

Team Jesus

Eph. 4:1-16

Series “Ephesians”

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This past week I had the opportunity to preach the homegoing service for one of our long-time members who had passed away, Carl Warwick. Carl was a great man...has an incredible family.

He loved Jesus. He loved his church. He loved his family...was married to his sweet wife, Nancy for 67 years...and there is one more thing Carl loved – and that is baseball!

Carl played in the Majors from 1961 to 1966. He is a member of the *TCU Letterman's Hall of Fame*. He is a member of the *Texas Baseball Hall of Fame*, AND is probably best known for his record of having the most pinch-hits (3) in a *World Series*...a record that still stands to this day! This took place in the 1964 *World Series* where his St. Louis Cardinals beat the New York Yankees in seven games.

Now, Carl played on some amazing teams. As just noted, he won a *World Series* with the Cardinals. He was originally drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers. He played for Houston's Colt 45's as well as the Baltimore Orioles. He played for a lot of different teams.

And this idea of playing for a team is what came to my mind when I read the passage that we are looking at today.

I'm calling the message: **Team Jesus**

The best team that we could ever play for is the “Church”. And if you have been with us in the series through the book of Ephesians, you know that Paul has had MUCH to say about the “Church” – it is the miracle...it is the mystery (3:4) that God revealed to Paul.

That because of Christ – in his death and resurrection (which we will celebrate BIGTIME next week in our Easter services) – in his death and resurrection he has given us access to God AND has broken the wall of hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile, and now we have been made “one in Christ” – this is the Church...this is Team Jesus.

Now, to set this passage up, let's remember the context. For three chapters, we have been learning about all that is ours “in Christ”.

- WHO we are “in Christ” ...
- WHAT we have “in Christ” ...

Go back and listen to these messages! It's amazing ALL that God has blessed us with, as Paul records it, “in the heavenlies” – and what we have...what IS our reality SHOULD positively affect our daily life and relationships.

We go from what has been termed the “vertical indicatives” of (Ch. 1-3) to the “horizontal imperatives” in (Ch. 4-6).

As members of the Church, on Team Jesus...those who are “in Christ” – we have these incredible blessings that are ours, and as we get to chapter four, Paul is going to insist we “walk” these blessings out.

This is the rest of our study in Ephesians. It has to do with our practice...how we live...what we do...AND listen: There’s a reason, I’m calling the message Team Jesus today. It’s because Christianity is a team sport!

This is important: Your relationship with Jesus is personal, but it’s not private.

And if we REALLY want to make an impact for the Kingdom...it’s not just how I live and that I am walking out my faith that matters. It’s not just how you live and that you are walking out your faith that matters.

It’s that we’re ALL in this together! We’re to be walking out our faith together – this is Team Jesus.

The words Paul uses for this “walking out our faith together” is “unity” and “maturity” – this is what he desires for the Church.

So, in keeping with this “Team Jesus” concept. The “win” for the Church is maturity...that’s what we’re after and we’ll see what “maturity” looks like in (v. 14-16).

BUT...we don’t get the win (i.e., maturity), if we’re not one (i.e., unity), and that’s the sermon in a sentence!

If I was a coach in the locker-room, and I had to motivate “Team Jesus” based off this passage of scripture, I’d put it on the whiteboard for all to see:

Eph. 4:1-3 – “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord (this is the second time Paul has referred to himself as a “prisoner for the Lord (cf 3:1) – he is a prisoner of Rome, but Paul is so God-centered he knows his imprisonment is FOR the purposes of and under the sovereign hand of God – he is a prisoner for the Lord!), **urge** (beg, admonish, exhort, appeal, implore – there is a sense of urgency to this this word – I URGE...) **you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,** (walk out the faith...let the funnel clouds touch down – walk it out...you’re your faith out and then he lists some traits that should describe how we walk) **² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

There will never be “unity” where these traits are not present and ever increasing. Underline them...highlight them...pray them into your life, and in the life of those you love.

Unity...oneness is ESSENTIAL. In just a moment, we will read in (v. 4-6) that unity and oneness is rooted in and reflected in the Godhead.

I was talking with a buddy just this week, and we were talking about this subject of unity and he brought up Jesus's prayer recorded in John 17.

Outside of Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and his prayer for forgiveness of those mocking and crucifying him on the cross, John 17 is the last prayer and the most exhaustive prayer we have of Jesus in the scripture.

And what was the subject of his prayer? Unity...Oneness! Unity is extremely important to Paul BECAUSE it was extremely important to God!

And we will NEVER experience unity and oneness without:

- Humility – this is understanding that you're not the most important person in the room...that it's not about you!
- Gentleness – this also translates as meekness. It's this idea of strength that is under control. Think of a mighty thoroughbred. It's powerful and strong, but under control!

There are some on Team Jesus that have stronger personalities than others...more passionate and outspoken than others. There better be a gentleness about you and how you go about things or there will be no unity.

You can't be short with others...that's why this next characteristic is so important.

