



Series: Ephesians: Life In Christ

Date: October 29, 2023

Speaker: Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Ephesians 4.1-16: Grow Up!¹

Intro

Good morning Mercy Church. If you have your bible, Ephesians Chapter 4. If you don't have one I'll have the words up on the screen and on your way out we'd love to give you a copy of the bible as our gift to you. Just stop by the Next Steps area.

We are RETURNING to Ephesians. We went through the first half of the book a couple of months ago and then we took a break for our series 'It's Hard to Believe.'

¹ Works Cited:

[Keller, Timothy J. "The Gifts of the Spirit." Redeemer City Church. Preached 29 August 2010.](#)

[Keller, Timothy J. "Building Up the Body." Redeemer City Church. Preached 11 December 2011](#)

[Mercer, Kyle. "APEST, Maturity and Unity." Two Cities Church. Preached 4 June 2023.](#)

Nee, Watchman. Sit, Walk, Stand. CLC Publications, 1964.

Packer, J. I. Knowing God. InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Now we are returning to it, so let me remind you what's going on with it. This letter was written by the apostle Paul to a young church in the city of Ephesus. It's not long. Only 3 pages in my bible. It was written to help a young church flourish in a metropolitan pre-Christian city. And we receive it as a young church in a metropolitan post-Christian city. Paganism was the dominant religion of their day, Secularism is the dominant religion of our day. They needed help applying faith to real life, so do we.

In its simplest breakdown, Ephesians is 3 chapters of doctrine followed by 3 chapters of instruction. In other words, the first half is all about **who we are in Christ**. It's some of the greatest theological language anywhere. And the second half is all about **how to live as a Christian predominantly in two main arenas - the church and the home**. So we'll see him talk about the church. That's today. We'll see him talk about conflict and forgiveness. We'll talk about friendship. Then he talks about the home and we'll cover marriage and parenting. We'll talk about how there is a real enemy who is actively fighting against you in both the church and the home. Gonna be filled with tactical commands so if you are more of a 'please just tell me

what to do,' well buckle up butter cup. Because that's what the next 5 weeks are gonna be filled with.

I want to tell you as I prepped THIS WEEK I felt that in some way, this may be the most important sermon I preach to Mercy Church this year. Because our response to what God calls us to in this passage will determine our future. Not facility search strategies or dynamic ministry ideas. Those are important. But how we respond to God's word and this word is about our role in His church. That's what will shape Mercy's next 5 years. It's confrontational and urgent, and I hope we will lean in.

Today through the first half of Ephesians chapter 4, God is going to call us to the kind of life that directly conflicts with two of the most deeply ingrained values of our day. Those two values are individualism and consumerism.

Consumerism says the more I have, the happier I'll be. And we are in such an intensely consumer-driven world, right? The AGE of Amazon. LIFE on Demand. Just press a button and you can order Ted Lasso Halloween costume, beard butter, and a Norwegian Ax all in the same shopping cart. We consume more information and more entertainment than any generation before us, and it's not even close. We have more leisure time and experiences than ever. You gotta

watch this show, eat at this restaurant, listen to this album, go to this concert, then go to a movie that shows the concert where she plays the album live. We consume so much.

But the problem is - you weren't created primarily to consume. You were created in the image of your creator. You were created to create, to cultivate, to contribute. So the problem is... and people end up experiencing this... **consuming stuff consumes you.** You stay up late consuming a show on your phone only to feel exhausted the next day. **You were not made to consume, you were made to contribute. And one of the primary arenas you were made to contribute to is in the church.** Paul is going to talk about that today. No healthy church can survive & grow & multiply where more people are consumers than contributors. Paul is also going to confront the danger of individualism in the church. Individualism may be our deepest held value in the west. We are a nation founded on the idea that the individual is valuable. We have a bill of rights. We each can make our voice heard by voting. Not bad, quite brilliant.

But what happens when that takes over our lives? When life is all about me. I gotta take the enneagram so I know who I AM. And I gotta discover myself. And I gotta do me. And I gotta live MY truth and I gotta do it on my iPhone. And build a world to suit me. And the word is going to say... you weren't meant to be the

center of your universe. You weren't meant to live for me. **You were created for "WE" not "me."** You were meant to live for others, not yourself. And a church full of Christians focused on "me" not on "we" will never survive. It will actually devour itself.

Those are the values of the world we are up against as a church. Consumerism & Individualism. And the church is to look totally different from the world. This passage calls us to such a beautiful, more desirable life than what the world offers. It calls us **to selflessly serve others by using our gifts God gives us to build up the church.** And the reason I say it's the most important sermon I preach this year is because our response to this passage will determine the character of our church and our impact on our community. Let's get into it.

