



Ephesians - Chapter Four

Summary of Chapter Four

Having provided a doctrinal basis for this letter, Paul now starts to explain to his readers the fundamental instructions for Christian living. There are three things which emerge as basic: the meaning of their call to follow Christ; the grace which has equipped each of them to play their part in serving him; and the unity they already have, but which they must make every effort to guard. It is for the sake of the Gospel that Paul was a prisoner in the Lord, leading by example in just how valuable it is.

Having dealt with the general calling, Paul goes on to list some of the spiritual gifts that are given to those called into roles of church leadership. The objective of these gifts is to disseminate the Gospel to those who would trust in Christ and build the church up to maturity and unity.

Paul then instructs his readers that they cannot live as if they were still pagans, attracted to all sorts of worldly desires. They have to put off that old way of living and turn to the life they had learned of through hearing and accepting the Gospel of Jesus. They are to be renewed in their spirits into a new humanity for Christ.

The chapter concludes with a list of activities that a believer should not engage in: lying, dishonesty, rash speech and angry exchanges with others. Such actions would grieve the Holy Spirit. Instead, people are to act kindly towards each other with mutual respect and love for one another.

VII Ephesians 4:1-16 - Unity in the Body of Christ

Paul now turns to exhortation based upon the truths he has been teaching, a common format for his letters, in which doctrinal truths are stated first, here in chapters 1-3; then application to life is built upon that doctrine in chapters 4-6. The exhortations of Scripture become empty moralism without this Gospel foundation.

VII.a Ephesians 4:1-6 - Exhortation to unity

Paul exhorts the church to unity based on the truths of the one God and his one work of salvation.

¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Prisoner. Paul's imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel is in the Lord and for those whom he brings it to: <<*This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*>> (Ephesians 3:1). His exhortations have great power, since he himself has taken these matters seriously enough to suffer confinement and loss of personal liberty in the Lord's service.

To lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. This is not about the individual role that believers are to undertake in their own service but a fundamental reminder of the Gospel principles to which all are first called: <<*Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel*>> (Philippians 1:27), <<*For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God*>> (Colossians 1:9-10), and: <<*As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Christians are to live in a manner worthy of the adoption, holiness, and unity to which they were called: <<*just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will*>> (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Humility was regarded as distasteful by the pagan world of Paul's day and remains so in modern philosophies such as Buddhism. Pride was more highly prized. All of the virtues mentioned – humility, gentleness, patience, and most of all, love – were displayed in Christ's own character and are to be evident in the daily walk of every Christian.

Peace is a state of reconciliation and love; therefore it acts as a bond to unite believers in Christ. Believers do not create unity but are to preserve the unity already established.

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Just as a human body has one spirit that animates it, so Christ's body, the church, is enlivened by one Holy Spirit who enlivens Christians to eternal life. On the church as a body, see Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

One hope. Christians do not have separate ‘hopes’ but are together called to eternal life and to enjoy God forever in resurrection glory. The fundamental hope of the Christian comes about because Jesus conquered sin and death, and this will be the same victory for all who continue to faithfully serve Christ as Lord, united to him through his church. They are also called to express that unity this side of eternity.

One faith refers to the doctrinal truths Christians commonly confess. One Spirit, one Lord Christ, and one God and Father constitute a Trinitarian formula.

One baptism. Christians have disagreed about the proper mode of baptism beginning in the early history of the church. One baptism here, however, may refer to the baptism of all believers into one body: *<<For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit>>* (1 Corinthians 12:13), which is the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when one becomes a genuine believer in Christ. If this view is correct, water baptism would be an outward sign of the inward reality of the believer being in Christ as the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: *<<Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit’>>* (John 3:5), *<<The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit>>* (John 3:8), and: *<<he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit>>* (Titus 3:5). There is, therefore, a profound spiritual unity of all genuine believers who are ‘in Christ’: *<<I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me>>* (John 17:20-23), founded on one faith in one Lord, irrespective of denominational differences. Others hold that the reference here is to water baptism, but would disagree concerning the proper mode, e.g. sprinkling or full immersion.

