybe not, but maybe. That's the imperative that comes after an indicative. The fact that I am preaching draws out a command for you to listen or whatever. You can fill it in the blank. We do it all the time in life. And Paul's doing the same thing. He's connecting two halves of the book between indicative and imperatives. And that's the way I think we should think about this text in the whole second half of the book as we enter into it.

[2 : 3 0] What's the relationship between Paul's indicative and now these imperatives that he's offering to us? And so that's what we're going to look at this morning. But before we do that, there's one more thing we should see before we hop into the text. And that's the context.

So Paul once again is drawing us back into the context of what's happening in his life. If you look down again at verse one, he says, I therefore, and then the very next line, the very four forwards, five words, a prisoner for the Lord. Now, if you remember, if you've been around at all for the sermon series, you know that he's actually said this a lot throughout the book. He starts things, I am about to tell you something. And then he says a prisoner. In chapter three, he said a prisoner for the sake of you Gentiles. And now he's saying a prisoner for the Lord. He wants you to be to remember that he's a prisoner.

He wants you to remember it. He's saying it over and over again. This is the third time in the last 20 verses that he said it. And I don't think that it's because he's bitter.

I don't think he's saying, look, I'm a prisoner for the Lord. For you, you need to listen to what I'm saying. I don't think he's saying it in a tone of bitterness because he says for the Lord, what's he doing there? It's something like when Jesus was standing before Pontius Pilate, before he was going to be hung on the cross. And Pilate had said, from where does your kingship hail? Where does your kingship come from? And Jesus said nothing.

And so Pilate said, will you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you? And Jesus answered him, you would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you. You see? Paul saying, I'm in prison.

[4 : 40] I'm on death row. Things don't look good. They don't look good for me and they don't look good for you. Persecution is coming. You live in a broken world. There is suffering all around you and you're suffering. But for the Lord, don't think that he's surprised.

It could not be so unless he gave the authority for it. You see? Paul is giving us a bunch of commands in this passage. Do this, do this, do this, do this. And he's doing it because the world outside of us is completely broken and he knows that that's because we are broken on the inside. It's not simply that the suffering exists all out here, but he knows that there's actually something wrong in here. It's not simply that everything outside of us is broken, but that we break stuff. We break promises. We break relationships. We break things all the time. In the Middle Ages, they called this concupiscence. Now, we just say things like break stuff. This is the tendency of us as sinners. And Paul knows this. Okay?

So he's putting together this huge thing for us in this passage by connecting indicatives and imperatives, who you are with what you ought to do. And the order is important. And so if we could sum up everything that's going on in this whole book and the transition here, I think we could say this. Paul's telling us this, become what you already are. Become what you already are. Okay? Now, we're going to unpack that. Two things. First, the indicative, our life with God, our life with God. And second, our life together in progress, the imperative. Our life with God, our life together in progress. First, our life with God. If we want to know what Paul wants us to become, the commands, we have to know what we are, what we already are, what's past tense and present tense for us. Let me just say before we get into it that this entire book is written for Christians. So if you remember in the very beginning of Ephesians one, he says that he's writing for the saints, to the saints in Ephesus. And then halfway through chapter one, he says, to the faithful who believe in

Jesus Christ. So if you're a Christian today, this passage is especially for you. This is for you, these imperatives. And it's for you because it's big time to know who you are, where you've come from and why you are this way. But if you're not a Christian today, if you're wrestling with the truth claims of Christianity, if you're here because you're in exploration mode, that's fantastic. The beautiful thing about this text is the first question we have to answer is what is the gospel? What is a Christian? What is it? What do we think? What do we believe? And that's what the indicative is. So we're going to go through that our life in God first, through just summarizing the first three chapters and then look at the imperative. Three verses, I just want to pull out three verses. The answer in these three verses that Paul gives us, the indicative, who you are if you believe in Jesus Christ is this, your life is in God and God's life is in you. Your life is in

God and God's life is in you. The first verses in, you might not have a Bible, so just listen. Ephesians one, we've said from the get go that if there's one verse in this whole book of Ephesians that we have to understand and learn and think about, that kind of opens up for us the meaning of the entire book. It's Ephesians one, nine to 10. And this is what Paul says. God is making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ. And here it is as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things, things in heaven and things on earth. What does it mean for Paul to say that he's unite that Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ, God is uniting all things in heaven and earth.