- Patience – we need to exhibit an attitude that is willing to work with others despite their faults and/or limitations...it's being able to handle the fact that everyone is NOT perfect and they may not handle a situation like you would...it's giving people space to grow and develop.

Illus. Palm Sunday - I read these qualities and can't help but think of Jesus. This is Palm Sunday weekend. We think on and reflect on Jesus riding into Jerusalem. You can't read that passage or think of that picture and NOT think of:

1. The humility of Christ! There has never been anyone more humble. He left heaven to come to earth. We'll read more of this in just a moment.
2. Gentle? Think about the gentleness of Christ. He is the epitome of strength under control. He could have called on legions of angels to deliver him from the cross, but instead took the shame and the beatings and the mockery and the nails...Jesus was so gentle – little kids loved being around him during his earthly ministry. Sinners that were worthy of being stoned found grace. That's gentleness.
3. The patience of Christ – no one is more patient and longsuffering. Paul referred to Christ exhibiting his "perfect patience" (1 Tim. 1:16) by saving Paul and showing him mercy.

Commentator, **A. Skevington Wood** – **“The absence of these qualities may jeopardize Christian unity. That is why Paul presses his readers to exert all their powers to maintain the oneness in Christ that binds all believers to each other because they are bound by him and to him.”**

See, that’s what unity is all about...it matters because of WHO God is! There is unity in the Godhead...and this is who we worship and serve.

Team Jesus, we move and live and find our being in WHO God is! The Triune God (three in one) should inspire us and fuel our “walking together”.

Eph. 4:4-6 – “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.”

There are seven “ones” here...that’s the number of completion!

Remember what this church in Ephesus is dealing with! There are Jews and Gentiles, and Paul keeps hammering the fact that “in Christ” – there is no longer two separate and distinct peoples. You are now “one in Christ”.

There is one body...one spirit...one hope...one Lord...one faith...one baptism...one God and Father of all.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates this in *The Message*: **You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”**

And what Paul is getting at here is “in Christ” you are one – SO, LIVE LIKE IT!

Now, there is a transition that takes place here in (v. 7), and what we read here is that unity does NOT mean uniformity. While we are one “in Christ” and his oneness should inspire and fuel our oneness – that does NOT mean that we are all the same.

On Team Jesus, we have different roles and functions – just as the Godhead has different roles and functions. We have different giftings and responsibilities within the Church – and if we are going to win (i.e., reach maturity), we must be ONE (unified), but in this unity, we are each doing our part.

This is what it means to be a TEAM!

Illus. Rowing or Synchronized Swimming – This is a good picture of what we’re talking about here. There must be oneness, but in order for that to take place everyone must be doing their part.

So, what does this look like when Team Jesus is unified...one, but each one is doing their part? We see this described by Paul in (v. 7-12). Let's look at it...this is so good!

Eph. 4:7-10 – “**But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.** (To put it in “team” terms: Jesus is the manager and he gets to doll out the gifts. None are more important than the other – but he gets to set the line up and he gets to put us in the position he wants us to play. You know why? Because of this next verse!) ⁸ **Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”** ⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ **He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.**)”

Now, very quickly before we move into (v. 11-12) – this is important here. Paul is pulling from Psalm 68. You see in (v. 8) where he writes, “Therefore it says...”

Paul knows the Word. And he quotes Psalm 68. You don't have to turn there, but let me show you what it says. Pay attention to this because Paul changes a word to make a point!

Psalm 68:18 – “**You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.**”

Did you notice the change of words...very important! I'll put both these verses on a split-screen so you can see it.

Illus. Split-screen (Eph. 4:8 and Psalm 68:18a) – I've italicized the word-change. Eph. 4:8 uses the words, “*gave gifts*” while Psalm 68:18 uses the words, “*receiving gifts*”.

What's going on here? Now, I love this. In the Old Testament, whenever there was a battle, the King that won would lead captives away and receive gifts from them...it was the booty that they collected from the win!

Paul...he takes this Psalm and directs it to Christ, who led those captive (that's me and you! We were held captive by sin!), and Jesus conquered our sin by descending into the lower regions of the earth – that's the grave, and then he ascended on high, (v. 9) “far above all the heavens”...

And in his grace and riches – look at this...King Jesus DOESN'T receive gifts from us which he does (our praise, our worship, our adulation – he's worthy of it all!) but he in his goodness and out of his riches distributes gifts to us!

That is some kind of King and some kind of grace! He gives us gifts so that we can accomplish what he calls us to.

Now, while King Jesus (or we should be saying Coach Jesus – he's the Head Coach!) while he gives us gifts (and we will be held accountable for how we use these spiritual gifts – another sermon for another day), he also gives Team Jesus leaders that have a specific gifting to help the team come together as one and help them win by reaching maturity.

Eph. 4:11-12 – “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...”

Now, rather than getting into each of these words and taking them apart one by one, the big idea here is Coach Jesus, gives people specific gifting to help lead the team...notice they are THE leader – there is one leader, his name is Jesus!

