

Ephesians 4:1-16

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[0:00] Thank you, Rob, for leading us. If you closed your Bibles, please open them back up to Ephesians chapter 4.

We're going to think about what God says to us through the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the Ephesian believers. I read Ephesians 4, 1 through 16.

I'm going to say a few brief words about verses 1 to 6, but we're going to spend most of our time thinking about verses 7 to 16. This is a passage, well, actually just before this, in chapter 3, verse 21, is a passage that bothered me when I was sitting in Books and Beans on Belmont Street in about 2007.

As to my shame that it bothered me, it showed not that God's word was wrong and that I was right, but quite the other, that I had some faulty thinking. If I was bothered by something God's word said. It's this verse that bothered me. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[1:14] Maybe you're wondering why on earth would that bother somebody. I loved the idea of God being glorified in Christ Jesus. I was very Christ-centered in my thinking.

By God's grace, I think I've grown in that, that I'm even more so now, but I was then. I was Christ-centered and I loved the idea that the Father, that God would be glorified in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.

What bothered me was that the church was put seemingly on equal footing with Christ. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

I thought, that seems inappropriate, doesn't it? To put the church alongside Jesus like that? I mean, I know that he bought her, that she is his bride, but she's not divine like he is.

The church is not as important as Jesus. Jesus, why is Paul putting them right here next to each other? But all it did was show me that I had a bad view of the church.

[2:16] And I needed to grow in my appreciation for the church so that I could with confidence say, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever.

And over the next number of years now, what's it been, 11 years since then, I've grown in my love for the church. And one of the passages that has been so helpful in that for me personally is this next part, right after that verse, in Ephesians chapter 4.

As we learned last week, as Dominic was preaching from Ephesians 3, Christ has already made one people out of warring factions, out of Jews and Gentiles.

He has broken down in his body the dividing wall of hostility, making one new body in Christ by the Spirit. He's already done that. It's a finished fact.

But as Dominic pointed out with wisdom last week, we don't exactly live that out. But by God's Spirit, he helps us live out that unity that he has created in his Son.

[3:32] And it's in chapter 4 that Paul begins to get very practical with how to live this unity in Christ out in everyday life, in the church.

So in the beginning of chapter 4, he urges us that we are one. That kind of captures what he's been arguing for the first three chapters.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another.

Well, that's very practical, isn't it? Maybe I'm the only one that somebody needs to be patient with and bear with, though I doubt it. There's probably others, maybe even in this room, that you need to be patient with in order to have this oneness that Christ has bought.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, the unity that the Spirit has already worked. Make every effort to keep that with the bond of peace.

[4 : 38] Now, listen to all these ones that Paul writes. 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 who's Lord over all. Then, as Paul so often does, after highlighting again the unity that we have together in Christ, he then begins to talk about the diversity within that unity.

So he says in verse 7, Now, this is not just the grace.

Not just the grace. This sounds like it's demeaning, this grace. It's not the grace of salvation that he's talking about here. That is truly a grace given to each of us in Christ.

But he goes on to make it clear that this grace that Christ apportions to each one of us has to do with a gracious gift to each one of us.

[5 : 51] Let's think about that a little bit more. It's interesting, though, how Paul goes about talking about the grace that has been apportioned to each one of us diversely.

First, he focuses our attention on Christ himself. He elaborates on Jesus. He always seems to do this. So we're going to spend some time thinking about how he describes Jesus in this context of talking about diverse roles that we have within this one body.

So he focuses on Jesus first. Then he focuses on a particular gift, the gift of a leader in the church or leaders in the church. And then after that, he focuses on everybody.

So we're going to take those steps. And for each of those three steps, looking at Jesus, looking at pastors and teachers, and then looking at all of us, I'm going to give an illustration of that by something around the world that involves my work with Training Leaders International, where we train pastors and other church leaders around the world.

So we'll look at the text. I'll give a little glimpse of an update on my work. And then I'll ask some questions that will probably make all of us squirm. And then we'll repeat the process.

[7 : 13] Look at the text. Tell an example from TLI. And then ask some questions that will make us uncomfortable. And then do it a third time. So I hope you're ready. It's, I hope, God's Word that will make you uncomfortable.

