

Beautiful People #4 “Maturing the Church”- Eph 4:1-16, Matt 18:15-20

Eph 4:13 “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 fulness of Christ”

Pray.

- I wonder if anyone knows how much the UK spends on healthcare each year?
 - **Around 230billion pounds** according to the latest figures¹!
 - Health is big business.
 - And if you work in the NHS- thank you for keeping us healthy!
 - Health is essential for the human body
 - But also for the church body.
- In this series on the church, we’ve seen that God’s people are likened to...
 - a **BRIDE** – God’s people dearly loved by our heavenly bridegroom.
 - a **BUILDING** – living temples indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
 - Paul also uses the **BODY**.
 - One body with several limbs, all joined together and working together, each essential, each playing its part (1 Cor 12).
- Well how does the church body remain healthy so that it can grow to maturity?
- In 2 ways, from our 2 passages today,
 - **Positive growth to maturity**- like a child growing healthy and strong.
 - Another initially appearing more **negative- growth in purity** as the disease of sin is cut out.

1) LET’S GROW TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY... by unitedly, diversely, building each other up!

- Let’s start with Ephesians 4. Growing to MATURITY.
 - This passage recaps some themes we’ve already seen in our series.
 - We won’t be able to look in depth, (I’d recommend Richard Coekin’s “Ephesians For you”² if you want to go deeper).
 - but let me point out three steps in the journey to maturity in this passage.
 - Unity, Diversity and upbuilding!
- It starts with **Unitedly**.
 - Paul is talking about the unity we saw in week 2 v3.
 - The church being one in purpose and commitment
 - And that oneness mirrors the oneness of God. V4-6
- But that unity is to be lived out in **diversity**
 - One body, but many limbs.
 - Hooray- we are all wonderfully unique and different
 - (in fact this also mirrors God:
 - 3 persons, 1God- diversity in unity)

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/317669/healthcare-expenditure-in-the-united-kingdom/>

² <https://uk.10ofthose.com/product/9781910307649/ephesians-for-you-paperback>

- And Paul talks about the gifts that V7 EACH one is given. by the risen and ascended Christ.
 - They start with the word gifts.
 - V11
 - First there's the *foundational Bible writing gifts*:
 - Apostles, Prophets.
 - Then there's the *contemporary Bible teaching gifts*:
 - Evangelists, Pastor- Teachers
 - Note that the 2 go together there
 - A pastor (literally shepherd) like me is to care for the flock by teaching.
- And these word gifts (me teaching on a Sunday, or the GSMA leaders teaching the kids, or the lifegroup leaders teaching midweek) are to stimulate everyone else to serve.
- V12 is the key here.
 - Did you see all the people are to be doing the work
 - Through serving one another
 - So that the body becomes strong and big and healthy and united even further.
- No longer infants. V14
 - Parents are very careful when they take toddlers to the beach.
 - One big wave and they can be knocked over.
 - They just aren't strong enough to withstand the buffeting of the wind and waves.
- We are to grow to maturity in the faith
 - So that we don't get knocked over by one big wave of false teaching:
 - Saying you can be saved without faith in Jesus
 - Or sex is holy outside heterosexual marriage
 - Or give money to church and you'll be blessed with health/wealth.
 - Those are eggs of false teaching.
- Instead v15 we are to speak
 - So every member of the church is not just to help in practical works of service,
 - But we are to **build one another up**
 - That is serve one another in such a way as we grow into a deeper understanding of the faith, coming closer to Jesus at the centre of the wheel (to use an analogy we've used before).
- **So let's grow to Christian maturity through**
 - **United upbuilding in diversity**
- ↻ Do you see that you have a role to build others up. Here's the application

- **KEEP “Speaking the truth in love” v15**
 - Each part v16

- The vision for our church is not like a football team,
 - One manager up at the front giving commands
 - 11 other players on the pitch doing the hard work
 - And then 40,000 in the stadium egging them on.

- No, it’s more like DIY SOS!
 - If you’ve ever seen that programme,
 - Where a massive army of carpenters, builders, gardeners, electricians, decorators come together to work on renovating someone’s house, particularly when they are going through a hard time!
 - Everyone working together to get the job done.
 - Yes a few co-ordinators overseeing the work (elders and other leaders)
 - But everyone hard at work
 - In this case, not just practically
 - But spiritually as well.

- ☞ Don’t leave the talking to others.
 - Over coffee today, could you do some BBC? Bible based chat?
 - “Anything you are learning from the Bible at the moment?”
 - “How has Jesus been encouraging or challenging you lately?”
 - We’ll put those on the slides at the end.
 - It’s awkward the first time, and it’s OK to talk about the weather or the football, but if we all up our game to talk more about Jesus, if it became more natural to pray with oen another and encourage one another, SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, I think we’ll find that we grow together
 - And when those waves of false teaching come, we’re stronger together, better sense of smell. Greater maturity.