Above all, through all, in all. God is omnipresent: *<<Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night’, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you>>* (Psalm 139:7-12), and: *<<Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting-place?>>* (Isaiah 66:1). Thus the Christian church is one body, wherever its separate congregations may be found throughout the world: *<<Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith>>* (Romans 3:29-30).

VII.b Ephesians 4:7-10 - The different gifts

Paul describes diverse gifts in the church. These come from the ascended Christ, distributed through his Holy Spirit.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:7

But each of us was given grace. Although all believers are equal in the sight of God, they are called individually and are gifted in order to fulfil the particular calling God has placed on each person separately: <<***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good***>> (1 Corinthians 12:7). Grace though is a universal free gift poured out upon each person.

Grace according to the measure of Christ's gift does not refer to different levels of saving grace but of grace given to serve Christ's church. To hold an office in Christ's church (vv.11-16) requires a special calling from Christ himself, who rules his body as its head (v.15).

⁸ Therefore it is said,

'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.'

Ephesians 4:8

It is said. Paul cites Psalm 68:18, where the one who ascends is the triumphant Lord God. Paul sees this as referring to Christ Jesus in his resurrection as head of the church.

Most in 1st Century Judaism would interpret this part of the Davidic psalm to refer to Moses ascending Mount Sinai and coming down with the law, so Paul sees Jesus in the role of Moses in a sense. After the 'new Exodus', which had been achieved in his death and resurrection, setting the human race free from bondage to sin and death, Jesus 'went up' into the heavenly realm where he now reigns as Lord. Instead of coming down again with the law, as Moses had done, Jesus 'returned' in the person of the Spirit, through whom different gifts are now showered on the church.

Gifts. In Psalm 68:18, the divine victor is seen: <<***receiving gifts from people***>>, but Paul adapts the passage to his purposes, as NT authors sometimes do in citing the OT, to show that Christ gives gifts to his people from his spoils of victory. Interestingly, ancient Syriac and Aramaic translations of Psalm 68:18 also have gave. The gifts given by Christ turn out to be the church leaders described in v.11.

The captives over whom Christ triumphed are most likely demons, this theme of victory over demonic forces was noted in: <<***God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church***>> (Ephesians 1:20-22).

⁹ (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

Ephesians 4:9-10

The lower parts of the earth. In the incarnation, Christ descended from the highest heavens to the lowest regions, i.e. to the earth, where he suffered, died, and was buried, but where he also defeated death and rose again. He then ascended 40 days later to be seated in the highest heavens at the right hand of the Father: <<So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God>> (Mark 16:19), <<While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven>> (Luke 24:51), <<When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight>> (Acts 1:9), and: <<Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear>> (Acts 2:33). It may also allude to the regions where departed spirits dwell awaiting judgement: <<For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water>> (1 Peter 3:18-20), although this seems less likely in this context.

Who ascended far above all the heavens. There is only one who fulfilled this: <<Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of the hand? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is the person's name? And what is the name of the person's child? Surely you know!>> (Proverbs 30:4).

Far above. Christ is the supreme head of the church who fills all things with his glory, power, and sovereign prerogative to dispense gifts to his people (vv.11-16).

However one may choose to interpret this passage, what matters is that, even with all the different gifts that Jesus has lavished on the church, it is the same Jesus, the same Lord, who is personally present, by the Spirit, in each of them. He lives within each member of his body. To keep that in mind is to go some way towards the other great goals of this passage. This is how to maintain unity. This is how, above all else, believers are to live up to the calling they have received.

VII.c Ephesians 4:11-16 - The gifts for edification of the church

Paul now turns to the individual gifts given to those who are called to build the church up into a unified and mature whole. The list in v.11 is not exhaustive, but it does provide the basis on which the early church was built. The focus here is gifted people who articulate the Gospel.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for
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the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

Christ gives specific spiritual gifts to people in the church whose primary mission is to minister the Word of God (v.12).

The apostles were witnesses to the resurrection; since the resurrection is the foundation of the church, the testimony of those who had seen the Risen Jesus was the first Christian preaching: <<*This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken through your apostles*>> (2 Peter 3:1-2), and: <<*But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Jude 17). Regarding apostles, refer to the comments on 1:1.