Though some of you it will encourage and not make uncomfortable. Let's look at Jesus. Verses 7 to 11. 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 led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. What does he ascended mean?

Except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

It is he. It was he who gave. And then he goes into leaders. That's a good chunk of thinking about Jesus before he even gets to us.

[8 : 18] Who is this Jesus? Christ is the one who apportions things. It is Christ who has ascended on high. It is Christ who, in fact, is higher than all the heavens and is active.

This is a picture of a victorious, enthroned king that is active in his people. And this is really important. To start our understanding of us as the church, to start it with thinking more about our victorious, enthroned king and how he is active.

In order to fill the whole universe, just another quirky side note about how off my thinking can be sometimes.

When I first read this, that he who descended has now ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe, I originally pictured something like Jafar in Aladdin.

At the end of that movie, if you haven't seen it, don't worry about it. But if you have, I pictured, like Jafar, becoming a genie and beginning to grow physically until he burst out of earth and up into the outer space and had phenomenal cosmic power.

[9 : 36] He filled the whole universe. And I thought, that's weird. Think about Jesus doing that, filling the whole universe. But as I've thought about it a bit more and learned from others, I don't think that's what it's describing.

Jesus ascended and sat down on the throne and fills like someone pouring out liquid into a cup. He pours out his spirit and fills the universe with grace and good gifts.

That's what he's about to go and talk about. So this is not Jesus growing up into some mammoth being that physically extends to the borders of the universe. But rather, this is the enthroned Christ who is pouring out and filling up like a cup with grace and gifts.

The universe, in fact. Paul's already written about Jesus ascending. Look at Ephesians.

Just flip the page over. Ephesians chapter 1, verses 19 to 23. Paul's talking about the power that is at work in us who believe.

[10:50] And he says, that power is like the working of God's mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given.

Not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body.

The fullness of him who fills everything in every way. That's amazing. God has exalted Christ, enthroned him above everything, everything's under his feet to be the head over everything for the church.

This is who Jesus is. A tremendously glorious, victorious king over everything, not just over those who believe, over everything.

And he's doing that for the church. So that's who Jesus is that Paul focuses our attention on.

[12:17] Let me tell you a few stories about this Christ on the field, further afield than here. I work for a mission agency, Training Leaders International.

As David said, our mission, our goal is to train, well, our goal is to strengthen the global church. That's the ultimate goal. Strengthen the global church.

And the way that we do that is by training her leaders how to understand scripture and communicate it. So we travel around the world, my colleagues and I, and we train people who are already in leadership in the church, mostly in the majority world, and we teach them the best we can by God's spirit how to understand scripture.

And they become more effective leaders within Christ's church. Here in the West, this will put it in context for you, here in the West, in the UK and in the USA in particular, there is one trained pastor. So somebody like David, somebody who has had training in scripture, in theology, one trained pastor for every 250 Christians in the West. If you go outside of the West to the majority world, there is one trained pastor for every 450,000 Christians.

[13:50] 450,000 Christians and there's one person who has been trained in scripture to lead them in right thinking, in understanding Christ, understanding God and His mission.

So we go around the world to help strengthen the church by training her leaders in God's word. One of the things we see all over the place, not just in the church in the West, but all over the place around the world, we see people who have a very fuzzy understanding of God.

The people who are already pastors with a very fuzzy view of who God is and what God does, who Jesus is and what Jesus does, and it comes out in their teaching.

We see all over the place people who think that if you give money to the church, then Jesus will bless you with health, He'll fix all of your ailments right now, He'll give you wealth, He'll give you prosperity.

If He's not, then either you don't trust Him enough or maybe it's that you're not giving enough to us, but this is what Jesus wants to do. He wants to give you health and wealth and prosperity right now.

[15:10] That is one of the most prevalent views around the world that we find among pastors.

And then we open scripture with them and they begin to see this image of Jesus. the Jesus who is enthroned and in fact who will give health and even an inheritance that no one can imagine in the end, but who does not do that yet.

Who sovereignly chooses from His throne to have a very different timing than we would choose. But He's the one enthroned over everything.

