

Greetings Christ Church of Wiesbaden!

Today our study in Ephesians will round out a section that has been focused on our unity as a church.

And in this section Paul has stressed things about us that are already true.

In Christ we are one.

And this would have been a very counter-cultural truth in the first century.

Because there were many divisions in that first century society:

Some were rich, and some were poor.

Some were from Jewish backgrounds, some were gentiles.

Some were male, some were female.

Some were highly educated. Some were simple trade workers.

And one of the most shocking truths of the gospel in that day was that all of those differences had been demoted.

Because in the church, all believers are one.

To show just how unified we are Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4-6:

Ephesians 4:4 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.

Today, we welcome such concepts of unity and equality.

We are not offended by the truth of our unity in Christ.

We see this as the way things ought to be.

And yet, in the passage we will study today, there is an offense for us.

Because, while we may prize unity and equality, that doesn't mean that we are genuinely unified.

For to be unified means to know each other well, to rely on one another and to be available for one another.

As a rule today, we are all pretty individualistic.

We define ourselves not by our relationships but by what we do and accomplish.

Outside of western culture, most people define according to their family, group or tribe.

Their personal identity is wrapped up in their family or group relationships.

Yet for most of us, we define ourselves according to what we accomplish and do.

And today our passage is going to challenge us on precisely this point.

Because in Christ, we have been given a completely new identity as a gift because of what Christ has done..

We are children of God and members of Christ's body.

And this new identity is to be central to how we think and act..

You've probably heard that the royal family has experienced some turbulence recently.

Prince Harry and Princess Megan have moved to America and they want to shed their titles.

Imagine if the royal family said, "Well, it seems we have lost a prince and princess. We must replace them."

And so, they decide to adopt you and your wife into their family.

If you were offered this adoption, most of you probably wouldn't refuse.

Now, imagine that the adoption was finalized.

Would you think any differently about yourself?

Of course you would.

You would inform all your friends: Guess what! I am a Windsor!

Yep, a real live prince!

And because of this new relationship, everything in your life would be redefined.
You would undoubtedly have a new sense of purpose.
And you would often remind yourself of your new identity.

Being of the house of Windsor would be the first description you would want people to know you by.

Now, in Christ, something similar has happened for every believer.
Because in Christ we are the Children of God.
And because we are the children of God, our self-identity must undergo a radical change.
We are in a new family and with that comes a new identity and new obligations.

In Ephesians 4:13-16, Paul calls us to discard our individualistic self-identity, and to view ourselves first and foremost as a part of Christ's Body.

And so this passage couldn't be any more counter-cultural to us.
So, let's study Ephesians 4:13-16- picking it up in verse 11 for context:

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds 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.

Say: *Thus ends the reading of God's holy and infallible word.*
The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.
Pray.

Our passage is about growing together in maturity.
A sermon outline is available online under the downloads section of the website.
And the first point there is...

I. Christ, The Measure of Maturity (13)

Normally we think of Christian maturity in terms of personal aspiration.
We want to grow in Christlikeness individually.
And this is right and good.

But the focus in our passage today is **"Growing Together in Maturity."**
In verse 13, Paul states this plainly.
He writes:

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,

Our model for maturity is Christ.
And this is not just true for us individually. This is true corporately.

Christ is our model for maturity and His maturity showed itself in a number of ways.
First he lived a holy life.
But his personal holiness was just the beginning.
He was also incredibly fruitful in ministry and He lived in close relationship with the disciples.

Think of how useful in ministry Christ was.

He had all the gifts for ministry.

He was the best teacher, he could organize and administrate, he could heal and perform miracles.

Christ's ministry was marked by incredible fruitfulness.

To use a sports analogy- Jesus was like that rare combination of an athlete where they have the highest degree of physical talent coupled with the greatest work ethic.

Christ had all the spiritual gifts and the most tireless drive for spiritual industry.

But even so, he never desired to be a one man show.

Instead, from the very beginning, he called to himself disciples.

And he lived in the closest relationship with them.

And this is instructive for us as we seek to grow in maturity.

Community and doing life together was how Jesus Christ expressed His maturity.

And in verse 13, Paul wants us to grow in this way as well- in community and doing life together.

Hear verse 13 again:

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,

So the goal of our Christian maturity is not simply individual, personal holiness.

It is also that we would grow in Christ together.

So let me ask you:

Is your desire to grow in Christlikeness only a personal thing?

Or do you have spiritual aspirations for others in the body of Christ as well?

Do you have a heart for your brothers and sisters in the church?

The author of the book of Hebrews writes in 10:24:

Hebrews 10:24 ... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Christian, your faith and growth in Christ is not just a personal thing.

Nor is it just a **"your family"** thing.

We must all seek to grow in Christlikeness together.

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,

So that's our goal.

Yet there is a threat out there and that we will deal with next in our outline:

II. The Threat of Worldliness (14)

In verse 14, Paul writes:

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.

Paul desires to see the church grow to maturity so that we would be impervious to the threats of false doctrine.

Now there are many ways to depart from orthodoxy, or right doctrine.

In Paul's day, churches could depart from orthodoxy by looking to the Jewish law for salvation.

Or churches could mix in the teachings of the pagan philosophers and their old folk religions.

These are just a few of the ways that churches could depart from orthodoxy.
And today, we have similar temptations to depart from God's truth..

We can get off track in our doctrine by buying into the teachings of various cults- like Mormonism or the Jehovah's witnesses.

We can get off track by mixing Christianity with our desires for success.

We see this done in churches where they believe the health and wealth gospel.

We can get of track by taking a **modernist view of the bible** where the miracles of scripture are seen as just myths.

But for the majority of us, the most significant threat to our faith is the philosophy of **materialism**.

Materialism is the belief that what we see and sense is really all there is.