[9 : 05] This is the central motif of the whole book. What does that mean? Well, the other way to think about it is using the term reconciliation. All things coming together is the idea of reconciliation. If you think back to Genesis one to three, what happens after sin enters the world is that things tend to rip apart. The opposite of uniting, they break apart.

The first thing that breaks apart at sin is God's relationship to humanity. God and humanity are ripped apart from each other. The relationship is broken. In the very next passage, Cain kills his brother. You remember that in Genesis four. And immediately we see that when God and humanity's relationship is broken, humanity and humanity's relationship is broken. Even as in a tight knit family, families are broken. They're ripped apart by sin. Sin has a power of disunifying things, of ripping things in half, of ripping things apart. Paul talks about it in terms of ourselves fighting with ourselves. Our will fights against our reason.

We want to do the right thing, but we can't do the right thing, right? You know this in your own self that in temptation, yourself is ripped apart from yourself. This is what sin does. Paul comes and says, here's the big picture. Here's the big indicative. Jesus Christ is putting all things back together, uniting all things in heaven and earth. That's the big plan for all of time. That's what's happening. We can't see it right now. We walk around in the world in mundanity and we can't see the hugeness of the fact that in Jesus Christ all things are being put together, reconciled. God and humanity, humans and humans, families with families, people with people, people in the land, all of these things. That's what Jesus Christ is doing.

All right, so that's the first one. The second one comes from chapter two. How is Jesus doing this? How is Jesus doing this? By what power? Ephesians 2, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins made us alive together with Jesus Christ. He raised us up with him and he seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Here's the point. The first place that Jesus Christ is uniting all things is in you who believe. This is who you are, Christian.

If you're a believer in Christ Jesus this morning, it says that you have Jesus resurrection life right now. You have what he has. You have been raised with Jesus in him, Paul says.

[11 : 57] Whatever is true of Jesus Christ right now seated at the heavenly places is what God thinks is true of you. Jesus Christ's righteousness is your righteousness. Jesus' justification is your justification. You are truly united to him right now as he sits in the heavenly places ruling over all things. God is doing a huge work in Christ Jesus of uniting heaven and earth and the first location of that work is in you who believe. This is who you are.

You truly are resurrected. You are truly living a resurrected life in Jesus Christ, in his resurrected life. That's what Paul is telling us. Thirdly and finally for the indicative.

In chapter 3, the second way that this union is being worked out today in the world right now is in chapter 3, verse 9 and 10. God is bringing to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery that was hidden for ages in him who created all things so that, and here it is, through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. What's he saying here? He's saying that the primary place that union, the big picture of what God's doing in all of history is made manifest to the world right now. Today is in the church. The church is the herald of God's ultimate plan of union of all things, of reconciliation. How does this work out?

Well, Paul said it works out like this. You who are Gentiles in the room, which I'm guessing is probably everybody, you were once far off. You were removed. You were cut off from the gospel, from the hope, from the covenant. But now in Jesus Christ you have been brought near. In other words, one of the ways he's saying is that the gospel brings racial reconciliation.

The gospel unites people that in our world ought not be united. Black and white, American and British, British and continental European, whatever it is. Our tendency as human beings is to bifurcate, to separate. That's what we do post-babbling. The church is the first location of the herald, the manifestation of God's big project of union. The way that you relate to the people across the aisle matters in God's big picture of uniting all things. The reconciliation of these relationships here is the first place, he says, that God's big gospel work is being worked out for the world to see. This is the death of bored Christianity.

