

Monday, February 4th

Read Verses 3:17-21

17 ... And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

We benefit as God's people when we are rooted and established in love. When we allow God to collectively bring us together, we begin to understand how profound God's love is for us. We know God loves us, but we don't grasp the enormity of it as individuals. We can know God loves us greatly, but we can't feel the height, width, breadth of God's love as an individual. When we come together as a community, and when we begin to treat others with Godly love, we begin to gain a far deeper understanding of God's love for us, as we love one another. When you are part of a church or a godly community that truly loves each other, we begin to love and experience the love that Paul is talking about here.

We all have a story. When we learn each other's stories, we identify with others in a more intimate level. These deeper authentic relationships of love for one another and spiritual transparency result in all of God's people being filled up with the full measure of God. When God's full measure is present his power transforms us and spills out to transform the community and those around us.

Last week we learned Paul's model for prayer – remember, request and rejoice. Here Paul is getting so caught up in the vision he rejoices. It is so compelling that God will do even more than we can imagine as he prays for the church to come to total spiritual perfection. Paul adds this doxology to say, "In case you think that it is too much to ask God to fill His saints to all of His fullness, remember that He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to His power and for His glory." God is not just able to do beyond what we ask, but *immeasurably* more.

God often displays His mighty power by working when we are incapable of doing anything in our own strength. At times for reasons we do not usually understand, He chooses not to display His power in our lives. At those times, His power and glory are displayed through the patient, joyous endurance of His people in the midst of their suffering. Even the apostle Paul, who penned these great words, had many disappointments in his ministry. And so, we should be motivated to pray big prayers with faith in a mighty God, who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. And, yet at the same time, we will all face difficult struggles in our prayer life. We simply cannot know the big picture of what God is doing, and so invariably we will experience disappointments in prayer.

Paul's prayers like our own, may be answered differently than expected, or by different means or timing, but he knows he can rejoice because his prayer is tied to the character of God.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, <https://bible.org/series/ephesians-0>.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *A Prayer for Renovation*, 20 Nov. 2016, <https://www.missionhills.org/identity-theft/>

Tuesday, February 5th

Read Verses 4:1-3

Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Paul has just spent the first three chapters of Ephesians teaching that God's eternal purpose is to sum up all things in Christ. He has shown that the mystery of the Gospel includes God bringing together two formerly alienated and hostile groups, the Jews and the Gentiles. He has made them into one new family. Together, we are being built into a holy temple or dwelling place of God. God dwells in us each individually and collectively as His Church.

Chapters four through six show specifically how the church brings glory to God and to Christ Jesus. In almost all of Paul's letters, he first lays the doctrinal foundation and then he applies it to everyday life. He begins his teaching on application by starting with our calling and by using the relational words of humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance and love. As you read through the second half of the book of Ephesians, you can't help but notice the importance of interpersonal relationships in the church and home.

Biblical humility means being Christ-sufficient not self-sufficient. The proud person trusts in himself. He thinks that he can do it. You often hear, "you've got to believe in yourself". No, the humble Christian trusts in Jesus. Biblical humility also recognizes that God has put us in positions. God has given us gifts and abilities to be stewards of the positions He has placed us in. When our position is kept in perspective, we tend to treat those around us gently. We recognize God has gifted us with abilities to steward those people or things in our circle with care.

Our circumstances don't change our calling. Paul understands himself to be engaged in the work that Jesus has called him to do, even though he is in prison. It doesn't matter what our circumstances are, there is a calling on our life. God is writing the story of our lives, we don't get out of it just because we are placed in a circumstance that is difficult or seemingly without hope.

As we walk our worthy life with God's call on our life, we are instructed to do so with patience. Biblical patience is the ability to hope without immediate results. God is never idle. Often God is doing things under the surface. Do you think Paul had any idea the letters he was writing from prison, would continue to be read for thousands of years by millions of people?

