

How to Grow Together in Racial Reconciliation

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West Valley Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

I want to bring you warm greetings from your brothers and sister in the Onnuri Church of San Jose. And on their behalf, I want to thank you for your prayers, your encouragement, and your support for embracing us, when the circumstances were very difficult 2 years ago. We are forever grateful for your hospitality. Please remember that we are praying for pastor Morgan and the "Rancho Santa Marta" team as they share the gospel and touch the lives of children in need.

I hope you are praying with us as well.

Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:1-16.

Please remember to keep the Bibles open to that area, so that we can examine the passage together.

-Prayer

- Chicken feet, Dried fermented scallops, Green tea leaves, pig's blood, Durian, Bitter melon

For those of you who are familiar with some of the ingredients, they come from a television show called, "Chopped." Now, if you are unfamiliar with "Chopped", It comes on the Food Network, and it is a cooking competition show between 4 experienced chefs looking to win \$10,000. What they have to do is to prepare a dish made up of mystery ingredients and they need to serve them to three master chefs, who will judge each dish.

What's interesting about this particular show, "Chopped" is that, chefs not only have to use all the ingredients that we normally would not think of, but they don't know ahead of time, what ingredients they will have. These ingredients are hidden in a basket and it will be a mystery to them. So at the start of the competition, they have to open the mystery basket and within 20 minutes, they have to come up with a dish that is not only edible, but will satisfy the taste of master chefs.

And the church of Jesus Christ is very similar. Not because our moms can cook some exceptional dishes in church, although that is very true for both West Valley and Onnuri church, (Pause) but the church of Jesus Christ is made up of different individuals, who have different backgrounds, different lifestyles, different social experiences.

To give you some ideas of the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, Paul has been unfolding to his readers about the eternal purpose of God. Because of this eternal purpose, God created this world. Because of this eternal purpose, God is still actively involved in the course of human history. Because of this eternal purpose, Jesus Christ became the incarnate Word made flesh.

What is that eternal purpose?

The eternal purpose is that, through Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and who raised from the dead, bring something entirely new, a new society, new humanity, a new creation, a new family, God's own family in which Jew and Gentile, a man and woman of the most diverse cultural backgrounds can be reconciled and united as brothers and sisters under the same heavenly Father. Here the words of God in Ephesians 3:6: *"This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."*

It's truly a magnificent vision that Paul has been unfolding in the first three chapters.

Now in chapter 4 verse 1, He turns from exposition to exhortation. He turns from Christian doctrine to Christian duty. From rich Christian theology to the concrete practical, down to earth realities of everyday life.

He says in verse 1, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

"He is calling the church **to be**. He finished telling us about the new society, the reconciled humanity in Christ, so now, he is begging us to live a life that is worthy of this great vision. Notice here the word, "I." I, the person of "apostolic authority", and notice that he is calling himself a prisoner for the Lord. Because he is imprisoned in Rome for the conviction he had for the Lord. Paul, the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and a prisoner for the Lord, is urging us *"to live a life worthy of the calling we have received."*

And the calling that Paul is begging us to live is the calling of *"Racial Reconciliation."*

Pastor Lance Lewis, who is the author of a book called, *"All Are Welcome: Toward a Multi-Everything Church"* defined racial reconciliation in this way: "Racial Reconciliation is an **observable** unity across ethnic lines, that Christ has called His people to **experience** and **enjoy** as a direct consequence of His work on the cross."

Christ is doing something amazing with the ethnic groups that he is redeeming from the creation of Adam. We are called to not only live a life that displays **observable** unity across different ethnic lines, but also to **experience and enjoy these fellowships** as a direct consequence of Christ's work on the cross.

I am sure you have experienced some Korean traditions.

I am sure you already noticed that Koreans do a fair share of bowing when we greet each other. In fact, by just roaming around the church this morning, I think I bowed to 40 people and **(Acting)** I was going like this all over the place like a duck in water.

I kind of like it, when there is a clump of people because if I do one bow, I kind of hit them all. But when individuals come, you have to bow individually.

You also probably noticed Korean respect for elders.

Usually, it's young people's responsibility to pour water or tea when an elder's cup is empty. And what's funny about that is that last Thursday, I was invited to the Men's Breakfast prayer group and Bruce, who is always hospitable and kind, comes up to me and gives me a cup and a tea bag (*because he knows that I only drink tea*), and he brings the pot of hot water to me. And when he was bringing the hot water, I naturally stood up and I **almost snatched the water pot away from him**, because I am so used to serving water or tea to elders. I had to resist the temptation to forcibly take the pot away from him, but I am sure he wondered, "*Why is this guy standing up when I am bringing hot water to him?*"

I am sure you experienced some of these cultural differences. So the question that we have to think about today is "How can we **grow** so that we **enjoy** this cultural differences? (Repeat)
And Why? Why do we need to **cross** ethnic lines to **experience** racial reconciliation?"

I will talk about three points:

- 1) We can grow our character through racial reconciliation.
- 2) We need the Word of God to grow in racial reconciliation.
- 3) We should speak the truth in love to further racial reconciliation.

