



# Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

## Week 12: Defining Family Dynamics Part I - Ephesians 4

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>(Baptism), 30<sup>th</sup>
- April 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>

### The Goal of Ephesians:

#### Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

*4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

#### WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

- **REDEMPTION 1:7** (Salvation, Restoration)
- **DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14** (God's plan for us)
- **GRACE 1:2** (God's favor that we never can earn)
- **PREDESTINATION 1:4-5** [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]
- **RECONCILIATION 2:1-21**
- **UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21**

**Week 1:** Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

**Week 2:** Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

**Week 3:** Understanding JC Headship of the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

**Week 4:** His Genesis – Predestination, What happened before Genesis and how it affects us today

**Week 5:** Ephesians 2:11-22 Being One – Not Two

**Week 6:** Paul's life with God.

**Week 7:** Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm (Intercession)

**Week 8:** Angelology

**Week 9:** Ephesians 3 – Intercession

**Week 10:** Equation for Unity = Humility + Gentleness + Patience + Forbearing + Love

**Week 11:** Victory & Gifts of the Trinity

**Week 12:** Family Dynamics Part I

**TOPICS:** Conflict (plain unafraid talk 4) Controlling the tongue (4). Sanctification (4). Boundaries/Necessary Endings (5), Sexual impurity/Covetous (5). Submission (5). Husband/Wives (5). Children and Parents (6), Armor of God (6). Reciprocity. FAMILY MATTERS.

### EPHESIANS 3:1-13

For this reason I, Paul, (A) a prisoner of Christ Jesus (B) on behalf of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> assuming that you have heard of (C) the stewardship of (D) God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> (E) how the mystery was made known to me (F) by revelation, (G) as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> (H) When you read this, you can perceive my insight into (I) the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is (J) that the Gentiles are (K) fellow heirs, (L) members of the same body, and (M) partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup> (N) Of this gospel I was made (O) a minister according to the gift of (P) God's grace, which was given me (Q) by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, (R) though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, (S) to preach to the Gentiles the (T) unsearchable (U) riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and (V) to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery (W) hidden for ages in (X) God, (Y) who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold (Z) wisdom of God (AA) might now be made known to (AB) the rulers and authorities (AC) in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was (AD) according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have (AE) boldness and (AF) access with (AG) confidence through our (AH) faith in him. <sup>13</sup> So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering (AI) for you, (AJ) which is your glory.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees to the (BK) Father (BL) of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, (BM) according to the riches of His glory, (BN) to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in (BO) the inner man, <sup>17</sup> (BP) that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, (BQ) being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> (BR) may be able to comprehend with all the saints (BS) what is the width and length and depth and height—<sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled (BT) with all the fullness of God.

[one sentence]

<sup>20</sup> Now (BA) to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly (BB) above all that we ask or think, (BC) according to the power that works in us, <sup>21</sup> (BD) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



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#### [UNITY DOES NOT MEAN SAMENESS]

**Unity in the Body of Christ** ESV (Unity and Diversity in the Body. Walk in Unity)

*4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, **urge you** [I BEG YOU] to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism,<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

#### **Ephesians 4:7-16**

*<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.<sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,*

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men[& women].”*

*<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth[lower parts of the earth]? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

*<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers], <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,*

#### **REVIEW:**

The Church is called to grow up as one unit. Not individuals maturing but a family, community maturing TOGETHER.

So, we no longer are children/immature:

#### **Ephesians 4:14b**

*by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

#### **Ephesians 4:15-16**

*<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up in every way into Him** who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Exactly how the church grows into maturity, Paul is ready with his answer. **It grows by truth and love.** To allow ourselves to be hurled hither and thither by the fierce blasts of false teaching is to condemn ourselves and the church to perpetual immaturity (verse 14). Instead, what we need is ‘the truth’, **provided** we speak it ‘in love’ (verse 15). For it is ‘in love’ that the church grows and builds itself up (verse 16). What Paul calls for is a balanced combination of the two. **‘Speaking the truth in love’ is not the best rendering of his expression, for the Greek verb makes no reference to our speech. Literally, it means, ‘truthing (alētheuontes) in love’, and includes the notions of ‘maintaining’, ‘living’ and ‘doing’ the truth. STOTT**



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### IF WE CHOOSE NOT TO:

DO "US" – Growing as a community/unit = IMMATURITY?

[Concerned about our own "ministry" over the growth of the church?]

DO TRUTHING IN LOVE, does that = NOT growing up into Christ?

[Stifles/Chokes/Stops bodily growth?]

### When we say NO to being THE CHURCH...

We are saying YES to Immaturity

We are saying YES to Disunity

We are saying YES to = NOT BEING LIKE CHRIST

[God will not tolerate division, disunity, selfishness....all grounded in self aggrandizement.]

THE EMPHASIS OF UNITY NOW MOVES TO PURITY...

## FAMILY DYNAMICS – PART I

### THE NEW LIFE – DOCTRINAL BASE/BIBLICAL BASE

**Ephesians 4:17-19** [Romans 1:18-32]

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the *futility* of their minds.

<sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their **hardness of heart**.

<sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

MIND – What do I feed my mind?

EMOTIONS – Where do I let my emotions roam? Do I control them or do they control me?

CONSCIENCE – What decides right and wrong for me?

ACTIONS – The culmination of the above three.

### VS 17 WORD WEALTH

**Futility, mataiotes.** The unregenerate mind is characterized by *futility*. The Greek term is similar in meaning to the Hebrew term in Ecclesiastes which appears in the phrase "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2; 12:8). The basic meaning of both terms is "**emptiness**." Paul was saying that the mind of a person apart from Christ's salvation is void of the capacity to perceive and reason about the matters of the unseen spiritual world. "Five traits of a worldly walk are summed up in the word *futility* (emptiness, purposelessness): darkened understanding, alienation from God, ignorance of God's way, a hardened heart, and an unfeeling state."<sup>1</sup>

### Hardness of Heart:

*pōrōsis*, stupidity or callousness leads to blindness

<sup>1</sup> Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1994). *Prisoner of joy: Living in Christ's Fullness and Freedom: a study of the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon)*. Thomas Nelson.



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*Pōros* was ‘a kind of marble’ or in medical writers a ‘callus’ or a ‘bony formation on the joints’. Hence the verb *pōroun* meant to **petrify**, to become hard and therefore insensible, and even blind. ‘intellectual obtuseness’ **Armitage Robinson**

**4457 πήρωσις, πόρωσις** [*porosis* /po-ro-sis/] n f. From 4456; TDNT 5:1025; TDNTA 816; GK 4387 and 4801; Three occurrences; AV translates as “blindness” twice, and “hardness” once. **1** the covering with a callus. **2** obtrusiveness of mental discernment, dulled perception. **3** the mind of one has been blunted. 3A of stubbornness, obduracy.<sup>2</sup>

### Mark 3:5

*And He looked around at them with anger, grieved at **their hardness of heart**, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.*

### Ephesians 4:20-21

<sup>20</sup> *But that is not the way you learned **Christ!**—<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is **in Jesus**.*

First, ‘you **learned Christ**’ (verse 20, *emathete*) – Christ is our substance (not learned about)  
Secondly, ‘you **heard him**’ (verse 21a, *ēkousate*) – You heard Christ’s voice (not hear about)  
[Via the Holy Spirit through their teachers, preachers, etc.]

Thirdly, ‘you were **taught** in him’ (verse 21b, *edidachthēte*)

Still alive, still viable, still inhalable, still present....

That is to say, Jesus Christ, in addition to being the teacher and the teaching, was also the context, even the atmosphere within which the teaching was given. **When Jesus Christ is at once the subject, the object and the environment** of the moral instruction being given, we may have confidence that it is truly Christian. For *truth is in Jesus*. The change from his title ‘Christ’ to his human name ‘Jesus’ seems to be deliberate. The historical Jesus is himself the embodiment of truth, as he claimed. STOTT

### Ephesians 4:21-24

<sup>22</sup> *to **put off your old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be **renewed in the spirit of your minds**, <sup>24</sup> and to **put on the new self**, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Put off = Making a decision. An action. [REPENTANCE = Acknowledgement of.....]