- So remember both parts..
 - SPEAKING THE TRUTH
 - AND DOING IT IN LOVE.
 - Without the truth our chat is empty
 - Wihtout the love, our chat is cold or harsh.

- Well that’s the first half- **GROWING TO MATURITY**

- But going back to our healthcare analogy, there are times when doctors and nurses have to help people to grow **positively**-
 - resetting a bone,
 - helping hair to grow after an operation

- enabling children to grow healthy and strong to their full size and stature.
- But sadly there are also times when more **negative** work has to be done.
 - An appendix needs to be cut out
 - A cancer needs to be given radiotherapy
 - A gangrenous toe needs to be removed.
- And this leads us onto an area that isn't often talked about,
 - partly because it feels slightly heavy
 - and also because actually it's very rare.
 - It's what we call church discipline.
 - But it's important we talk about this, study the passages, ask questions about it, because it's part of what we are committing to as members of our church.

So the second point is

- **2) LET'S GROW IN CHRISTLIKE PURITY... by careful loving discipline**
 - And for this we need to turn to Jesus' words in Matthew 18. P985.
 - By the way on the out the **Dig deeper** gives you a chance to think about this in greater depth on your own or in lifegroups this week,
 - it also has a link to an **article on the gospel coalition** website which goes into greater detail, especially if you've never thought about this before.
- Matt 18:15 (p985) "If your brother or sister sins" (cd be "against you") here's what you have to do...
- **How negative....!**
 - *Why do we have to rake over other people's sin, that sounds totally unloving and unchristian?*
 - *Couldn't we just let sleeping dogs lie?*
 - *Can't we just forgive and forget? After all no-one is perfect.*
- But these are the loving words of Jesus, our kind-hearted Lord.
 - And he knows that if it is not dealt with properly sin can
 - Spoil
 - Separate
 - Spread
- This was happening in Corinth when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to them.
 - There was a guy who was sleeping with his step mother, and the whole church knew about it.
 - They obviously didn't think it was a big deal.
 - But Paul thought that it was.
- So he encouraged the Corinthian church to take the appropriate action.
- Let's look at the steps that Jesus gives us.
- **First what I'd call Step zero!**

- It's not in the verse but it's throughout the rest of the Bible.
 - This is the day to day discipleship for followers of Jesus
 - Who calls us to repent and believe.
 - And if we have the kind of relationships where we are speaking the truth in love, God willing either sin won't happen
 - Or if it does, gracious conversations through a gentle word in lifegroup, or from the conviction of the Holy Spirit during a communion service will lead us to repent of our sins and turn from them.
- 99 times out of 100 we're in this low level stage, and there's no need for even the first steps of church discipline.
 - But what if sin has happened, it's public, and it's of a significant enough level to cause real damage.
 - The kinds of sins that Paul talks about in 1 Cor 5 include
 - Sexual immorality
 - Greed
 - Idolatry
 - Drunkenness
 - Swindling or defrauding someone out of some money.
 - Slander
 - Other sins which involve elements of discipline in the NT include
 - Divisiveness (Titus 3)
 - False teaching (2 John)
 - There isn't a closed list in the NT.
- Let's take **slander**. So you discover that someone says something behind your back that wasn't true, it was damaging, and it's really upsetting.
 - What do you do? Don't do what the world does which pours fuel onto the fire by talking about them behind their back, or giving them the cold shoulder treatment, or getting them back with snide and sarcastic comments,
 - **Next Step 1: v15. Private discussion**
 - V15 You graciously go to them (which takes real guts, but God is with you), and have a calm conversation, and say, do you mind if we talk this through these comments which I found hurtful.
 - And the person says, "I am SO sorry. I did say that, I was upset for these reasons, and I should never have said it and I'm so sorry".
 - Well it was painful, but Jesus died for that sin, and he's died for the worse sins that you have committed, so you forgive them, you pray together, and you move on.
 - Perhaps in the conversation you realise how you upset them in the first place, so you can ask for forgiveness for your part in it all, because it is rare that sin is completely one sided. The reconciliation which is the aim of all this has been achieved. IN Jesus' words you have "won them over".

