

“A Gauge for Maturity”

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I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version taken from the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 6 and verses 12, 13, 15 and 16. “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. We pray for all hearts to be open and receptive to your words. The oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality as your word states. Pour your grace down on us here today and in the months ahead to guard, protect, and to preserve that unity. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

In the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians the apostle Paul talks about *what* we believe. The last three chapters discuss *how* to apply what we believe. Unless we allow God's word to travel that long route from the head to the heart, and we haven't changed how we behave, what's the point? As Christian disciples, the goal is to become more like Christ, amen?

The verses that were read talk about walking in a worthy manner—walking as Christ walked. In doing this, unity is achieved and protected. What an amazing thing it is that the body of Christ is not made up of cookie cutter people; that's our strength! We're all different.

In Christianity, unity shows itself outwardly, but it's cultivated inwardly. We experience unity or disunity through our interaction with others in the body of Christ. Unity manifests itself because of godlike qualities that are being fostered on the inside—qualities like humility. There are five god-like qualities that are listed in the verses that were read—humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and unity. The first one, humility is the foundation to the four that follow it. So without humility the body of Christ suffers disunity. With humility as the foundation to unity, the other qualities in between will then develop and manifest themselves.

Humility is when we regard others as better than ourselves; we're *critical* of our own faults, but *charitable* in our judgment of others. For example, we're quick in observing our own weaknesses, but quick to overlook and make allowances for the shortcomings of others. We aim to be better than others, but esteem them to be better than ourselves. We know more about all the shortcomings of ourselves than we do any of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

In Philippians 2, Paul gives a perfect example of humility. "In humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own

interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Christ was fully God, yet emptied himself of godly prerogatives. He became a man and died the shameful death of crucifixion What a perfect picture of humility.

John Wesley notes that the Greeks and Romans didn’t even have a word for humility, in fact, they thought the attitude of humility was a disgrace. The term was probably created by the early Christians because there was no other word to describe this behavior. The word humility was actually used derogatorily of Christians. To Greeks and Romans, it was pitiful and a sign of weakness to not be full of pride and self-satisfaction. Humility is called a Christian virtue, but the thing about humility is that if one focuses too much on it it’ll turn into pride. It’ll become a shallow quality that’s just acted out. One can’t act humble or talk humble—they just are humble.

Jesus Christ was and is the perfect picture of humility. In Matthew 11: 29 Jesus says to “Take my yoke upon you . . . for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Jesus was born to peasant parents, born in a stable, laid in a feeding trough, never owned a home, only owned the clothes he wore, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. In a moment he could have exercised divine prerogatives, but instead chose to walk in his Father’s will. Christ calls us to walk in the same way he walked—in humility.

Humility is pretty much the opposite of the world’s ways. It’s the Christian virtue from which most godly qualities derive, yet the world lifts up pride rather than humility. To the world humility is seen as weakness and helplessness. It was

Satan's sin of pride that wanted to exalt himself above his Creator. Pride was the original sin of Adam and Eve because they trusted in their own understanding rather than God's. Proverbs says when "Pride comes, then comes dishonor" and "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling." Isaiah warns us that "The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled" and "The arrogant one will stumble and fall."

Matthew says "Blessed are the poor in spirit", and James says that "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." We're always going to fight against our pride because we're flesh. But surely, being aware of its destructive nature and consequences, we should be more able to be vigilant against it, and to do our best to resist it. Humility must be the root of all spiritual blessing. As sin has its root in pride, godly virtues have their root in humility. When we repent and get on God's side about our sin, we see ourselves for who we really are. Pride is in the middle of all conflict and disunity within the church. Pride hinders our relationship with God, and it hinders our relationships with others.

Humility begins with a proper self-awareness, for example, being more aware of our selfish nature. This in turn moves one toward a Christ-awareness—to walk in the way that Christ walked. Jesus is the one we compare our self to—not others. When Paul looked at himself in self-awareness he saw a man who was what he called the chief of sinners. When Peter realized who he was when confronted with Christ he said "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When Job looked at himself with Christ-awareness he said, "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." We should all be saying to ourselves, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." And God, full of grace, and mercy, and compassion looks down from heaven and lovingly accepts us because of the work of Christ.

A gauge for measuring our maturity in Christ is humility. When humility is manifesting itself in our relationships, then our unity is being managed. When it isn't being managed and protected disunity is the result. When we experience pressure and conflict in relationships it's a sign that disunity is rearing up its ugly head and boasting. Unity will find a way to collaborate and speak the truth in love. What we need to do is protect and maintain that unity. Love unites, but selfishness divides and separates.

We all have pride to manage in our personalities, but let's put on love and be controlled by love as we speak the truth in love. A barometer of maturity is humility, but we may not notice what's happening until disunity rears its head. So let's focus on maintaining and protecting our unity in Christ. Let's pray. God of love, work within us to regard others in a lowliness of mind and esteeming others better than ourselves. Help us to be critical of our own faults in comparison to you, but charitable in our judgments of others. Motivate us to be quick in observing our own weaknesses, but quick to overlook and make allowances for the shortcomings of others. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.