[Skit of someone trying to take a coat off of someone else]

- De-clothe. Get naked.

### RE-CREATION!

Put on= Making a decision. An Action.

[jacket object lesson]

- Clothe yourself. Get dressed.

[DO ON/OFF SKIT HERE. Grey robe/White robe. Staining substance.]

### Questions we should be asking ourselves:

<sup>2</sup> Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.



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- Who is responsible for Putting Off?
- Who is responsible for Putting On?
- What actions/process does “putting off” require?
  - Repentance
- What actions/process does “putting on” require?
  - Constant renewing of our minds. HOW?

#### *Renewed in the spirit of your minds*

This verb is a **present infinitive**, in distinction to those of verses 22 and 24 which are aorists. It indicates that, in addition to the decisive rejection of the old and assumption of the new, implicit in conversion, a daily—indeed a continuous—inward renewal of our outlook is involved in being a Christian. If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, **then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds.** STOTT

In a word, recreation (what God does) and repentance (what we do by his grace) belong together and cannot be separated.

#### **THE NEW LIFE – ACTIONS BASE/BIBLICAL BASE – Praxis** [practice as distinguished from theory]

Paul’s practical side. He gives concrete actions:

- A: All actions concern our relationships. (“You cannot be good in a vacuum” STOTT)  
 All actions develop/affect unity in the church  
 All the evils are destroyers of that unity.
- B:  
 Each put off is balanced by a put on – Balancing Action
- C:  
 Each case includes a reason for the action. (Theological reason).

#### **Ephesians 4:25-32**

##### **PUT ON / PUT OFF** [List on board]

<sup>25</sup> *Therefore, having A. **put away falsehood**, [lying, pretending, ]  
 let each one of you B. **speak the truth with his neighbor**, [  
 C. *for we are members one of another.**

<sup>26</sup> A. **Be angry and do not sin**; [Appropriate displays of anger = ?]  
 B. *do not let the sun go down on your anger*, [Deal with your anger]  
<sup>27</sup> C. *and give no opportunity to the devil.*

**Psalm 4:4** *Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.*

<sup>28</sup> A. *Let the thief **no longer steal**, [items, ideas, ...]*



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B. *but rather let him labor*, [earn \$, earn respect, earn your place]

C. *doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may **have something to share** with anyone in need.*

<sup>29</sup> A. *Let **no corrupting talk** come out of your mouths*, [Corrupting = ?]

B. *but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion*, [Building speech = ?]

C. *that it may **give grace** to those who hear.*

[Corrupting/Evil = Evil' here is *sapros*, a word used of rotten trees and rotten fruit.]

<sup>30</sup> ?. *And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

It is not immediately clear why Paul now introduces the Holy Spirit: *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* (verse 30). But the apostle was constantly aware that behind the actions of human beings invisible personalities are present and active. He has just warned us to give no opportunity to the devil (verse 27); now he urges us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. **It is evident from this that the Holy Spirit is fully personal, for *lypeō* is to cause sorrow, pain or distress, and only persons can feel these things.** But what grieves him? Since he is the 'holy Spirit', he is always grieved by **unholiness**, and since he is the 'one Spirit' (2:18; 4:4), **disunity** will also cause him grief. **In fact, anything incompatible with the purity or unity of the church is incompatible with his own nature and therefore hurts him.** One might add that because he is also the 'Spirit of truth', through whom God has spoken, he is upset by all our misuse of speech, which has been Paul's topic in the preceding verse.

We notice also in verse 30 the references to being *sealed* with the Spirit and to *the day of redemption*. The sealing (as Paul has already explained in 1:13) took place at the beginning of our Christian life; the Holy Spirit himself, indwelling us, is the seal with which God has stamped us as his own. The day of redemption, however, although we already have redemption in the sense of forgiveness (verse 1:7), looks on to the end when our bodies will be redeemed, for only then will our redemption or liberation be complete. **So the 'sealing' and the 'redemption' refer respectively to the beginning and the end of the salvation process.** STOTT

<sup>31</sup> A. *Let **all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander** be put away from you, along with all *malice*.*

<sup>32</sup> B. ***Be kind** to one another, **tenderhearted, forgiving** one another,*

C. *as God in Christ forgave you.*

**Bitterness** (*pikria*) Sour spirit with sour speech. The embracing of festering negativity, cynical. 'an embittered and resentful spirit which refuses to be reconciled'. Aristotle by A.R.

**Wrath** (*thymos*) passionate rage

**Anger** (*orgē*) a settled and sullen hostility.

**Clamour** (*kraugē*) To get excited, raising of voices in a quarrel, shouting, screaming, at others

**Slander** (*blasphēmia*) Speaking evil of others, behind their backs, to defame and destroy their reputation.

**Malice** (*kakia*), or ill will, wishing and probably plotting evil against people. THE COMBINATION OF THE ABOVE 5?

*chrēstos* /Christos = Kind

Compassionate = Tenderhearted

*Charizomenoi* - *forgiving one another* is literally 'acting in grace' towards one another,



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### Ephesians 5:1-4

C. *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Self centered:

<sup>3</sup> A. *But sexual immorality [fornication (porneia)] and all impurity (akatharsia) or covetousness [I deserve, I want, I need]*

B. ***must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.***

<sup>4</sup> A. *Let there be no filthiness [obscenity] nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place,*

God centered:

C. *but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

But the reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's good gift, which we do not want to see cheapened. All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator. STOTT

What do I need to put off?

What do I need to put on?

Taking Whose we are + The TRUTH we know/believe = Action.

**NotEs:**



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# IVP

## III. New standards

### 4. Christian unity demands the maturity of our **growth** (verses 13–16)

The apostle goes on to elaborate what he means by *building up the body of Christ*. It will evidently be a lengthy process, leading (in three pregnant phrases) to *the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, mature manhood, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. This is the goal to which the church will one day attain.

Because this verb **attain** means literally ‘to come to meet’ (*katantaō*), and because the first and third phrases refer explicitly to the Lord Jesus (‘Son of God’ and ‘Christ’), Markus Barth interprets the second (‘mature manhood’) as referring to him too. He translates it ‘the Perfect Man’ and pictures the church as the bride of Christ going out in a joyful festival procession to meet her Bridegroom at his triumphant appearing. It is an attractive reconstruction, and certainly accords with the development of the bride and bridegroom imagery of 5:25–27. On the other hand, it seems somewhat forced, since what we are said to ‘attain’ or ‘meet’ is not simply ‘the Son of God’ but ‘the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God’, not simply ‘Christ’ but ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’. In other words, the church’s goal is not Christ but its own maturity in unity which comes from knowing, trusting and growing up into Christ.

We pause to note that the church’s unity, although already in one sense given and inviolable, as we have seen, yet needs in another sense to be both ‘maintained’ (verse 3) and ‘attained’ (verse 13). Both verbs are surprising. If unity already exists as a gift, how can it be attained as a goal? Probably we need to reply that just as unity needs to be maintained *visibly*, so it needs to be attained *fully*. **For there are degrees of unity, just as there are degrees of sanctity**. And the unity to which we are to come one day is that full unity which a full faith in and knowledge of the Son of God will make possible. This expression effectively disposes of the argument that unity can grow without Christian faith or knowledge. On the contrary, it is precisely the more we know and trust the Son of God that we grow in the kind of unity with one another which he desires.

**This full unity is also called *mature manhood*. Some interpret this individually of each Christian growing into maturity in Christ, which is certainly a New Testament concept. But the context seems to demand that we understand it corporately. The church is represented as a single organism, the body of Christ, and is to grow up into adult stature.** Indeed, Paul has referred to it as the new humanity which God is creating, or as ‘one new man’ (2:15). To the oneness and the newness of this ‘man’ he now adds matureness. The *one new man* is to attain *mature manhood*, which will be nothing less than *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, the fullness which Christ himself possesses and bestows.

