

The Nitty-Gritty of Unity and Maturity in the Body

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[0:00] So I thought we'd start with a quiz. Here's your first question. Where is the world heading? Where is the world heading?

Is it economic collapse, nuclear disaster, catastrophic events like a meteorite or earthquake or tsunami? Is it global warming leading to global meltdown?

Is it a pandemic super virus that's going to kill us all? Is it anarchy, revolution or Islamicization? First question, where is the world heading?

Second question, where is the church heading? Is it heading in the right direction? Is it heading in the wrong direction? Is it not heading anywhere?

Is it going backwards? Second question, where is the church heading? Third question, where is your life heading?

[1:00] Where is your life heading? What is round the corner? What does tomorrow bring? When we're sitting here in 2016, what will it look like? Where is your life heading?

These are big questions. They come with complicated answers, I'm sure, in our lives. And we're tempted to say, well, we don't know. There's real uncertainty.

We don't know where the world's heading. We don't know where the church is heading. I'm not even sure what I'm going to have for breakfast tomorrow. I can't answer these questions. But we can.

Because the book of Ephesians copies us in to the memo that God sends to his church about where everything is heading. If you've got a Bible, then Ephesians 2 verse 10.

Ephesians 1 verse 10. It says, He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ. To be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment.

[2:04] When the end comes. This is what the end looks like. To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. That's where it's all heading.

That's where this world is heading. That's where the church is heading. That's where your life is heading. To the Lord Jesus. Who will rule and reign over everything. And everything will be united under him.

To bring all things in heaven and earth. You and me and everyone else to unity under his rule and reign.

Where is the world heading? Well, the Lord Jesus. Where is your life heading? The Lord Jesus.

Where is this church heading? In the end.

To the Lord Jesus. That's where it's heading. But God has decided in his wisdom to bring that future reality into the present. He's formed a model community.

[3:05] A community to live that out now. To show the world where everything is heading in the future. Ephesians 3 verse 10. His intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.

To the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm. That the church is a foretaste of what the world will one day be. That this church is under the rule and reign of Christ.

United together purely because of Jesus. And it gives a watching world a foretaste of what that looks like. A model community. A prototype community.

But that creates a problem. If that's where the end is. And this is what we're supposed to be now. How can we be included in it as such a bunch of sinful ratbags?

With all our flaws and failings. With all our shortcomings. With all our faults. Well chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 answers that.

[4:06] Because it says it's all by grace. It's all by God's initiating goodness. That he's treated us far better than we deserve. That he's saved us from our sins.

That he's given us new life in Christ. He's prepared good works in advance for us to do. That by his grace. Dependent on his grace.

We're being shaped to be that community. That will one day be the reality for everything. All by the power of the gospel and unstoppable grace.

And that grace is so powerful. That it heals the greatest chasm the world has ever known. The chasm between Jew and Gentile. The chasm that still separates the world.

I don't know if you read in the paper this week. About even in Israel they're going to segregate buses. Between the Palestinians and the Jews. That riff still goes on.

[5:06] And Paul writes in Ephesians. The first part of chapter 3. That it's healed in the Lord Jesus. Because grace is that powerful. And the gospel is that good. And so he finishes chapter 3 with these words.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more. Than all we ask or imagine. According to his power. That it is at work within us. To him be glory in Christ Jesus. Throughout all generations. Forever and ever. Amen. Is that what it says? Are we sure that's what it says? Is there something fundamentally missing?

According to his power that is at work within us. To him be glory in the church. And in Christ Jesus. Throughout all generations forever and ever.

That the glory of the church. Intrinsicly mirrors the glory of Christ. Christ. And so what Paul is going to go on to explain to us. In chapter 4, 5 and 6.

[6:11] Is how our community is to reflect that glory. The nitty gritty of how that's to happen. The nuts and bolts. The how to. We're going to leave the stratosphere of salvation.

Where we've been. And we're going to start to look at how we relate. One to another. How we relate as a church. How we relate as families. How our husband relates to his wife. How we tackle and defend against the adversary's attacks.

We're going to leave doctrine and we're going to move to duty. We're leaving what God has done to what we must do. We're leaving exposition to exaltation. So this sermon is called the nitty gritty of unity and maturity in the body.

It is an urgent plea from Paul for gospel unity and growing maturity in the church. And it is right where we are at Bruntsfield. It is right where we are.