Patience needs to be accompanied by bearing with one another in love. We need to keep moving forward together in spite of the differences among us. Unity is a byproduct of purpose. If we are unity in our purpose, then we are united in our calling. Unity among believers is a big deal in the Bible. Jesus prayed for it just before He went to the cross. Paul

has just spent the first three chapters of Ephesians encouraging us that God's eternal purpose is to sum up all things in Christ. The call to follow Christ through the Gospel is also a call to grow in loving relationships with one another.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, <https://bible.org/series/ephesians-0>.

Smith, Craig. "The One Thing." *Identity Theft*, 29 Jan. 2017, <https://bit.ly/2CBL0A5>

Wednesday, February 6th

Read Verses 4:4-10

⁴ 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.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.⁸ This is why it says:

*"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Unity is very important to God. God wants us to have one mind. In verses four through six, the oneness is undeniable. God's people, which is His church, should in the same way reflect that oneness.

Unity does not imply uniformity. Paul goes on to show how the various members of the body have different gifts. As we exercise these gifts under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the one body grows in maturity and strength. True unity requires uniqueness and it requires a united purpose. When Paul says, "each one of us", he is shifting from the big you, meaning the church, down to the individuals who make up that church.

What he literally says is, "To each one the grace is given." And that signals that he is not talking about just the general, undeserved kindness of the Gospel, but rather he is talking about a specific grace that is given to each one of us. What he is really talking about here is spiritual gifts. You must receive God's gracious gift of eternal life before you receive His gracious spiritual gift that enables you to serve Him.

A spiritual gift is the normal way the Holy Spirit manifests His presence through a Christian individual. Each individual person in the church has a way that the Holy Spirit says, "I'm here." It is as if Paul is saying, "The church is like a puzzle. It is only when we put all the pieces together that the whole picture emerges. It is only when all the pieces get joined together and get unified, that we see what God is doing and we see the fullness of who God is."

In verse eight, Paul cites Psalm 68:18, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." Paul takes this verse about a victorious Israelite king leading his captives in triumphal procession, receiving gifts of plunder and applies it to the victorious, ascended Christ in relation to His church. After His ascension, Jesus gave gifts to His church. The picture is of a victorious warrior, receiving spoil after his victory and then distributing that spoil as gifts to his people.

Paul doesn't stop with the idea of Jesus distributing gifts to His people, he wants us to understand what it cost Jesus to give us our gift. He descended first, which means he came out of heaven. He set aside his glory, he set aside the right to be worshiped, and he became one of us. That's his first descent. When Paul says the lower earthly realms, that is probably a reference to the grave, the tomb. Jesus went to the cross, he took our sin upon himself and he died for us. That is what it cost Jesus. He went from heaven down into the tomb itself.

As we exercise the spiritual gifts that the ascended, victorious Savior has given to us, we help to extend His sovereign rule before He returns to reign supremely. To extend Christ's sovereign rule over all, we must be committed to the local church, where we can discover and exercise the gifts that He has given us. To fulfill Christ's purpose for our lives, we need to not only to attend church, but also get involved by using our gifts to serve others.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, <https://bible.org/series/ephesians-0>.

Smith, Craig. "The One Thing." *Identity Theft*, 29 Jan. 2017, <https://bit.ly/2CBL0A5>

Thursday, February 7th

Read Verses 4:11-16

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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 fullness of Christ.

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. ¹⁵ 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.

In today's reading Paul is not listing all possible gifts, but rather concentrating on leadership gifts. Each of these groups of gifted people are mentioned for their role of establishing the church and their job is to equip people for ministry. Paul is not saying these people do the ministry, but rather he is saying they enable or direct the ministry for the church. Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are all called to use our gifts in the works of service toward others. Each of these leadership gifts centers on the Word of God, indicating that the Word

is foundational to a mature church. The leaders equip the church for the work of service through the Word of God. In this way the body grows to maturity in Christ.

