



## Lesson 8: Growing as One

### Teacher's Edition

**Overview:** Paul transitions from the doctrinal to the practical section by showing the importance of believers living and growing together in community as Christ empowers them.

**Purpose:** Believers should see the importance of living in a community as it relates to spiritual growth. They should recognize that spiritual growth apart from a community of believers was never designed by God to work.

**Passage:** Ephesians 4:1-16

**Introduction:** Who you are will impact what you do, or at least it should. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians show a believer what God has done for them. They recount his glorious election, adoption, redemption, sealing, and the unity he has brought between those who used to be outside God's family and those who used to be in it. Now they are one. Because of all of this, Paul prays that they would more fully understand what God has done for them, and then prays that their growing knowledge of God's love would strengthen them. He follows all of this up with a very hefty command: walk worthy of your calling. Act like you are a child of the King, redeemed and destined for eternal glory, because you are.

But the way Paul immediately applies this truth might surprise us. He doesn't tell us to clean up our immorality or watch the way we speak, at least not yet. He doesn't begin by telling us not to steal or lie, although he will. He begins this section by addressing the way believer interact with each other. Why? For two reasons: 1) the glory of the gospel is seen

in the reconciliation of believers with God and with others, and 2) we need other Christians to help us so that we can walk worthy of the gospel. No one can go it alone, we all need help!

As Paul makes this transition from right teaching to right living, the hinge is our life in the body of church, with other believers, growing together to achieve Christlikeness.

### ***Why would Paul begin here? How does this***

#### **I. Paul shows us the need for unity (vv 1-6).**

##### **A. Unity requires hard work (vv 1-3).**

**Explanation:** Part of the reason for Paul's immediate emphasis on unity is how difficult true unity is. Unity requires us to humble ourselves and to put up with the sinful and at times hurtful behavior of others. Our Christian character doesn't exist in a vacuum, it is shown as we display the fruit of the Spirit in our interactions with other people.

**Humility** The word for humility comes from two Greek words meaning "lowly" and "minded." It describes a person who thinks lowly of him or herself in a proper way. Interestingly, this word doesn't exist in Greek literature before the New Testament. Greeks and Romans, and for that matter most people today, view a low opinion of oneself as a vice, and not a virtue. Paul discussed this same idea in Romans twelve when he said that no one should think higher of themselves than they ought to think.

**Gentleness** Paired with humility is the virtue of meekness, or gentleness. This has the idea of controlling one's anger, of having strength yet keeping it bridled. Aristotle saw this word as the middle point between "excessive anger against everyone and on all occasions," and "never being angry with anything." Paul states in 2 Corinthians 10:1 that is the attitude of Christ, yet even Christ strongly confronted at times. Humility and gentleness work together beautifully. Arrogant, proud people who view themselves as important who are likely to be harsh with others. Humble people see others as more important and are willing to be gentle and careful in their dealings with others.

**Patience** Filling out these virtues is the virtue of patience, putting up with people who are unkind, immature, or downright mean. It is one thing to respond rightly when someone is unkind. It is another to respond that way again and again, with different people. Sometimes we get sick of dealing with the same problem over and over. Sometimes we get frustrated that we are constantly facing new problems. Yet God, the perfect example of patience (cf Romans 2:4), continues to put up with our sinful and hurtful actions, and he desires that we do the same.

***What are some practical ways believers can show humility, gentleness, and patience in everyday church life?***

All of this should be done because our desire is to keep “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Because we have been baptized by the Spirit into the church, we are all one. Now it is our job to display that unity by the way that we live.

**B. Unity reflects God’s character (vv 4-6).**

**Explanation:** The keyword for this section is the word “one.” That word shows up seven times, and describes the Trinity (one Spirit, one Lord [Christ], one God and Father of all), the gospel (one hope, one faith, one baptism), and the church (one body). God’s desire.

God desires that the unity we see in the Trinity should be displayed by believers. Christ makes this point more dramatically in his high priestly prayer (cf John 17:20-21). Because God is one, he made sure that there is only one way to him, or as others have said “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

***Is it ever appropriate to divide the body of Christ? Over what?***

Unity must never come at the expense of doctrinal or practical purity, however. Scripture warns that Christians must separate from those who believe the wrong things (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 John 10) or who live persistently sinful lives (1 Corinthians 5:1-2).

***Why does God require separation if his goal is unity? How can Christians fail to strike this balance between separation and unity?***

**II. Paul shows us the provision for unity (vv 7-12).**

**A. Christ gives gifts to enable the work of ministry (vv 7-11).**

**Illustration:** Being equipped for the right job can mean life or death. Can you imagine a soldier being sent to the front lines the first day after he arrived for boot camp? Would you appreciate it if you found out your child's high school biology teacher dropped out of college? How would you feel if you were about to go under for an operation and found out the operating doctor graduated from college but never went to Med school? To be successful in life, one must be first trained, or equipped, to do his or her job properly. Fortunately, God does not leave us unequipped when it comes to our need to be unified. He gives us the tools we need to achieve the high demand he's given us.