And this is the dominant philosophy of our day.

It's also called **secularism**.

The first tenant of secular philosophy is this: What I can see and experience is first and foremost true.

If I can't see it, taste it, touch it, smell it or hear it- then it doesn't really exist.

In our day and age, this is the greatest errant teaching that we have to contend with.

It is in the air we breathe philosophically speaking.

It's in the media we consume.

It's in the education that most of us were brought up with.

It's the controlling philosophy of almost every non-Christian we know.

And none of us are unaffected by it.

Many Christians today are actually quite syncretistic in the way they view the faith.

Syncretism is mixing religions.

And God's people did this often in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the greatest spiritual threat to God's people was the temptation to worship other Gods.

And this seems like such a strange temptation for us.

Who would be tempted to worship Baal, the God of the storm?

Why would anyone every be tempted to bow down before an idol?

The reason the people of the Old Testament were tempted to worship other deities was because they felt vulnerable to the forces of nature.

Disease, infertility, a lack of rain, or being over-run by a neighboring nation were all threats to their existence.

And so they hedged their bets. They syncretized.

They trusted in the God of Israel...but they also put a little bit of trust in the other God's as well.

They routinely failed to trust Yahweh fully.

And God hated this.

Yet we do the same thing we say to ourselves:

"I'm pretty sure the God of the bible is truly God. But just in case He is not, I'm going to make sure that I have the best life possible now. Because there is a chance that you only go around this world once and then there is nothing beyond the grave. And in that case, I want to make sure I don't waste my life."

Functionally, this is how many of us operate and so we hedge our bets on God.

And this is nothing less than syncretism.

It is buying into the spirit of the age- the philosophies of materialism and secularism.

And this shows itself in our lack of complete commitment to Christ.
It shows up in how we prioritize our time.
It shows up in how we spend our money.

The greatest philosophical threat to Christians today is materialism because it is the prevailing philosophy of our world.

And Paul wants us to recognize this threat for what it is:
It is a view of reality that is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

Paul says in Colossians 2:8:
Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

You see, from the biblical point of view, materialism is not simply a human philosophy.
It is one of many philosophical options proffered by the devil.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote:
2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Any way of thinking that leads us away from a pure devotion to Christ is ultimately of the devil.
Think of Satan's deception of Eve.
His basic temptation was this:

***"Come on Eve, think for yourself. If God was so good, why would he keep anything from you? God created the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... and God wants you to remain ignorant!
God is holding you back. His rules limit you!
That fruit will make you wiser and more knowledgeable. So stop being such a submissive servant and think for yourself."***

That was Eve's temptation and we are experiencing a similar temptation today in the church.
Materialism is a philosophy of the devil telling us that what we can see is all there is.

And Paul desires that we in the church would
14 ... 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.

So take stock of your faith.
How have you hedged your bets on God?
Do you truly believe that Christ is the risen Lord?
And is that faith reflected in the way you prioritize your time? In how you spend your money?
In how you think about the church?

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, Paul summons us to action by saying:
2 Corinthians 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. **5** We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

There is no such thing as a neutral observer in this world.
We all have to pick a side.
And Christians are those who have chosen to follow Christ.

Now Paul does not leave us with a warning in this passage.

Instead, he closes the section by showing us what we are supposed to aspire to in the church.

And this brings us to our final point which is:

III. The Goal of Unity (15-16)

In verses 15 and 16, Paul writes:

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.

There are three things I want us to notice about these verses.

The first is...

1. The Importance of Love

Love is mentioned twice in these verses.

First Paul says, that we are to speak the truth in love.

And this refers to reminding each other of the truth of God's word.

God's word builds us up. It straightens us out.

And yet Paul knows that we can very easily speak the truth in such a way as to do damage and harm. And so he tells us we are to speak truth in love. That is with gentleness and understanding.

The second mention in love is at the end of verse 16:

so that [the body] builds itself up in love.

As Christians, we never grow when we are forced or coerced.

We grow because we are encouraged by the grace and love of Christ.

And as we grow in Him, we end up looking more and more like him.

If we are not growing in our love as a church, then we aren't really growing.

It is possible for the church to grow numerically but not to grow in love.

And Paul makes it clear that if we are really growing in Christlikeness, we will resemble Christ in his love.

The next detail I want us to notice about these verses is...

2. The interdependence of the members

In verse 16, Paul tells us how interdependent we are to be:

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.

The body is a whole and every part is necessary for the whole body to function.

To use the analogy of a wrist-watch, what does it matter if you only have the externals of a watch?

That is, just the watch-face, the housing, the hour and minute hands and the wrist band.

You can have all these things and still call it a watch.

Yet without all of the tiny gears and parts under the watch-face, the watch is totally useless.

So it is in the church.

All of the members are to be interdependent and if any part is missing or broken, then the entire operation of the church will be effected.

And so the bottom line is that we all need each other.

The final point I want us to recognize about these verses is...

3. The Increase of Usefulness

The goal of our unity is that we would be useful as Christ was useful.
This was spoken about first in verse 13 where Paul refers to “Mature Manhood.”
He speaks about it again in verse 16 by saying:

16 ...when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The great advantage of maturity is usefulness.
Paul has in mind here a healthy adult who is at the height of their powers.
And this is what the church is supposed to be like.
Not juvenile and unskilled. Not sickly and out of commission.
But rather trusting in Christ and working skillfully for His mission.

The goal of Christian maturity is usefulness for Christ and his kingdom.
And this is a goal that we must aspire towards together.

I started out this sermon by talking about our native individualism.
But Christ would have us think differently about ourselves.
We are each parts of a whole- members of his one body, with Christ as our head.

May we never think of ourselves merely as individual Christians.
Instead, let us define ourselves as members of Christ and connected to the family of God.
Amen.