

Small Group – Leader’s Guide – Sept 18/22

Read Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

1. In v. 2-3, St. Paul lists a set of virtues by which the Christian community is called to conduct itself among its members. These virtues are "social virtues". Why are these virtues called "social" and how are they specifically expressed or experienced in relationships and in community?

These virtues are focused on the other person, and not on the individual. Humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, and eagerness to preserve peace and unity are virtues that prioritize the collective good or the other person's good, and not just for the self. We are humble for the other, not just so to be humble in ourselves. We are gentle for the other, not just so that we can be gentle for ourselves. This means that we individually strive to be virtuous not for its own sake but for the sake of other people, especially for people in the church, and for the sake of the world.

2. In v. 13, St. Paul describes the heavenly goal of Christian community as attaining to the maturity, fullness, and stature of Jesus Christ. Each individual Christian is called towards personal holiness and godliness, and it involves personal discipline like personal Bible study, prayer, fasting, or generosity and service to the disenfranchised. But how does a Christian community *collectively* grow up in Christlikeness? What does that look like for a local church?

Answers will vary, but it will involve outward focus, service, hospitality, welcome, generosity, visible presence, active ministry and involvement in other people's lives, in other businesses, in other causes, in other city endeavours. And just as essential: growth in Bible knowledge, theology, and doctrine, apt to teach, apt to evangelize, prayerful, exemplary in moral character, models confession of sin and repentance of sin, calls others to repent and confess sins, models faith in the eternal hope of the resurrection, etc.

3. In v. 15, St. Paul attributes our growing up together into Jesus by our "speaking the truth in love". In this case, the word "truth" is synonymous to the teachings of Holy Scripture relating to God and the Gospel of His Christ. What does it look like for a community to speak the truth in love to one another?

We are to be scriptural and biblical in our navigating relationships; and this doesn't mean we are quoting the Bible every single moment to each other. We are principally based and formed by the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles in our mode of conduct, in our speech, in our relating to each other. We are not just being nice or polite to each other. We are called to encourage each other by God's Word, prayerful in Scripture, loving in our rebuke and correction for one another, teaching and informing others who are ignorant of Scripture or lack knowledge thereof. We are a community that is formed and founded in the Bible, not so we may whack people on the head with it, but so we may live according to it in how we talk, walk, and behave.

4. In v. 16, St. Paul describes how a maturing Christian community operates in real-time and in real space, all things being equal. That is, the whole body being "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 description is abstract, but specifically, what does it look like in church when we are joined together, when each part properly works, and when our church builds itself up in love?

Answers will vary, but it will at least look like having genuine, consistent, and timely concern for each other. We look after the material and spiritual needs of our members who are especially alone, sick, afraid, or struggling. We take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. When one part suffers, the whole body suffers. When another part is honoured, we all rejoice together. Just as we take care, nourish, work out, and clean every part of our body, we must pay careful attention to every single individual in our own community.