We can, we need, we should

1) We can grow our character through racial reconciliation.

In verse 2: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

"We can see in verse 2 that Paul begins with a character not a structure. Because maintaining character is not only the most difficult hindrances when it comes to racial reconciliation, but it could also bring the greatest reward in advancing our character. Although dealing with people who are different is always challenging and sometimes it can rub us in the wrong way, but we can exponentially grow our character. Let's look, one by one, in areas in which we can grow.

Humility means lowliness in mind and seeing the value of other people. **Gentleness** means sensitive and kind in nature. **Patience** means long-suffering towards aggravating people. And **bearing with one another** means mutual tolerance, and **love** is what embraces them all.

This is how God wants to grow you. He wants to grow you in humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love as you face all kinds of people in the church. They may have different **personalities**; different **backgrounds**; different **tastes** that can rub you in a wrong way, but God wants to grow your character through it.

I once told my friend, who is pastoring in Philadelphia, that it is easy for me to serve in a church where almost everyone are born in South Korea; and raised in the United States when they were young; who are in early 30s and fluent in both in English and Korean; who likes Sci-fi and Lord of the Ring movies; who likes Korean food.

It is so easy for me to relate to those, who are in so many ways that are like me. It would be so easy for me to naturally be patient with them. It would be so easy to be naturally gentle with them and bear them with love. I would probably have less conflict with those who **spoke** like me, **think** like me and **look** like me.

But the problem is that we will not grow at all. We will not grow much in character, if we surround ourselves with people who are like us. And Scripture is very clear on this, that “we have not been called to live a natural life of simply hanging around with people like us.” Because the power of Christ, dwelling within us has given us a supernatural life, where God does something unique and beautiful with the people who are different.

Remember how Paul ended chapter 3:

It says in Ephesians 3:20

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.***

As we make an effort to unite with those who are different , it displays Christ’s wisdom and glory to the world. When I come to a people who are unlike me, because of the call of Jesus, you will see God doing something wonderful and amazing in your life and He will show you what real,genuine sanctification looks like.

***There are these two questions that I asked my congregation every few months or so, to check whether or not, they have been growing in character. I will ask these two questions to you and I hope you can reflect on it a little bit:

A. Are you humbler, happier, more self-controlled, and do you have more inner-peace than last year? (Pause)

B. Do you have the courage to ask somebody who knows you, whether this is the case or not?

Do you have the courage to go up to somebody that you know and say, “Hey, would you say, “I am humbler, happier, more self-controlled and do you have more inner-peace?”

It won’t be easy to ask the question like that, but this is a start to examine ourselves. And remember we can grow our character in racial reconciliation.

2) **We need the Word of God to grow in racial reconciliation**

The word, “body” appears 4 times in our text:

It says in...Verse 4: “There is one **body**.”

Verse 12: “So that the **body** of Christ may be built up.”

Verse 15: “We will grow to become in every respect the mature **body** of him who is the head,that is, Christ.”

Verse 16: “From him the whole **body**, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,”

You will notice in these verses that the church of Jesus Christ is described as a body. “*Body of Him, who is the head, that is Christ*” and the whole body is *joined*” and “*held together by every supporting ligament.*”

This is the picture that Paul uses to describe the church. And what’s interesting about this is that Paul is the only person in the Bible who says that. He is the only author in the Bible, who

describes the church as a body. And the intriguing question is this: “Where did he get that from?”

One of the places that I think he got it from was his experience in the Damascus road. Do you remember when he met Jesus in the road to Damascus? Jesus said to him, *“Saul, why are you persecuting me?”* **Me?** Paul didn’t even believe that Jesus was alive. So how could he be persecuting Jesus?

He probably thought more and more throughout the years, what Jesus meant when He said, *“Saul, why are you persecuting me?”* And Paul came to understand as he wrote Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians that *Jesus is **so uniting** His people to Himself through faith that Jesus is their head, and they are members, parts of His body,* And what Christ wants to do is to grow this body. To make this body strong, so that this body becomes a standing reminder to the world of all that Jesus Christ has done for our salvation.

*And in order to do this, Paul says that Jesus has given certain gifts. Paul mentions 5 specific gifts in verses 11-12, that says, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Christ has given the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers. But what’s interesting about these five gifts is that they have the central task to teach the Word of God. The **apostles** were the chosen messenger of Jesus Christ. **Prophets** were the fore-teller of God’s word. **Evangelists** are the ones who shared His word. And **pastors** and **teachers** proclaim and exegete the word of God to people.

And when you look at Jesus’ ministry on earth, He spent most of His time teaching people about the truth of the gospel. **Why is that?** Well, that’s because John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is the eternal Logos, THE Word. And we are attached to the living Word of God, who became the head of the body, the church.

So Jesus uses Scripture, the written Word about Himself to grow His body. Jesus said in John 17: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

So Christ imparts these gifts associated with the teaching of Scripture to keep the vital fluids pumping in His body.

