



1200 Lexington Road
Wilmore, KY 40390

Pastor Daryl Diddle

(859) 858-3521
office@wfmc.net

“Control”

Sermon Series: “Getting Past the Past,” No. 5

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Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. 4 For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

5 There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

7 However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. 8 That is why the Scriptures say, “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”

9 Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10 And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

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We're looking at the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church this morning...Ephesians chapter 4, if you'd want to look there with me. The first sixteen verses of Ephesians 4.

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Getting past our past - that's been our theme these last few weeks. Finding ways to ***not*** let our ***futures*** be ***bound*** by the ***harmful*** or ***sinful*** or ***immature*** experiences of past days.

The fact is, no one can truly move forward in life if we ***dwell*** on those hard ***happenings***, those hurtful ***issues***, or those ***mistakes*** we made yesterday. We can't drive ***forward*** successfully if our eyes are fixed on the tough things in our rear-view mirror.

[ *Lifts Auto Review Mirror as Object Lesson* ]

So we said that ***recognizing*** the ***need*** to get ***past*** our past is the first step toward actually ***doing*** it; and we have to be ***intentional*** about that. As the Apostle Paul told the Philippian church, Christ-followers are called to ***“forget what is behind, and strain toward what is ahead.”***<sup>1</sup>

That takes intentionality.

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Next, we affirmed that it ***is actually possible***...it is ***realistic*** to get past our pasts. God is ***ready*** and ***more*** than ***able*** and ***powerful*** enough to help ***heal*** our pasts and turn our ***vision*** toward the ***future***...if we will trust Him for that in faith.

God will, and wants to, help us get past our pasts.

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After that, we recognized that getting past our past involves ***identifying*** and then ***doing away with childishness***...the ways we ***used*** to think and act when we were ***young*** and ***immature***.

Those specific areas are different for all of us, but inviting God's Spirit to point them out and then help us remove them from our lives...that is a key part of letting go of the past and living as mature persons and believers.

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And then, last Sunday morning, we identified one significant and frankly very common childish way of thinking, and that is the ***making of decisions based merely on our feelings***...on the way we ***feel*** about something at any given moment. As the Apostle Paul wrote to ***several*** of those early churches, living and making decisions according to our feelings is the way of a ***child***...***not*** the way of a spiritual ***adult***, because our feelings are the most volatile, unexplainable and unpredictable part of our makeup.

Feelings are important, we said – God gave them to us, after all; but our feelings need to be kept in perspective and in check if we're to consistently do as God asks us to do...if we're ever to get past our past and move ahead as adults.

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This morning, we close out this series with one more area we all need to address if we are ever to, truly...

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:13

[ Again, *Lifts Auto Review Mirror* ]

...get past our past, and that is...the internal ***insistence***, we were all born with, of ***being in control***; or to put it another way, we must be ***willing*** to honestly and fully ***surrender*** ourselves to the Lord.

Moving past the past...moving ***forward*** with God means ***giving ourselves wholly to Him***.

That's actually what this passage is about...what Paul writes to the Ephesian believers here.

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It may not seem like it at first, but this passage actually deals with two of the absolute ultimates of life...two of the very greatest and most important things.

And they're tied together! You get one with the other.

Let me explain.

There in verse 3, Paul talks about the ***unity of the Church body***. "***Make every effort***," he says, "***to keep yourselves unified in the Spirit – binding yourselves together with peace***."

That right there is the first ultimate...the first greatest thing: the ***ultimate goal and good*** of the Church body...the ***worldwide*** Church body...is to be ***one***; like Jesus said, "***as he and the Father are one***."

We know this because this was Jesus' highest prayer for His followers:

not to be cookie cutter copies of each other, but rather...

to be on the ***same page*** with each other about ***Him***...

to work always toward the ***same purposes*** and ***goals***...

and to be at ***peace*** with each other, even when our own personalities and perspectives differ.

You see, a church...a group of Christians who are ***unified***...who are ***really, truly one***...that is how the unsaved world would realize that something ***divinely amazing*** and ***powerful*** was going on.

A unified Church puts God's power on public display, because everyone knows that people who are so different in so many ways ***do not naturally act*** and ***live*** in unity.

Because of our fallen nature, we humans ***default*** to ***disunity*** – we ***default*** to ***division*** and ***dispute*** and ***discord***...and even the unsaved world knows that...they can look around and ***see*** that. They see it in nations and tribes and families and couples.

