

As Each Part Does Its Work

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Date: 21 April 2024

Preacher: Trevor Archer

[0 : 00] Thank you. It is a joy to be with you. If you've got your Bibles open, it's Ephesians 4, but we're also going to look a little bit at Ephesians 1. As an American pastor some years ago wrote a best-selling book, as it turned out to be, about the local church, its core conviction was this.

The local church is the apple of God's eye. It's the focal point of all that he is doing in the world. Now, look around.

Look at one another. This was his conviction. If you're a Christian here this morning, part of this local church, you are part of being the apple of God's eye, the focal point of all that he's doing in the world.

That actually well reflects the main theme of Ephesians as a letter. In fact, there's no other letter in the New Testament that kind of has such an expansive, such a soaring, such a cosmic view of the place of the local church, which looks so ordinary.

Look at that. Look at one another. So ordinary. So weak. So apparently ineffective and inconsequential. But in God's economy, it's these companies of God's people, small and large, scattered around the world throughout time, is the focal point of all that he's doing against the back cloth of all that is happening in the world, the rise and fall of nations, the coming and going of prime ministers, wars and times of peace.

[1 : 45] God is working constantly, and he's doing that through the local church. And the point is, in chapter 1, verse 10, the whole unfolding storyline of the Bible is encapsulated in the fact, in the story of salvation, which is a story of God working every single day through his people in the world, through the whole course of human history, with one great aim.

There it is in verse 10, to bring all things in heaven and earth under Christ. That's where it's going. If you're a Christian, that's your destiny. That's where you and I are going.

And Ephesians shows us, through Jesus' death and resurrection, how God will bring into being this new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, as it's called elsewhere in the book of Revelation.

It's the kind of world that we long for. It's the kind of world that we sing about. Famously, John Lennon sang about it in the 60s and 70s with that song, Imagine.

Most of you are of an age and time, well, you'll remember that song. But what was he singing about? He said, I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be at one.

[3 : 02] The world longs for peace. The world longs for unity. The world longs for oneness. But it can't deliver it. It's not in the power of humankind to deliver the kind of world that we want.

And yet, the fact that we long for that kind of world is all part and parcel of the imprint of God's image in our heart and our soul. We've lost that world. We lost it in Genesis.

But it's a world that's going to be regained, as John Milton put it, paradise regained, that's spoken about in the book of Revelation. That's the journey of the Bible, from paradise lost to paradise regained.

But that world isn't going to be regained by human beings. It's going to be regained by the intervention of God. And he's begun that through the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what's going on in history, against the butt cloth of all that's going on in our own lives, and in the history of our nation, and the history of the world right now? It's this. God is building his church.

[4 : 07] As Ephesians puts it, one world, one body, one people. And before we get to the passage in Ephesians 4 this morning, I just want to remind you, if you're a Christian, of something that you're in danger of missing every day and losing sight of, and I can see from some of your faces that you're losing sight of it, it's the incredible privilege of being a Christian.

It might not feel like that here this morning, but if you're a Christian, you are amongst the most privileged people in all the world.

You really are. Why? Well, as Ephesians 1 puts it in verse 4, you're chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Or again, adopted as God's sons, heirs of all that he owns, to be adopted into the family of God.

The story is told of the little boy who was adopted, and he was getting a lot of grace from his mates at school. And in the end, he turned around and said, at least my father chose me.

Your fathers had no choice in the matter. You were just given to them. Isn't that brilliant? Adoption is at the heart of the Christian experience.

[5 : 27] A father in heaven who so loved you personally that he purposed, he chose you to adopt you into his family.

Paul is saying to this ragamuffin church in Ephesus, this is who you are. Christian here today in Brunfield, this is who you are. You are chosen.

You are adopted. You are, verse 7, redeemed through the death of Christ. As Peter puts it, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

How much does God love you? That much. To give his son. You fathers here, can you imagine any scenario where you're willing to give up your child to rescue another person?

This is the immensity of God's heart and God's love that he has given his very best, his only begotten son, to rescue us. That's the value that he puts upon having you in his family.

[6 : 30] Do you see the thing? You couldn't be of greater value. You couldn't be of greater worth. You couldn't be of more significance. This is your identity. And that's why, because we're sealed with the Holy Spirit, verses 13 and 14, there's a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance so that we cry in our heart, Abba, Father, we are aware of our relationship with God, that we are called to live, verse 12, for the praise of his glory.