[14 : 58] Are we bored with Christianity today when you wake up in the morning? Are you bored with it? Your mission is to map the gigantic work of Jesus Christ in uniting heaven and earth now in your relationships. It's a big job. It's a big vision. It's the kind of ambitious vision that says, I want to see the city transform for the gospel. It starts, Paul is saying, in relationship reconciliation, within these walls, within the small worlds that you occupy at work and your home, families being put back together, friendships being put back together, these small things are mapping out into the huge reality that is the work of God for the end of the world. That's what Paul is telling us. That's the indicative. That's who you are today. You have resurrection life with Jesus Christ and you've been put on mission to map reconciliation, to herald it to the world. That's first. That's the indicative. Now second, we come to the imperative. Our life together in progress.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, Paul says those things are true of you today. Now we come to what he says when he says, become now what you already are. Become what you are. Work out what you've been called to do. You see it in the very first verse. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. So you see there the calling to which you have been called. That's the indicative. That's the fact of who you are, your resurrection life in Christ. Now he's saying, I urge you to walk according to that fact. Walk according to the resurrection life you have in Jesus Christ. He tells us how to do it, I think in three ways. Three ways. The first way is to think about what's the goal. What's the goal? What's the goal of walking in a manner worthy of what you have been called? And that's found in verse 11. So come with me to verse 11. What's the goal? He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Why? Why? Why ministry? Why are we doing this?

What does he say? For the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. And here it is. To mature manhood. To mature manhood. So he tells us that the goal of ministry, the goal of all this church stuff, the goal of our existence as Christians is to develop into mature manhood. Now the ESV probably needs to get some more gender inclusive language in 2016. So it should say something like to mature adulthood, right? Not just manhood. Men and women included here. So we're to come into mature adulthood. Look, when you believe the gospel, when you come from death to life like Paul talked about in Ephesians 2, the point is that you become a spiritual infant.

You become a baby, a spiritual baby. The author of the Hebrews says the same thing in Hebrews 6. When you believe in God, believe in Jesus, you have to drink milk. It's the time of drinking milk, right? You become a spiritual baby. And it's good to be a baby. When it's time to be a baby, you ought to be a baby, right? I have a one year old daughter, Juliet. She's 13 months now in some change and she can't walk yet, which is a little bit, if you know anything about like kid development, that's a bit behind. She's like, if you've seen her, she's really small. She kind of looks like a doll. And so her little bitty legs, they just can't do it yet. And I'm not better about it or anything, but it'll be all right. But look, when she takes her first step in the next couple of weeks, hopefully, maybe this maybe today, I don't know. She'll look, what are we going to do? What are Heather and I going to do when we see it? Hopefully we'll be there. Well, we're not going to do this.

We're not going to be like, it's about time. Like I've been walking for 28 years, actually on the day today. You know, call me when you can run the 100 meter sub 13, you know, sub 13 seconds. I'll be impressed then Juliet, but this, you took one step. That's nothing.

[19 : 44] I see that all the time out in the world. I see people taking steps all over the place. You can't even run. Now, we're not going to say that, right? What are we going to do? We're going to pick her up. We're going to hug her. We're going to kiss her. We're going to, we're going to clap for her because she likes to clap. Those are the things we're going to do, right? But in five years from now, if Juliet can only take a step and then fall and have to get back up and take one more step, if she's still working on it at that level, then it's terrible, right? It's terrible. There's something very wrong. It's good to be a baby. You see, it's good to take your first steps, but it's not good to stay that way. Babies have to grow. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you become a spiritual baby, but it's not good to stay that way. You have to become. You have to grow. And so the question that Paul's presenting to us is, what's a spiritual baby? What does it mean to be a spiritual infant? And I think he gives us a clue at three things very briefly in verse 14. He just says the goal is to become mature adults. And then he says in verse 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 and deceitful schemes. Three things I think here, one is this, spiritual babies don't have a whole lot of theological discernment. In other words, they probably can't transverse the scriptures very well.

