

# The Reformation Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

The recovery of Scripture in the common languages during the Reformation set the church on fire. It birthed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. We are a Reformed church, celebrating this great gift, but we must remember that this requires *semper reformanda*, “always reforming.” Faithful churches are always growing in grace.

## Summary of the Text

Paul’s imprisonment doesn’t limit his prayers and exhortations. He calls the Ephesians to walk worthy of their high calling by being lowly and gentle, patient and bearing with one another in love (vv. 1-2). By doing so they would keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). This unity is not created by the church, but already established: there’s one body and one Spirit, and we were called into one hope of our calling (v. 4). The “ones” continue: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of the many. He is above all and through all and in all believers (vv. 5-6). This profound unity doesn’t result in boring monotony. Christ ascended into heaven in victory and from there gifted each believer with specific grace (vv. 7-8; cf. Ps. 68:18). Before He ascended, Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth, but now He has gone up above all that He might fill all things (vv. 9-10). From this exalted position He gave church government: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers so that the saints would be equipped to do the work of ministry and thus edify the church (vv. 11-12). This will lead us all to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of maturity of the fullness of Christ (v. 13). Then the church will not be carried about by various winds of doctrine, but by the truth spoken in love will grow up into the head who is Jesus (vv. 14-15). It’s not that only some parts of the body are connected to Him, but each one is made effective by Him, and each is also connected to every other part. Every member does its part and together causes the growth of the body not in mindless mechanical motion, but in love (v. 16).

## The Dangerous Idea

Alistair McGrath said the dangerous idea at the heart of the Protestant revolution is that all Christians have a right to interpret the Bible for themselves. It was dangerous when the excommunicated Martin Luther translated the Bible into German in 1522 while under the protection of Elector Frederick of Saxony. William Tyndale spent his life translating the Bible into English on the run and published the New Testament in 1525, evading authorities until he was captured and executed in October 1536. His last words were “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!” Less than four years later King Henry VIII supported the publication of the English Bible, and Tyndale’s translation became the foundation of what would be the King James Version. The Roman Catholic Church opposed the publication of Scripture into the vernacular because it meant loss of control. Luther’s first of 95 Theses states “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.” And the second: “The word repentance cannot be understood to mean the sacrament of penance, or the act of confession and satisfaction administered by the priests.” This put a considerable dent in the efforts of Rome to sell indulgences and pay for the improvements of St. Peter’s Basilica. Giving the Bible to the church was dangerous then as it now, threatening corrupt magistrates who want to control the populace. The underground church in China prints its own unedited copies of the Bible. The Bible teaches us how to withstand tyranny and slavery, oppose abortion, honor marriage, protect the vulnerable, do justice and love mercy. God requires us to read and teach our children how to read, and He alone bestows inalienable rights—not people, parliaments, or presidents.

# The Reformational Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

## Two Unities

The idea that every believer ought to read and interpret Scripture was by no means invented in the Reformation, but it was recovered (cf. Rom. 3:1-2). Martin Luther emphasized what has become known as the priesthood of all believers. In the church there are not some members who are holy and some who are not, but all are saints. All of us are to walk worthy of our calling, and all are a part of the body of Christ united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (vv. 4-5). This is a given unity of the Spirit that we keep, exhibit, honor, and enjoy in the bond of peace (v. 3). This might seem like an odd thing to emphasize as part of the legacy of the Reformation. Didn't Luther blow the church up and splinter it in a thousand directions? Not really. He exposed the corruption within the church, calling everyone to repent. It's important to remember the reformers didn't simply walk away from the Roman church. Rome excommunicated them, and when this happened, they did not get rebaptized. They knew that they were in line with the historic and ancient church, founded on the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone, and they were endeavoring to reform late medieval corruption. The first unity is given and ought to be maintained by all trinitarian Christians who can honor one another's baptisms. All Christians agree on primary doctrines and should act like it while we talk about secondary issues which include modes of baptism, eschatology, and the color of the church carpet. The second kind of unity is described in verse 13, a unity Paul says we will eventually come to: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." This unity consists of like-mindedness on things that Christians can disagree about but eventually won't. Though we have been growing and reforming for two millennia, we still see lots of spots and blemishes, many ways to mature (cf. Eph. 5:25-27). Maturity can't be forced or rushed, and those who demand it now exhibit, oddly, impatient immaturity. Andreas Carlstadt did this when in Luther's absence he served bread and wine to the congregation at Wittenberg on Christmas Day without adequate instruction.

## The Affair of the Sausages

What the process of coming to the unity of the faith, to measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ look like? It does not look like an ecumenical group hug where we pretend that deep theological differences aren't that important. In order for Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches to have visible unity with Protestant churches, they would have to become Protestant in their view of the church, leaving behind the idea that apostolic succession is through popes or patriarchs, however ungodly they might have been, through the laying on of hands upon their successors. Protestants rightly recognize the marks of the church are word and sacrament, not having your ecclesiastical ancestry papers in order. When the apostles encountered someone they didn't know casting out demons in Jesus' name and told him to stop, Jesus told them to lay off: "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side" (Lk. 9:50). One of the places we can demonstrate unity is at the Lord's Supper. Paul rebuked Peter in front of the church in Antioch for not having table fellowship with the Gentiles when the Jews came down from Jerusalem (Gal. 2:14). This was an issue of justification by faith. Because God justifies all believers by faith, including those from churches who are mixed up on this, we should strive for unity and welcome our brothers to the Lord's Supper. The church grows up into Christ when "each part does its share", edifying one another in love (v. 16). In 1522 in Zurich, believers had a party where they ate sausages, going against the odd tradition of abstaining from meat during Lent. This was controversial at the time but a good example of how the church reforms—feasting and celebrating the person and work of Christ.