We're growing. We're growing. But we've got to deepen. We've got to strengthen. We've got to unite. And it's all got to be moving towards maturity. Growing together in the image of the Lord Jesus.

[7:23] Jesus. The irony is not lost on me. An Englishman standing before a majority of Scots talking about unity. But we'll deal with it. So please open your Bible.

Turn with me to chapter 4, verse 1. Paul writes, As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. Bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions?

[8:28] He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the universe. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son

of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful schemes. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Let's pray and ask God's help to understand these verses. Father God, be glorified in this place.

Father, we long that you would make us as individuals what you long and desire for us to be.

[9:48] Father, would you make us as a people all that you long and desire for us to be. May you do this all through your gospel, by the power of your Spirit, in your Son, the Lord Jesus, and all by the abundant grace that he's poured out for us.

Father, bless us in this time we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So the first thing we see is this.

Maintain our unity earnestly.

Look with me at verses 1 to 6. There's a real urgency in what Paul is saying. Look at the very first words. As a prisoner for the Lord.

This desire, this mission that Paul is on to unite the church has cost him his freedom. He's writing from prison. He is not playing at this. This is the desire of his heart.

And it's cost him his freedom. Look at what he then goes on to say. I urge you. I urge you. I earnestly beseech you. To take this seriously.

[10:58] I earnestly beseech you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. To walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Look at verse 3.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Make every effort. Pull out all the stops. Leave no stone unturned.

Keep nothing back. It's an urgent plea. It is a serious entreatment that Paul gives his readers.

Note that unity is not something that needs to be worked up. It's something that has to be worked out and worked on. But unity is implicit in the gospel.

Look at it. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. That as sinners come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus as they're humbled unto grace.

[12:02] They are forced together. They're not only reconciled to God but they're reconciled to each other. That the gospel nets us into a family as adopted children of the living God.

That intrinsic, implicit in the gospel is unity. But we need to work on it. We need to work it out. We need to strive for it. We need to strain every muscle to keep it.

It is an absolute fruit of the gospel. But unity is a sweaty struggle to maintain. And it is of primary importance. How do you maintain it?

Well, by walking in a manner worthy of the gospel. What does that look like? Well, it looks like verse 2. That as the gospel does its work in our lives, it transforms us.

And Paul says that looks like this. Being completely humble. Not a place for me, myself and I. It's not a place of pride.

[13:09] It's not a place where we make it all about ourselves. But it's a place of humility. Where we put others first. Where we seek their best. We want to see them grow.

We want to see the spotlight shone on Christ. And not on us. We're content to be the backing singers. While Jesus takes center stage.

And you can see why that's important for unity. If I make it all about myself. It pushes everybody else away. You know that example of what is a boring person? Someone who talks about themselves when you really want to talk about yourself?

It's not to be it. It says be completely humble. And gentle. Not going around crushing and trampling on people.

If we do that, unity suffers. There was a baby and toddler group. I just popped in. People think I'm weird when I hang out with baby and toddler. Because I have no babies or toddlers. And there was a...

[14:12] One of the newborn babies was in a rocker. And there was a... And there was a... Boisterous boy who was playing with her. And the mum kept on saying, Be gentle.

Be gentle. Be gentle. Show real concern. Treat each other nicely. Don't hurt people.

Be gentle in your speech. Be gentle in your actions. Be gentle in your inactions. Don't show a lack of care.

Be gentle with one another. Be patient. It's come to my attention over 10 years of pastoral ministry that some people are quite frustrating.

And yet if you fly off the handle at every given moment of frustration, then unity is destroyed. And bear with one another in love.

[15:15] Do you know what? Bear with one another is slightly more than patience. It's not just actively not flying off the handle. It's moving towards those that we find difficult.

And we're to do it in love. And with gritted teeth or rolling eyes. And for that we need real grace. It takes real effort.

And our temptation is to say it's too hard. It's too much. They're too difficult. They've gone too far this time. They've wound me up too much. And yet that is to diminish grace.

And that is to forget all that Jesus has died for to make us one. Do you know what? Bruntsfield's never going to be the biggest church. No one's ever going to write a book about us.

No one's going to get a book deal about all that the Lord's doing here. But we could be the best church in certain areas. What if Bruntsfield strived to be the humblest church where Jesus shone as we decreased?

