

Ephesians ~ Chapter 4 ~ Scripture [NIV, 1984]

Unity in the Body of Christ

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 led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

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 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be 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 men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into 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.

Living as Children of Light

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians ~ Chapter 4 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What did Paul urge the Ephesians to do? (4:1) What three virtues forge unity among Christians? (4:2) Why these virtues instead of others? Would they keep a sports team unified?
2. How should Christians conduct themselves toward each other? Should Christians conduct themselves toward non-believers in this same way? (4:2-6)
3. Who gives grace to each believer? What does this do for us? Does it enable us to live in peace with one another? Or what? (4:7)
4. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 (although not quite) in 4:8 and then comments about it in 4:9-11. What does he say about it? More important, why does he say it?
5. With what kind of people does God fill the church (community of believers)? (4:11) Why does God give different people different spiritual gifts? (4:12-13)
6. What is God's prescription of unity among believers? How unified is your church? Do you think that the Christian church today reflects God's desired unity? If not, what do you think should be done about it? (4:14-16)
7. In what way were Ephesian believers (both Jews and Gentiles) instructed not to live as Gentiles (here meaning heathens)? (4:17-19) Why? Be specific.
8. How did Paul contrast the Ephesian Christian believers with the heathen Gentiles? In what way does God want Christians to change? How should Christians stop living and how should new Christians begin living? (4:22-24)
9. What should we keep in mind regarding lying, anger, and stealing? Why? What's the harm if you're a believer and know you are loved by God and will be forgiven? (4:25-28)
10. Can the Holy Spirit be hurt? (4:29-30) Really? How easy or difficult is it to do these things Paul commands in 4:29-30? This is only for Christians to do with other Christians, right?
11. Verses 4:31-32 are probably among the best memory verses in the entire Bible. Try to commit them to memory this week. In these verses are six things Paul said to get rid of: describe what they are in today's conversational terms. And what positive commands did Paul give the Ephesians? Are these easy things to do? Why or why not? (4:31-32)

Ephesians ~ Chapter 4 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What did Paul urge the Ephesians to do? (4:1) What three virtues forge unity among Christians? (4:2) Why these virtues instead of others? Would they keep a sports team unified?

So far, Paul has emphasized that God has revealed a mystery, namely that salvation is for both Jew and Gentile and they are the family of God that is rooted and established in love. Paul further said that God called the church (believers) to display his wisdom. Paul now shows how God made provision for those in the church to live and work together in unity and to grow into maturity.

In 4:1, he said to live a life worthy of your calling (to salvation) or your faith as a believer and member of God's church. In 4:2 he named three, and possibly four virtues:

- 1) humble, i.e., showing a modest estimate of one's own importance.
- 2) gentle, i.e., mild in temperament or behavior; kind or tender.
- 3) patient, or able to accept or tolerate delays, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious.
- 4) bearing with one another in love (possibly the same as #3)

These virtues seem somewhat strange, even for the Christian church. How about leadership? How about teaching? How about perseverance, strength, wisdom, vision, or compassion? I don't think these virtues, then or now, would do much to unify a sports team or a business. Paul does, in fact, discuss other virtues later in this chapter and the letter, but this is where he starts, probably because he is trying to disarm the natural animosity between Jews and Gentiles before moving on to other requirements.

2. How should Christians conduct themselves toward each other? Should Christians conduct themselves toward non-believers in this same way? (4:2-6)

In 4:3, Paul continues the emphasis on a peaceful relationship and unity between the different factions (Jews, Gentiles, and possibly others). This is certainly necessary today as it was back then so all believers can share the hope (remember, back then "hope" means more a certainty than a vague longing for) of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. This is expressed strongly in 1 Corinthians 8:6 – yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

In these verses, Paul was focusing specifically on *believers* of various ethnic backgrounds living in unity. He was not suggesting that this is the way to relate and interact with non-believers.

3. Who gives grace to each believer? What does this do for us? Does it enable us to live in peace with one another? Or what? (4:7)

This grace has been given to each believer by God as Christ has apportioned (divided and allocated) it. (The commentary on some translations suggest that it was Christ as the ascended Lord who gave these gifts, which seems to be reinforced in 4:11. Whether it

was God the father or Christ the son doesn't really change the meaning of the passage.) As we've discussed previously, grace is the love and mercy given to us by God because God desires us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it Here, Paul alters or extends its meaning slightly and, as we'll see in the next 8 verses, God has given a different special gift or abilities to *each* individual believer.

This special gift goes beyond the humble and gentle virtues spoken about earlier and is designed for building up the church—yes, working peacefully with others—but that's not the emphasis here.

4. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 (although not quite) in 4:8 and then comments about it in 4:9-11. What does he say about it? More important, why does he say it?

