

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Growing up in Him - Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction

Good morning. Our talk this morning comes from Ephesians 4:1-16. In this second series on the Epistle to the Ephesians which commenced last week, we have now arrived at the point in Paul's teaching where we consider practical issues from Ephesians 4-6. Our heading, "Growing up in Him" is found in Ephesians 4:15 and will be considered shortly. We will look at Ephesians 4:1-16 under three headings:

1. The results of teaching (Ephesians 4:1-6)
2. Divine resources (Ephesians 4:7-13)
3. Stability and growth (Ephesians 4:14-16)

1. The results of teaching

Let us read Ephesians 4:1-6. *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* Ephesians 4:1-6.

The word "therefore", in Ephesians 4:1 means, "as a result of what I have already written". Let us remind ourselves that what Paul writes is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). So we are not to pick out the bits we find easy to accept and reject the rest. In Ephesians 1:1 Paul introduces himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God". Paul's teaching has the authority of God. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul reminds the Ephesians that he is a "prisoner of the Lord". Paul was in prison at Rome, incarcerated there for no valid reason, but he accepts the situation as from the Lord. From the whole tone of the epistle we can tell that he is not discouraged. One of the outcomes of his imprisonment is this letter to the Ephesian Christians. Paul immediately beseeches or pleads with the believers to live in such a way that it is consistent with the full range of blessings as outlined in the earlier chapters. In the pagan idolatrous Roman Empire they were to display moral characteristics that would be completely different to their unbelieving neighbours.

In Ephesians 2 we find the features that make for a harmonious local church fellowship. It is to be in the spirit of love, the love that flows from the new nature that was received at conversion when the Spirit of God took up residence in the believer. Lowliness and meekness were fully seen in Christ. Matthew 11:29 "I am meek and lowly in heart". He came to do the will of His Father (John 6:38). Therefore, we observe in Christ no selfishness or self exaltation. Christ lived and died to please His Father and to bring about our blessing. These same characteristics are to be seen in us. As to the features of longsuffering and forbearing we are to exhibit these at all times, especially in difficult situations. All this is to be done in the spirit of love towards one another which comes out of the teaching in Ephesians 3:17-19, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and **to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.**"

Ephesians 4:2 rightly practised will enable Christians to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as stated in Ephesians 4:3. For Christians, this unity will be seen in their church fellowships, but only if self-will is not active among them. Unity will not be seen in our fellowships if we are at each others' throats, wanting our own way. Paul, when he wrote to the Philippians, saw in the disagreement between Euodias and Syntyche the potential for serious disruption to unity in that Christian gathering. Therefore, Paul specifically requests help that the difficulty might be resolved quickly (Philippians 4:3).

In Ephesians 4:4-6 we have seven unities. These seven may be the core issues that the Spirit of God would have believers maintain, not just as an intellectual matter but in terms of our Christian profession both in and outside the fellowship. Let us look at Ephesians 4:4 and the three unities of one body, one Spirit and one hope, which are only true of Christians.

One body

For a moment we need to look away from the various Christian denominations and consider what is taught in Scripture. The body is a single living entity formed by God and is never other than complete. It comprises all true believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is linked to its Head (Christ) in heaven by the Holy Spirit. In the body there are only true believers who know Christ as Saviour and Lord. In Acts 9:3 the Lord Jesus spoke to Saul of Tarsus and said "*Why persecutest thou me?*" when he was imprisoning and killing Christians. 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 teaches about the one body that lives, functions, and yes, also suffers in this world.

One Spirit

There is only one Spirit of God. He it was that formed and baptised believers on the day of Pentecost when He came down to form the church, dwell in each believer and so formed the one body. Every person who trusts in Christ as Saviour is immediately brought into the one body.

One hope

Christians are probably the only people who have a concrete certainty of a life beyond death because of the promises and teaching that are found in Scripture. John 14:3 gives the Lord's own promise of His coming again. 1 Corinthians 15 teaches the importance of the truth of resurrection and how it will occur in a believer and the changes that will be made so that we have a body suitable to live in heaven. Lastly, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 teaches about the moment when the Lord Jesus Christ raptures all believers, those living and those that have died, to heaven.