Again, he’s the Head Coach! He specially equips though, leaders to help the team understand their mission and vision...to help the team perform at an optimum level so they can win!

And this group: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers – look at what their main task is – (v. 12) – “to equip the saints FOR the work of ministry, for the building up...for edifying and making strong the body of Christ.”

See, it there? The point of these leaders it to help equip the saints so that Team Jesus is built up...so that it is made strong...for what purpose?

Eph. 4:13 – “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...”

This is kind of coming full circle off last week...Paul prays that believers would be “filled with the fullness of God” – remember this form last week (3:19)? That was an individual prayer for Christlikeness.

Now, Paul writes that Team Jesus is given leaders to help them reach maturity – which is a corporate Christlikeness. Team Jesus is to be filled with the fullness of Christ and this happens as members of Team Jesus (me and you) are filled with the fullness of God.

You and me...we should look like Jesus! His Church...Team Jesus...should look like him as well. It only happens if we’re one, and this oneness is solidified as gifted leaders do their job!

When we’re one, we win.

Think about it! These leaders are teaching truth...they are modeling truth...they are intentional in pointing out error. They are focused on rooting out dissension wherever it rears its ugly head. They don’t stand for racism or schisms in the Church – none of that happens on Team Jesus.

A team like this, wins! They mature. And what does this “winning”...what does this maturity look like? It is spelled out for is in (v. 14-16).

Eph. 4:14-16 – “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.”

Here's how we know Team Jesus is winning. Here's how we know when we are maturing...you could call these marks of maturity. It's seen in how we think, how we speak, and in how we love.

Now, there is a personal and corporate element to this. Notice how many times the word “body” is used in this passage of scripture – 4x in these 16 verses.

In this, we each have to play our part. I am responsible for making sure I maintain unity and oneness just as you have to. I am responsible for becoming a mature believer so there can be a mature Church, and you are responsible for this as well.

We can know we're maturing as individuals and as Team Jesus by:

1. How we think

Eph. 4:14 – “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 talks a lot about the mind. We talked about this a little bit last week, the role of the mind. We can know we are growing in maturity when we are getting stronger doctrinally. We're not easily led astray by false teachers and false doctrines.

When tough times come, we don't give in and throw in the towel, and abandon our faith. We know we are winning (i.e., maturing) when we are winning the war for our mind.

- Taking thoughts captive...
- Loving the Lord with our minds...
- Renewing our minds in the truth of God's Word.

When we sift through the Enemy's schemes and recognize his temptation and with our mind fight and win the war against the lusts of the flesh and the appeal of worldly ambition and beauty, we can know we are maturing.

Same goes for a church. When we are fettered to TRUTH...when we grow in our doctrine and theology...when scripture is the funnel by which we gauge success and scripture determines what we keep as a priority, that's when you know we are growing in maturity – it has to do with how we think!

Another mark of maturity...how you can tell we are winning as Team Jesus (personally and corporately) is:

2. How we speak

Eph. 4:15 – “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”

Now, listen to this...important to emphasize here what “speaking the truth in love” is NOT! Sometimes we think speaking the truth in love is a way of putting someone in their place...it’s like we say this as a caveat before we beat up on someone.

That’s NOT what this is...this is NOT speaking truth as you see it to someone. This is referring to speaking the truth of God’s Word in love to someone because that is the ONLY thing that is going to help them grow into Christ!

It’s NOT speaking truth as you perceive it to be. It’s speaking the Word of God over people.

Remember, we are to be humble and gentle and patient with our teammates. So, you can know you are maturing NOT when you get your point across under the auspices of “truth in love”, but instead when you speak God’s word over someone that helps them grow into Christ.

Take it as a Church. As Team Jesus, here are at Champion Forest, are we known as a group of people that speak God’s Word...it doesn’t just govern our lives, but it is in our heart, on our lips.

A final mark of maturity can be identified by:

3. How we love

Eph. 4:16 – “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.”

Illus. Loving our Community – Yesterday, we had a couple of events going on here at the church. One was at the Community Ministry Center (CMC), the other was what we called a “Bunny Breakfast” for our friends from KISD with special needs. Check out these pics.

It’s a mark of maturity...love! The early church father, **Tertullian of Carthage** was an apologist for the faith. You know what he said won him to Christ. It wasn’t doctrinal arguments.

He said, and I quote: **“They (Christians) demonstrated something I didn’t have. The thing that converted me to Christianity was the way the loved each other.”**

“Love” is one of the most repeated words in the book of Ephesians...I believe it’s repeated 13x!

- 3x in Chapter 1...
- 1x in Chapter 2...
- 2x in Chapter 3...
- 2x in Chapter 4...
- 4x in Chapter 5...
- 1x in Chapter 6...

Could you be referred to as a mature Christian? Is Champion Forest “winning”? Love is the proof.

Unity and maturity. For the sake of Team Jesus, let’s make sure we are fighting for both.

Will you pray with me?