

In chapters 1-3 of Ephesians we've seen all that God has done for us to make us part of his family, the church. God has done absolutely everything to give us eternal life, to make us an heir to his inheritance, to give us every spiritual blessing. He's even given us the faith to believe this. Paul finished chapter 3 by praying we'd understand all that God has done and we'd know more and more how much God loves us.

We're completely and utterly passive in becoming part of God's family. We didn't chose to be in it, God chose us. We didn't do anything to earn the right to belong in God's family, Jesus died for us to qualify us, to make us pure and blameless, acceptable to God. Chapters 1 to 3 are all about salvation by faith, and even that faith is a gift from God. We did nothing to earn our place, so we can do nothing to lose it.

However much Henry and Helena may wish they were born into a different family is completely irrelevant. They can do nothing to change their identity as part of our family. They didn't chose it; they cannot lose it. That's true of my imperfect, temporary, for this life only, family here on earth. How much more is that true for God's eternal, perfect family. We didn't chose it; we cannot lose it.

"So", I hear you cry, "what I do, how I live my life, my actions, good or bad, are utterly irrelevant to God? If I can do nothing to save myself then why does it matter what I do? Why should I bother coming to church on a Sunday? If God has saved me to be part of his family, and being saved has nothing to do with what I do, why should I bother turning up to the Windsor Fellowship Church each week?"

And those are very good questions. And the simple answer is that how we live our life is extremely important. It is vital. What we do as part of God's family, the church, is of utmost importance to God. Yes, of course, it has no bearing on whether you are saved for eternity. But, what you do reveals whether you have been saved. It doesn't save you, but it is the evidence that you have been saved.

Paul of course knew this; he's just spent 3 chapters telling us all the amazing things that God has called us to. And then in the 2nd half of the letter he spells out what our life should look like in response to what God has done. **Ephesians 4:1** "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

This isn't a call to live life so you will be called by God. This is an exhortation to live a life "worthy of the calling you have received", past tense, already have.

So, what does it look like to be part of God's family. Paul is going to tell us several things over the coming chapters, but his first big point. The point that automatically flows out of all he's just been telling us in chapters 1-3 is:

1. We're God's family so live in unity (4:2-6)

Look at the description of what this life that is worthy of our calling looks like in verse 2. Look at that verse and imagine what your own physical family would be like if it could always be described like that. Then imagine what your church family here at the Windsor Fellowship Church would look like if it was described in that way. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

In these words, there's a recognition that we need help, none of us are completely sorted, we need compassion and understanding; we need support and care. This is how God has treated us, therefore, as part of his family, to live a life worthy of the calling we have received, be like verse 2.

Paul gives us a motive for living like this in verse 3. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Through the work of God the Holy Spirit we've been made into one family, one body, we are eternally united. So, it makes complete sense for Paul to exhort us to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."

How can we begin to do this? Verse 3 again, "through the bond of peace." Peace brings us together. Peace unites us. We were at war with God and therefore at war with others, and at war with ourselves. Now, because God, through the Holy Spirit, has called us into his family, we are at peace with God. And because of being at peace with God we can be at peace with each other and with ourselves.

This is Remembrance Sunday, we pause and reflect in our 2 minutes of silence what it cost for our freedom, we reflect on the cost for us to live in peace. And we think about how we should live in the light of the sacrifice of so many in the World Wars. Of course, to be at peace with God cost the greatest sacrifice the world has ever seen, it cost the death of God the Son on the cross dying in our place to bring us into God's own family, to make us at peace with God. Being at peace with God means we can be at peace with each other.

The flip side is true. If we are divided, hostile, judgemental, aggressive, we are in no way

displaying the unity that God has given us by being part of His family. If we don't live like verses 2 and 3 we're causing division and hostility. When we think about it clearly that's a crazy thing to do. Paul thinks that too. Look at the motive he gives us to live like verses 2 and 3. Look from verse 4 and see why it's crazy for us to divide and be hostile and judgemental.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. And God is supreme and unites all things.

Now, we read this and we can't help but think of what a mess the physical church is. Think of all the different denominations, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc, etc etc. But, not only on that scale, think of our own Anglican denomination. Riven with splits and distrust and argument and hostility. It's a very, very long way removed from the description given here in chapter 4. Unity is utterly central to living a life worthy of the calling we've received.

When a family is facing division, it's painful and damaging. Some of you will know that from your own earthly families. When children reject you, and go off and make mistakes in their life I'm sure it must be awful for the parents. Well that is also true of God's family, when we fight it hurts God. It's his body we're dividing, it's his family we're damaging. We'll talk a bit more about what we unite around in a bit. But, for now, just think about your relationships with other Christians, could verse 2 and 3 describe that interaction.

However, it's important to note that this passage isn't primarily talking about our relationship with Christians in other churches or denominations. Paul picks up those relationships in chapter 5. The primary and most important application of these verses is how we exist as a family here in the Windsor Fellowship Church.

We've come from different churches, different backgrounds, even different points on the theological spectrum. How should we exist as a family? Well like verse 2 and 3. If you think someone has got something wrong. Or, if they don't sing the songs you like. Or, they emphasise something differently to you. Or, they don't do what you'd expect them to do. Or, whatever it is that might make you feel divided with your brothers and sisters here in this family. What should you do?