Although it seems that this growth into maturity is a corporate concept, describing the church as a whole, yet it clearly depends on the maturing of its individual members, as Paul proceeds to say: *so that we may no longer be children* (verse 14). Of course we are to resemble children in their humility and innocence, but not in their ignorance or instability. Unstable children are like little boats in a stormy sea, entirely at the mercy of wind and waves. Paul paints a graphic picture, tossed to and fro (*klydōnizomenoi*, from *klydōn*, rough water or surf) meaning ‘tossed here and there by waves’ (AG) and *carried about* (*peripheromenoi*) meaning ‘swung round by shifting winds’. Apparently Plato used this latter word of tops, which led E. K. Simpsom to dub such people ‘whirligigs’.<sup>7</sup> NEB brings the two storm pictures together by translating ‘tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching’. Such are immature Christians. They never seem to know their own mind or come to settled convictions. Instead, their opinions tend to be those of the last preacher they heard or the last book they read, and they fall an easy prey to each new theological fad. They cannot resist *the cunning of men* (*kybia* means ‘dice-playing’ and so ‘trickery’) or *their craftiness in deceitful wiles*.

In contrast to **doctrinal instability, which is a mark of immaturity, we should be speaking the truth in love** in order that we may *grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love* (verses 15–16)

We must not look in these verses for inspired instruction on human anatomy and physiology. The apostle’s intention is not to teach us how the human body works, but rather how the body of Christ grows. True, he uses some terms employed by ancient Greek medical writers like



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Hippocrates and Galen. ‘We can almost see him turn to “the beloved physician”, of whose presence he tells us in the companion epistle (Col. 4:14), before venturing to speak—technical language of “every ligament of the whole apparatus” of the human frame.’ But his emphasis is on the head ‘into’ whom we are to grow up (verse 15) and ‘from’ whom the body grows when ‘each part is working properly’. Markus Barth brings out clearly in his translation this focusing of attention on the initiative and work of the Head, Christ: ‘He is at work fitting and joining the whole body together. He provides sustenance to it through every contact according to the needs of each single part. He enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love.’

If now we drop the body metaphor and enquire ~~exactly how the church grows into maturity, Paul is ready with his answer. It grows by truth and love. To allow ourselves to be hurled hither and thither by the fierce blasts of false teaching is to condemn ourselves and the church to perpetual immaturity (verse 14). Instead, what we need is “the truth”, provided we speak it “in love” (verse 15). For it is “in love” that the church grows and builds itself up (verse 16). What Paul calls for is a balanced combination of the two. **“Speaking the truth in love” is not the best rendering of his expression, for the Greek verb makes no reference to our speech. Literally, it means, “truthing (alētheuontes) in love”, and includes the notions of “maintaining”, “living” and “doing” the truth.** Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God’s revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself ‘the Spirit of truth’, and his firstfruit is ‘love’. There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity.~~

### Conclusion

Here, then, is Paul’s vision for the church. God’s new society is to display charity, unity, diversity and growing maturity. These are the characteristics of ‘a life worthy of the calling’ to which God has called us, and which the apostle begs us to lead (verse 1).

The more we share Paul’s perspective, the deeper will be our discontent with the ecclesiastical *status quo*. Some of us are too conservative, too complacent, too ready to acquiesce in the present situation and to resist change. Others are too radical, wanting to dispense with the institution altogether. Instead we need to grasp more clearly the kind of new society God wants his church to be. Then we shall not be content either with things as they are, or with partial solutions, but rather will pray and work for the church’s total renewal.

Some look mainly for structures of unity, but seem to have no comparable concern that the **church should become a truly caring community** marked by humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love. Paul’s primary concern is not for structures; he begins and ends with love (verses 2, 16).

Others lay great stress on the fact of the church’s unity as a theological concept clearly articulated in their minds, but appear to see nothing anomalous in the visible disunity which contradicts their theology.

Others are content with a uniformity of church life and liturgy which is dull, boring, colourless, monotonous and dead; they have never glimpsed the variety God intends or the diversity of ministries which should enrich and enliven their membership of the body of Christ.



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Others have a static view of the church, and are well satisfied if the congregation manages to maintain its size and programme, without cutback; they have no vision of church growth either by evangelistic outreach or by the Christian maturing of their members.

All such complacency is unworthy of the church's calling. In contrast to it the apostle sets before us the picture of a deepening fellowship, an eagerness to maintain visible Christian unity and to recover if it is lost, an active every-member ministry and a steady growth into maturity by holding the truth in love. We need to keep this biblical ideal clearly before us. Only then shall we live a life that is worthy of it.

## 8. A new set of clothes

### 4:17–5:4

The apostle continues to describe the new standards which are expected of God's new society, or the life which is worthy of God's call. Called to be 'one' people, he has argued, we **must cultivate unity**. Called to be a 'holy' people, he goes on to argue now, we must also cultivate purity. **Purity is as indispensable a characteristic of the people of God as unity.**

Paul opens this section on the church's purity, just as he opened the former section on the church's unity, with an assertion of his authority as an apostle of Christ.

Verse 1        *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you ...*

Verse 17      *Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord ...*

The phrase *in the Lord* means 'in the Lord's name' (GNB). He is making the solemn claim that he writes to them with the authority of the Lord Jesus. NIV brings out this emphasis: 'I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord.'

The gist of his message is plain: *you must no longer live as the Gentiles do*. He is generalizing of course. Not all pagans were (or are) as dissolute as those he is about to portray. Yet just as there is a typical Christian life, so there is a typical pagan life. When each life is true to its own principles, it is fundamentally opposed to the other. His readers knew from experience what he was saying; for they had been pagans themselves, and they were still living in a pagan environment. But they must live that way *no longer*, even if all around them others continued to do so (*as the Gentiles do*). Once they were pagans and so lived like pagans; now they were Christians and must live like Christians. They had become different people; they must behave differently. Their new status as God's new society involved new standards, and their new life in Christ a new lifestyle.

The way Paul handles his theme is to begin with the doctrinal basis of the new life (4:17–24), and then move on to its practical outworking in everyday behaviour (4:25–5:4).

## 1. The doctrinal basis (4:17–24)

It was essential at the outset for his readers to **grasp the contrast between** what they had been as pagans and what they now were as Christians, between their old and their new life, and further to grasp the underlying theological basis of this change.

*Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; <sup>18</sup> they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; <sup>19</sup> they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness. <sup>20</sup> You did not so learn Christ!—<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life*



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*and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,<sup>23</sup> and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

What is immediately noteworthy is the apostle's emphasis on the intellectual factor in everybody's way of life. While describing pagans, he draws attention to *the futility of their minds*, adds that they are *darkened in their understanding* and attributes their alienation from God to *the ignorance that is in them*. **He thus refers to their empty minds, darkened understanding and inward ignorance, as a result of which they had become callous, licentious and insatiably unclean.**

**Empty minds + Darkened understanding + Inward ignorance = Callous, Licentious, Insatiable**

But in contrast to them the believers had 'learned' Christ, 'heard' him, been 'taught' in him, all according to the 'truth' which is in Jesus. Over against the darkness and ignorance of the heathen Paul thus sets the truth of Christ which the Christians had learned. **Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to the power of ignorance and error to corrupt, and the power of truth to liberate, ennoble and refine.**

**Learning scriptural truth + Understanding + = Purity of life**

#### *a. The pagan life (verses 17–19)*

But what is the origin of the darkness of heathen minds, when God himself is light, and he is continuously speaking to mankind through his creation, and both heaven and earth declare his glory? It is *due to their hardness of heart*, says Paul. The word he uses is *pōrōsis*, and on its derivation and history Armitage Robinson supplies a long additional note. *Pōros* was 'a kind of marble' or in medical writers a 'callus' or a 'bony formation on the joints'. Hence the verb *pōroun* meant to petrify, to become hard and therefore insensible, and even (when 'transferred from the organs of feeling to the organ of sight') blind. But in his view it does not mean 'stubbornness'. It is rather 'intellectual obtuseness, not the steeling of the will'. He examines the eight New Testament occurrences of the word and then concludes: 'Obtuseness, or a dulling of the faculty of perception equivalent to moral blindness, always gives an appropriate sense. On the other hand, the context never decisively favours the meaning "hardness", and this meaning seems sometimes quite out of place.' So he opts for 'blindness', as does the AV in this verse, as 'the least misleading' rendering.

