

Ephesians 4:1-16
Out Of The Many, One

Eph 4:1-16 (ESV) *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (pastors) and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

We come to a major shift in Paul's letter. We have been flying high in the first half, but now Paul is going to bring us down to earth, to the world he lives in, and to the one we live in. Paul opens by setting the tone and the theme for the rest of the letter. He already told he is *an Apostle by the will of God*, now he says *I am a prisoner for the Lord*, or better, *I am bound IN the Lord*. Of course, both things are the Father's will. Paul is bound to Christ, both as an Apostle and a prisoner, and in either case, he is committed, determined to live up to his calling, no matter what his circumstances. "*I urge you, or I am calling all of you, to do the same,*" he says. And what is our calling as a Church? It is first to Unity. *Out Of The Many, One*. That phrase is in Latin on the US dollar bill, part of the Great Seal of the United States: "*E Pluribus Unum*". Did our founding fathers have a sense of what Paul is saying? Can a people of great diversity, hold and keep a vision of a new nation? Can the Church hold fast to the one unifying vision that God has revealed? Our vision is our hope of a guaranteed future: sealed by the Holy Spirit, secured by the Son, and ordained by the Father.

So Paul says our calling and vision is "*Out Of The Many, One.*" But has there ever been a time in Church History where we *DID* achieve real unity? Probably hard to find, but it may not matter. Our generation is called to the same unity that Christ has offered every generation. He knocks on the door of our Churches and says, "*I am willing to come in. Will you let Me?*" Paul says when we submit to Christ as Lord and King, "*when each part of the body of Christ is working properly, [it] makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*" The first sixteen verses in this chapter are an introduction to all that it takes to live up to our calling, to truly *GROW* in love, and Paul says three

things have to happen. All three are the key ingredients in the success of our calling, our holy vocation:

1. Every believer must be committed to Unity
2. Every believer must be committed to Ministry
3. Every believer must be committed to Maturity

UNITY — MINISTRY - MATURITY

First is *UNITY*. Unity is not simply a commitment to Jesus Christ as our Head, but commitment to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who Paul says, “...unites us with Himself in the *BOND of peace*.” What qualities do we seek, what do we pray for, and what makes us eager to want to maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit?

Primarily it is humility. Humility is not shyness, and certainly not self-deprecation. “*It is not a focus on self at all*,” C.S. Lewis wisely said. Humility is about me being *self-less*, and other person being *MORE*, as I commit to the other person’s best interests. It is the way a mother cares for her infant child. It is the way a godly husband cares for his family, but more on that to come. Humility is the fertile ground of ministry and service. And it may be, in a kind of upside-down way, that we actually *learn* humility by serving.

Next is Gentleness. This is sometimes called meekness in the Bible. It is *NOT* weakness. Jesus is meek, and Jesus said the “*meek will inherit the earth*,” which means the meek will someday have all the power! So gentleness means we have power, but we use it to show kindness, to have compassion when we may be tempted to use force, to speak words of encouragement when we are tempted to lash out with threats.

Finally, there is Patience. This is a tough one. How do you respond in traffic? Or long lines (and when there is a new clerk in your check-out lane)? Do we take a moment and ask for some repentance, or do we grumble about all the morons in the world? Patience is *LONG SUFFERING*. *Wow!* I don’t like suffering even for a *short* time! And this word means the “*long-suffering of the faults of others, and being slow to rebuke them (or yell at them)*.”¹ Patience means love and tolerance of others. We serve them and allow them to grow and growth takes time, reminding myself that I too am a work in progress. Patience is the only attribute to which Paul adds a fuller meaning when he says, “*bearing with one another in love*.” He does not mean wearing a courteous smile while inwardly seething with resentment. He means actually suffering with them, carrying part of their load.

There is a reason Paul puts humility first. Without humility, pride kicks in, the wrong kind of pride that leads to all of the “relational sins” that drive people apart. We become harsh, judgmental, intolerant and aggressive. We hate those who differ with us and cannot love them. Pride puts *ME* first: “I am right, my way is better,” we think. We even willing to lose friendships to win an argument. Pride is never about win-win, it is always “*I must win and you must lose!*”

Paul says by seeking humility, gentleness and patience, we become effective servants in the Temple of God. As we seek Him we actually do mature, and as we mature we will “*be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit*.” Now Paul is going to use a whole string of “*Ones*” to describe the unity that the Triune God can create among Christians in His Church. He says, “*There is one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*(4:4-16) *ONE GOD* who *IS* three persons, who is the perfect model of unity,

who is the Head, the Foundation, and the Life of the ONE Church in the world. God is really serious about this, as Tom Wright points out, *“One thing we cannot do is pretend that this isn’t a central and vital issue. Unless we are working to maintain, defend and develop the unity we already have, and to overcome, demolish and put behind us the disunity in which we still find ourselves, we can scarcely claim to be following Paul’s teaching.”*²

Every believer must be committed to MINISTRY.