[16:14] What if we were the gentlest church where we treated everyone so gently and so nicely and so kindly and so well? What if we were the most patient church? What if we were the church that was able to bear with one another in love?

Not running away but running towards when it was difficult. Maintain the unity through the bond of peace. Strife is to be abnormal in the church.

Yes, there'll be friction and there'll be tension and there'll be flare-ups. But that's got to be the exception and not the rule. And it's how quickly we can rally around and put the fire out.

So what about you? When you look at verse 2, how are you doing? What does it reveal as it shines the light of God's word into your life? Anger?

Impatience? Unforgiveness? Pride? Selfishness? Well, let's let grace deal with it because unity is more important. See as well the part that truth plays in unity.

[17:22] There's one of everything. Only one. One body. One spirit. One hope. One faith. One baptism. One God. And Father of all.

The way the world does unity is let's decrease everything to its lowest common denominator. Then we'll get on. So the Muslims and the Hindus meet and they say, well, we could be united because we both believe in something.

The fact that Hindus believe in millions of God and the Muslims believe in one. Neither here nor there. Let's not talk about it because we're united. And Paul says real unity comes when truth is at the absolute center.

Where it's preserved and stuck to and celebrated. And therefore, as we celebrate, as we remember all that we hold in common. That's where real strong unity comes from.

Paul says unity will only exist where it will only last. And it will only be vivifying where the truth is celebrated and clung to.

[18:22] And it makes the church look like an unusual community. When the world looks in and sees a church fighting and divided, they say we want nothing to do with that.

We've got enough of that in our lives. But when the world looks in and sees weird people being a weird community together in a good way, they say I've never seen anything like this.

Where there's loads of people at every age and stage of life, sharing life together, bearing with one another. Treating each other well. There's something weird about those guys and I need to find out what.

What an opportunity then to say it's Jesus who makes it all possible. We use this word fellowship, don't we? Like if you're having coffee over the back fence with your neighbor, if they're a Christian, we call that fellowship.

And if they're a non-Christian, we say, well, that's friendship. The word fellowship is the Greek word *koinonia*. And it's the word you'd use for business partners. Who are joined together, who strive with common aims and common goals.

[19:29] They're going somewhere. They have written down how they're going to treat one another. The truths that they hold dear. Their aims and objectives and vision. And that's what fellowship is. That as a church, we're celebrating together everything.

That God has called us together in. Maintain our unity earnestly. Secondly, use your gifts gloriously. Verses 7 to 10.

But to each one, grace has been given as Christ apportioned. And then we get the quote from Psalm 68. And Psalm 68 is a victorious psalm as the conquering king rides into the city.

And the picture is this. It's like the victory parade. And the king rides in at the front of his army. And with him, he has all the spoils of war. And as his people gather and cheer and rejoice together, he distributes the gifts amongst his people.

Because it makes the king look glorious. And that's what it's saying here. That Christ Jesus has descended. He's fought a battle through his death against our sin and death and Satan.

[20:41] And he's won. And he's ascended. And as he's ascended, there's a victory parade. And amongst his people, he distributes gifts. That word *grace, ex gratia*, not saving grace, but gifts.

He gives gifts to his people. Why? To make them look glorious. To make him look glorious. If you are a Christian here today, God has given you a gift or gifts.

He's given you particular skills and abilities for you to use to make Jesus look glorious in his church. He's done it. Has Christ apportioned it?

He's measured it out. He's provided everything we need in our church to bring him the maximum glory amongst ourselves. Notice he's given us gifts, but he's also given us responsibilities.

We can't get out of things by saying it's not my gift. So when it comes to evangelism, we can't say I'm not a gifted evangelist, so we just stay quiet. When it comes to things like serving people, we go, well, serving people is not my gift, so that gets me out of it.

[21:49] Not at all. He's given us responsibilities. But he's also given us gifts. Things that only you can do to contribute to the work of the church to make Jesus look more glorious.

Yes. But we're all very British, aren't we? And we're all a little bit humble and self-effacing, and we put our hands in our pockets and shrug our shoulders and say, well, I don't have any gifts. Well, that would be to contradict God's word and say, well, this is a lie.

Or it either masks our sin and selfishness. It says we're not going to use them. Jesus, we're not going to use what you've given us to make you look glorious.

Giving of gifts, receiving of gifts, using of gifts. This is what Paul writes to Romans. To the Romans, we have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If it is serving, then serve it.