Despite the careful arguing of his case, however, Armitage Robinson has not carried the translators and commentators with him. Certainly Mark 3:5 (where Jesus 'looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart') seems to imply a wilful obtuseness. Coming back to our Ephesians text, NEB translates it 'their minds have grown hard as stone', GNB uses the word 'stubborn', and J. H. Houlden comments: 'Pagan immorality is seen as wilful and culpable ..., the result of their deliberate refusal of the moral light available to them in their own thought and conscience.' It is true that in biblical usage 'heart' and 'mind' cannot be separated, since the heart includes our capacity to think and understand. Nevertheless, there is a real distinction between 'ignorance' and 'hardness' or 'obstinacy'.

If we put Paul's expressions together, noting carefully their logical connections (especially *because of* and *due to*, both translating *dia*), he seems to be depicting the terrible downward path of evil, which begins with an obstinate rejection of God's known truth. First comes *their hardness of heart*, then *their ignorance*, being *darkened in their understanding*, next and consequently they are *alienated from the life of God*, since he turns away from them, until finally *they have become*



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*callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness.* NEB has ‘They stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desire’. Thus hardness of heart leads first to darkness of mind, then to deadness of soul under the judgment of God, and finally to recklessness of life. Having lost all sensitivity, people lose all self-control. It is exactly the sequence which Paul elaborates in the latter part of Romans 1. Comparative tables may help to demonstrate this:

**Romans 1:18–32**

**Ephesians 4:17–19**

#### Stage 1: Obstinacy

18 ‘Men ... by their wickedness suppress the truth’

21 ‘Although they knew God they did not honour him as God’

28 ‘They did not see fit to acknowledge God’

18 ‘Due to their hardness (*pōrōsis*) of heart’

#### Stage 2: Darkness

21 ‘They became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened’

22 ‘They became fools’

28 ‘A base mind’

17 ‘The futility of their minds’

18a ‘They are darkened in their understanding’

18b ‘The ignorance that is in them’

#### Stage 3: Death or judgment

24 ‘Therefore God gave them up’

26 ‘For this reason God gave them up’

28 ‘God gave them up’

18 ‘They are ... alienated from the life of God’

#### Stage 4: Recklessness

God gave them up to—

24 ‘Impurity’

26 ‘Dishonourable passions’

27 ‘Shameless acts’

28 ‘Improper conduct’

29–31 ‘All manner of wickedness ...’

19 ‘They have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness (*aselgeia*, meaning public indecency of a shameless kind), greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness’

b. *The Christian life (verses 20–24)*



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The RSV does not adequately bring out the sharpness of the contrast, the ‘but as for you’ (*humeis de*) or ‘you, however’ (NIV) of the beginning of verse 20: *you did not so learn Christ!* Over against heathen hardness, darkness and recklessness Paul sets a whole process of Christian moral education. He uses three parallel expressions which centre on three verbs, all in the aorist tense, meaning to ‘learn’, to ‘hear’ and to ‘be taught’, with a final reference to ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’.

First, ‘you learned Christ’ (verse 20, *emathete*)

Secondly, ‘you heard him’ (verse 21a, *ēkousate*)

Thirdly, ‘you were taught in him’ (verse 21b, *edidachthēte*)

These are remarkable expressions. They ‘evoke the image of a school’ and refer to the catechetical instruction which Paul assumes, indeed knows; they have had. According to the first, Christ is himself the substance of Christian teaching. Just as evangelists ‘preach Christ’,<sup>5</sup> so their hearers ‘learn’ Christ, and ‘receive’ him, that is, a tradition about him. But what sort of Christ do they learn? Not just the Word made flesh, the unique Godman, who died, rose and reigns. More than that. The implication of the context is that we must also preach his lordship, the kingdom or rule of righteousness he ushered in, and all the moral demands of the new life. **The Christ whom the Ephesians had learned was calling them to standards and values totally at variance with their former pagan life.**

Secondly, Christ who is the substance of the teaching (‘you learned Christ’) is himself also the teacher (‘you heard him’). It is a pity that RSV translates the phrase *you heard about him*, for there is no preposition. Paul assumes that through the voice of their Christian teachers, they had actually heard Christ’s voice. Thus, when sound biblical moral instruction is being given, it may be said that Christ is teaching about Christ.

**Thirdly**, they had been *taught in him*. That is to say, Jesus Christ, in addition to being the teacher and the teaching, was also the context, even the atmosphere within which the teaching was given. When Jesus Christ is at once the subject, the object and the environment of the moral instruction being given, we may have confidence that it is truly Christian. For *truth is in Jesus*. The change from his title ‘Christ’ to his human name ‘Jesus’ seems to be deliberate. The historical Jesus is himself the embodiment of truth, as he claimed.

But what exactly is this truth that is in Jesus? If heathen darkness leads to reckless uncleanness, what is the truth which sets Christians free and leads them to righteousness? The next verses (22–24) give the answer. To **‘learn Christ’** is to grasp the new creation which he has made possible, and the entirely new life which results from it. It is nothing less than putting off our old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on like clean clothing the new humanity recreated in God’s image.

When does this take place? RSV is seriously misleading in that it renders the infinitive verbs as if they were imperatives, and thus represents Paul’s written instruction as fresh commands to his readers: *Put off your old nature ... and put on the new nature* (verses 22, 24). But this cannot be right, for two main reasons. First, in the parallel passage in Colossians the verbs are aorist participles, indicating what the Colossian Christians did at the time of their conversion: ‘Seeing that you have put off the old nature ... and have put on the new nature.’ Secondly, if they are commands in Ephesians 4:22, 24, then the command of verse 25 becomes a nonsense: *Therefore, putting away falsehood ...* Surely this ‘therefore’, which builds on what has just been written, can hardly base one command upon another, as if to say: ‘Put off your old nature ... and put on the new ... Therefore put away falsehood’. The Colossians parallel, on the other hand, makes perfect sense, because it builds a present command on a past fact. It reads: ‘Put all these things away—



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anger, malice, slander (*etc.*)—seeing that you have put off the old nature ... and have put on the new' (3:8–10). It is because we have already put off our old nature, in that decisive act of repentance called conversion, that we can logically be commanded to put away all the practices which belong to that old and rejected life. In Ephesians 4 as in Colossians 3, therefore, the same logic is to be found. **The verbs 'put off' and 'put on' are not fresh commands which the apostle is now addressing to his readers, but old ones which he gave when he was with them and of which he now reminds them.** Indeed, these commands are the very 'truth as it is in Jesus' which they had been taught and learned. So we should repunctuate these sentences, and replace the full stop at the end of verse 21 with a colon or with the word 'namely', thus: 'You did not so learn Christ!—assuming that you ... were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, namely that you were to put off your old nature ... and put on the new ...' JBP captures the sequence of thought well: 'What you learned was to fling off ... and to put on ...' So does NEB: 'Were you not ... taught the truth as it is in Jesus?—that, leaving your former way of life, you must lay aside that old human nature.'