Paul tells us here in verse 2 and 3. Listen to each other, understand each other, talk to each other, be open and honest and caring and compassionate. Assume the other person has a good reason and motive for thinking like they do. Explore what each other thinks and feels. Be united. God has already made you more united than you can possibly imagine. You are as united as one body can be. I feel pretty united with my arms and feet. They're part of me. So, you are with the other Christians sitting here in the Windsor Fellowship Church. So, act like it.

If there is upset, or pain, or mistrust we need to understand and support and help each other to deal with this. To ignore it is to let a sore fester and develop. And an untreated, festering sore will become gangrenous and eventually must be cut off. But, a sore which is treated with love and compassion and care will heal and be restored. How do we do that? Look at verse 2.

Now, we're talking here about the unity of God's family. So, of course, God hasn't left us alone to deal with this. He's not a God who will tell us what to do and then sit back and see how we get on. Not at all. He's made us part of his family, so he'll equip us for the sake of our unity.

2. God equips us for unity (4:7-16)

Look at verse 7, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." Now Paul isn't talking here about the gift of grace that saved us. The word grace in that context means God's free gift of salvation that we don't deserve and cannot earn. Paul is talking here about the gifts that he gives to each one of us as part of Christ's family.

Note, that each one of us have been given something. That means each one of us here who is part of God's family have been given a gift by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been given a diversity of gifts. We're not all gifted in the same way, but we are all gifted. This has nothing to do with value. Certain gifts aren't more valuable than others. Someone who is gifted in administration is as valuable as someone who does the refreshments who is as valuable as someone who welcomes, as someone who is musical, as someone who preaches, as someone who does... Well you get the idea.

We're all gifted by Jesus differently. Our unity is expressed in diversity. Included in the one family image, integral to the metaphor of us all being part of one body, is the idea of diversity. As the quote from Psalm 68 in verse 8 tells us. Jesus, the victorious king who reigns over all as given us all different gifts.

And in verse 13 we see why Jesus has given us these gifts. “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.” We’ve been given gifts not for our individual sake. We’ve been given gifts to help us to grow in unity. To help each other mature in our knowledge of Christ, our love of Christ, living our lives like Christ. Or to use Paul’s phrase, “Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

What gifts has Jesus given you? How are you using those gifts for the sake of your family in the church? Maybe you are musical. Maybe you could help in crèche or Sunday school. Maybe you could put the chairs out. Maybe you could welcome people. Maybe you’re gifted at listening to other people. Maybe you’re gifted at hospitality and you could cook for people who are struggling. Maybe you could do... what? What are your gifts?

We’ve all been given gifts in different ways. There not more important or valuable than others. However, Paul does focus in on one group of gifts. If you look at verse 11. There is a list of people. All those listed are involved in speaking roles. Christ has gifted to the church Apostles and prophets. Those are the people who God used to write the Bible, to record God’s word for us. God also gave some people to be evangelists. Now, all Christians are supposed to do the work of an evangelist, that is telling others the good news about Jesus. But, some are particularly gifted in this way. It’s people who get into random conversations with all sorts of people and end up talking about Jesus.

And then the last group, Christ himself gave the pastors teachers. There is no ‘and’ in the original. It’s describing one kind of person. Someone who is a pastor should also be a teacher. And someone who is a teacher should also be a pastor. That’s describing my job here as Rector.

My job here is to teach God’s word faithfully to you and then apply it to your lives. My job description is given in verse 12. Look at that now. My job isn’t to do any works of service, my role as Rector is to equip all of you to do them. If you thought that employing me would mean you might be able to do less I’m sorry to disappoint. My role is to equip you to do what you’ve been doing and then encourage and equip you to do even more! Of course, I’m also part of the church family so I should also be doing works of service. But, I’m doing those things as part of the body, as a member of the church family, not as part of my pastor/teacher role as rector.

Look at verse 12 and see why Christ has provided me for you. Look and see what the result of God equipping the church is. Christ gave pastors and 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”

Now, we’ve talked a lot about unity. Please note this isn’t unity at all costs. Unity with no boundaries. This unity is unity in the faith. It relates to a confession of what our faith is. It relates to knowledge of the Son of God. Its unity aimed at maturity in Christ. The description in verses 12 and 13 is a process. We’re not fully united now. We’re not complete in our knowledge of Jesus, we’re not yet fully mature. We need to use our gifts, whatever they may be, for the sake of others to grow and mature. I need to use my gifts as your pastor and teacher to help us on this journey towards unity, towards deeper knowledge, towards maturity.

As we progress on this journey we’ll begin to grow up. Paul uses an illustration about children in verse 14. You know how kids play with one toy, then they get bored and move on to the next. Or they might be fixated on one story, or TV programme and then they flit on to the next big thing. Well if we don’t grow in our knowledge and love of Christ we’ll be like that in our Christian lives. We’ll remain immature. Verse 14. “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 scheming.” And the antidote to this immaturity is, look at verse 15. “instead, speaking the truth in love.” There is truth, and we must speak it. Our culture plays down the existence of absolute truth. And even in the church the idea of truth is under attack. But, we must speak the truth. Our faith is a confessional faith. We believe in the creeds. There is absolute truth and it is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must speak the truth otherwise we’ll remain divided, immature and ignorant. But, we must speak the truth in love. We must speak the truth in light of the characteristics listed in verse 2. If we do that we will be increasingly united, we will grow in maturity and knowledge. But for that to happen each of us must use our gifts for the sake of each other. We must do our works of service. We are a family and to be part of a family involves responsibility.

As we finish let me read verse 15 and 16. And let’s all think about the work we should be doing so that God’s body grows and matures. “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. ¹⁶ 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.”