Some prophets. Different views on the nature of the gift of prophecy in the NT affect one's understanding of this verse; refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Ephesians 2:20. Since the Greek language construction here is different from Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, some see this verse as a broader reference to the gift of prophecy generally in the NT church, rather than a reference to the 'foundational' prophets mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5.

From the Greek word for the Gospel, *euangelion*, evangelists denotes people like Philip and Timothy who proclaimed the Gospel to an unsuspecting world: <<*The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him*>> (Acts 21:8), and: <<*As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully*>> (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul himself was both an evangelist and an apostle, who also took on pastoral and teaching duties. His writing also gives sufficient evidence to consider his role as prophetic.

Pastors or shepherds. In the OT these are kings and judges, for example David: <<*For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel*>> (2 Samuel 5:2), and: <<*Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'*>> (2 Samuel 7:7). In the NT, pastors and elders shepherd by watching over and nurturing the church: <<*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son*>> (Acts 20:28), and: <<*Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly*>> (1 Peter 5:1-2). There is some uncertainty as to whether pastors and teachers refers here to two different ministry roles or functions, or whether the reference is to a single 'pastor-teacher' ministry role, since Paul uses a

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different Greek conjunction at the end of the list, joining the two nouns more closely together than the other nouns in the list. If teachers are a separate group, they can be understood as a special branch of pastors, e.g. overseers, elders, etc. responsible for instruction in God's Word: <<*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching*>> (1 Timothy 5:17).

Those church leaders with various gifts are to equip the saints, i.e. all Christians, so that they can do the work of ministry. All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used in ministering to one another: <<*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*>> (1 Corinthians 12:7), <<*All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses*>> (1 Corinthians 12:11), and: <<*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received*>> (1 Peter 4:10), but they still need to be equipped through biblical and moral exhortation by those gifted to do so.

The diversity of gifts serves to bring about the unity of Christ's people, his church.

To maturity extends the body metaphor used earlier for the church and contrasts with 'children' in the next verse: <<*About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil*>> (Hebrews 5:11-14).

Some aspects of Christian maturity do take time, but there are many ways in which, once someone has come to believe in Jesus as the Risen Lord and discovered his presence and power in their life, maturity can follow swiftly. Here Paul shows how it happens, what God has given to the church to make it happen, and why it matters. It matters because, without maturity, Christians are very vulnerable to all kinds of trickery that may well take them a long way away from where they ought to be; see v.14.

Some people think that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is people who divide the church, whereas the knowledge of the Son of God, both knowing Christ personally and understanding all that he did and taught, is edifying and brings about maturity when set forth in love: <<*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death*>> (Philippians 3:10). The work of the gifted ministers is to proclaim and teach the Word centred on Christ rather than on speculative or eccentric teachings of their own: <<*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified*>> (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The measure. Christ Jesus is the standard of the maturity to which the church must aspire.

The full stature of Christ is the full expression of his divine and human perfection: <<*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*>> (Ephesians 1:22-23), <<*I pray that you may have the power to*

comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God>> (Ephesians 3:18-19), <<For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell>> (Colossians 1:19), and: <<For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily>> (Colossians 2:9).

¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

Ephesians 4:14

Immaturity in the truths of Christian doctrine makes the church like gullible children tossed to and fro helplessly by the waves and wind of cunning and deceitful schemes of false teachers: <<*But the wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud>> (Isaiah 57:20), <<Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander>> (1 Peter 2:1), <<Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world>> (1 John 4:1-3), <<For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ>> (Jude 4), and: <<I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false>> (Revelation 2:2).*

¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16

The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience but must always be presented in love. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up into Christ. The illustration of children in v.14 is now advanced to the adult maturity for those children must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, becoming more like him in every way they can.

Of course, a body does not grow into a head but as the head, Christ leads, directs and guides the body: <<*But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ>> (1 Corinthians 11:3), and: <<For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour>> (Ephesians 5:23).*

Joined and knitted together by every ligament. Paul continues the body metaphor to describe the church's maturity. Every member, i.e. every believer, viewed as a limb or unit in Christ's body, plays a crucial role in this growth.