What had they been taught, then? They had been taught that becoming a Christian involves a radical change, namely 'conversion' (as the human side of the experience is usually called) and 're-creation' (the divine side). It involves the repudiation of our former self, our fallen humanity, and the assumption of a new self or re-created humanity. Each of these two Paul calls (literally) a 'man', the 'old man' which is put off, and the 'new man' which is put on. Charles Hodge explains their language: 'What is here called "the old man" Paul elsewhere calls himself, as in Rom. 7:14 "I am carnal" ... or "the flesh" ... as in Gal. 5:16, 17 ... It is called "man" because it is ourselves.' Further, our former self and our new self are vividly contrasted with each other: 'As we are called to put off our corrupt nature as a ragged and filthy garment, so we are required to put on our new nature as a garment of light. And as the former was personified as an old man, decrepit, deformed, and tending to corruption, so the latter is personified as a new man, fresh, beautiful and vigorous, like God ...' *i.e.* created in his image.

The portraits Paul paints of both 'men' balance one another. The old was *corrupt*, in the process of degenerating, on its way to ruin or destruction; the new has been freshly *created after the likeness of God*. The old was dominated by *lusts*, uncontrolled passions; the new has been created in *righteousness and holiness*. The lusts of the old were *deceitful*; the righteousness of the new is *true*. Thus, corruption and creation, passion and holiness, deceit and truth are set in opposition to one another, indicating the total incompatibility of the old and the new, what we were in Adam and what we are in Christ.

In between these **contrasting portraits** of the kind of person we 'put off' and 'put on' comes verse 23: *and be renewed in the spirit of your minds*. This verb is a present infinitive, in distinction to those of verses 22 and 24 which are aorists. It indicates that, in addition to the decisive rejection of the old and assumption of the new, implicit in conversion, a daily—indeed a continuous—inward renewal of our outlook is involved in being a Christian. If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds.

In all this teaching the divine and the human are beautifully blended. In the command to exchange our old humanity for a new one, Paul is not implying that we can bring about our own new birth. **Nobody has ever given birth to himself.** The very concept is ludicrous. No, the new humanity we assume is God's creation, not ours. Nevertheless, when God recreates us in Christ according to his own likeness, we entirely concur with what he has done. We 'put off' our old life, turning away from it in distaste, and we 'put on' the new life he has created, embracing it and



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welcoming it with joy. In a word, recreation (what God does) and repentance (what we do by his grace) belong together and cannot be separated.

All this the Ephesian and other Asian Christians had been taught. They had been thoroughly grounded in the nature and consequences of the new creation and the new life. It was part of the ‘truth in Jesus’ which they had learned. They had not only been taught to ‘put off’ the old and ‘put on’ the new; they had done it. The reality took place at their conversion. Then the symbolism may have followed at their baptism, for some early baptisms included a ceremonial investiture with a white robe. Now Paul reminds them what they had learned and done.

Looking back over these verses, we can perhaps grasp more clearly the two solid doctrinal foundations for Christian holiness which Paul has laid. They are like two roots from which holiness sprouts and grows. **First**, we have experienced a new creation, and **secondly**, in consequence, we have received a new mind which is constantly being renewed. Moreover, the two are organically related to one another. It is our new creation which has given us a new mind; and it is our new mind which understands our new creation and its implications. Since it is a new creation in God’s holy image, it has involved for us the total putting away of our old fallenness and the thankful putting on of our new humanness.

*Therefore*, Paul continues, ‘each of you must put off ...’ (verse 25, NIV). That is, because you did throw off your former self once and for all, you must now throw off all conduct which belonged to your old life. Your new behaviour must be completely consistent with the kind of person you have become. As we have already noted, the metaphor (‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’) is drawn from the way we dress. It can now be elaborated.

The kind of clothing we wear depends on the kind of role we are fulfilling. For example, when we go to a wedding we wear one kind of clothing; when we go to a funeral we wear another. I realize of course that some young people in the West wear blue jeans at all times. Nevertheless the custom of adapting our dress to suit the occasion still stands as a general principle. Many people’s dress is also determined by their job. Soldiers and sailors wear different uniforms. Lawyers have special clothing, at least when they appear in court. So do some clergy. So do prisoners and convicts. But when we change our role, we change our dress. When prisoners are released from custody and become free people again (putting off one role and assuming another), they change what they are wearing (putting off prison garb and putting on ordinary clothes). Similarly, when a soldier leaves the army and becomes a civilian, he gets out of uniform into ‘civvies’. Just so, since by a new creation we have put off the old humanity and put on the new, we must also put away the old standards and adopt new ones. Our new role will mean new clothing, our new life a new ethical lifestyle.

## 2. Six concrete examples (4:25–5:4)

It is marvellous to see how easily Paul can descend from lofty theological talk about our two humanities, about the Christ we have learned and the new creation we have experienced, to the nitty-gritty of Christian behaviour—telling the truth and controlling our anger, honesty at work and kindness of speech, forgiveness, love and sexual self-control. All very practical. And before we come to his six examples, we need to notice three features common to them all.

**First**, they all concern our relationships. Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced in relation to God but in isolation from human beings. You cannot be good in a vacuum, but only in the real world of people. Besides, ‘all the qualities enjoined here are aspects of that unity in the church which it is our writer’s prime concern to elucidate and to foster. To this matter he



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deliberately gives pride of place ... Similarly, the evils to be avoided are all destroyers of human harmony.'

**Secondly**, in each example a negative prohibition is balanced by a corresponding positive command. It is not enough to put off the old rags; we have to put on new garments. It is not enough to give up lying and stealing and losing our temper, unless we also start speaking the truth, working hard and being kind to people.

**Thirdly**, in each case a reason for the command is either given or implied, indeed a theological reason. For in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles doctrine and ethics, belief and behaviour are always dovetailed into one another.

#### *a. Don't tell lies, but rather tell the truth (verse 25)*

Strictly speaking, the Greek word is not *falsehood* in the abstract but 'the lie' (*to pseudos*). It is possible, therefore, that Paul is referring here as in Romans 1:25 to 'the great lie of idolatry', and that because his readers had renounced that supreme falsehood of paganism, the chief symptom of a futile and darkened mind (verses 17–18), he urges them now to forsake all lesser lies and speak the truth. Certainly the avoidance of lies is of little use without the active pursuit of truth. The followers of Jesus (in whom is truth, verse 21) should be known in their community as honest, reliable people whose word can be trusted. The reason given is not only that the other person is our *neighbour*, whom we are commanded in Scripture to love, but that in the church our relationship is closer still, *for we are members one of another*. Paul brings us back to his doctrine of the church as the body of Christ (*cf.* verses 12–16), and implies that 'a lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ'. For fellowship is built on trust, and trust is built on truth. So falsehood undermines fellowship, while truth strengthens it.

#### *b. Don't lose your temper, but rather ensure that your anger is righteous (verses 26–27)*

'Be angry, but sin not' is an echo of **Psalm 4:4**. It seems clear that this form of words is a Hebrew idiom which permits and then restricts anger, rather than actually commanding it. The equivalent English idiom would be 'in your anger do not sin' (NIV). Nevertheless, the verse recognizes that there is such a thing as Christian anger, and too few Christians either feel or express it. Indeed, when we fail to do so, we deny God, damage ourselves and encourage the spread of evil.

**Scripture plainly teaches that there are two kinds of anger, righteous and unrighteous.** In verse 31 'anger' is one of a number of unpleasant things which we are to 'put away' from us. Evidently unrighteous anger is meant. But in 5:6 we are told of the anger of God which will fall on the disobedient, and we know that God's anger is righteous. So was the anger of Jesus. There must therefore be a good and true anger which God's people can learn from him and from their Lord Jesus.

**I go further and say that there is a great need in the contemporary world for more Christian anger.** We human beings compromise with sin in a way in which God never does. In the face of blatant evil we should be indignant not tolerant, angry not apathetic. If God hates sin, his people should hate it too. If evil arouses his anger, it should arouse ours also. 'Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake thy law.' What other reaction can wickedness be expected to provoke in those who love God?