But what’s interesting to note in this picture is that it shows what all believers have in common. **Our access to Jesus through Scripture, is all the same**. Nobody has more access than you do. No matter what structure exists within the church, no matter which country you are from, no matter what kind of translations you use to read the Bible, no matter what kind of education degrees you have, our access to **Jesus through Scripture is, all the same**. Therefore, since we have the same access to the Word through the Spirit, we can all unite together under the same God, under the same Spirit, and under the same headship of Christ. **Our access to Jesus through Scripture is all the same**. And through the Word of God, He is growing his body in all nations.

There was an American missionary who was traveling across Korea by train. At a busy station, an old man boarded and he sat across from the missionary. The man was Korean and he started to speak Korean to the American missionary. The Missionary responded in the only Korean phrase that he knew, which was "I don't understand". A few minutes later the Korean tried again, but the missionary could only say "I don't understand." The Korean then tried a

third question, only this time the American recognized a familiar word, 예수, which means JESUS. The American pointed to himself and said 예수. The Old Korean man did the same thing and pointed to himself and said 예수 with a smile of delight on his face.

The Korean then unwrapped the bundle he was carrying. It was a large Korean Bible. He turned to a page and pointed to a place that he wanted the American to read. Understanding the reference, the American took his own Bible and counted the number of books and chapters to the place that the old man had pointed to. The old man had pointed to Mark 3:35 "Whoever does the will of God is my brother." The American then searched for a suitable reply. He counted the chapters and he pointed it to the Korean Bible. It was Psalm 133:1 "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" The Korean man read it and smiled in agreement for the rest of the journey.

These two men, ages apart in culture were brought together in a remarkable friendship as they pointed to Scripture. It was their Bibles that had a common language of the Spirit. **God uses the Scripture to grow us in racial reconciliation.**

3)We should speak the truth in love to further racial reconciliation

As we grow in the Word of God, what are we ought to do?

Verse 15 says this: *"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."*

Here is the application for us today. You will not grow. I will not grow unless we speak the truth in love. Speaking the truth in love means this: **It is speaking with absolute honesty on the basis of Scripture, but saturated with sweetness and tenderness.**

And we need this mixture, a perfect balance between truth and love together. Because without it, we will spiritually die. Unless there is someone from outside that tells us in both love and truth, we will never grow.

Love without truth is deadly. It's deadly because we can't really see ourselves except through the vantage point of other people.

Years ago, I had to record my first preaching when I was in seminary for a preaching class. So I wrote a sermon and recorded it. And when I first heard my voice in a voice recorder, I turned to my friend and said, "What's wrong with this thing? Do I have a sore throat? Was I sick? Why does my voice sound high and whiny?" And he said, "That's how you always sound."

The reason why you don't want to hear yourself in a voice recorder is because you don't really hear yourself. I hear myself right now through the bones in my neck. I do not hear myself the way that I am. Nobody can hear themselves and see themselves, except through a vantage point of other people.

So, if we surround ourselves in a place where people will only love you, and will not speak truth to you, then you will never grow. Why? because you don't have the necessary self-

knowledge to become the mature body of Christ. You will think that you are perfectly fine, when you are not. Love without truth is deadly.

But, truth without love is deadly as well. Why? When you tell people the truth, without love, that person is not only going to listen to the truth. That person is going to harden their hearts. You will drive them further away from the truth.

So, those people who are nice tend to love without truth, and those people who are direct tend to speak without love. But we need to remember that **truth** without love does not accomplish **truth**. **Love** without truth does not accomplish **love**.

But why, in so many cases, do we fail to speak the truth in love.
The answer is simple. It's because of our **selfishness**.

1) Why do we sometimes want to love and fail to tell the truth? Because we are afraid that the other person will be mad and will hurt us. The reason we are not telling the truth is because of selfishness. That's why we are withholding truth to people.

2) Why do we sometimes want to tell the truth without love? Because we want to put the other person down. We want to tell the truth without love because we want to prove who is right and get the satisfaction of winning arguments. We like to show how educated we are and we like to put the other person down because of our selfishness.

Who then can we look to for truth and love? Pastors? Elders? Deacons?
Definitely not!

We should look to Christ. Jesus always spoke the truth in love. Because he is both **truth** personified and **love** personified. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" and He also said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." God is love. As the God-man, Jesus was love walking.
Jesus is both **truth** personified and **love** personified

And we see this most clearly when He encountered the Samaritan woman at the well. John tells us at the beginning of the story: "His disciples had gone into the town to buy food." Jesus was sensitive to this woman's need for privacy, so He spoke to her privately. Had the disciples been there, Jesus may not have drawn out, such a vulnerable conversation. And by Himself, He crossed the cultural and ethnic lines in love.

But, truthfully, He didn't let her pretend to be a single lady. Rather, He lovingly and truthfully spoke to her, in order to help her see her need, for new life and forgiveness. The way that we can grow in both truth and love is to fixate our eyes on Christ. To **know** Him more intimately. **To trust** Him more readily. **To grow** in His grace and knowledge through His Word.
Let that be true, for all of us.

Let's pray.

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 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. 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.) 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 maybe 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 them a true 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.