In love. There is no Christian maturity or true Christian ministry without love, see 1 Corinthians 13, and every act of love in the name of Christ is valued and remembered by him, as each part is working properly, as illustrated in Matthew 25:31-43, Matthew 26:6-13, and here in vv.25-32.

Paul makes a clear distinction in these verses. Although there are some who may see that the purpose of the church is for the benefit of some specially gifted people, actually it is the opposite that is true. The main point why certain people have special roles is so that every single Christian, and the church as a whole, may be equipped for their work of service. Make no mistake, v.12 indicates clearly that the point of God calling people to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, is so that every Christian can serve in the way they are called to do, they are there for the building up of the whole body of Christ.

VIII Ephesians 4:17-24 - The Old Life and the New

Paul testifies to the new life in Christ as experienced by the mainly Gentile Christians in Ephesus. They are to reject their former pagan ways and become a new humanity for Christ according to the Gospel. The way to achieve this is by adopting the appropriate mindset.

¹⁷ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.

Ephesians 4:17-18

Paul affirms most solemnly in the Lord that his Gentile readers, as part of the new creation, should no longer live as the Gentiles do (vv.22-24), and: <<*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator*>> (Colossians 3:9-10).

In the futility of their minds. They are darkened. Both in antiquity and today, people who reject the knowledge of God think of themselves as enlightened. Enlightenment only comes through knowing God: <<*But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings*>> (Hebrews 10:32).

Alienated from the life of God. Paul uses the word alienated to describe their relationship to God because of their ignorance, and their culture had no guiding light, moral compass, or reason to restrain their basest and most extreme behaviour.

Their ignorance here is not lack of general education; some were brilliant in their own way, but such brilliance is all wasted and futile in the end when combined with hardness of heart toward the truth of the Gospel in Christ: <<*With them*

indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: “You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them”>> (Matthew 13:14-15), which Jesus also states in John 12:40, and Paul also quotes it in Acts 28:26-27, and again from Isaiah in Romans 11:8 <<as it is written, ‘God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day’>>.

¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of impurity. ²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus.

Ephesians 4:19-21

Being blind and in the dark had once brought the Ephesians to the condition of having no conscience, they have lost all sensitivity. This had produced total action and dedication to the worst categories of sinful behaviour: <<*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron*>> (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

Licentiousness includes every kind of impurity, lechery and debauchery, warned against elsewhere: <<*You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry*>> (1 Peter 4:3). There was no restraint and almost all of their myths of gods and goddesses also involved this behaviour. To work all uncleanness means a dedication to do so always and to the furthest extent the selfish, the sinful, the most destructive and pernicious things. All is done for that person’s benefit alone - complete and total greediness.

That is not the way you learned Christ! They have now been taught in complete contrast to their former state or condition. They have learned the truth in Christ; the light, being pure, dispels the darkness.

For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. Paul reminds them that what they had heard from him, and been taught by him, was the truth that is in Jesus. This truth is universal and eternal, and both freeing and empowering to new and good behaviour. Refer also to the comments made on Ephesians 3:1-4.

As truth is in Jesus. Jesus confirmed that speaking the truth and making it known was a primary reason for his earthly ministry: <<*Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’>> (John 8:31-32), and: <<Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice’>> (John 18:37).*

²² You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

Put away, your old self. As Christians seek to do this, God makes it a reality, as seen in Romans 6:5-7 and Colossians 3:9-10. Even Paul's Gentile readers can be part of the new creation in Christ. Self is the generic Greek for 'man' or 'human' – perhaps an allusion to Adamic man apart from Christ. Verse 22 describes the negative side of regeneration, while vv.23-24 point to the positive side.

Corrupt. People need inner transformation because their hearts are: <<*devious above all else*>> (Jeremiah 17:9a).