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received,
OK, right off the bat what you see is 'therefore.' Now, when you are reading your bible at home and this word comes across, what you gotta do is recognize this is a progression. The old preacher saying is when you see the word therefore...make sure you know what it's there, for. In this case, Chapter 4 verse 1 is the opening of the second half of this book. And the whole first half has been about who you are in Jesus, like I said at the beginning. In fact, there was only ONE imperative... only one command... in the first 3 chapters and it was the

command to *remember* (2.11). Everything else was 'this is who you are.' You were dead, God made you alive. GOD SAVED YOU through His son Jesus who went to the cross to pay the debt you and I owed for our sins. He died in our place and He rose again defeating death and through FAITH, we receive the forgiveness He purchased for us and we receive new life.

And now He calls us to walk. Chapters 4-6 have 40 commands. It's full of here's how to walk. The order is key. We walk FROM our identity, not FOR our identity. From salvation, not for salvation. Worthy of the calling we have received. Your calling out of sin and into Christ... into new life... and INTO the church - God's people - walk WORTHY of that.

Our faith is ACTIVE. Watchman Nee, a Chinese pastor from the 20th century, wrote a book about the Christian life and it was really a treatment on Ephesians. He called the book *Sit, Walk, Stand* and you should pick it up.

"Though the Christian life begins with sitting, sitting is always followed by walking. When once we have been well and truly seated and have found our strength in sitting down, then we do in fact begin to walk. Sitting describes our position with Christ in the heavenlies.

Walking is the practical outworking of that heavenly position here on earth."²

So we walk. We walk worthy. And the arena for that walk is the local church. Because the worthy walk is all relational. Watch.

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

A walk worthy of the gospel is characterized by these two couplings. Humility and gentleness. See, when you understand the gospel, there's just no room for pride. The gospel tells me that I was lost and bound for eternal death: Ephesians 2.4 - BUT GOD. Not but me. But God. There is just no place for pride here. And that's going to be so critical in a minute when we start talking about spiritual gifts. Because we could start comparing ourselves to each other. But instead, we are humble - and our humility looks outwardly like gentleness towards one another. Not harsh, gentle. It looks like patient love. Because God's love towards us looks like patient love. So if you struggle with anger, with harshness, with impatience and frustration - it means you are forgetting the way God looks at you. You are forgetting what you deserve.

² Watchman Nee, *Sit Walk Stand*, 27-28.

When we remember the gospel, we are able to bear with one another in love. Meaning when you mess up, I am patient. When you sin, I respond in love. I stay engaged with you and lovingly respond to you. And I don't know your disposition but this is hard for me. I want everything perfect in the church and I want it immediately. I want all the wrong things fixed immediately. And when I have to wait...my reaction is so often not patient love. It's impatient frustration. And it's that way often in other areas of life. And so my only hope is each day remembering my worthy walk doesn't look like harsh impatient leadership. It looks like gentle, patient shepherding. Because that's how Christ loved me. To what end?

3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Those who know the peace of Christ will not love conflict or controversy. They will not love gossip. This is one of the toughest things for me in ministry. Is how much people in ministry seem to love church controversies. And I'm prone to this too. It's like the sinful nature in us seems to salivate over the things that will tear the church apart when we should grieve it. But he says instead you should WORK. Make EVERY effort. Not just a little effort. Like ALL POSSIBLE effort. To KEEP the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

In other words, you and I don't CREATE the unity in the church. Christ created unity through His blood and then His spirit. Our unity as brothers and sisters in the family of Christ is a gift given to us at great cost to Himself. Our role is to work hard to maintain it. Now that means two things and listen it's big.

1. **If you relish the things that actively cause disunity, you are forgetting the gospel.** Things like conflict or gossip. Y'all we should flee from gossip. What is gossip? Come on, you know what it is. It's when you speak poorly of another by saying what you heard. You cannot maintain unity and gossip at the same time. You must WORK HARD NOT to do those things
2. But listen, you can also passively disobey what God calls you to here. You can simply not make every effort. I think this is what more of us struggle with. It's consumerism. We come to church for the input we get and never make any output. We blame our disconnectedness on our schedule or on our personality or we blame the church. And yes, the church has its problems FOR. SURE. **But a lot of times those twin values of individualism and consumerism make us sit back and say I don't really WANT to be involved in the lives of others.** Just serve me my sermon, please. And at the first sign of something being off, we bail. If that's you, you've forgotten the gospel. Think about it, other than

great love for you why would God want to be involved in your life? You are a HOT MESS. He knows what you are thinking. And it's not good. But he moves toward you anyway in LOVE. For your Good.

Listen to me I say this in love - Your passivity towards God's church is disobedience to God's command on your life. You facilitate an erosion of unity when you do not actively strive to keep it. I'll show you more on that in a minute.