Psalm 68:18 – When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious...

Although the psalm says “received gifts from men,” Paul is referring to the rabbinic interpretation current in his day that read the Hebrew proposition “from” in the sense of “to” and the verb for “received” in the sense of “take and give.” I think this is a stretch, but we'll give Paul his poetic license and somewhat altered interpretation here.

But the more important thing that Paul explains further in 4:10 is the fact that Christ “ascended” also means that he previously “descended” to earth. This passage does *not* teach, as some people think and some translations suggest, that Christ descended into hell. Paul is simply using this as a reminder that Christ came to earth (his incarnation) and his subsequent resurrection and ascension.

5. With what kind of people does God fill the church (community of believers)? (4:11) Why does God give different people different spiritual gifts? (4:12-13)

Many types of people are needed in the church. *Apostles* are mentioned—the initial 12 because of their role in establishing the church (2:20) but also in a broader sense of being ambassadors of Christ (like Paul), although this was largely in Biblical days. *Prophets* were people to whom God made known a message for his people appropriate to their need or situation. Claims of prophethood have existed in many cultures through history, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, in Ancient Greece, Zoroastrianism, and many others. Islam makes Muhammad the greatest prophet while other Islamic traditions place the total number of prophets at 224,000. The Mormons consider Joseph Smith their founding prophet. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, established in 1863, believes Ellen G. White (one of their founders) is a prophet. Other people named as prophets by various Christian denominations include Bernhard Müller, John Alexander Dowie, William M. Branham, Gerald Flurry, William Miller, Marshall Vian Summers, and Hong Xiuquan.

While other gifted people helped the church grow and strengthen through edification, *evangelists* help it grow through augmentation, i.e., gaining new believers. Since the objective mentioned in 4:12 is “to prepare God's people for works of service” we may assume that evangelists also helped other Christians in presenting their testimonies to non-believers.

Pastors and teachers are more-or-less lumped together and it is clear that their functions are closely related (shepherding and teaching)

We are given these gifts, then and now, “to prepare God’s people for works of service.” The people mentioned are not to do all the work for the people, but to train the people to do the work themselves “so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Spiritual gifts are for the body, the church, are not to be exercised individualistically. “Built up” emphasizes the key idea of growth. There is no one thing alone that will bring about this growth—it results from a combination of many gifts and talents working together.

6. What is God’s prescription of unity among believers? How unified is your church? Do you think that the Christian church today reflects God’s desired unity? If not, what do you think should be done about it? (4:14-16)

God’s prescription of unity is closely connected with growth, maturity, and stability. In 4:14, Paul uses several images: immature infants and those who are unstable being tossed about by distorted teachings and the cunning and craftiness of deceitful schemers. Not a pretty picture. Paul seems to suggest that some people are ignorant of the beliefs and teachings of the church while others are actively opposing it.

A truthful and loving manner of life is implied in 4:15 along with continued growth (here speaking of individual growth, not only growth of the church). The image here is a bit difficult: the NIV Study Bible explains that 4:15 is a different restatement of 4:13, based now on the image of Christ as Head of the body, which is the church. Paul thus speaks primarily of corporate maturity. It is the “body of Christ” that is to be “built up” (4:12). In 4:13 “we all” are to become “mature.”

Verse 4:16 has further images of the body growing under direction of the Head. The parts of the body help each other in the growing process, picturing the mutual ministries of God’s people spoken of in 4:11-13. The last important thought of this section is that maturity and unity are impossible without love.

7. In what way were Ephesian believers (both Jews and Gentiles) instructed not to live as Gentiles (here meaning heathens)? (4:17-19) Why? Be specific.

The “futility of their thinking” (4:17) referring to heathen or pagan Gentiles means that life without God is intellectually frustrating, useless, and meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 – “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” The basic thrust of Ecclesiastes is that all of life is meaningless (useless, futile, hollow, vain) if it is not rightly related to God. Only when based on God and his word is life worthwhile.

“Darkened in understanding” or “ignorance” and being “separated from God” (4:18) Paul says are a result of “the hardening of their hearts” (moral unresponsiveness).

In 4:19, “given themselves over to sensuality” (or “lustful pleasure” in the NLT) means that the hardening of the hearts of unbelievers is reflected in their moral insensitivity and sexual immorality. Romans 1:28 – Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

Notice in Romans 1:28 (and 1:24, 1:26), Paul adds that if you choose to live as heathens, separated from God, God not only allows you to do so, and he will actually help you on your ignorant, immoral way (“give them over to a depraved mind.”