I'm sure you've been through Ephesians 1 at some point. If not, it's a great passage to return to. But that's who we are as Christians. And I just want to remind us of that. Before we come to chapter 4 today, because getting hold of that is so important to our everyday life and service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or as it puts it in chapter 1, in verse 1 of chapter 4, as a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

You see, as a Christian, you've been chosen, you've been adopted, you've been called into God's family, and he's given you a purpose. And the purpose is to live a life worthy of who you are.

Remember that film, Saving Private Ryan? There's a very poignant scene at the end of it, where 50 years or so later, Private Ryan, now an old man, returns to visit the grave of Captain John Miller, who had led that band of people.

[8 : 10] It's a true story, isn't it? He'd led those troops to rescue Private Ryan. And he's there now, Private Ryan, with his wife, with his children, with his grandchildren.

They're all gathered around that grave in France, in that cemetery. And he turns to his wife, and he says, tell me that I've earned it.

Tell me that I've earned it. You see, he was aware that the sacrifice, what was made for him, had granted him a life that John Miller never knew. He was aware of the enormity of the cost of it.

And his instinct was, tell me that I've earned it. Tell me that I've earned it. That's so, so related to that deep instinct within us that thinks we can earn our salvation.

Do you see the point? We can't earn it. There's nothing we can do to earn our salvation. It's a gift of God. Those words of Private Ryan are the very antithesis, the very opposite of the gospel.

[9 : 18] Because the gospel says you can't earn it. It's a gift. The gift of faith, the gift of grace given to you. You can't earn your salvation.

God has done it all. And knowing that God has done it all, knowing that we respond to God, not out of duty, but out of love.

The Christian life isn't duty, it's devotion. It's the response to love. Knowing that he's done all those things for me, what can I do but love him in return, with his help, day by day?

It's the response of love. And here in the verse 1 to 16 of chapter 4, it spells out kind of what it means, therefore, to live a life of devotion.

What's the implications for us, as a local church, to the immensity of God's love and God's goodness to us? Well, it is simply this.

[10:17] First, it's to be a peacemaker. And secondly, it's to be a bodybuilder. A peacemaker and a bodybuilder. Verses 1 to 6.

As we've already seen, you see, there's an instinctive longing in the human heart for peace, for unity. We have things like the United Nations. The nations come together, long for unity. But if anything so illustrates the total impotence of a nation or nations to get together to create unity, it's the United Nations. We have a united kingdom.

It's a very dangerous thing to talk about in Scotland, isn't it? The united kingdom. You see, there's this longing in all of us for unity, for togetherness.

But as we've already seen, left to ourselves, we can't create that. But the gospel creates it. Christ has won the peace and he's created unity for his family.

[11:22] Firstly, Paul talks about it in chapter 2. It's a peace between God and his people. In Christ, verse 13, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

He himself is our peace. But it's not until we have that vertical peace with God that we can begin to have peace with one another. You'll never have horizontal peace between people.

Without first, you have that vertical peace between a person and God. That's what God is creating in the gospel. Verse 14 of chapter 2, He has made the two groups, Jew and Gentile, naturally hostile to one another, one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

You see, the gospel has the power to do something that no other human institution, philosophy, religion, whatever you might want to call it, has the power to do.

It's to create a global community. And you can illustrate this very easily. You've had surely the experience of being somewhere else. You're away on holiday, whatever it might be, and you meet another Christian.

[12:32] And immediately, there's a bond between you. Now, last May, I think it was, I was very happily walking along the promenade in a place called St. Brellard's Bay in Jersey.

Beautiful. And the sun was shining, and like the typical Brit abroad, I had my T-shirt, take my T-shirt off, have my knotted hanky on my head, no, I didn't really.

But we're just walking along there, Val and I, and then suddenly, this guy leans over outside of this, it's kind of like a hotel, but it was all open. And he said, Trevor, it's Trevor, it's Trevor, isn't it?

I go, who's this guy? It was your pastor. And that's why we're here today. It was a direct result. But the amazing thing, isn't it?

You've surely been there. There's an immediate rapport. There's an immediate brotherhood, isn't there? You're in the family. You've never met them before, but they're a brother and sister in Christ.

[13:35] It's just one of the reflections of what God does in the gospel. It's incredible, isn't it? God brings us together. But it's not man-made, it's God-made.

We don't create this unity, it's a given. But you remember what Paul says here in Ephesians? Maintain the unity of the gospel in the bond of peace.

You see, unity is not something we create, it's given. You're in Christ, I'm in Christ, it's given. All we can do is destroy it.

Or maintain it, which is Paul's point here. He's calling us to be peacemakers. Not so much peacemakers, but actually peacekeepers to maintain the unity in the bond of peace.