4 There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope at your calling — 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

One, One, One. Bible reading 101 - repetition is for emphasis. He's saying the relationships, the community that is the church is in some way to reflect the ONENESS of even God himself. That's actually what Christ prayed for us in John 17. FATHER make them ONE, even as you and I are one, SO THAT the world may believe you sent me.

There is deep spiritual significance to maintaining unity. It reflects to the world the very nature of God. A community actively building each other up but with a spirit of humility and gentleness - THAT is a testimony to God and His love for us.

And just as He is about to go into telling them how to practice their gifts He pauses for this powerful picture from the Old Testament.

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 For it says:

When he ascended on high,
he took the captives captive;
he gave gifts to people.

9 But what does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

Ok, this is so powerful. PAUL is referencing Psalm 68:18 to help them understand the value of the spiritual gift God has given them. In ancient times if a king's city was attacked the king would descend from his throne and go out to battle. And if he won, he would return and ascend again to his throne and give the spoils of war as a gift to his people. Well, Psalm 68 uses this imagery to describe the day when the ark of the covenant was returned, by King David, to the Tabernacle. And as the ark, that carried the very presence of God... ascended to the holy of holies. This is the end of the exodus! The people were blessed by the presence of God ascended

as the one true king. And the fruits of the victory were the milk & honey of the promised land. But then Paul...man he reads the Old Testament like we should. Reads it with Jesus in mind. He sees the Psalm and he says...God was not done at the exodus. God has a bigger enemy to defeat. Sin and death. And to defeat sin and death He descended from His throne in heaven, He came to earth in the form of man. He descended all the way to the cross. To humiliation and injustice. To death. Where He won victory for us. And when He ascended from the grave... He resurrected! And He ascended back to heaven but STILL remained with his people.

And He had a better way of dwelling with His people than in a box in the tabernacle. He would dwell in them through the HOLY SPIRIT! And better gifts than milk & honey. He had spiritual gifts to give His people.

When you think about spiritual gifts, we are about to talk about those...think about the death and resurrection of Christ your King. Who in His grace GAVE His Holy Spirit to you and then a spiritual gift to be used to celebrate His victory and build up the body of Christ. It's remarkable. Let's look:

11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build

up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

So now we've got some ministry assignments that flow out of spiritual gifts. This is tracking back to verse 7 where it says grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now this is not the complete list of spiritual gifts. There are 5 different lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament and all 5 are different which means there is no complete list. This list is the list of equippers. There are certain gifts that are there to equip the saints for ministry.

You've got apostles who are there to say LET'S GO! There's more to be done! Apostles are yes the 12 apostles. But there's also an apostolic gifting that looks out into tomorrow and says with urgency we've got to go plant a church there or send missionaries there! This is part of my gifting and it's needed. We need vision. The prophets are the ones that look at today and see where we are not in alignment with God's word and they call us out! They say watch out church! Watch out that your life is all about creature comforts. There is no kids programming in the Book of Acts! There are no comfy chairs in the persecuted church! Watch out church for where consumerism is replacing discipleship! Then there are evangelists that look out at

the lost and say whatever we do, we gotta go reach our lost neighbors. Don't care if the church is growing if it's only a bunch of dissatisfied Christians hopping to a new location. Evangelists are the ones who keep our mission focused and our baptism waters full. Pastor Scott - that's him. Then you have shepherds. Our translation today says pastors but the word is shepherds. These are the ones that say ok yes we need vision & correction & focus but...we've got families right here struggling who need care. They say do you know this guy or girl? I had lunch with them a couple of times. This is Pastor Jake, Pastor Josh, & Pastor Rashard. Without them, we burn ourselves out.

Then you have teachers - this is another one of my areas of gifting - who say we need to mine the depths of God's word and understand what it says. And if we aren't in the word we are crazy. BUT ALL OF THESE ARE FOR...EQUIPPING the saints.

So hear me out...all of these gifts are to equip you to use YOUR gift - OH and BTW a lot of you probably have THESE gifts and we just haven't identified them yet. These aren't limited to the elders of the church but ARE present in the elders. But my job and the job of these other equippers is to equip you to use your gift to help build up the body. That's what your gift is for.

So let's talk for a second about spiritual gifts.

Spiritual Gifts are differing abilities given to each believer by the holy spirit for the purpose of blessing and building up the local church into the character and likeness of Jesus

With that definition, let me say a couple of things to help you out because I want to call you off the sidelines. Away from individualism and consumerism and INTO the life God has called you to. If you are a Christian, you have a spiritual gift. NOW hear me - spiritual gifts are, according to scripture, only given to Christians. They are for the building up of the body.