If it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then generously. If it is to lead, then do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

[22:57] What is your gift? How are you using it to make Christ look glorious? I'd love to help you with that. Loads of people would love to have a chat, and we'd love to plug you in, in a way you can use what Christ has given you to make him look good in this place.

Number three. Hone your lives biblically. Look at what he says in verse 11. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor, teachers.

He particularly emphasizes these four gifts. And these four gifts have one thing in common, because they're all word gifts. They're all about the revelation, spreading, and teaching of God's word.

Paul lays these out here, not because they're the most valuable, not that they're to be prized, not that they're to be elevated or pedestaled, but because they're to do with God's word. God's word is to be the driving force that drives everything else.

God's word is to be the driver. It is as we learn this book, we learn how to serve, how to give, how to show mercy, how to serve. It's this book that's going to drive everything else to make sure we do the right things for the right reason, to the glory of Christ.

[24:24] Our aim on that wall is to be people being transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ, and this book reveals it for us. God's word is to be the driver of everything.

So there was 12 authoritative apostles who revealed it to people. There were New Testament prophets who laid it out for people.

There were evangelists, people unusually gifted at communicating the gospel. Their pastor teaches to teach the whole counsel of God and to apply it to our lives.

And verse 12 tells us why. Not that they do all the work, not that we relinquish responsibility and sit in a hammock with a cigar wearing slippers. Christ has gifted them to the church to equip the people for works of service.

That's all of us. To equip the people for works of service. To get this word into our lives. So it might drive us to be the community that God wants us to be to make his gospel look great.

[25:29] To equip his people. Christ gave these gifts to certain people that we would be equipped for works of service so that the body of Christ might be built up.

To equip us all. To serve. Ultimate goal is this. Unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

Become mature. How do you know if you're mature? Well, if you're a cheese, you know how you're mature because you stink. If you're a red wine, you know if you're mature. Because you're expensive.

What if you're a Christian? How do you know if you're mature? Well, I think there's three things already. Your character. Are you a verse 2 kind of person? Do you reflect that in your life? Are you using your gifts to make Christ look glorious?

Are you united with your brothers and sisters in faith and knowledge of the Son of God? Attaining to the whole measure of Christ.

[26:36] There's a long way to go, isn't there, when we evaluate ourselves against that list. Feel like little boys, in short, trousers. But here's the key.

How do we get there? By pressing into this word. By honing our lives on this word. At university, I always went to church twice.

Not because I thought it would get me favor with God. Not because I was after some brownie points. Also, the coffee after the service was awful, so I had every reason not to go.

But the reason was, is there's an awful lot of Bible to learn. There's an awful lot of stuff to be equipped with. And I wanted to be dangerous for the Lord Jesus. I wanted to be dangerous. I wanted to be fruitful. I wanted to be growing and equipped. I wanted to be tooled up to take on the world. And the way to do that was to sit under the word. And have it permeate every area of my life.

[27:34] So I might be equipped to do works of service. That's what it's saying. Is your life honed biblically? Is this the blueprint for your living?

Is this the daily food of your soul? The insignia of your heart? The chorus of your mind? The words on your tongue? The joy of your existence? The melodic line of your day?

The progress chart for your growth? The telescope helping you see Jesus better? The love letter you read from God? The goal of your good days? The anchor for your bad days? The motivation on your lazy days?

Your comfort on your stressful days? Is this word the center soul and circumference of your life? Is it equipping you? Is it making you ready?

Is it teaching you about Jesus and uniting us together? God has gifted us word gifts in the church to make us dangerous for his son to make his son look glorious in our lives.

[28:31] You know your computer? I used to get the blue screen and it said driver error. Driver error was that two things weren't talking to each other and they weren't working properly.

The Bible is the driver for everything we do. So if we lose connection to this, it all starts to break down. We're learning and growing and being equipped together.

Together. Here's the last thing. Connect in Christ increasingly. Verses 14 to 16.

What are the results when Project Church functions like this? Where we're striving to keep unity, where we're using our gifts gloriously. And we're honing our lives biblically.

Well the first one is this. We've got safety and security. We'll no longer be infants. We'll no longer be those following anyone who will promise us sweets.

[29:34] We won't be like a little canoe on the ocean, battered and tossed back by winds and waves of doctrine. Maturity anchors us in Christ.