The challenge here is not to destroy what God instinctively and intrinsically creates in the gospel. But how do we do that?

[14:37] Well, Paul is really helpful here because he tells us four ways in which we can keep the peace. The first is there in verse 1 or verse 2.

Be completely humble. Be completely humble. You see, this is why I wanted to remind us who we are in Christ. If you know yourself to be chosen and adopted and the recipient of God's grace and totally unworthy of it but lavished with his love, if you know yourself to be made alive to God, to be given a glorious hope of the future, surely there's no room for pride in that, is there?

It's all stuff that God has done for you. You haven't achieved it. You're not better than the next person. Very often you're worse than the next person. But this is what God has done.

And if he's done it by himself, humbling himself unto death. So there's no room in the Christian life for pride. Now, that's easy to say but pride is the first thing to enter us.

It's the heart of sin, isn't it, after all? The big eye. And it's the last thing to leave us. That self-preservation, that instinct to want to be first, to be noticed, to be applauded.

[16:02] It's profound. And yet, here in the Gospel, God sets about making his people a humble people. Not a Uriah Heep kind of humble.

Charles Dickens wrote about, you know, oh, I'm ever so humble. Not that kind of thing. But the outlook upon life that realizes that all I am and all I have been given is a result of the grace of God. And it's astonishing. It's wonderful. And I'm valued by God beyond my wildest imagination. C.S. Lewis put it like this.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. That's brilliant, isn't it? It's not thinking less of yourself.

Don't devalue the value that God has given to you. You're the most privileged person in the universe. But because of that, think of yourself less.

[17:05] Reflect the Father. Reflect the image of the Son. Reflect the Spirit that indwells you, that looks to the needs of others. Think of the people who've made the greatest impact on your Christian life.

Have you got them? Got that person? Probably several. But that one person. I would venture to say that the quality that has impressed you and left such an impression upon you by that person is that they were humble.

They were humble because they denied themselves. They put up with you. I'm thinking of one guy particularly, a guy called Ian Oliver who when I became a Christian for probably two years, every Thursday lunchtime, we would meet up, I'm showing my age now, at the Wimpy Bar.

I don't know if you still have Wimpy Bars. They were the precursor of McDonald's. And we would meet up in the Wimpy Bar in Leicester Square for an hour and he was basically discipling me. It cost him a lot. Every time he paid for the meal. But it wasn't simply the cash it cost him. He gave his time. Not only the hour we were there, the half hour each way that it took him to get there.

[18:24] All the way through there was that sacrifice, there was that humility in order to bless me. You've all got people in your lives like that. That it costs them. It costs them to serve you, to grow you in the faith.

They were humble. They wanted your best. They wanted your flourishing. They wanted your improvement as a Christian. Paul goes on to say, be completely humble and gentle.

How quickly unity is fractured by our lack of gentleness. You see, gentleness comes from a heart that knows the Saviour. The one who said, come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for I am gentle and lowly of heart.

gentle is not weak. We're told Moses was the meekest man upon the face of the earth. He was a strong man.

He once killed another person. He was probably a very big, powerful guy. But God said he was meek. He was gentle. Why? Because he'd experienced the love and the grace and the mercy and the humbling of God.

[19:37] And that made him gentle. This is the point that's being made here, isn't it? This same spirit of Christ, the one who is gentle and lowly, is a spirit that indwells you and me, Christian.

So let's be gentle with one another. It's the secret of true unity. The third way is that of patience. Verse 2 again, be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love. See, none of us, this might come as a surprise, none of us are the finished product.

We're not in heaven yet. So we struggle with sin every day. We struggle with the old nature. We're all work in progress. I had a friend from Northern Ireland, one of the elders at Chessington, who took 18 months off of his work to come and serve in the church.

And after two months he came to me and he was quite troubled because he thought, you see, working in a church was the ideal job. He thought, this is it. I can leave my business in the oil business and all the aggravation of that.

[20:46] I'll be working in a church. It will be a taste of heaven. And he said to me, Trevor, I've come to the conclusion that Christians are great at loving one another from a distance.

Isn't that true? I can love anybody from a distance. But you put me in a team with them. I want to do it this way. They want to do it that way. It's a recipe for conflict and disaster, isn't it?

I need to be patient. Once I was in the Philippines with another of the elders from Chessington visiting a missionary couple that we'd sent from Chessington.