- Now forgiveness is a process as well as a point, so you are going to need the Holy Spirit to help you when feelings of bitterness arises.
 - But sin has been dealt with carefully and in love, it's been contained,
 - it hasn't been gossiped all over the church,
 - in fact relationships have got stronger because grace and forgiveness has been offered and accepted.
- But what if the other party doesn't change. In our example the slander, is ongoing. There's clear evidence for it, but there's no signs of repentance, in fact it's getting worse.
- **Stage 2: Take 1 or 2 people along.**
 - V16 This time you probably have a word with one of the **elders**, who are to take the lead in church discipline with their an oversight role over the whole congregation, but it could be someone else.
 - There's a quote from Deuteronomy there, showing that we are following due process here, that we are looking for lawcourt kind of clarity of evidence, not guesswork or hearsay.
 - And a second conversation takes place.
 - God willing there will be the same levels of
 - Generosity
 - Care
 - Honesty
 - Perhaps everyone is convinced that no sin has happened, or that it has been dealt with appropriately.
- But what if the person has been sinning. Perhaps they've been sleeping with someone they are not married to. And they aren't willing to stop.
- Now usually, and tragically in these cases, by the time it gets to this stage those involved run away. They feel hurt and they stop coming. That's a tragedy because there's now unresolved sin and it's unlikely to be dealt with appropriately.
- But God-willing there is repentance, healing, help offered (because we are all sinners, and we all need God's help). There may be patterns of behaviour that have got stuck, and help is on hand, no-one is condemning the person, all along the motivation is to lovingly restore them and help them, and this very passage is followed by a clear command to forgive a (presumably repentant) brother or sister multiple times.
- But what if there's still no turning from sin.
- **Sin** is a problem in Christianity, but it can be dealt with,
- but **unrepentance** is a far greater problem.
 - A man is **still** living with a woman who is not his wife
 - A woman who calls herself a Christian is **still** worshipping her old gods
 - A lifegroup leader is **still** teaching something that clearly goes against the central teaching of the apostles

- **Steps 3: The wider church are to be involved.**
 - **V17**
 - Now I know this is a heavy topic, but just to reassure you,
 - This is very rare, In my 20 years in church leadership conversations have got to level 1&2 but not steps 3 or 4.
 - God willing like a liferaft on a boat you hope it will never be needed.
 - As a last resort it needs to be brought to the church.
 - Without oversharing gory details unnecessarily
 - The church is made aware of the situation
 - All the while, seeking for the person to be brought back to repentance
 - Different churches make these decisions in slightly different ways.
 - But if the person is still not turning from that serious publicly known sin that is bringing Christ into disrepute, the church decides to take things to step 4.
- **Step 4. Treat the individual as if they are not a Christian.**
 - This doesn't mean that they aren't a Christian.
 - They may not be, if they've never seen that Jesus is to be Lord as well as Saviour.
 - Or they may be a Christian who is stuck.
 - And this may spur them to turn back in repentance.
- How do you treat an unbeliever? You love them, you share the gospel, they are still welcome to come to church to keep hearing the gospel.
 - But they won't be given communion
 - And the NT encourages the relationship to be treated differently.
- But they may say "I'm so sorry, I got it wrong, Jesus forgive me"
 - And they'll be welcomed with open arms like the prodigal son.
- But tragically if there's still no repentance, they are treated like an unbeliever.
- One further note: tears. (Ed Shaw- Living out Podcast³)
 - From the person under discipline
 - From the people enacting the discipline.
- I hope you can see that those two words **careful** and **loving** are key
 - The whole purpose here is to build up, to protect the flock and to help the individual.
 - All of us are sinners, all of us can get stuck.
 - These steps may take a long time.
 - All of the fruit of the Spirit will be prayerfully sought along this painful path, so that we are being loving, patient, gracious.

³ <https://www.livingout.org/resources/podcasts/89/church-membership-and-discipline-church-leaders-5>

- But ultimately sin is serious, and Jesus has given us loving commands for how to
- **Grow in Christlike purity by careful loving discipline.**
 - OK. What's the application?
 - Well after quite a serious end to our teaching on the church, I'd like to end where we began:
 - Jesus is our loving bridegroom.
 - He loves us.
 - He loves us warts and all.
 - He wants to cleanse, heal, change us.
 - If we remain close to him as our Saviour and Lord, talking to him, asking for his help, this maturity and purity will be growing incrementally withiout
 - KEEP WALKING CLOSE TO JESUS.
- Martin Luther pictures Christ as a King marrying a prostitute.
 - As the church of Christ we have been shamefully unfaithful.
 - (strong language, but biblically true as we'll see in Jeremiah)
 - And yet he still loves us.
 - And you know what happens when a marriage takes place.
 - All I have I share with you: E's CDs, C's marmite!
 - And everything he has, his righteousness, grace is given to us.
 - And all our shame is taken by him and fully paid for at the cross.
- Martin Luther says *"Who can even begin to appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can comprehend the riches of this glorious grace? Christ, the rich and divine bridegroom, marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all of her evil, and adorns her with all of His goodness. It now is impossible for her sins to destroy her, for they are laid on Christ and swallowed up by Him"*.
- As we take communion today,
 - Take hold of Christ afresh,
 - Feed on him in your heart by faith
 - Turn away from the sins that separate you from God and your brothers and sisters.
 - Receive the forgiveness and healing that is yours.
 - **Let's pray.**