

Love Letters

Lesson 8: Ephesians 4

At the halfway point in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul begins his appeal to the Ephesian believers to live and work in the unity that is based upon Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit, in order to reveal the direct correlation between behavior and basic core values.

Paul is now in prison but he did not see himself as a prisoner; rather he was constrained by the love of Christ at work within him. And fortunately for us, Paul was shut in with his pen, his parchments, and his prayers—the result of which is the letter containing this wonderful exhortation. If, two thousand years later, believers today could operate from this same vantage point, we too would be able to dramatically impact our loved ones, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our world for Christ!

Read Ephesians 4:1–32.

Day One: Family Unity

The word *therefore* in verse 1 connects Paul's present exhortation with his teaching in the previous chapters regarding God's ultimate purpose for mankind and the unveiling of the mystery in Christ Jesus. There is a life-lesson here in Paul's words: Christianity is a *walk* and God expects His children to walk worthy of their calling; but how is this possible? We're about to find out.

For the benefit of your study today, take a moment to meditate on the first three verses of this chapter in the Amplified Version: "I therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal and beg you to walk [lead a life] worthy of the divine calling to which you have been called with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service, living as becomes you with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another. Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of [and produced by] the Spirit in the binding power of peace."

1. What initially stands out to you in the reading of these verses?

Previously, Paul stated that believers are: *chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit*. He said we are: *His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*. Now Paul says emphatically that we are to *walk worthy . . . with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service*. The

word *worthy* is *axios* in the Greek, meaning *equal weight*. In other words, there should be a balance between the believer's calling and conduct that brings glory to God.

It is imperative that believers grasp the importance of this point, causing Paul to say in verse 1: "I beseech" (NKJV); "I entreat" (NAS); meaning *appeal* and even *beg!* After sharing the riches that are ours in Christ, Paul is literally begging believers to walk worthy.

2. Let's pause here and linger long enough to delve more deeply into Paul's meaning. Using your dictionary, write a definition for the virtues Paul mentions in verse 2:
 - a. Humility (See Philippians 2:1–8 for an example.)
 - b. Gentleness (1 Thessalonians 2:7)
 - c. Longsuffering (1 Timothy 1:16)
 - d. Love (1 John 4:10–11)
 - e. Personal: Is the Lord highlighting one of these virtues right now in your life? Ask Him to help you be made willing to model it in your present circumstances.
3. What, according to Paul, is the responsibility of every believer (verse 3)? Please explain.

It should be noted that believers are called to "keep" the unity of the Spirit—not to try and create it—only the Holy Spirit can do that! Our role is to guard, protect, and maintain what has been entrusted to us. The Greek translation of the phrase *endeavoring to keep* means working toward something difficult with the determination to make it happen. Is this *your* attitude today?

4. In verses 4–6, the word *one* is used seven times to refer to the unity of the church. The foundation for unity is based on the beliefs that Christians have in common. List the common core beliefs of the church that Jesus Christ has created.

Memory verse: Ephesians 4:16 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

Under his [Christ's] direction, the whole body is fitted 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.

Day Two: Unity through Diversity: Spiritual Gifts

Reread Ephesians 4:7–16 for review.

Here in verses 7–16, Paul introduces the subject of spiritual gifts bestowed on each believer for the good of the body of Christ. As each one uses their gift(s) in harmony with one another, the church is able to accomplish God’s will in the world.

1. What does Paul state about spiritual gifts in the following:
 - a. Verse 7
 - b. Verse 11
 - c. What is the two-fold purpose of spiritual gifts (verse 12)?
2. List the gifts Paul mentions in verse 11. Notice the diversity and how these particular gifts pertain to a life-calling.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Note: In verses 8–10, Paul presents a brief summary of Psalm 68 to reinforce his point. In it, King David describes a victory parade up Mount Zion. After God won a great victory for His people,

David returned the ark of the covenant to its rightful home in Jerusalem. He also brought home the spoils of battle, distributing some to the temple and some to his brave men. Paul uses this illustration to refer to Christ conquering His enemies, returning to His rightful place in heaven and bestowing spiritual gifts on His people.