A mature church grows into doctrinal unity on the core essentials of the faith. We grow into a deeper knowledge of Jesus through our deepening knowledge of the Word of God, which reveals Christ to us. Mature growth and knowledge of our Lord results. Thus, the church will not be tossed around by every wave and wind of false doctrine, but rather will grow up into maturity in Christ.

As you grow in the faith and apply the Word to your own life, look for ways to impart God's truth to others. In this way, we mature individually in Christ, we mature in our relationships with one another and we mature in our love for one another. We become a healthy body of believers with sound doctrinal discernment. Spiritual truth is not subjective, according to individual preference or experience. It is objective and true at all times and in every culture. A healthy church must hold to, proclaim and practice the truth of the gospel.

Speaking the truth of the Gospel is speaking truth in love to others. It is only by believing the Gospel that people will be saved from God's eternal judgment. Biblical love is a commitment to seek the highest good of the one loved. We should be patient, kind, and sensitive in how we talk with others.

In all things, our heart's motive should be to win people to Christ and to build them in the faith. Love does not take selfish advantage of others, but rather sacrifices self for the good of others. Love is to be the very atmosphere that permeates the church as we grow in Christ. In fact, the phrase "in love" occurs six times in Ephesians, more than in any other New Testament epistle. Truth without love can be harsh. But, love without truth is not genuine love.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, <https://bible.org/series/ephesians-0>.

Smith, Craig. "The One Thing." *Identity Theft*, 29 Jan. 2017, <https://bit.ly/2CBL0A5>

Friday, February 8th

Read Verses 4:17-19

Instructions for Christian Living

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Paul started chapter four by urging us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling and then in recent verses developed how the worthy walk pertains to church unity and maturity. In today's reading, Paul begins to teach us how the worthy walk affects our personal holiness. He isn't giving us some helpful hints to try if we feel like it. He is giving the Lord's commandments for how His people must live. Paul is showing that when we become a

Christian, there must be a distinct break from the past. People should be able to see clearly the difference in our lives, so that they wonder, “what happened?”. His message is quite simple; believers must not live as unbelievers live.

In verse 17 Paul makes a general statement about how unbelievers live, “in the futility of their mind.” In verse 18, he shows why they live this way. The idea seems to be that the reason unbelievers live in the futility of their mind is that they are darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God. The reason they are alienated from the life of God is that deep within them, they are ignorant of God. They do not know Him. The reason for this ignorance is that their hearts are hardened due to sin. Then in verse 19, he shows this kind of futile lifestyle inevitably leads to impurity.

Many unbelievers live for a purpose, even for noble purposes. But, if they do not take God and eternity into consideration, what is gained? It’s all vanity or emptiness, unless it is done in light of God and eternity. Paul’s exhortation to us is to not drift through life living for the next momentary pleasure. Don’t live in the futility of your mind. Live with a godly purpose in light of eternity.

Paul also says, “Don’t walk around with a darkened understanding.” As Christians, we need to be renewed and transformed in our mind through God’s Word. We need to become biblical thinkers about every issue we face, whether how to relate to others or how to manage your time and money and even our vocations.

The phrase, “because of the ignorance that is in them,” explains why unbelievers are alienated from the life of God. They do not know God personally. *Ignorance* translates from the Greek word from which we get our word, *agnostic*. It means to be without knowledge. Paul traces their spiritual ignorance to “the hardness of their heart.” The person who is hard of heart ignores God and His commands. As believers, we seek daily to know the living God in a more intimate way. Submit every area of your life to Him. Don’t let sin harden your heart and produce doubts and spiritual ignorance.

Verse 19 describes the final result of this downward spiral into sin. To become callous means to cease to feel pain; thus, spiritually, it is to lose the capacity to feel shame or embarrassment. As Jeremiah 17:9 puts it, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” As believers, we must get into the habit of instantly judging our own sin on the heart level. Be transformed by the renewing of our minds through God’s Word and we will not live as unbelievers live.

Cole, Steven J. “Ephesians.” *Bible.org*, 2007, <https://bible.org/series/ephesians-0>.