So...when an unsaved person sees a Church...a group of Christians that is truly one in goal and purpose, all living and working together peacefully, all moving in the same direction...that unsaved person has to stop and think, "***Wow – there has to be something behind that, because that doesn't just naturally happen***."

That's why ***unity among believers*** is an ***ultimate value***, according to the New Testament. There's nothing that speaks more loudly to an unsaved world about the power of Jesus than the

unified Church...a group of people who've done away with the childishness of divisions and discord and disunity.

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But how do you get to that?

Ah, that's the second ultimate, and Paul talks about that next! He talks about it in the context of what was happening, specifically at Ephesus; but you know...the same thing happens in many, many Christian groups. In just this sermon series, we've seen it in both the Corinthian and Roman churches...and that is, ***the practice of exalting oneself over others because of giftedness or ability or talent.***

It's the thinking that says, "I'm ***better*** than ***you*** because I can ***do this*** or ***that*** or the ***other***...and ***you can't.***"

It's that wanting to be first...

It's that need to exalt ourselves...

It's that feeling that we need to prove to other people that we have worth...

It's the tendency we have to rank people...to put people in some order of value...

All of that...that's a vestige of the fall in our thinking. We were all born thinking that way...it's part of all of our pasts, but it's a childish way to look at ***ourselves***...and at ***others***...and at the ***Church body***, and it has to be ***done away with*** in ***individuals*** in order to have a ***mature Church.***

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Paul explains all this in verses 11 through 16...about how God gives different gifts to different people, ***not*** so some can claim to be better than others, but so the ***whole of the body*** can be ***functional*** and ***complete*** and ***work together*** in ***unity***, you see?

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I can't prove it, of course, but I'll bet Paul got so tired of explaining this...he did it over and over and over again, just in the letters we have from him.

I'm sure there were other letters too, and I'll bet this idea appeared in just about all of them...because Paul knew that, ***in order to have a mature Church body, you have to have mature, individual Christ-followers***...and a mature, individual Christ-follower is one who accepts the fact that God gave them their gift – whatever it is – ***not*** so they could lift up ***themselves***, but so that ***Jesus*** could be lifted up...so Jesus could be seen by the world ***in the one-ness...in the unified, peace-filled body of His Church.***

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But the only way individual Christ-followers can get to that sort of maturity...that sort of perspective...is by giving up control of themselves...and surrendering themselves fully to Jesus.

The only way to really grasp that we are just ***one...important*** but ***small...part*** of Christ's Body...the only way to really grasp that is to ***admit*** and ***embrace***...what Paul says there in verse 15, that ***"Jesus is the head."***

Jesus is the **head**; **He** is the top, the boss, the chief, the most important part.

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**We** are **not** the head of the body; Jesus is.

We don't get to determine what the Church is. Jesus does.

We don't have the last word about the Church. Jesus has the last word.

None of us are the most important person in the room here. Jesus is.

We all have to come to terms with that.

But you see, that **also means** that...since **we** are a part of the **body**, **we** don't get to determine what **we** do or don't do, **personally, either**.

Jesus does.

And you see, that's surrender. That's what surrendering ourselves to Jesus means.

It's giving up the sort of control **over ourselves** that we were all born demanding.

It's admitting, not just that Jesus is the head of the **church** body, but that Jesus is the head of **my** body.

It's admitting that we don't get to determine what we are, personally. Jesus does.

It's admitting that we don't get to have the last word...about ourselves and our own personal plans and goals and futures. Jesus does.

It's admitting that we aren't the most important person...not just in **this** room, but in our **own** room at home. Jesus is.

That's surrender...surrendering control of ourselves to Jesus...giving ourselves fully to Jesus.

You see, that's Jesus' ultimate goal for every one of His followers. Every other part and component and crisis of the Christian life leads up to this.

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The **unified Church** is God's ultimate goal for **His people** on earth.

The **surrendered believer** is God's ultimate goal for His **individual followers**.

And here's the thing: the only way to God's ultimate **corporate** goal of a unified Church...is through God's ultimate **individual** goal of surrendered believers.

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The reason any local church is not living up to God's intention for it is because of unsundered individuals within it. Individual Christians who have not given their whole selves to the Lord as fully as they know how to do...they will always keep the body from being unified in goal and purpose.

But more than that, you see, the unsundered believer will keep themselves from accomplishing all the tremendous things God wants to do through them.

The unsundered Christian is self-limiting. We limit our own abilities and spiritual effectiveness when we hold on to being the head of ourselves.