Ephesians 4:5 has three more unities and these are more extensive in character than the previous three because it is possible to have unbelievers mixed up with those who are true Christians.

One Lord

That which comes readily to mind is Matthew 25:1-13 about the five wise and five foolish virgins. All ten thought they had a good relationship with the Lord but it was only true of the five wise. There were five foolish to whom the Lord said, "*I know you not!*", Matthew 25:12. Judas, who betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ, was not right with the Lord; he was only interested in money! (John 12:6, John 13:29) This truth of a mixture of people, some with faith and some who have not, is seen clearly in the parables about the kingdom of heaven e.g. Matthew 13:24-30. Now Lordship involves authority and obedience. The Lord has the authority and as a Christian I need to be obedient to Him. Obedience is putting the Lord Jesus first, before everyone and everything else. If I say I am a Christian but at the same time pursue a lifestyle like unbelievers then there is a big question mark as to what I am. The Lord's claims over a believer must be paramount. If this is so, then we are helping to keep the unity of the Spirit.

One faith

This encompasses all the truth that has been communicated to us in the Scriptures. It is not the exercise of faith when we come to Christ and own Him as Saviour. Jude in his epistle puts it this way, "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that **ye should earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.*" (Jude 3) We are to hold the truth even when everyone seems to be giving up. Paul to Timothy also said, "*Hold fast the form of sound words*" (2 Timothy 1:13). It is important not to add to or take away from the words of Scripture (Revelation 22:18-19) so that the meaning is altered.

One baptism

This is water baptism. It is the ordinance that demonstrates our allegiance to Christ. Water baptism does not save. The teaching of baptism is that we have died to the world and all its ways and that the new life given at conversion is the life I am going to live.

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all

Finally in Ephesians 4:6 we have the seventh unity, that of "*one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*". This verse is wider than the Christian profession. It takes in the whole of creation from the beginning of time. It is not the universal "fatherhood" of God so that people can live ungodly lives then all will be well in the end. What we have is God's claim as the creator and originator of all life. This means that we are all accountable to God. God holds ultimate control over the whole of creation. In order to have a living relationship with the one God and Father, then the Lord Jesus Christ must be our Saviour.

"Who is above all", indicates the supremacy of God.

"Through all" informs us that nothing in the whole of creation occurs outside of the sovereignty of God and that His providence and government pervade the whole of creation whether overtly or covertly. We might see this as a little hard to understand when we consider the devastation of wars, natural disasters and tyrannical governments. But these things are a result of sin and the damage it has done to God's creation. Down through the ages, it has always been God's intention that the people of this world should seek the safety and blessing that is found only in Him. Paul's message to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34 illustrates God's nearness and accessibility.

Lastly we have the phrase "in you all". This can only be said of believers whom God "hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" 2 Corinthians 1:22.

2. Divine resources

Let us read Ephesians 4:7-13. *"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

In Ephesians 4:7 we are introduced to divine resources that Christ gives to the body. This is not an exhaustive list but is expanded in 1 Corinthians 12. Whatever the gift, each is also given the appropriate measure of grace in order to fully use the gift for the benefit of the whole body of Christ. Our sphere of function may well be limited to the geographical area where we live but that is not to hinder our utilisation of the gift.

Ephesians 4:8 directs our attention back to our Lord Jesus Christ, *"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."* First, we are reminded that our Lord Jesus Christ has gone up on high. He is now on the Father's throne in heavenly glory, but we must not miss out on the triumph that Christ achieved, *"He led captivity captive"*. Satan and those with him have been defeated. The expression implies the display of a defeated foe led in chains by a conqueror. Colossians 2:15 clearly shows the victory, *"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it"*. Also, Hebrews 2:14-15, *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."* Lastly in Ephesians 4:8 we are told that it is the triumphant Christ who is giving gifts. The gifts are given to those who have been set free from bondage, set free to serve our risen Saviour and Lord, the One who is the Head in heaven of His body on earth.