Paul shifts his focus when he says in v. 7 *“grace was given to each one of us.”* Now Paul is going to talk about diversity. Each person has a different gift, just as every person has a different personality and background. Paul uses Psalm 68 to dramatically illustrate his point, and the Jewish believers would have known this Psalm is talking about Moses and the defeat of the Egyptians and the Exodus through the Red Sea. Moses went up to Mount Sinai and came back with the Torah, the Law, and thus the birth of the nation of Israel. Later, during the reign of David, Psalm 68 was the song of victory when David led the procession of priests as they carried the Ark to the Temple site in Jerusalem. But Psalm 68 looks forward to the ultimate victory for Israel when Messiah will conquer all of the Kings of the earth and he will *take* gifts from the nations and carry them into the Temple of Zion in the New Jerusalem as Jesus leads a massive parade of followers who proclaim *“Jesus the Messiah is King of the entire world!”* This Triumphant Entry into the Temple is an echo of Psalm 118 where the crowds shouted out on Palm Sunday *“Blessed is the One Coming in the Name of the Lord!”*. Now, in a way, Heaven has come—as we have prayed for 2,000 years *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done!”* And Paul is drawing on all of these events and images because he sees the ascension of Jesus like Moses going up into Mount Sinai. Except Jesus ascends as the King and is still waiting to return, just as David was anointed and then waited many years before his coronation in Jerusalem. But for Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the New Exodus, and the entire human race has been set free from the bondage of sin and death. But Jesus has not come down again like Moses did. He will! Just not yet. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit down at Pentecost, but not to Sinai but to Zion, and a multitude of gifts rained down and filled His followers with a new power. Paul changes the words *“takes gifts from men”* and changes them to *“gives gifts to men.”* The Holy Spirit ushered in a New Covenant, where the Law is on the heart of every follower of Jesus, and thus we have the birth of His Church.

The gifts that Jesus *GIVES* through the Holy Spirit become our power for ministry, for service to others. We are all priests in His Temple that is undergoing a continuous building program. I love the way Peter describes this whole process: *“As you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.””* (1Pe 2:4-6, ESV). Compare that with what Paul has told us: *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”* (Eph 2:19-21, ESV) They are both talking about a living Temple, a Building that is also a Body. A body is growing organism that grows from within, yet we

are called living stones in a building that grows up stone by stone. And we are “stones that can cry out!” We reach up and pray and praise our Head above, who is also the Rock under our feet! That really blows my mind! Go back and notice how Peter calls us all priests. We are offering sacrifices, that means we are interceding on behalf of people inside the Church who need building up and we are calling those outside, the strangers and aliens, to come in and drink freely. Remember Paul said we were at one time all outsiders, aliens and strangers. And Peter when says, “As you come to Him...” he is talking about conversion, a complete change of state, becoming citizens of Heaven, becoming ministers in a Temple that is growing as we are maturing. It is like watching a child grow into the stature and the likeness of his Father, or better yet, being transformed into the character of our King. Paul and Peter both say we are built on the cornerstone, Jesus. Yet Paul adds “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...*”. From His ascended position Jesus gave the church Apostles and Prophets, gifted men, who are the very foundation of His church. If it had stopped there, then it would only be a solid foundation, for sure, but no building. Paul says Jesus also gave us pastors and teachers who would shepherd the church, train us, lead us and teach us so we grow “*from child to manhood*” as a Body, and we grow “*stone by stone*” into a building that span generations. “Living Stones” maturing as human priests, growing the church in strength and numbers, “*building up the body of Christ*” (v.12). Everything we do is FOR CHRIST, and we do it because of what Christ did FOR US. None of this comes naturally. We must want to grow and mature.