It is particularly noteworthy that the apostle introduces this reference to anger in a letter devoted to God's new society of love, and in a paragraph concerned with harmonious relationships.



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He does so because true peace is not identical with appeasement. ‘In such a world as this,’ comments E. K. Simpson, ‘the truest peace-maker may have to assume the role of a peace-breaker as a sacred obligation.’

At the same time, we need to remember our fallenness, and our constant proneness to intemperance and vanity. Consequently, we always have to be on our guard and act as censors of our own anger. If we are wise, we shall be ‘slow to anger’, remembering that ‘the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God’. So Paul immediately qualifies his permissive *be angry* by three negatives. First, *do not sin*. We have to make sure that our anger is free from injured pride, spite, malice, animosity and the spirit of revenge. Secondly, *do not let the sun go down on your anger*. This instruction illustrates well the folly of excessive literalism in interpreting the Bible. We are not to understand Paul ‘so literally that we may take leave to be angry till sunset’, for ‘then might our wrath lengthen with the days, and men in Greenland, where days last above a quarter of the year, have plentiful scope of revenge’. No, the apostle’s intention is to warn us against nursing anger. **It is seldom safe to allow the embers to smoulder.** Certainly if we become aware of some **sinful or selfish element** in it (and if our *orgē*, anger, degenerates into *parorgismos*, resentment, the word used at the end of verse 26), then it is time for us to cease from it, and either apologize or be reconciled to the person concerned. In the Old Testament a moneylender who took a poor person’s cloak as a pledge was required to restore it ‘when the sun goes down’, so that he might sleep in it, and an employer who had any servants who were poor and needy was required to pay them their wages daily ‘before the sun goes down’. There are many similar situations in which it is wise to live a day at a time. ‘Never go to bed angry’ is a good rule, and is seldom more applicable than to a married couple.

Paul’s third qualification is *give no opportunity to the devil* (verse 27), for he knows how fine is the line between righteous and unrighteous anger, and how hard human beings find it to handle their anger responsibly. So he loves to lurk round angry people, hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship.

#### *c. Don’t steal, but rather work and give (verse 28)*

‘Do not steal’ was the eighth commandment of Moses’ law. It had and still has a wide application, not only to the stealing of other people’s money or possessions, but also to tax evasions and customs dodges which rob the government of their dues, to employers who oppress their workers, and to employees who give poor service or work short time.

In echoing the commandment (*let the thief no longer steal*), however, the apostle goes beyond the prohibition and draws out its positive implications. It is not enough that the thief stops stealing. Let him start working, *doing honest work with his hands*, earning his own living. Then he will *be able* not only to support himself and his family, but also *to give to those in need*. Instead of sponging on the community, as thieves do, he will start contributing to it. And none but Christ can transform a burglar into a benefactor!

#### *d. Don’t use your mouth for evil, but rather for good (verses 29–30)*

The apostle turns from the use of our hands to the use of our mouths. Speech is a wonderful gift of God. It is one of our human capacities which reflect our likeness to God. For our God speaks, and like him we also speak. Speech distinguishes us from the animal creation. Cows can moo, dogs



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bark, donkeys bray, pigs grunt, lambs bleat, lions roar, monkeys squeal and birds sing, but only human beings can speak.

So *let no evil talk come out of your mouths*, Paul says. ‘**Evil**’ here is *sapros*, a word used of **rotten trees and rotten fruit**. When applied to rotten talk, whether this is dishonest, unkind or vulgar, we may be sure that in some way it hurts the hearers. Instead, we are to use our unique gift of speech constructively, *for edifying*, that is to build people up and not damage or destroy them, *as fits the occasion*. Then our words will *impart grace to those who hear*.

Jesus taught the great significance of speech. **Our words reveal what is in our hearts**, he said, and we shall have to give an account on judgment day of every careless word we have uttered. So James was only echoing the teaching of his Master when he emphasized the immense power of the human tongue for good or evil.<sup>5</sup> If we are truly a new creation of God, we shall undoubtedly develop new standards of conversation. Instead of hurting people with our words, we shall want to use them to help, encourage, cheer, comfort and stimulate them. I have myself often been challenged by the contrasting speech of the wise man and the fool in Proverbs 12:18: ‘There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing’.

It is not immediately clear why Paul now introduces the Holy Spirit: *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* (verse 30). But the apostle was constantly aware that behind the actions of human beings invisible personalities are present and active. He has just warned us to give no opportunity to the devil (verse 27); now he urges us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. It is evident from this that the Holy Spirit is fully personal, for *lypeō* is to cause sorrow, pain or distress, and only persons can feel these things. But what grieves him? Since he is the ‘holy Spirit’, he is always grieved by unholiness, and since he is the ‘one Spirit’ (2:18; 4:4), disunity will also cause him grief. In fact, anything incompatible with the purity or unity of the church is incompatible with his own nature and therefore hurts him. One might add that because he is also the ‘Spirit of truth’, through whom God has spoken, he is upset by all our misuse of speech, which has been Paul’s topic in the preceding verse.

We notice also in verse 30 the references to being *sealed* with the Spirit and to *the day of redemption*. The sealing (as Paul has already explained in 1:13) took place at the beginning of our Christian life; the Holy Spirit himself, indwelling us, is the seal with which God has stamped us as his own. The day of redemption, however, although we already have redemption in the sense of forgiveness (verse 1:7), looks on to the end when our bodies will be redeemed, for only then will our redemption or liberation be complete. So the ‘sealing’ and the ‘redemption’ refer respectively to the beginning and the end of the salvation process. And in between these two termini we are to grow in Christlikeness and to take care not to grieve the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is a sensitive Spirit. He hates sin, discord and falsehood, and shrinks away from them. Therefore, if we wish to avoid hurting him, we shall shrink from them too. Every Spirit-filled believer desires to bring him pleasure, not pain.

*e. Don’t be unkind or bitter, but rather kind and loving (4:31–5:2)*

Here is a whole series of six unpleasant attitudes and actions which are to be *put away* from us entirely. *Bitterness* (*pikria*) is a sour spirit and sour speech. We sometimes talk about a ‘sour puss’, and I guess there are sour tomcats too. Little is sadder in elderly people than a negative and cynical outlook on life. Quoting Aristotle, Armitage Robinson defines it as ‘an embittered and resentful spirit which refuses to be reconciled’. *Wrath* (*thymos*) and *anger* (*orgē*) are obviously similar, the former denoting a passionate rage and the latter a more settled and sullen hostility. *Clamour*



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(*kraugē*) describes people who get excited, raise their voices in a quarrel, and start shouting, even screaming, at each other, while *slander* (*blasphēmia*) is speaking evil of others, especially behind their backs, and so defaming and even destroying their reputation. The sixth word is *malice* (*kakia*), or ill will, wishing and probably plotting evil against people. Alternatively, it may be inclusive of the five preceding vices, namely ‘silently harboured grudge, indignant outburst, seething rage, public quarrel and slanderous taunt.’ There is no place for any of these horrid things in the Christian community; they have to be totally rejected.

In their place we should welcome the kind of qualities which characterize the behaviour of God and his Christ. We are to *be kind to one another*. The word is *chrēstos*, and because of the obvious assonance with the name of Christ (*Christos*), Christians from the beginning saw its peculiar appropriateness. It occurs in the Sermon on the Mount for God’s kindness towards even ‘the ungrateful and the selfish’. *Tenderhearted* is ‘compassionate’, while *forgiving one another* (*charizomenoi*) is literally ‘acting in grace’ towards one another, as God in Christ has acted in grace towards us. *Therefore*, because of God’s gracious attitude and generous actions towards us, we are to *be imitators* (*mimētai*) of God, as beloved children. Just as children copy their parents, so we are to copy our Father God, as Jesus himself told us to. We are also to follow Christ, to *walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*. The same verb for self-giving (*paradidōmi*) is used of the heathen in 4:19. They give themselves up to licentiousness; we like Christ are to give ourselves up to love. Such self-giving for others is pleasing to God. As with Christ so with us, self-sacrificial love is a *fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. It is thus a striking truth that sacrificial love for others becomes a sacrifice acceptable to God.