Renewed. Paul expressed the negative side of the new creation in v.22 as putting off the old self, while vv.23-24 express the positive side as an entire transformation of believers' inner selves, focusing here on the spirit of your minds: <<*Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit*>> (John 3:3-6). Christians sometimes distinguish between knowledge of head and of heart, but the Bible shows that they should love and serve the Lord with all that is in them, including their minds, at all times: <<*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*>> (Deuteronomy 6:5), <<*So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*>> (Deuteronomy 10:12), <<*you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul*>> (Deuteronomy 13:3), <<*He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"*>> (Matthew 22:37), recorded also in Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. The renewal or 'transformation' of the mind, see Romans 12:2, is a process in which believers begin to think in new and right ways as they meditate on the truths of God's Word. Without a fundamental change of heart and mindset a person's behaviour is not going to change either. It is a matter of the heart and mind being open to the ever wider range of insight and imagination that comes with 'learning Christ' (v.20).

Clothe yourselves with the new self means literally 'man' as already noted, something Paul writes about elsewhere: <<*We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin*>> (Romans 6:6), and: <<*Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*>> (Romans 13:14). Paul focuses on the individual aspect of the corporate 'new man' as described in 2:15. Believers are created anew in Christ; refer also to 2:10.

Created according to the likeness of God further shows the connection with the original creation in Genesis, where: <<*God created humankind in his own image*>> (Genesis 1:27a). Paul uses a similar phrase in one of his letters to Corinth: <<*Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven*>> (1 Corinthians 15:49).

In Paul's letters he often writes of what people have learned of Christ but does not say what that is. There are some critics who claim that Paul and his Gentile churches did not know much about Jesus, other than his death, resurrection and role as mediator with the Father. The synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke as they are known today, were only just being circulated around the time Paul wrote this letter, and John's Gospel would not be written for about another 30 years. Yet it is clear from the teachings of morality in heart and mind that Paul so often writes of, that the teachings of Jesus were the foundation of what these new converts had based their faith on; in addition to his death and resurrection, of course. Additionally, they had the guidance of the Holy Spirit within.

IX Ephesians 4:25-5:2 - Rules for the New Life

This is very much a list of instructions of how not to live, followed by how life under Christ should be. Believers should not lie, not be angry with each other, not speak rashly, nor should they be dishonest in any way. Such actions would grieve the Holy Spirit. The only way forward is to trust in God and imitate his examples of kindness, forgiveness and compassion.

IX.a Ephesians 4:25-32 - Exhortation to an Edifying Lifestyle

Paul gives practical examples of how church members build up Christ's body (see vv.13-16), based on what is true of them as Christians.

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

Ephesians 4:25

So then. In vv.25-32 Paul will show how Christians are to put into practice the truths explored in vv.17-24.

Let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours. Paul is quoting from the prophet: <<*These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace*>> (Zechariah 8:16), which predicts that God is going to renew his people and restore their fortunes. This demands the highest moral character, that is: <<*Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart*>> (Psalm 15:2).

Number one on the list is putting away falsehood: <<*You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another*>> (Leviticus 19:11). All lying is false, incorrect, and carries misinformation; it is the complete opposite of truth and reality. Paul reminds the reader that, if one part of the human body acts contrary to the truth, it affects the whole body, and the purpose and authority of the head. Also in a Church, Jesus being the head, all others are

members of one another. These connections are held together in the truth of God.

²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,
²⁷ and do not make room for the devil.

Ephesians 4:26-27

Be angry but do not sin. Here, Paul quotes from David: <<*When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent*>> (Psalm 4:4). Not all anger is sin, for anger is a natural human emotion and there is a place for righteous anger in the Christian life; but the believer should not be consumed by anger, nor should one's anger even be carried over into the next day, as this will only give an opportunity to or make room for the devil. Paul was well aware of the adversary's schemes in such behaviour, especially in the church: <<*And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs*>> (2 Corinthians 2:11).

²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Ephesians 4:28

Thieves must give up stealing. Paul uses the thief to illustrate how repentance impacts one's lifestyle. Repentance involves both stopping (negative) and starting (positive). The thief must stop stealing and start doing honest work. Stealing arises out of laziness and greed, so the repentant thief must display the opposite: diligence at labour, i.e. work honestly, and a willingness to share. Paul had set an example in this: <<*For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Paul's example was indeed to give something to the needy. Not just by meeting their physical needs as suggested in the requirement to work but, in Paul's case, to meet their spiritual needs as well.