It's His right to do what He sees fit. When people, the pastors around the world begin to get this view of Jesus enthroned and sovereign, apportioning as He wants to His people, they've talked to us like one man named Baloo who is my translator in North India.

He described these views that he used to hold and how this is just transforming His ministry to realize that Jesus is in control. And that this idea that Jesus will just do whatever we want Him to do if we give enough money, that that's completely false.

So His idea and His preaching are beginning to be shaped by the Word and His understanding of the enthroned Christ. It's very practical when you get a vision of who Jesus really is from His Word.

[16:38] Baloo's expectations of Jesus have had to shift based on what Scripture says about Jesus. What about ours? Is that only in North India?

Or is that only in the majority world that our expectations have to shift in light of Scripture? Or might that happen here too? For example, how much does this vision of the resurrected, powerful Christ affect you daily?

how much does it shape what you do? How you talk to people? I confess that I need to be shaped by this.

I think often about Christ crucified for my sins. Amen. What about Christ raised from the dead and seated on the throne? Does it affect us?

I think it practically, it should practically affect how we live and how we talk to people. Maybe our expectations of who God is will shift a little bit when we start wrestling with this vision of Jesus.

[17 : 51] Well, this Jesus gives gifts to His church and He does it for a purpose. So let's now shift, as Paul does in this passage, from a focus on Christ Himself to now look at some of the gifts that He gives to His church.

So look at Ephesians 4. Verse 11 is where it begins to shift. It was He, this Jesus, who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. So, one of the things that Jesus, enthroned over everything, does for His church is give leaders to His church.

He gave apostles and prophets, who Paul has described as the foundation on which the church is built up. He gives evangelists, people to speak His good news to unbelievers, and He gives pastors and teachers who are here to do something not for unbelievers, but for believers.

Does that bother you? That Jesus gives pastors and teachers specifically for believers? Let's look at what it says.

[19 : 12] Why did Jesus give pastors and teachers? Look at verse 11, sorry, verse 12. He gave some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service.

Or some translations that you have might say to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Why did Jesus give pastors and teachers?

Is it for the pastor or teacher to do the work of ministry? This is where it's going to get uncomfortable because that's a dominant view in the church.

Jesus has given pastors and teachers to do the work of ministry. Who's called to the ministry? The pastor. Is that right? Why did Jesus give pastors and teachers to the church?

To equip the saints for the work of ministry. That's slightly different. We're going to think about that more in just a few moments, but let me tell you a little bit about a man named Bayani.

[20 : 22] I was recently in the Philippines just about a month and a half ago. For Training Leaders International, I'm the director of curriculum development. So I'm in charge of a team that produces, writes the courses that our trainers then take and go around the world to teach the pastors and leaders.

teachers. And just recently I got the privilege of going myself to the Philippines to try out to field test course one of a new nine courses that we're writing.

So we wrote course one and we got to go try it out. And we met a man named Bayani. Bayani is a pastor in Luzon, the northern big island of the Philippines.

And he brought two of his elders to this training. So Bayani and two of his elders were going through this learning how to interpret scripture and he was so honest. It was refreshing to have somebody like him.

He was honest about some of the difficulties in pastoring in the Philippines. And here are some of the things he mentioned. It is hard to be a pastor when the congregation expects you to do certain things, to be a certain way, but you think that Christ expects you to do something different.

[21 : 43] That's hard. And he said he spent the first half of his pastoral career simply trying to do whatever the congregation expected him to do. And he was having a very hard time of it.

For example, his congregation expected that he would develop great youth programs. Now as good as those are, is that the pastor's role?

He said another pressure that he received was visiting the sick and the shut-ins, those who couldn't come out. Is that the pastor's role?

Is that what Jesus gave the pastors and teachers to the church to do? To visit people who are not there? He was spending all of his time trying to develop youth programs and visit everyone who was not able to be there.

He was having a very hard time. And then he began to learn that Jesus has different expectations of him. And he was very honest as we were wrestling with this passage.

[22 : 46] What does the enthroned Christ want the pastor and teacher to do? In fact, he described how some people in his congregation up in the mountains of Luzon, some people in his congregation, they would get visits from others in the congregation to come and care for them and talk to them, and they did not appreciate that as much as when he came.