It is noteworthy how God-centred Paul’s ethic is. It is natural for him, in issuing his moral instructions, to mention the three Persons of the Trinity. He tells us to ‘copy God’, to ‘learn Christ’ and not to ‘grieve the Holy Spirit’.

#### *f. Don’t joke about sex, but rather give thanks for it (verses 3–4)*

Paul turns from ‘self-sacrifice ... to its very opposite, self-indulgence’, from genuine ‘love’ to that perversion of it called ‘lust’. The Greek words for *fornication* (*porneia*) and *impurity* (*akatharsia*) together cover every kind of sexual sin, in other words all sexual intercourse outside its God-ordained context of a loving marriage. To them Paul adds *covetousness*, surely because they are an especially degrading form of it, namely the coveting of somebody else’s body for selfish gratification. The tenth commandment had specifically prohibited coveting a neighbour’s wife, and earlier in this letter Paul has written of the ‘greed’ involved in unclean practices (4:19). So all forms of sexual immorality, he writes, *must not even be named among you*. We are not only to avoid their indulgence, but also to avoid thinking and talking about them, so completely are they to be banished from the Christian community. This was a high and holy standard to demand, for immorality was rife in Asia. And since the Greek goddess Artemis, ‘Diana of the Ephesians’, was regarded as a fertility goddess, sexual orgies were regularly associated with her worship.

Verse 4 goes beyond immorality to vulgarity. For *filthiness* means obscenity, and both *silly talk* and *levity* are probably an allusion to coarse jesting, which is the cheapest form of wit. All three refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in dirty conversation. But these things *are not fitting*. *Instead*, Paul says, *let there be thanksgiving*. The contrast is striking and beautiful. In itself thanksgiving is not an obvious substitute for vulgarity, since the latter is essentially self-centred, and the former God-centred. But perhaps this is the point that Paul is making: ‘Whereas sexual impurity and covetousness both express self-centred acquisitiveness, thanksgiving is the exact



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opposite, and so the antidote required; it is the recognition of God's generosity'. It seems to me probable, however, that Paul is setting vulgarity and thanksgiving even more plainly in opposition to each other, namely as alternative pagan and Christian attitudes to sex. Of course Christians have a bad reputation for being negative towards sex. Dr Michel Fourcault, since 1970 Professor of the History of Thought Systems at the Collège de France, is apparently writing a *History of Sexuality* in six volumes. Explaining his work in *Le Monde* in January 1977 he spoke of 'Christianity's most intolerably burdensome legacy, sex as sin'. And it is true that some of our Victorian forefathers came close to this identification. But the reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's good gift, which we do not want to see cheapened. All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator.

## Conclusion

What is the theme which has run right through chapter 4 and spilled over into chapter 5? These chapters are a stirring summons to the unity and purity of the church; but they are more than that. **Their theme is the integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe) and Christian ethics (how we behave).** They emphasize that being, thought and action belong together and must never be separated. For what we are governs how we think, and how we think determines how we act. We are God's new society, a people who have put off the old life and put on the new; that is what he has made us. So we need to recall this by the daily renewal of our minds, remembering how we 'learned Christ ... as the truth is in Jesus', and thinking Christianly about ourselves and our new status. Then we must actively cultivate a Christian life. For holiness is not a condition into which we drift. We are not passive spectators of a sanctification God works in us. On the contrary, we have purposefully to 'put away' from us all conduct that is incompatible with our new life in Christ, and to 'put on' a lifestyle compatible with it.

Two words stand out as summarizing this theme. In 4:1 Paul begs us to lead a life that is *worthy* of God's call, and in 5:3 he tells us to avoid immorality, 'as is *fitting* among saints'. It is most unfortunate that the word 'saints' has come to be used, if not for the heroes of the church who have been canonized, then at least for exceptional and often eccentric people who are distinguished from others by their pallid countenance, heavenward look and invisible halo. But 'the saints' are all God's people who have been reconciled to him and to each other. Therefore, certain kinds of behaviour are 'worthy', or 'fitting', being appropriate to who we are, while certain others are 'unworthy' or 'unfitting', being inappropriate.

Let no-one say that doctrine does not matter! Good conduct arises out of good doctrine. It is only when we have grasped clearly who we are in Christ, that the desire will grow within us to live a life that is worthy of our calling and fitting to our character as God's new society.<sup>3</sup>

From Ephesians 4:17–19, describe what had been wrong with the Ephesians' approach to life as unregenerate Gentiles.

Their minds

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<sup>3</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 143–194). InterVarsity Press.



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Their emotions (hearts)

Their consciences

Their actions

### WORD WEALTH

**Futility, *mataiotes*.** The unregenerate mind is characterized by *futility*. The Greek term is similar in meaning to the Hebrew term in Ecclesiastes which appears in the phrase “vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2; 12:8). The basic meaning of both terms is “emptiness.” Paul was saying that the mind of a person apart from Christ’s salvation is void of the capacity to perceive and reason about the matters of the unseen spiritual world. “Five traits of a worldly walk are summed up in the word *futility* (emptiness, purposelessness): darkened understanding, alienation from God, ignorance of God’s way, a hardened heart, and an unfeeling state.”<sup>4</sup>

### Ephesians 4:17–5:2

#### The Old and the New Human: Two Ways of Walking

#### PREVIEW

It is rather artificial to break up 4:1–5:21 into distinct sections. Even so, we are helped by stylistic and thematic features to mark off distinct parts of the text for the sake of manageability. Ephesians 4:17 repeats the *therefore (oun)* initiating the exhortation section in 4:1 (reduced by NIV to *so*, and by NRSV to *now*), thus taking up the exhortation in earnest with an emphatic appeal: *Walk (NIV and NRSV: live) no longer as the Gentiles do!* The section concludes in 5:2 with an equally emphatic *Walk in love as did Christ! Walk*, as in 2:1–10, serves as an *inclusio* (marking a section by repeating a beginning word or phrase at the end).

Adding to this frame is the contrast between Gentiles *handing themselves over* to vice (4:19) and Christ *handing himself over* to God as an act of sacrificial worship (5:2). The focus of contrasting lifestyles is not brought to a close at 5:2 (cf. *walk* in 5:8, 15, in addition to further contrasts), but the striking contrast between “two ways of walking” serves as a useful theme under which to consider this section of Ephesians.

The contrast between the two modes of life is sharpened here in two ways. First, 4:20–24 challenges readers to recall their baptism as a ritual of *taking off or putting off the old human (the old anthrōpos)* and *putting on the new human (the new anthrōpos)*—Christ. Second, verses 25–32 illustrate life in *the new human* with exhortations on truth-telling, anger, theft, speech, and grieving the Holy Spirit. Prohibited behavior is contrasted with what should replace it. The contrast is sharpened further in verses 31 and 32 with lists of vices and virtues, likely drawn from Colossians 3:8, 12–13. The first two verses of chapter 5 bring the exhortation to a climax with the call to imitate God and to *walk* like Christ. We hear an echo of 4:1 with its call to *walk in a way worthy of God’s calling*.

Here is a summary of the many contrasts in this passage:

#### ***the old human***

#### ***the new human***

decaying

being renewed

<sup>4</sup> Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1994). *Prisoner of joy: Living in Christ’s Fullness and Freedom: a study of the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon)*. Thomas Nelson.



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walking like the Gentiles

imitating God

walking like the Gentiles

walking in love as Christ

who have given themselves up

who gave himself up

to every unclean work

for us

alienated from the life of God

forgiven and loved children of God

ignorance

learning

empty mind

renewed in the spirit

darkened thinking

of the mind

the lie

the truth

every evil

the good

stealing

working with one's own hands

rotten language

truthful and grace-full language

bitter, angry, and wrangling

kind, compassionate, and forgiving

As to structure, verses 17–19 form one sentence, as do verses 20–24. Verses 25–32 are shorter sentences exhorting to various kinds of behavior.