This instruction does not only apply to obvious criminal acts such as stealing but calls for honest dealing in all things. God had ordained this in business as an example: <<*You shall have only a full and honest weight; you shall have only a full and honest measure, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you*>> (Deuteronomy 25:15), and: <<*You shall have honest balances, an honest ephah, and an honest bath*>> (Ezekiel 45:10).

²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:29

Evil talk. As with the 'stopping' and 'starting' noted in v.28, Christians are to stop using corrupting speech, substituting it with talk that is useful for building up and

giving grace. Such speech not only includes that which is derogatory or misleading about the church but also to those in the wider community, whether from a different faith group or unbelievers. It causes reputational damage to the church and therefore to the one whom the church represents, Jesus Christ and his Father.

Evil or corrupting, Greek *sapros*, also applies to bad or rotten fruit: <<**No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit**>> (Luke 6:43), and bad or putrid fish: <<**when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad**>> (Matthew 13:48).

To give grace in speaking means to benefit others rather than corrupt them through what is said.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Grieving the Holy Spirit means to cause him sorrow by one's sins. Israel had fallen foul of this by turning away from God: <<**But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them**>> (Isaiah 63:10).

Marked with a seal. The word Paul uses could refer to the seal or official stamp on a document or package, marking it out for a particular use or occasion. The mark indicates who it belongs to and what it is for. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the community, and in the heart of the individual Christian, declares that they belong to God, and that they are destined for full redemption; that is, the liberation which will come on the day when God sets the whole world free and gives believers their resurrection bodies. That is central to the Christian hope, and possessing this hope gives particular shape to their present lives.

The day of redemption is the day of Christ's return: <<**Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near**>> (Luke 21:28), <<**and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies**>> (Romans 8:23). For more information on a seal refer to the comments on Ephesians 1:13.

³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:31-32

All bitterness means 'every kind of bitterness'. All also modifies the other items in the list, telling readers to put away all wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice. Bitterness may head the list because it so often leads to the other sins that Paul includes here.

Bitterness comes from a heart that is not right before God: <<**You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of**>>

this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness>> (Acts 8:21-23); it is a primary characteristic of an unregenerate person: *<<as it is written: 'There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.' 'Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive.' 'The venom of vipers is under their lips.' 'Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness'>>* (Romans 3:10-14); and it causes destruction and defilement: *<<See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled>>* (Hebrews 12:15). Bitterness and resentment are thus incompatible with Christian character and must be put away.

People often are very careless with their speech, i.e. slander, hurtful accusations, inappropriate remarks, boasting, etc., even though they know that the tongue can ignite a forest fire of harm to others: *<<So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell>>* (James 3:5-6).

Being kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving flows from constantly remembering that God first forgave his people and that they still need his forgiveness daily, i.e. as God in Christ has forgiven you, as the Lord's Prayer clearly states: *<<And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors>>* (Matthew 6:12), confirmed in: *<<And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial>>* (Luke 11:4).

IX.b Ephesians 5:1-2 - Exhortation to self-sacrificial love

Paul calls on his readers to imitate God through the example of Christ's love.

Chapter 5:1-2 are included here to complete the major section under review.

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God. Believers are to imitate God's holiness in all of their conduct: *<<Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect>>* (Matthew 5:48), and: *<<Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful>>* (Luke 6:36). They are to be like him, not as slaves trying to earn a wage but as children, and beloved children at that!

Live in love is the overarching theme of Christ's teaching and underpins the whole Gospel message: *<<For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life>>* (John 3:16). Indeed, the Son gave of himself in this way: *<<For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay*

it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father>> (John 10:17-18), i.e. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

Christ loved us. The past tense does not suggest that Christ has stopped loving anyone but only that, when he gave himself up for them, it was the supreme act of his love: <<*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*>> (John 15:13).

A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God is a reference to the OT sacrificial system that once pleased God: <<*Then you shall take them from their hands, and turn them into smoke on the altar on top of the burnt-offering of pleasing odour before the Lord; it is an offering by fire to the Lord*>> (Exodus 29:25), now replaced by the acceptance of his Son, who is the ultimate and final sacrifice: <<*Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself*>> (Hebrews 7:27), and: <<*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*>> (1 John 4:10).