It didn't count as much that someone else from the congregation visited them when they were sick. No, no, it only counted that the pastor came. Is that what Jesus intends for the pastor and teacher? It looks to me like Christ gave some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for their work of service.

What exactly are your expectations of the pastor and teacher? Think about this deeply. Not just now, but as we leave from here, what you're expecting David and the elders to do and to be, is it what Jesus wants David and the elders to do and be?

So David, I'll ask you a question about this. Are you primarily trying to accommodate the expectations of the congregation here, the people in Bon Accord, or are you primarily trying to accommodate Christ's expectations of what you're supposed to do?

[24 : 31] The elders, I see a few of the elders here. Here's a question for you, or a few questions. What can you do to help David equip the saints for their work of service, for the church's work of ministry?

What can you do to help him equip them? Do you need to have some difficult conversations with some people here that might have false expectations of David?

Would that be something that you as elders should do? Have hard conversations about people's expectations, about what the enthroned Christ wants David and you to do?

Or, elders, do you need to sit down with David and work through how he can better equip the saints for their ministry? Because we can all improve. David has room to grow.

Do you need to have those conversations? And maybe you already are. If you are, then please be encouraged. Because the enthroned Christ has something for David and you elders to do.

[25 : 43] And if you're already thinking about that and how to do it better, then I encourage you with that. What about you congregation? What are you expecting that David should do as pastor and teacher?

That the elders should do as shepherds and teachers? And is it the same as what the enthroned Christ expects of him? Do you expect him to equip you to do the work of ministry?

Because that's what it says here. So let's shift into that now. The third part. Us as the congregation, the saints, God's people as it says here.

Because this passage has something to say to us. It says that it's ours to do the work of ministry. What does that mean?

What does that look like? If you are sitting there thinking okay, I can see that Jesus enthroned over everything, Jesus wants me to do the work of ministry, and he wants David and the elders to equip me to do that.

[27 : 00] I can see that, but what does that mean? What do I actually do? If you're thinking that, then keep reading in Ephesians 4. Though you might be a little bit frustrated, because often when we think about my gifts, what has Christ gifted me to do in the church, what are my gifts, we often think about particular tasks or qualities, and that's fair.

1 Corinthians 12 to 14 is specifically about that. There are gifts of tongues and prophecy and healing and all sorts of gifts. Romans chapter 12, Paul talks about each person is given by Christ's grace, different gifts like serving, that's a gift by Christ, or generosity in meeting the needs of others, that's a gift, or hospitality, or administration, or teaching, all sorts of gifts.

But that's not what he does here in this passage. He does not label any particular gift, except for pastors and teachers and the leaders. He alludes to every part doing its job.

He calls it the work of ministry, but he doesn't actually focus on what it might look like for each of you. But what he does do in Ephesians 4 here is he orientates all of us, regardless of our gifting, around, you could say, a certain question that we should ask.

Or he orientates us in a certain direction, that regardless of our gift, this we must do. What does he say? Look at chapter 4, verses 12 to 16.

[28 : 53] And I'm going to read these kind of phrase by phrase and ask practical questions as we go. So we are to be prepared for the work of ministry, or works of service, so that that, oh good, what's the purpose?

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.

Oh, good. So regardless of whether Christ gives me the gift of administration, and so how can I do that, or the gift of teaching, or the gift of serving, or the gift of giving, or whatever, regardless of that, my purpose is to help the body of Christ be built up and reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

So here's a fundamental question for all of us, regardless of your gift. Are you trying to help others in here grow in unity in the faith, and grow in unity in the knowledge of Jesus?

Or do you just float in, maybe learn something, and then float out, and never even ask the question, how can I help that person, or that person, actually grow in the knowledge of Jesus?

[30 : 25] Regardless of the gift Christ has given you, it's supposed to do that. Until we become mature, do you come here to learn how to help each other mature in Christ?

I was blessed recently by a number of you individually at different times. I'll highlight Murdo Scalpy, because he loves to be highlighted in public. We got together and had a great conversation, and we ate these things that had really hot peppers, and we got caught off guard and coughed a lot.

But in the midst of all of that, we talked with each other about how we could be more mature in Christ. What are we struggling with? Right now, what is my struggle to being mature in Christ?