**Explanation:** This is a challenging passage when it comes to some of the finer details,<sup>1</sup> but the general point Paul is making is quite clear: Christ has given us everything we need to grow into spiritually unity. As has been often observed: unity is not uniformity. In other words, people can be unified without looking the same. In fact, one of the most exciting parts about the church is that we don't all look, or think, or act the same. In order to truly

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<sup>1</sup> There are a couple tricky questions in this passage. First, what does it mean that Christ went into the lower parts of the earth? While some think this indicates a "descent into Hades" it most likely refers simply to his incarnation or perhaps even his death (the lower parts being his grave).

There is also difficulty with Paul's quote, which appears to be from Psalm 68:18. However, in the Hebrew copies we have today the Psalmist says God receives gifts, not that he gives them. It is possible that Paul is looking at a copy of the Old Testament that says "gave" rather than "receive," or that he is summarizing the whole Psalm (which talks a lot about the gifts that God gives) and borrowing and slightly tweaking one of the verses to communicate the whole idea.

be unified, we need each person to use the skills and abilities that God has given us.

**B. Christ's gives leaders to enable the work of ministry (v 11).**

**Explanation:** Christ gives us spiritual leaders to help get us ready to grow in our own unique ways. Five specific roles are listed here: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers.<sup>2</sup> While we no longer have apostles or prophets today, we do have a record of their most crucial ministries and writings available for our use today. The last three positions are still given by Christ to the church.

Evangelists refer to those who travel bringing the gospel to others. This can refer to what we think of as evangelists, but probably also includes church planters and missionaries, those who seek to take the gospel to those who have not heard it before. "Pastors" is the word for shepherd, and refers to those who lead and guide the people of God by applying God's Word to their lives. Pastors also teach, as do teachers, but they also do more than that.

**Application:** God gave spiritual leaders for your good! He desires to use them to get you ready to serve him. We have to be careful not to view those over as us though they can get nothing wrong, but at the same time we should respect and listen to those God has given us and seek to learn and grow from them.

***What are some ways that pastors, evangelists, and teachers prepare believers to live for Christ?***

**III. Paul shows us the goal of unity (vv 12-16).**

**A. Our unity should result in participation in ministry (v 12).**

**Explanation:** We often describe what pastors and missionaries do as "ministry," and that's understandable and it's not wrong.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Greek, pastors and teachers are put together in a unique way the other ones aren't. The idea is that the two roles, while not identical, are very closely related.

The problem with this line of thinking is that the primary job of Christian ministers is to prepare **others** to minister. It's not just the pastor's job to disciple believers, or to share the gospel, or to study God's Word and seek to show others how it should apply to their lives. That is **everyone's** job. And it's the job of the pastor to help the people he has been called to shepherd to be able to do that. Churches only grow as everyone gets involved in ministry.

**Application:** Are you getting involved in ministry? Are you seeking to share your faith? Are you seeking to help other Christians grow? Those aren't jobs for the pastors, or deacons, or table leaders, those jobs are for everyone! God wants everyone to get involved in what he's doing in the world through the church, and that means you!

***What are some practical ways believers can seek to be involved in ministry?***

**B. Our unity should result in doctrinal maturity (v 14).**

**Explanation:** One of the reasons that God gave the church is to teach believers what is right and wrong. Because doctrine and practice are so closely tied together, wrong teaching can lead to dangerous and sinful living. In the New Testament, believers are often warned about false teaching.

***What are some dangerous doctrines and teachings that are in America today?***

Unfortunately, many Christians don't know their Bible well enough to refute wrong teaching. So when a false teacher or a Christian teacher with dangerous teaching shows up Christians aren't ready to refute what they are hearing.

**Application:** Many believers roll their eyes when they hear the word "doctrine." But doctrine simply means teaching, and having the right teaching about Christ is necessary if we want to live lives

that honor God. Sometimes discussions about doctrine can seem to be obsessed with details, like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. But sometimes minute distinctions can lead to big differences. While we should be careful about not getting carried away with small details, the general attitude of believers should be a positive one when it comes to doctrine. What is your attitude about doctrine?

**C. Our unity should result in spiritual growth (vv 13, 15-16).**

**Explanation:** Paul uses an unusual picture here. He describes Christ as the giant head of a small body. The goal of that body is to grow up into the head. To look like Christ in their interactions with others and fill out what Christ should look like in the world. But that can only happen as each part of that body works together.

**Application:** The church will only grow as each part does its job. Are you contributing to the growth of the church? If the church was a puzzle, each Christian is a piece. Every missing piece matters. You need the church, and the church need you!

***How do believers help the whole body grow? What are some ways believers can help others grow (think informal as well as formal ways)?***