Ephesians 4:9-10 expand a little more on the greatness of Christ. We are reminded that the One who ascended must have descended first. This descending is into death after laying down His life on the cross. It is contrasted to His ascending *"far above all heavens, that He might fill all things"*. This reaches to two dimensions, first the highest possible point, *"above all heavens"* for there is no one higher or greater than Christ the Son of God. Secondly it extends beyond time into eternity when God shall be all and in all (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Ephesians 4:11 brings us to the specific gifts. These are people who are fitted for the various tasks that are needed in the church. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who gives them for the work He has entrusted to His servants. The first of the gifts are apostles and prophets and this takes us back to Ephesians 2:20, *"Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone"*. Those raised up in the early days of the church had a very specific role of going out to reach the lost and teach the new converts. In so doing, many local church fellowships were established. The foundation that they laid was all about Jesus Christ, His person and work, for He was that foundation. As in 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 the apostle Paul wrote, *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

Once the foundation was laid, the apostles and prophets, as presented in Ephesians 2:20, have passed away and the next gifts of evangelists, pastors and teachers become the prominent gifted people to the church.

Evangelists

Let us consider evangelists. It is interesting to note that in Scripture we have only one person mentioned by name as an evangelist, Philip, Acts 21:8. We read of his work in Acts 6:1-6, to help widows. But when persecution arose in

Jerusalem, Philip, along with many Christians, were driven out of the city and he embarks upon a gospel campaign in Samaria, Acts 8:4-8. In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul encourages Timothy to “*do the work of an evangelist*”, and likewise we are told to do this. This can be done in a whole variety of ways, public preaching, giving out gospel literature, one to one conversations, youth work, etc. We all need to be challenged about doing “*the work of an evangelist*”!

Pastors and Teachers

Is the next gift, “*pastors and teachers*”, one gift or two? For the sake of this talk I will consider the functions separately. Pastors are those who have a concern for the total well-being of believers in the church fellowship. The word translated ‘pastor’ could also be translated ‘shepherd’ and this gives additional insight to the wide ranging activities of a pastor. A shepherd leads, guides, protects and feeds sheep. A pastor therefore must have some teaching ability. A teacher by implication teaches, gives instruction, but he may not have pastoral abilities.

In Ephesians 4:12-13 we discover the reason for the gifts: so that believers might be fully instructed in the truth with the intention that each reaches the maturity of being Christ like, showing in our lives the features of Christ.

3. Stability and growth

Finally, let us read Ephesians 4:14-16. “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*”

Christians live in a dangerous world. There are those who seek to deceive and cause Christians to be blown about like a sailing ship in a mighty storm at sea. What such a storm tossed person needs is a safe haven and an anchor! Ephesians 4:15 is very plain that our safety and anchor results from right teaching by those who “*speak the truth in love so that we grow up in Him*” and therefore we too are expected to speak or hold the truth in love. We know we are starting to grow when we live out what we have been taught. “*Grow up into Him*” then becomes a reality in our souls. Who is the “*Him*”? It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ who is the “*Head of the body*”, Colossians 1:18.

As we close today's talk, Ephesians 4:16 brings a different dimension to what we have been considering. We now have a description of the body under the control of the risen Head in heaven. Each Christian has a place to function in the body for the good of the whole. Notice this verse starts with “*From whom*”, this is Christ. We are all in the right place, “*Fitly joined together*”, put there specifically by Christ. As we all do our part; then there is growth in the body of Christ, growth in love.

These are beautiful considerations as to how we, in our local fellowships, should be functioning. Love is the pervading strand that runs through this section as the essential ingredient for every group of Christians. Let us challenge ourselves this morning with this question, “Am I seen as a loving Christian in my church fellowship, helping others to grow in Christ”?

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