And the other thinking, well, how can I maybe help you with that? How can we spur each other on to grow in maturity in Christ? It's something like that, something very practical.

But it takes this fixed gaze that that's my job here. I'm the church, I'm part of the church, I'm supposed to help others mature in Christ.

[31 : 43] Then, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful schemings.

So, is there something that you are doing here in this body that is helping others not get blown around by false teaching? Regardless of what your gift is, it's supposed to do that.

Help mature people so they don't get blown around like infants in a storm. Instead, speaking the truth in love, that's a really important, really important two-fold statement there.

Lindsay and I were told at one point, those who speak the truth without love are just swinging a bludgeon. Those who speak love without truth are just mush. You need to speak the truth in love.

This is for all of us. This is our work of ministry. Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head that is Christ.

[32 : 57] One of the things that we do in Training Leaders International, we realize that the world has come to the West. So we not only go out to the majority world to try to help train pastors and leaders, that's mostly what we do, but we also have been starting an immigrant training program where we do the same training but with immigrants who have come and are pastoring congregations in the West but still have no access to be trained unless we bring it to them.

There's a group of Hmong Christians. The Hmong people are in the Western China, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, that area, but many have come to the West.

And there's a large population of Hmong Christians in the Twin Cities where we are, Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as some Latino communities, Mexican, Guatemalan.

And so recently I was able to train to teach a course in Scripture to Hmong and Latino pastors in Minneapolis. And one of the Hmong ladies, her name is Ying.

So we're not just training pastors, we're training leaders in all sorts of capacities, men and women who in some way lead within the Christian community. Ying has a ladies' Bible study that she leads and she wants to grow in her understanding of Scripture, so she's coming along to this training.

[34 : 30] And she was struck by Ephesians chapter 4, verse 16, the very final verse of this passage we're looking at. It says, from Him, that is Christ, from Him the whole body, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

She started describing some of the expectations of her church in the Hmong subculture there. And we asked the question, who is it that grows the church?

In this passage, who's in charge of growing the church? And we wrestled with that. And we learned that it's hard to answer that because there's two things.

In Him, sorry, where is it? Verse 16, from Him, from Christ, so Christ is in charge of it, He's the active one, but He's not actually the subject of the verb to grow.

From Him, the whole body grows and builds itself up as each part does its work. So the answer is twofold. Christ is in charge and the body is in charge of growing itself.

[35 : 49] And this just blew her mind as she described because she thought that it was supposed to be the minister who grows the church. Or if not the minister, then that core group. You know, in a church, there's typically a small group that pretty much does everything.

Well, she was describing that in her community. There are these few families that they just do everything. And other people just sit back and don't do it. And everything gets done.

And I just assumed, Ying was saying, I just assumed that that's how the church grows. It's the pastor and then this kind of core group of families. But that's not what this says.

Christ is doing it and He's doing it as each part does its work. Which is you. Not just the core group of a few people that do everything.

That's the way to burn out people who have caught the vision. Because everybody does what the enthroned Christ has given you to do. So here are the questions and I'll wrap up with these questions.

[36 : 54] Why are you here? Murdo, I know why you're here. Because I asked you to come all the way down and I appreciate you being here. I love seeing your face. I know why some of you are here because you've told me.

But what about the rest of you? Why are you here? Hopefully the central reason is to worship the God of the universe who saved you by Jesus through His death and resurrection.

We're here to worship with each other the one God of the universe. That's right at the core. But that's not the only thing. Why are you here? According to this passage, it should be to be equipped to do better at helping each other mature.

So is that why you're here? To be equipped to help each other grow in Christ. What are your expectations of your own role here?

Your expectations of David as pastor and the elders as leaders? What are your expectations of the church health? Of how the church grows in health?

[38 : 04] Are they in line with the risen, enthroned Christ? Christ. I'm going to close by a short prayer and then we're going to sing together, O church arise.

And then I'll read a benediction from Ephesians 3 after that. But please allow me to close in prayer. And then I'll read it next with me on the slow p oath in the river.

Amen. Give it a chance I can be set up together. grieving. narrow pups in the river. Remember it? ButStrops is low pups in the river Falls right When the 40 15 20 20 21 21 23