Every believer must be committed to MATURITY

I don't know about you, but it hits me that Paul is painting a very ideal scenario. I could say he presents an impossible scenario, an unattainable goal. It's like thinking the Cubs could win the pennant! (Oh wait, sorry! They DID win in 2016) As I said before, look at the history of the Church! Or even better, look around us and we see the divisions and fighting both in and among the churches. I saw an interview with Tom Wright, who wrote a biography on the life of Paul, and the interviewer asked “What would Paul think of the state of the Church today?” Tom answered, “Paul certainly would be saddened by the division, but I think what would bother him most is that no one cares.” That is a very educated opinion which I think may be true.³

What Paul is doing is directing our minds to the final goal, the end point. Notice we worship and serve in the church UNTIL. Until what? “...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v.13). That word “until” means the end point, and it points to the full measure of the stature of Christ, that point in time when we are all grown up. The point when the church is finished and perfect in terms of nothing left to do. How do we get to that end point? Not by simply waiting for it, but by becoming mature and highly effective people. People of integrity and stability, “...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”(vv.14-16) That is quite a sentence! Let's break it down. Paul wants us to realize that we work to become mature men as we are waiting for full maturity, for perfection, because that is the Father's purpose for us. Remember what Paul told us earlier? We

are God's special art work. God created us in Christ for good works and He has already prepared them for us. His purpose is that we walk in those good works. Now Paul tells us we have been given gifts to help us live that life of good works. Maturity begins by committing ourselves to grow in Christ for God's purpose, so *that* (and "so that" is a strong term for purpose), so *that we may no longer be children (immature) ... but we are to grow UP!*" That is the main sentence in vv.14-16. God's purpose is that we *GROW UP* as Christians, grow up toward the Head, into Christ, because as the Head He is holding everything together, and He is adding new parts (or new *STONES*). This description is a blending of the metaphors of Body and Building, because joints hold our limbs together in our bodies just like mortar holds bricks and stones together in a building. But the point is, we are all together. It is *ONE*. And as we "*speak the truth in love*" what happens? We "*make ourselves grow in love,*" which is really the sense of Paul's sentence here in vv.15 and 16. The word we translate as "*speak the truth*" is one word and it is a verb that means "*to be true*". The Greeks used it to mean "*to communicate what is true by words as well as actions. A person is true when he conceals nothing and does not try to deceive.*"⁴ What happens to immature children? They are *tossed to and fro ... by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by deceitful schemes.*" Just as children are vulnerable to all kinds of trickery and lies that want to steer them into danger, immature Christians are like babies in a boat being tossed about on a stormy sea with thieving pirates at the helm. In our world today, as in Paul's world, Christians are still vulnerable and are still being conned. What does Paul want to see in the Church? People committed to maturity. People "*called by God*" who reveal the very secrets of who Christ is in a loving way: how He was crucified, was raised and is now seated at Gods' right hand intervening for us. And to do this effectively, in a way that builds us up into Christ, we have to *BE true and to BE faithful*. God describes Himself in the Hebrew Scriptures as "*One who shows lovingkindness and faithfulness*" and the OT authors used this phrase many times to describe God's character. That word "*faithfulness*" in the Old Testament is our Greek word translated as "*speaking the truth.*" See? It is much more than just talking! It is lovingkindness and faithfulness, being open and honest. It is about communicating who Jesus really is, what Jesus is really like, just as Jesus showed us clearly what His Father is like, just as Paul tells us "*That is Who we must be like.*"(Eph 5:1)

Our personal growth and Church growth are team efforts. We do not do either one alone. Paul says we are to strive "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Notice Paul says "*eager to maintain the unity*", not to *originate* the unity, that comes from the Holy Spirit, but to *maintain* it! And that means we serve, we minister to one another. And that takes maturity because of our great diversity. Paul envisions it all working together, and he says in that last line... "*when each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*"

Out Of The Many, ONE!

Our Father, by your grace and by your power please help us to be obedient to your word and, as a member of the church, to be submissive and supportive of our pastors and leaders. Help us to be patient with ourselves, that we are growing step by step as we make progress in our walk with you. Help us to be patient and kind to others and help them to walk step by step so we grow together. Show us what truth and lovingkindness really means. All of this we ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen

¹Richard Coekin, Explore by the Book “Ephesians” p.227

²N. T. Wright “Paul’s Prison Letter” p.45

³Difficult Bible Questions and the First Century World: Facing the Canon with N. T. Wright
(YouTube video Aug 22,2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyenhsKfFjU>)

⁴TNLT Ceslas Spicq Vol 1 p.67

Spicq gives a fuller explanation on “speaking truth in love”:

“These usages allow a somewhat original interpretation of Eph 4:15, aletheuontes de en agape, which could be translated either “live by the truth and in love” (NJB) or, in line with the context, which denounces error and deceitfulness, “remaining in the truth, in love.” In any event, the emphasis is on remaining attached to the truth of the gospel, holding fast to it, with the Johannine connotations of being of the truth, loving it, professing it, carrying it out; in other words, conforming one’s conduct to it.