You might ask “How are gifts different than skills or enneagram numbers?” Gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit to BLESS others. J.I. Packer says it this way

“The ability to speak or act in a certain way... is only a spiritual gift if and as God uses it to build up the body. Some natural abilities or talents that God has given He never uses in this way, while sometimes He chooses to build up his body through performances that in our eyes seem substandard. What makes something a spiritual gift is not the quality of the performance, but the blessing of God.”

So yes, you may have a talent, but it is only a spiritual gift as God uses it to build up the church.

This is why a CEO may be an elite-level strategist in the private sector, but she may be a prayer warrior in the church. Because God may bless the church through her business savvy, but may not. He may instead unleash the power of God through her gift of faith.

So how do you begin to identify your spiritual gift? I'll give you three questions and where all three of these connect is usually a good starting spot.

1. What ministry are you passionate about?
2. What need or opportunity do you see in front of you?
3. What do others in the church affirm in you?

And when we are all actively operating in our spiritual gifts, the church will start to grow up.

14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head — Christ. 16 From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

See the blessing of the gospel is that we receive new life in Christ. And just as you are born an infant so you are born again as a spiritual infant. Beautiful new life. But just as infants grow so we are supposed to grow. Prolonged infancy is an unhealthy thing. Paul says you gotta grow. Do you know what the signs are that you are still a spiritual baby? Paul says

1. **You are not discerning (v.14).** You are easily deceived. You are spiritually dumb. You can't tell good teaching from bad or poisonous teaching. So until you know your way around your bible, you are an infant.
2. **You are self-centered (v.15-16).** You're easily offended. You're always getting your feelings hurt, You're always feeling slighted, You're always conscious of how are people looking at me or thinking about me or treating me, or am I being treated rightly or not? You're always absorbed with yourself. You're always thinking about yourself. You're not thinking about other people. You can't take criticism. You can't admit where you've done wrong, you where you're concerned about your image or how you look, you're a spiritual baby.
3. **You are unsteady.** Like a baby, you get easily distracted. You start things...you start reading plans... you start a community group... you start serving... you get emotionally charged in a service but then there's no follow through. Like a

baby, you are led by your feelings. That's not maturity, that's infancy. Eugene Peterson used to call discipleship a long obedience in the same direction. But you change directions all the time.

So how do we respond? Well, a couple of things to land us today.

First, Paul seems to expect there to be spiritual babies. **So don't be surprised if there are spiritual babies all over the place here.** If you are thinking...yeah babies are the problem! No. that just means you are more of a baby than you realize. You are a BIG baby. Paul said he himself was a baby. Do you notice that in verse 14? Then WE will no longer be... So if he's a baby, then in some sense we all are. Which as we dwell on it should help summon that humility from the first part of our passage today. It should summon love for when we sin against each other. Just a bunch of babies. It should summon quick forgiveness and lots of anticipation for what God still has ahead for us.

But at the same time listen - **Don't you dare tolerate spiritual infancy in yourself.** Don't be okay with selfishness. Don't be okay with a biblically illiterate feelings-based faith. Let's GROW UP! And when we do, God will ignite our feelings in response to the glorious truths we learn about him in his word!

Secondly, **I urge you to commit yourself to the local church.** Look at the language of this passage. It is through deep committed involvement in the local church and through deep unity in community with fellow members of the body that you will grow towards maturity in Christ. Don't settle for a loosely connected network of Christian friendships. Don't reject them of course. Christ loves them. But Christ calls you a part of the body. So in love attach yourself to the body.

And how do we grow?

15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head — Christ.

If we speak the truth without love we are harsh. Why would we do that? Because in our pride and ego, we are more concerned with being right than we are with being loving. We are actually being selfish. Concerned we are right. Which isn't the gospel at all. So truthfully if you speak truth without love you aren't speaking full truth. Others don't hear us because our approach is cold. It lacks the warmth of the gospel. Which ironically will push people further from the truth. Truth without love actually isn't truthful.

But others of us don't want to rock anyone's boat so we speak love and avoid truth. Which ironically is self-focused. We are afraid the person will be mad at us or even lash out at us and then we will feel guilty.

Which ironically is self-focused AND prevents anyone from growing.

But here's the reality - none of us can perfectly mix truth in love. So what do we do? We look to the place where truth and love meet. And we sit there and we dwell there and we learn. The cross.

In the gospel Jesus announces truth - we are all sinners in need of a savior. And unless that savior pays for our sins we are eternally doomed. Listen that is the most important truth you will ever hear because it tells you who you really are. It's offensive though, isn't it? I'm an eternally doomed sinner? Harsh. But the gospel is also the most loving thing you can hear. Why? Because Jesus says I LOVE YOU SO MUCH, I'm going to pay your debt for you. I'm going to DIE for you. What love!

Do you know this love? Are you growing in this love?