Paul addresses that too, starting there in verse 14.

When we remain unsundered to Jesus' leadership...Jesus' headship of us, we are like immature children, we get tossed and blown about by all sorts of things, we wind up being tricked by people, lied to, we lack love, we resist what God's doing through the greater Church body...and on and on, you see?

The unsundered Christian – who holds on to being the head of themselves...it's a self-defeating way to live because we wind up never finding out what God really designed us to be and to do.

We wind up missing what God really wants for us, which is to put the childish selfishness of the past behind us and to grow up...to be mature in our trust in Him, and to become what He made us to be.

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To give up control of ourselves to the Lord...to surrender headship to Him.

Of course, you can see why this is the most significant battle of the Christian life.

Satan does everything he can to oppose this sort of full, personal surrender to Jesus, because he knows that if he keeps us in control of ourselves, he keeps us ineffective and frustrated, and he keeps us from *ever* becoming who God designed us to be.

But even more than that, if Satan keeps us from surrendering ourselves to God, he keeps the Church *diminished* and *disputing* and *divided*.

That's why the greatest thing Satan can accomplish is to keep individual Christ-followers thinking *they are the head of themselves*.

If He can do that, then we just keep fighting and competing and bouncing off of each other, instead of working together, and together with God, against Satan's evil.

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So I think what God wants to know today is...will you take the ultimate step of surrender? Will you give up control of yourself to Jesus?

Will you let Him be the head of you?

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If you're ready to find out who God made you to be...

If you're tired of chasing dead end goals and temporary purposes...

If you're interested in dealing a big blow to the enemy...

If you're ready to become a true asset to the greater Church and Kingdom...

[*Again, Lifts Mirror*]

If you're ready to get past the past and move on to the ultimate good that God wants for you...to give up control and surrender yourself fully to Jesus, you can do that today.

You can admit that **Jesus** is the head, not just of the **Church** body, but of **your** body and your past and your future. You can give Jesus full authority over you.

Now, even when you do that, the days and circumstances to come...that we don't even know about yet...those will bring the temptation to take back that headship...take back that control.

But you need not fear. In those times, if we'll ask, God's Spirit will give us the power to **stay** surrendered, so that Jesus can keep working out His perfect will and way in our lives.

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Are you ready? Do you need to get past the past of demanding to be the head...demanding control? Are you ready to embrace the maturity of surrender?

Maybe for the first time?

Maybe you've already surrendered yourself, but you're being tempted...there's a battle going on right now inside you and you're being tempted to re-take control...but you want to declare today that Satan's not going to win that battle in your life.

Would you want to come and seek the Lord. You can come and do that at the altar ... you can do that at your seat.

That's the simple invitation: get past the past need of being in control. Let God be the head of you. He is worthy of our trust. You don't have to worry about that. You don't have to worry about trusting Him. He wants to give us only His best.

Surrender. – That's His ultimate goal for us.

Surrender – past, present, future.

Surrender – all we are...every part.

That's what God's asking for today.

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Prayer: “Lord, if you are speaking here to just one or two people, you know us. You know us better than we know ourselves. You know the battle that is going on within some, and you know they are asking you even today ... “Lord, would you stay the head of my life. I don't want to retake control here. I want you to be the head of my life.”... If they need your help, would you give that to them.

And if there's a couple here today that have never truly given you the headship of their life, this is the greatest thing that any individual Christian can do and it's the greatest thing for the body of Christ as well. For all of us to be able to say, “Jesus is the head of me. I relinquish control. I surrender the ability to lead my own life. I give all that to Jesus.”

If you're working with somebody here, Holy Spirit, would you complete that work in their life today. We pray in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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If you'd like to come and do business with the Lord at the altar, come as we sing. If the Lord is calling you, listen to His call. That's part of making Him the head.

**Closing Song:** “I Surrender All”

**Closing Word and Benediction:**

Another image that scripture gives us of this surrender is to give ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is our reasonable act of worship ... reasonable in regard to what Jesus did for us. Somebody said that the danger of living sacrifices is that they tend to want to crawl off the altar from time to time ... and that's true ... very true. We give the headship of ourselves to Jesus, but, every once in a while, something comes along and we say, “Yeah, I want to take this one back for me ... I want to do this for me.”

Surrender. That is getting past our past, the childishness of control, and that is giving our futures to Christ.

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Thank you for coming to worship this morning. The Lord bless and keep us all. Amen.

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