8. How did Paul contrast the Ephesian Christian believers with the heathen Gentiles? In what way does God want Christians to change? How should Christians stop living and how should new Christians begin living? (4:22-24)

Paul says that Christian believers were (and are) taught about Christ with truth. They were taught to put off their old corrupt selves, to have a new attitude and a new self created to be like God. Heathens and pagans were not taught this. Many were raised learning about multiple gods, Epicureanism or hedonism (pleasure is the greatest good), platonism (affirms the existence of abstract objects), or other pagan beliefs.

But simply declaring yourself to believe in Christ is just the beginning. God wants you to get rid of your sinful desires, to have a new attitude, and to become more like God in true righteousness and holiness.

In the Lord's Prayer, when you say "hallowed be your name," you are saying, "May God again demonstrate his holiness." But as God's holiness is demonstrated, we sense that we are unclean and unholy. Nevertheless, because God is holy, his people also must be holy and we are challenged to achieve and maintain that holiness (Deut 7:6, 26:18)

Deut 7:6 – For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. Dissension do we achieve this holiness? By respecting, honoring, worshiping and praising God's name, fearing God, and walking in his ways

9. What should we keep in mind regarding lying, anger, and stealing? Why? What's the harm if you're a believer and know you are loved by God and will be forgiven? (4:25-28)

The rest of this chapter sounds a little like Proverbs—do (or don't do) this and then this good thing will happen, or do this and you will prevent this bad thing from happening, or do this and here's why you should do it. Some of the things are taken almost directly from the ten commandments (don't lie, don't steal) but many more are things designed to help you get along with others (don't gossip, get over your anger, work together, be compassionate) and things that will please God (don't do things that will grieve the Holy Spirit).

But the main emphasis in these verse is a continuation of the whole chapter of unity in the body of Christ, the church, working alongside other Christians, and leading a holy life pleasing to God. Notice what is in these verses:

(4:25) Speak the truth and don't lie. Why? Because we're all in this together and lies will create dissension and tear us apart.

(4:26-27) Don't hold onto anger, because it will cause you to sin, which is not pleasing to God. Holding onto your anger for what—revenge?—will give the devil a foothold in your life. Don't let it happen.

(4:28) Don't steal. Don't even be a beggar but get a job, start working. Why? So you can support yourself, of course, and not have the need or desire to steal, but more important, so you can share with others in need. What a novel concept!

And don't ever fall into the trap of feeling that now that I'm a Christian, I can sin with impunity because God loves me, I have a free pass into heaven, and God will always forgive my sins.

10. Can the Holy Spirit be hurt? (4:29-30) Really? How easy or difficult is it to do these things Paul commands in 4:29-30? This is only for Christians to do with other Christians, right?

Paul's phrase "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" certainly makes it sound like the Holy Spirit can be hurt. The word "grieve" actually has three definitions, all of which can apply in this passage.

1) Suffer grief, mourn, lament, be sorrowful.

2) "Grieve" can also mean feel grief for or because of, for example, "she did not have the opportunity to grieve her mother's death."

3) cause great distress to (someone), for example, "what grieves you, my son?"

Synonyms include sadden, upset, distress, pain, hurt, wound, break someone's heart.

So the real meaning of this phrase is that our actions (lying, staying angry, stealing, gossiping, tearing down others) are causing great distress to the Holy Spirit because he feel so sorry for us. Using the old Clinton quote, the Holy Spirit feels our pain. Our stupid actions have broken the Holy Spirit's heart because he, being God, loves us so much.

Paul's commands in 4:29-30 are not always easy to follow. Don't gossip. But gossip is so juicy and so much fun. Don't talk about someone behind his back. But he is so weird (or incompetent, or something) that I just have to tell someone. I'm supposed to build up someone that I don't respect? Do you really mean that? Don't get revenge? But that's an American pastime; there are movies and TV shows about it; I have to do my part.

For the most part, Paul is still talking about Christians interacting with other Christians, but when he introduced evangelicals and church growth into the mix, we can see that much of this advice is not just Christian to Christian but Christian to everybody.

11. Verses 4:31-32 are probably among the best memory verses in the entire Bible. Try to commit them to memory this week. In these verses are six things Paul said to get rid of: describe what they are in today's conversational terms. And what positive commands did Paul give the Ephesians? Are these easy things to do? Why or why not? (4:31-32)

What are we to get rid of?

1) Bitterness. Proceeding from or exhibiting strong animosity (hostility or active hatred). Marked by resentment or cynicism. Sometimes resulting from severe disappointment.

2) Rage. A feeling of intense, violent, or growing anger

3) Anger or wrath is an intense emotional response that involves a strong uncomfortable and emotional response to a perceived provocation.

4) Brawling (legal definition), a rowdy argument on church property. Can also mean a large-scale fist fight usually involving multiple participants.

5) Slander. Making false and damaging statements about someone.

6) Malice. The intention or desire to do evil

The positive commands Paul gave the Ephesians were to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you