These particular verses in this context are challenging to interpret and have puzzled scholars for centuries. Paul states that Christ's ascent was prefaced by His descent to the *lower parts of the earth*. It's possible Paul is referring to Christ's descent into hell to preach to the captives following His death on the cross (Acts 2:27–28 and 1 Peter 3:18–22), or he could have been speaking about Christ's descent to earth in His incarnation. Whichever the case, the point here is that Christ descended and ascended—there is nothing hidden from Him. He completely fills all things; everything in heaven and on earth is under His authority and control.

Selah~

Did you know that as a child of God it is in *your* spiritual DNA to serve Him for His glory? It is part of your "good works prepared beforehand that you should walk in them." The list of gifts here in Ephesians 4 is not all-inclusive; others are also mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Look these up and note the gifts mentioned.

- Romans 12:3–8
- 1 Corinthians 12:1–31
- Personal: Take a moment for a little spiritual inventory. Based on your knowledge, what gift do you believe God has given you to use in serving others? Are you allowing yourself to develop to your full potential? What do you hope to contribute over time to the body of Christ?

It takes the entire community of believers, united in will and purpose, to carry out the work of the ministry. Though individual members may seem insignificant in terms of the big picture, each one has a vital role and contribution; no one is more or less important than another. Together we can accomplish much more than any of us can do alone. The world is watching and whenever they see us operating in unity, they witness us modeling the fullness of Christ in action!

3. Earlier, in verse 3, Paul mentioned the unity we believers are to keep. Here in verse 13, it is the goal we are to reach. In your own words, summarize that goal as stated in verses 13–15.
4. As each member of Christ's body fulfills its part, what amazing dynamic occurs (verse 16)?

Day Three:

The New Man

Reread Ephesians 4:17–24 for review.

The *believing* and the *doing* of the gospel are both present in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The first three chapters are devoted to who we believers are in Christ. Then in chapter 4, Paul reaches a turning point, going from the spiritual to the practical, getting specific about what *to do* and what *not to do* in developing a Christian lifestyle.

Repeatedly Paul uses the word *walk*. It is an action verb that takes in the whole of life—requiring believers not to only to *be* but also to *do*. When Paul speaks about the walk of the believer he is referring to every aspect of their conduct that has first been transformed in the heart and mind by the Spirit.

1. Use verses 17–19 to depict in your own words the believer's previous conduct and the reason for it. Pick out specific words that describe the "old life."
 - a. Verse 17
 - b. Verse 18
 - c. Verse 19
2. "But you have not so learned Christ" (verse 20). In contrast to unbelieving Gentiles, the Ephesian Christians were taught how to conduct themselves when they put their faith in Christ. Note what Paul highlights in these verses.
 - a. Verses 21–22: What are you to put off?
 - b. Verses 23–24: What are you to put on?
 - c. Personal: Identify a part of your previous "old nature" that you no longer practice (you don't need to share this with your group if you're uncomfortable). Contrast this with an aspect of your current Christian lifestyle that exemplifies Jesus Christ.

*Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character;
sow a character, reap a destiny.* —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Day Four: Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Reread Ephesians 4:25–32 for review.

In verses 25–32, Paul moves in terms of lifestyle behavior to that of personal relationships. The glimpse we are given here is that the believers in the early church dealt with the same issues we Christians face today. The underlying lesson is that when we do fall short, we must realize it is possible to *grieve* (offend, vex, or sadden) the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed, branded, secured as His own. In other words, it's very personal to Him.

Don't rush the exercise below; take some time with it, allowing God's Spirit to search your soul and make it personal to you.

1. What are the specific “do nots” that Paul lays out in the following verses:
 - a. Verse 26
 - b. Verse 27
 - c. Verse 28
 - d. Verse 29
 - e. Verse 30
 - f. Verse 31

If God has put His finger on any of these “do nots” today, lift it in prayer and ask His forgiveness.

2. Along with the command of what not to do, Paul gives several positive commands. List those below along with why they are important.
 - a. Verse 25 (Reinforced and restated from verse 15)
 - b. Verse 28
 - c. Verse 29
 - d. Paul's last command in verse 32 depicts the very nature of God. What is it and why is it so essential that we put it on?

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: Take the next step of obedience and record the difference it makes in your life.

Prayer Requests ~