And we were walking along this street one day on the island of Mindoro and this guy was coming towards us and he had a T-shirt on and it said on the front, don't give up on me. Now, in the Philippines, it's a wonderful climate, just like Edinburgh on a spring day. Everybody's walking about in their T-shirt and shorts. That's all you need. And they've all got emblazoned with little messages on the front.

[21 : 54] So we're thinking, this is probably a pop group. Don't give up on me. Strange name, but nevertheless, probably a name of a pop group. But the answer came when he walked past us and on the back of the T-shirt it said, God's not finished with me yet.

Don't give up on me. God's not finished with me yet. Christian, in our dealings with one another, remember that. God's not finished with that brother and sister yet, just as he's not finished with you. And the older you get, this is my experience, I want to speak on behalf of my wife on this occasion as well, I think it's this. You realize how innately selfish and self-centered you are.

And it's a lifetime experience of God, the Holy Spirit, striving with you through disappointments, through failure, through tragedies, in order that we might bear the resemblance more of his son. Don't give up on me. God's not finished with me yet. So be patient. You see, patience, what does patience do? Patience extends to other Christians the thing that we're very good at extending to ourselves.

[23 : 08] Patience. We're always ready to excuse ourselves, aren't we? There's always a reason why I've acted in a certain way. I can be patient with myself because, wow, I'm still a work in progress.

Yeah, but so is the other Christian. They're a work in progress as well. We're all a work in progress. So be humble, be gentle, be patient. Make every effort, he says here.

Make every effort because there was nothing half-hearted in the way that the Lord Jesus gave his life to seek and save the lost. So being a peacemaker has those four elements to it.

Humility, gentleness, patience, and the desire to go the extra mile, to make every effort. Take the initiative of sorting out differences.

Is that instinctive to us? No, it's a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Well, let them come. Let them come and say sorry to me first.

[24 : 11] Then we'll get reconciled. Is that how God acted towards you, towards me? No, exactly the opposite. He came seeking and saving the lost.

He took the initiative. Making every effort is actually swallowing our pride, emulating the Savior, making every effort to be patient with that person, to be united with that person for whom God has joined together.

As we say at the marriage ceremony, let no man put asunder. See, unity to God is precious to him. It's the marriage of his bride to his son.

Let what God has put together, let no man put asunder. It's a fearful thing to cause another Christian, especially a younger Christian, to fall and stumble and fall away because of our lack of humility, because of our lack of gentleness, because of our lack of making every effort to be patient and even be ready to be wronged in order to be a peacekeeper.

It's a big calling, isn't it? This is massive. But it's also accompanied by another thing, isn't it? Verses 7 to 16. We're getting towards the end now. We must close. And that's to be a body builder.

[25 : 31] What's it say here? Verse 16, as each part does its work. What is that work? It's the work of building up the church. And the point of building up the church is not that we can have a nice club where we're all good mates with one another.

It's always for the benefit of the world outside. Do you remember that Psalm? I think it's Psalm 133 talks about how blessed it is with brothers and sisters dwell together in unity, for there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Flip that around for a minute, would you? What happens when a church becomes disunited? What's the first thing to go? You tell me. What's the first thing to go?

Graham? See, it's the only name I know in the room. Well, I know his wife's name, Alex, but I'm not going to ask her because she's going to give us lunch later. What's the first thing to go when a church is disunited?

A heart for the world, isn't it? There the Lord bestows his blessing when a church is united. The converse is true. When a church is disunited, it loses a concern for the world outside.

[26 : 42] And the world outside looks at it and says, don't talk to me about a message of peace and unity, how God has reconciled it. it hasn't.

Look at you. You're arguing with one another. You're disunited. The message has no value. They can discard the gospel. You see, unity is just so core to the proclamation of the gospel. But how does the church grow? How does it become strong? Well, verse 7 and 8, to each one, grace has been given as Christ appointed it. This is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

This is how the church grows. That's a reference to actually Psalm 68 that has a picture of a conquering general who's giving out the gifts, giving out the spoils to his army. And here's the conquering king, here's the Lord Jesus Christ, and he's about building his kingdom in the world through ordinary men and women like you and I, aware of our frailties, aware of our failings, aware of our sin, but redeemed, made right with God, and empowered to reach out with this gospel through the grace God gives us.

[28 : 06] To each one, grace has been given. And Paul here isn't talking about so much salvation grace as service grace, the ability to use the gift God has given us for the glory of his name.

A variety of gifts are given in chapter 4, aren't they, that display our unity and our diversity. But actually, Paul doesn't list here, he does elsewhere what these gifts are, but here he talks rather about the role.