They don't yet haven't learned exactly how to think about God, how to search the scriptures and learn about God, how to do theology, how to know theology. Look, Paul has no time here for anti-intellectualism. He's saying you got to know something. You got to read the scriptures. You got to think. You got to look at the text. You got to try to understand it. You got to think about God, about who he is. One of the marks of a spiritual baby is a lack of theological discernment. The second is this, I think that he's giving us is, and this is in conjunction with Hebrews 5:14, which we don't have time to flip to, but in Hebrews 5:14, he talks about spiritual infants having a lack of ethical discernment.

So he says basically that new Christians don't understand good and evil, that they can't yet navigate the world very well in terms of ethics, in terms of morality. Look, one of the ways that's mapped out into spiritual infancy is that we're quick to get upset.

We're quick to get upset about things. We're quick to be surprised by other people's feelings in the church. We just have a tendency to get upset about the things that are happening here that we just don't like and to talk about it. Look, this is a mark of spiritual infancy. The lack of ability to forgive, to see in others the same sins that you struggle with yourself, to be able to show mercy quickly. This is a lack of ethical discernment. This is one of the marks of being a spiritual infant. The last one I think Paul's offering to us in this phrase being tossed to and fro, one of the ways we can take that is spiritual babies are always looking for the next big spiritual experience. So you're always looking for the next huge prayer to be answered. That can be a good thing, but one of the ways that works out is that you haven't yet come to see that the spiritual life, the Christian life is slow and patient and long suffering and liturgical. Week in, week out, Scripture, prayer, sacrament, worship of the body, fellowship. This is the Christian life, slow growth, long suffering, patient. So these are three marks of what it means to be a spiritual baby.

Now how do we grow? How do we move forward Paul's saying? And we see it secondly in the task, the task. What's our task in growth, in becoming, in obeying? What's our task?

[24 : 13] And we see it back in verse one and two. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And here it is. Walk with humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love. Long suffering, patient, loving, quick to forgive, humble. These are the things that he maps out for us. What does this look like? Jesus having eaten the last supper on the night that he would be betrayed, knowing that it was his time to go back to God, John tells us. Roads from his supper, he grabbed a towel in a basin, he poured water into the basin, he took the sandals off the feet of the ones he loved in the world, his brothers, his friends, and he cleaned the cake, mud, the dust, the filth from their feet. This is the man who at the very same moment was upholding the world lest it fall into oblivion. He became the foot washer God. Jesus Christ laid down his rights to become man. He laid down his rights even more to wash people's dirty feet and he laid down his rights even more to die. The God man.

We live in a culture, a late modern culture that for about 200 years now has been screaming at us about how many rights we have. If you know kind of the world of the rights talk.

What these rights oftentimes amount to is simply the right to fulfill our desires and the way we want to fulfill our desires and the right actually to be left alone. You have the right today to privacy, you have the right today to individualism, you have the right today to be whoever you want to be with no outside constraints. These are the rights you have in the late modern world. You have the right not to forgive anybody in life. That's a right guaranteed by you in the Western culture. You have a right not to wash people's feet.

You have a right not to serve anybody. You have a right to be left alone, to be left to yourself in this world. This is your rights in our culture. What's humility? The laying down of this right. The laying down of this right. Jesus says this at the end of that passage. Do you understand what I've done to you? He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord and you have a right and you were right for so I am. If I then the Lord and the teacher, the God who upholds all things, lest they fall into oblivion, have washed your feet so you also ought to wash one another's feet. This is humility. This is what Paul's talking about. How do we get like this? Secondly, how do we get like this? At the very end in verse 15 he says this, rather instead of pursuing spiritual infancy our whole life, rather speaking the truth and love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. So his answer is this, speaking the truth and love. Now a lot of us in here are known for speaking the truth. You know who you are and everybody else probably knows who you are as well. You're a truth speaker. And then some of us are known as people who don't speak the truth or don't confront or do anything like that because of love. We don't want to risk relationships so we don't speak truths. So we have kind of the introverted loving people and the speaking truth people. And what Paul is saying is this, we need both.

We need both. If you speak without gentleness, patience, humility, long suffering, knowing that you are the very center that you're talking to, then you're just going to crush people's souls. You're just going to crush people's souls. You are going to ruin friendships.