It gives us discernment and it helps us spot the wolves when they come. It helps us to sniff universalism and say that's not biblical. It helps us to see prosperity teaching and say that's a promise not in the Bible.

It helps us see legalism and say no it's grace. It helps us understand and live for Jesus in a way where we're not distracted or diverted or wandering down unhelpful paths.

Maturity keeps our life on course. But it also brings us together as we speak the truth in love. I think Ephesians 4 verse 15 is one of the most misused verses in the Bible.

That we use it as a catch-all for gossip. I think we should pray for Jennifer because Jennifer's an alcoholic. I'm just speaking the truth in love and we think that's acceptable. Or we tell people really tough things in really unloving ways and say well I'm just speaking the truth in love.

[30:47] It's not acceptable. The truth in Ephesians is always the gospel. Verse 15 says when the church is united together what it means is that we're going to speak the gospel all the time to each other in love.

Why in love? Because we want to see it take root and bear fruit in people's lives. So everyone reaches maturity. No spiritual Peter Pans.

No one left behind. Not individualism with some running ahead. But as a group project everyone moving to maturity together. Helping each other along.

Do you know what the world record for the longest surviving headless chicken is? Apparently if you cut a chicken's head off it can stay alive and runs around like a headless chicken. Do you know how long somebody kept one alive?

18 months. Mike the headless chicken stayed alive for 15 months in the home of Lloyd Olsen in Fruita, Colorado.

[31:52] But in verse 16 it says, verse 15 the end of it says the church isn't a headless chicken. It has a head and his name is Jesus. And as we grow towards him we grow together.

Jesus is the glue that knits it all together. And as I lie awake at night thinking about Brunsfield and I see the great credible diversity that we've got going on.

How is it all going to stay together? How are we going to keep such a broad range of people together? Moving together. Moving together. Growing together. Well it's right here because it's Jesus.

As we all grow closer to him. We all grow closer together. Jesus and only Jesus joins us. If you're not a Christian here today we're so pleased you're here.

But know that you'll always be an outsider looking in. Because until you're connected to the head through faith in Christ. You will never really be a part of his body.

[32:55] Because the church isn't a headless chicken. Look at verse 16 and then we're done. From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament. Grows and builds itself up in love.

As each part does its work. Every part does its work. I think I'm getting old because I wake up in the morning and some parts of my body hurt and I don't even know what I did.

So I have a bad knee but I'm a man so I never go to the doctor. So I hobble around like John Wayne. But my right knee overcompensates. So then my right knee starts to hurt.

Then I'm walking weird so my hip hurts and then my back hurts and then my shoulder hurts. It's all because my knee wasn't doing its thing properly. That's what it says about our church.

We're all different parts of the body and if you don't do your bit then everybody has to overcompensate. And we end up walking like Quasimodo. It's the point.

[33:57] We've got to pull our weight. There's no spectators. Every part doing its work. No consumers. Ephesians 4 is such a rich chapter and it is just where we are as a church.

And here's our goals. Four things. Maintain our unity earnestly. Earnestly. Striving. If there's gaps let's close them.

If there's rifts. Let's look to Jesus and trust grace. Use your gifts gloriously. What are they? And how can we use them to build up the body and make Jesus look great?

Let the world see what Jesus is like. Hone our lives biblically. Get as much of this word into your life. Listen on Sunday. Go to your home group in the week.

Read the Bible one-to-one with somebody. Do daily devotions. Let this word shape and drive everything about you. And connect in Christ increasingly.

[35:01] As we all grow towards him. Captivated by him. Suddenly we all realize that we're incredibly close together. When he is our goal. He is our aim.

He is our joy. Let's pray. Father God we long to be your body. Connected to your son our head.

We long to be a peculiar people. Peculiar that grace is growing us.

Uniting us. Maturing us. Enabling us to serve. Enabling us to put your glory on full display. Father we're so conscious that we're not what you'd have us be.

So may grace abound. May your spirit have free reign. May your word equip us. And Father may you do your work for your glory. Father we're so conscious.

[35:59] That the world will know that we're your son's disciples. By the way that we love one another. And how we long for this community of Brunsfield. To see us not as an annoyance.

Not as a historic club trying to keep up tradition. But as a living body of your son the Lord Jesus.

Father expand your kingdom and do it. Through uniting us.

Equipping us. And sending us out. As we serve together for your glory. Father do this by your spirit for your glory. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36:53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.