So, he says in verse 11, Christ himself gave apostles and prophets. Now, they're not the Old Testament prophets, they're the early New Testament prophets that together with the apostles gave us what we call the New Testament, a Bible for every generation.

But then he goes on in verse 11, then there are evangelists, pastor, teachers, shepherds, who all have this one thing in common, they share and teach the word of God.

In other words, God gives every local church, its leaders, in order that the church, every member of the church, might flourish together.

[29 : 17] Church is never to be a spectator sport. You see, if only they'd listened to me last night, Chelsea would be in the cup final today. But they didn't.

And the problem was they couldn't hear me. I mean, I was shouting at them from 400 miles away at a TV screen. Living the Christian life is not a spectator sport.

That's the point. It's not that the pastor, teachers, the evangelists, they're the ones out there doing the work, and I'm just shouting them on, go for it, go for it, Graham. No, no, no.

They're like player coaches. They're on the pitch, and we're on the pitch. And their role is to use the word of God to encourage us, to equip us, to strengthen us, to challenge us, to inspire us, so that each member does its part.

That's a glorious picture, isn't it, of unity, of body, that God says here, God has given to every Christian a gift, many gifts very often, but at least one gift.

[30 : 25] At least one gift. So if you know Christ this morning, have you asked yourself, what is that gift that God has given to me? What are those gifts that God has given to me?

And how does he want me to use them in his body, and where can I serve him? I'm about the day and age where I can remember choruses from being sent to Sunday school as a child.

Although it wasn't a Christian home, I was sent to a brethren Sunday school. There's one that always stays with me. There's a work for Jesus. How does it continue? Those of you that know it, come on, don't be shy, you brethren amongst us.

There's a work for Jesus. None, dearie me, none but you can do. I really am aged, aren't I? There's a work for Jesus. None but you can do.

It's a great thing, isn't it? See, you live next door to those neighbours. It's only you. You are in that office, in that university, in that college, in that school.

[31 : 25] You're in that workplace. There's a work for Jesus. Only you can do. God has gifted every one of us and set us in our different places and given us this work to do.

And we're in it together and we're a team together and we need one another together. And as Graham mentioned at the beginning, we come together on a Sunday to encourage one another, to remind ourselves who we are, to patch up some wounds, if needs be, in order that we can go back on the front line on Monday morning.

Because that's the picture. The church is an army, Ephesians 6. We're in a spiritual battle. It requires prayer. It requires protection. It requires that we support one another.

Because that's the way an army wins the victory. It's a glorious picture, isn't it? So here we are, called to be peacemakers and to be body builders. We build ourselves up in all sorts of ways, not just here on a Sunday. When we meet with another Christian, perhaps read the Bible with them, or just over a cup of coffee. [32 : 36] When we invite people into our homes. When we meet in our small groups. When we serve together in teams. I want to do it this way, you want to do it that way. What did that guy say on Sunday about unity?

Yeah, let me start to be a bit humble. This is the way it works. It's a glorious thing when you see God at work in a group of Christians who are so diverse in so many different ways. Educationally, socially, racially. It's only God can do this in the gospel. It's a glorious thing to behold, isn't it? It's for his praise and glory. Friends, as you know, we live in a comfortable, pleasure-seeking, self-seeking culture.

And it can be like a cancer to the soul. And we need to repudiate that culture and the spirit of the age and have the spirit of the master who says, I've not come to be served, but to serve. So this gospel is gloriously counterculture. It means that daily the Lord calls us to follow him, to follow him.

[33 : 48] in a life that's characterized by unity, humility, and a desire to build up by fellow Christians, that together we can reach out to the glory of God, to a lost world around us.

Well, may the Lord empower us daily to live up to our calling. That's our calling. Whatever day job we do, this is our calling, Christian. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this glorious book of Ephesians. We thank you for the remarkable, the astonishing example of the Lord Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve. Lord, help us to embrace that every day when our old nature constantly wants to be served. Help us, Father, indeed, to be peacemakers. Help us, even this day, if we need to, to reach out to another Christian, to put things right and show the glory of the gospel to reconcile.

Help us, Lord, to be those who want to use our gift to build up the church. Thank you that you've gifted every one of us, no matter what our age, what our situation.

[35 : 03] Thank you, Father, for that gift of prayer that you so often have given to our older brothers and sisters who do this invaluable work behind the scene to strengthen those on the front line.

Lord, in all these things, may Jesus Christ be glorified, we pray. Help us, we ask, day by day to live to your glory and for our good. Amen. Amen.

Amen.