

## NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON- 17th March 2024 am

**TITLE: "Praying for maturity" TEXT: 1 Ephesians 4 v 11-16**

**Series: How to pray for my church Part 3**

### Scripture references from the ESV

**Ephesians 4** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> **And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,<sup>[c]</sup> to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> 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.**

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. <sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. <sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ!— <sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self,<sup>[d]</sup> which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands,

so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

We have been looking at how to pray for our church in terms of being thankful and loving one another. The question before us now is how are we going to get better at both those aspects and also mature together as the church of Christ?

There is an expectation in scripture that

**God's people will not stand still but grow ever more into the likeness of Christ.**

However, sometimes people come to faith and, having learned the basics, they stagnate and stay as children in their Christian walk. This can happen at any stage of life – after baptism, following significant life events such as having children, and, as we get older, it is easy to mistake worldly maturity for Christian maturity.

It is vital that we mature in Christ throughout the course of our life (v14 above).

Over 2000 years of church history, many doctrines have been presented that run counter to the gospel and pull people away from Christ.

In today's world, it is all too easy for new Christians to come across false doctrine via YouTube and to get confused, thereby losing their focus on Christ and the truth of the gospel. Prosperity gospel preachers have tapped into this via TV and other means.

- If we are not mature in our faith, how will we be able to discern what is true and what is false?

This has always been a problem for the church, as Paul's letters to the churches reveal. The church in Ephesus was not immune to the influence of false teachers, and in his letter to them, Paul encourages them (and us) to mature, growing in love and thankfulness and being united in the love of Christ.

Earlier in the letter, Paul unpacks the reality of who we are in Christ, and the unity that we share in him. Jesus died for

to pay the price for our sins, rose again and formed us as a part of his bride – the church.

**In him, we are one body united through one Spirit with one hope under our one Lord, as we share in one faith expressed through our one baptism under our one Father.**  
Jesus Christ has brought us into this one-ness with him, but how do we live this out? How do we, as a church, mature in our unity in Christ so that we do not remain mere children?

**Jesus Christ brought us into the one-ness with him.**

**Jesus Christ has provided everything we need within this church for our mutual building up in him.**

- 1. We are to receive our equipping (vv11-12).** We often mistake unity for uniformity, but that is not what it means. In fact, we should expect almost the opposite (v7). We are enriched by different personalities, backgrounds and cultures but **we should also expect to be enriched by the diversity of gifts that Christ distributes for our mutual understanding.**

The gifts listed in v11 are crucial in using the diversity of gifts to build up our unity. It is like an orchestra, which contains a diverse range of instruments. No section of instruments sounds the same as any other. However, if left to themselves only a dreadful noise would be heard. The orchestra is missing some crucial components.

- a)** The orchestra needs music written for it by a composer. The church finds the equivalent of a music score in the Bible, the inspired word of God written down for us by the apostles and prophets appointed by God.

**The church has the perfect and most beautiful composition to play for the world to see and hear.**

- b)** The orchestra needs a conductor. Without a conductor, each musician will just make their own interpretation of the music. A conductor will direct the orchestra to play the music together in unity. His role is to study the music and the meaning behind it, and teach the orchestra from this, setting the pace for the musicians and stopping people from rushing off or being too slow.

**Just as the orchestra needs a conductor, so God's church needs shepherds and teachers, appointed not by man but by God.**

Primarily in our church, these are the elders. Our elders are to take the inspired word of God, written and directed by the apostles and prophets, and they are to utilise it for the shepherding and teaching of the church.

**We grow in our Christian walk by being equipped by those appointed by God to teach and shepherd us.**

The elders in this church take their role seriously and their desire is to equip the church as they shepherd and teach us. They seek to protect and guide its members through the word of God, pointing the church towards greater knowledge, faith and love of Christ so that the church is more and more united under Christ.

We are to listen, and submit, to those God has placed over us, not because they are any better than us (we are all sinners), but because God has assigned them to their roles. We are to be open to the protection, guidance and teaching that they bring us from the word so that we are equipped.

**We are to receive our equipping from those appointed to these roles.**

**2. We are to use our equipping in giving out and building up (v12).** *God gives to a church spiritual leaders whose role is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. And from the work of ministry by the saints, the body is built up. God's pattern for producing people with powerful, mature faith and genuine love is not to have the pastor-teachers do all the work of the ministry. They are to equip the saints to do the ministry.* (John Piper)

- The ministry that we are all called to do is the building up of the body of Christ.

The orchestra is not the conductor! The orchestra is everyone involved in it, and they all have their own role to play, while supporting one another. Musicians in one section will practice together, following instructions from the conductor, in order to get perfect unity rather than just getting it right individually. Any one section then needs to support the other parts for the sake of the overall sound. An orchestra is not a solo project and nor is a church.

**We are all to play our part in giving out and building up (v12-16).**

We are to speak the truth in love, and use the gifts with which we have been equipped to build one another up. God has given us all different personalities, skills, amounts of time, energy and finances, and we are to use these framed in the teaching that has

been given to equip us to build one another up. If we do not use all our God-given assets to build up the church, then we are wasting them. This is the purpose for which they are given.

- It is vital that we encourage one another daily.

**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** (Hebrews 3:12-13). The word exhort means to strongly encourage and this is not just a job for pastors and elders. It says **brothers** – that is all of us who are the church! We are vital in each other’s walk in Christ. We are to encourage one another daily, because we love one another, and we are to do it in love.

- Unless we know one another, how can we be united with one another and encourage one another in love?

This kind of living and loving cannot be achieved simply by attending church on a Sunday.

- We are to speak the truth in love over one another.
- We are to encourage one another daily, as far as is possible
- We are to point one another to Christ

**We are to grow and mature together.**

This cannot be done on a Sunday alone. We need to get involved with each other. Try inviting people to lunch or supper – it doesn’t have to be a feast and it doesn’t have to be on a Sunday! Go for walks together, or play board games. Belonging to a home group is a good start but it is a bare minimum as they only meet twice a month and so will not be able to wholly fulfil the aim of getting involved with one another.

- Get creative, as our God is, and think through ways that we could all live out this very different way of life.

As we unite together in Christ more and more, we will live out the communion that we have in him.

**The life of the local church sounds more beautiful than the best sonata and is more powerful than the greatest symphony, no matter how good the orchestra.**

How should we be praying for our church?

**1) Pray for our leaders:**

- For wisdom and guidance
- For God to protect them
- For their families

**2) Pray for each other:**

- That we would be more united as a church
- That we would mature in unity around the gospel
- That every member, no matter what their contribution to church life, would remain confident in the truths of God's word
- That God would use **you** to build his church up, asking him for specific opportunities
- That those on the fringes of the church, whether because they choose to be or because their circumstances dictate this, will come to see the role they can play

**3) Give thanks to God:**

- For the church here
- For those he has used to build you up in this church

When people hear the great symphony of Christ's church,  
they not only hear the good news but also experience it.

We are the best witnesses when the church is being church as Christ intended it to be.