[28 : 28] But if you never speak the truth, then I want to question and ask today, do we actually have real Christian friendships? Do we actually have real Christian friendships if we don't speak the truth and love to one another? This is how we grow, he says. This is what Paul's answer is. So that brings us finally to just a very briefly. This leads us, all of this kind of talk about growing and spiritual infancy leads us to examine ourselves. I think it's helpful throughout the year to ask these questions that Paul's raising of us. The question in the format like this, am I different right now? Have I grown in any way more this year than I did from this time last year? Am I more theologically astute now than I was a year ago? Am I able to transverse the scriptures in a better way today than I used to could?

Do I have better ethical discernment? Have I overcome sin this year that I struggled with last year? Am I more patient and long suffering this year than I was this time last year? Do I treat others with gentleness more than I did last year? Am I more of a refrain refreshment to people to be around this year than I was last year at this time? Do I love the saints? Do I love this community right here more this year than I did last year?

Am I embedded enough to actually show love here more than I was last year? Do I have real friendship in this place? Do you have real friendship with people in this room?

Speaking the truth in love more this year than you did last year. Most of us, probably like me, just had to awake into the fact that the answer to many of those questions is no.

No. So what do we do? What do we do when we awake into our spiritual infancy, when we wake into the no? Well look, very simple. You turn back to the indicative. You turn back to who you are. It's not a coincidence that Paul brackets all these imperatives in the very middle of this section with a rehashing out of the indicative statement of the fact of who you are in Jesus. He says at the end of verse five and six, we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is overall and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts.

[31 : 02] Lord says when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. Look, he's saying this, I'm telling you to do a bunch of stuff, but don't forget about Christ ascension. Jesus ascended twice. The second time was into the heavens and the first time was on the cross for us. Look, you are not saved today because this year was better than last year in terms of Christian growth. That's not why you're saved today because Jesus Christ spoke your name when he was hanging on the cross. That's the indicative. When you realize you haven't grown at all this year, you remember the indicative. That's the ground you walk on. You're not a Christian because of your growth or your lack of growth. Nevertheless, you must grow. When we don't grow, I just want to charge you with this and we'll be done. We prayed the Lord's prayer together today and it's helpful because we need to reflect on the Lord's prayer more often. One of the things missed in the translations of the Lord's prayer in English are that when he prays, give us to this day our daily bread, the words this day or today are actually implied in the rest of the clauses. So it could read like this, give us today our daily bread as we forgive today, as you forgive us today.

Protect us from temptation today. Lead us not into temptation today. Deliver us from evil today. What do you do when you wake up to the fact that yesterday was a total failure?

You didn't grow. All the indwelling sins come back. You're not reading the scriptures. You're not praying. You look like a spiritual infant. What do you do? Remember this, yesterday is yesterday. That's the point of the Lord's prayer. Yesterday's guilt is yesterday's guilt.

Remember us today from temptation. Forgive us today, you see. Today is the horizon of the future, not yesterday. Today is the day that we grow. Today is the day that we step out of bed and herald the reconciliation that God is working out in Christ Jesus. It's today.

It's for today. The prayer is for today, not yesterday. The guilt and shame of yesterday, Jesus Christ tells us are as far as the east is from the west. Your lack of growth is gone.

[33 : 41] It's gone. Today, Monday, tomorrow, it's new. It's refresh. The gospel's for you. Tomorrow, Monday morning. Today is resurrection life. Paul tells us in the final verse, speak the truth and love today so that we can grow up today into the horizon of the future. This makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Let's pray. Our Lord and God, we ask that you would help us, Lord Jesus, to not be shamed by our lack of growth, but to be driven into the future so that we long to grow. That you would reshape our desires.

That we would love to see Jesus Christ in the scriptures. That we would love to commune with you in prayer. That we would love to fellowship with the saints. That we would love to reconcile relationships that are broken in our lives. We ask that you would do this work in us through the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name.