### Structure of 4:17–5:2

For this reason I testify in the Lord—

You are no longer to walk as Gentiles. (4:17–19)

You did not so learn Christ, the truth in Jesus.

You are to have taken off the old human



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and to have put on the new human. (4:20–24)

Therefore, having “taken off” the lie—

- Speak truth with the neighbor.
- Be angry, but do not sin.
- No longer steal, rather give to those who need.
- No rotten words, rather impart grace.
- Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
- Let all vices [list] be removed from you.
- Rather be like God in Christ [list of virtues]. (4:25–32)

Therefore, be imitators of God

and walk in love just like Christ. (5:1–2)

### OUTLINE

On Not Walking Like Gentiles, 4:17–19

Learning Christ by Putting on the New Human, 4:20–24

4:20–21	Learning Christ, the Truth in Jesus
4:22–24	“You Are What You Wear”
No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth, 4:25–32	
4:25	Saying No to the Lie and Speaking Truth
4:26–27	Sinless Anger
4:28–29	Meeting Need with Hands and Words
4:30	On Not Grieving the Holy Spirit
4:31–32	Contrasting Ways of Relating to Others

Imitating God and Walking Like Christ, 5:1–2

### EXPLANATORY NOTES

#### On Not Walking Like Gentiles 4:17–19

This section begins with an emphatic double statement: *For this reason I therefore declare and testify in the Lord.* Notice first that *therefore* appears as it did in 4:1, indicating the resumption of exhortation premised



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on grace. As the exhortation of 4:1 was premised on God's grace as explored in the preceding chapters, so now again the exhortation follows necessarily from the rehearsal of Christ as gift-giver and growth-giver (4:7–16).

*Testify* is a translation of *marturomai*, from which we derive the English term *martyr*. Readers hear the following exhortation as emerging from someone who is a witness *in the Lord* and for that reason is to be heeded. A more intimate tone is set in 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12, where Paul as “father” (2:11) exhorts, encourages, and “testifies to” (*marturomai*) his “children” to “lead a life worthy of God” (cf. Eph. 4:1!). In Ephesians 4:17 the tone is less of parental intimacy and more of apostolic authority. Recall 2 Corinthians 2:17 where Paul speaks as “from God before God in Christ” (TRYN).

As in 4:1, the exhortation has to do with *walking*. This motif first arises in 2:2 (notes; 4:1, notes). Life is not static; it leads somewhere—either to ruin or to *the life of God* (4:18). The direction in which believers are to walk is first suggested by its opposite, the *walk* of the Gentiles. Since most of the recipients of the letter are Gentiles, the use of *Gentile* is here meant to bring to consciousness their former manner of life (cf. 4:22; 2:1–2, 11–12; 5:3–7).

The description of Gentile existence is brutal in both brevity and one-sidedness, owing much to a tradition of Jewish characterizations of Gentile life (TBC). Here its function is to hold up an ugly mirror to the readers, reflecting their former *walk* for purposes of warning, encouragement, and reinforcement of identity. Readers are *no longer* to *walk* as they once did (and presumably are still tempted to do—hence the exhortation). *No longer* fits well the *once-now* schema observed also in chapter 2 (notes) and sets the scene for the baptismal reflections to come in 4:22–24.

Alienation from God and God's will for human life is first a matter of corrupted consciousness, from which flows corrupt behavior. This is sketched in broad strokes with a string of virtually interchangeable images: the *mind* (*nous*) of such persons who are *alienated from the life of God* (cf. 2:12!) is *futile* (4:17; cf. Rom. 1:21; Wisd. of Sol. 13:1). Their *thinking* (*dianoia*) is *darkened* (cf. again Rom. 1:21; Wisd. of Sol. 17:2–3, 17, 21). “The light has gone out in the seat of Gentiles' understanding so that they are no longer capable of apprehending ultimate truth” (Lincoln: 277). All this is a result of the *ignorance* residing in them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14; similarly, Wisd. of Sol. 13:1), a result as much as cause of their alienation from God.

*Ignorance* thus cannot be claimed as an excuse (cf. Rom. 1:20–22). From a Jewish perspective, Gentile ignorance is culpable ignorance, particularly because of its delusions of knowledge and wisdom (cf. emphasis on delusion in Eph. 4:22; 1 Cor. 1:18–25). The author is not describing “a defect in the ability of his readers to reason” (Best, 1998:417) but an inability or unwillingness to perceive life and its demands in accordance with God's will.

A parallel to ignorance is, not surprisingly, *hardness of heart* (4:18). The *heart* is a virtual synonym for *mind* in the Bible (1:18, notes). *Hardening* is a frequent biblical way of describing resistance to truth or to God (cf. Mark 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Rom. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:14; the prime example is Pharaoh, Exod. 7–14; Rom 9:18). Such *hardness of heart* (Eph. 4:18) leads strikingly to *callousness*, to a “loss of sensitivity to pain,” as *apalgeō* can be translated literally (4:19; Liddell and Scott)—in this case moral pain. As the NJB translates it, *Their sense of right and wrong [has been] dulled*.

Once such hardening has happened, people *hand themselves over* or *deliver themselves up* to licentiousness, every kind of impure practice, and greed. The similarity to Romans 1 is striking, but there Paul says three times that God has *given up* such persons to a life of dissipation (1:24, 26, 28). The verb *paradidomi* is the same term used of Judas handing Jesus over to the authorities (e.g., Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13). It is the same term used of Jesus in Ephesians 5:2, who *hands himself over* for us as an offering and a sacrifice. Here the term has a tragic and fateful ring to it. These are, after all, the sons and daughters of disobedience, the “walking dead” under the rule of the evil authority of the air (2:1–3). Even so, they have *handed themselves over* to that authority as living yet deadened sacrifices.

Their life is marked by three interrelated categories of vice, all of which appear repeatedly in lists of vices (Best, 1998:422): *licentiousness*, *impurity*, and *greed*. *Licentiousness* or *debauchery* (*aselgeia*) is already linked with *impurity* (*akatharsia*) in 2 Corinthians 12:21 and Galatians 5:19, where both are listed with *fornication* (*porneia*). Jewish and Jewish-Christian believers viewed sexual sin as a representative affront to the holiness of God and characteristic of “unclean” Gentiles and their idolatry (cf., e.g., Wisd. of



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Sol. 14:26). Tellingly, this trio of vices is echoed in 5:3, 5, with the exception that *fornication* has replaced *licentiousness*.

The concern about *purity* has in this instance less to do with personal spiritual and moral hygiene, as important as that is, than with the fact that Gentile readers are now a part of God's holy temple (2:21–22). God's home cannot abide the defilements of sin (*every unclean work*) so heedlessly engaged in by those whose minds and hearts have become inured to purity and holiness (cf. also 1 Cor. 6:9–20).

*Greed* (*pleonexia*) here signifies the force that drives *license* and *impurity* (NRSV: *greedy to practice*). Some link it more closely to sex by translating it as *lust* (e.g., NIV). While that restricts its meaning too much, it draws attention to the fact that greed as *insatiability* is at the root of sexual excess as well. In that sense, sexual sin is symbolic of all other greed, the most prevalent being not sexual but economic! Biblically, *all* such greed is closely linked to *idolatry*, as is explicitly the case in 5:5 (cf. Col. 3:5; also Rom. 1:29 in light of Rom. 1:24–25; 1 Cor. 5:9–13; Isa. 2:6–20).

Such a bleak picture of *the Gentiles* might easily play into moral arrogance toward outsiders. However, its purpose here is to hold up a mirror to *the saints*, reminding them of their *former* way of life and regrettably also their *present walk*. This is, after all, exhortation. In this way the finger pointed at them becomes a prophetic/apostolic word reminiscent of the OT, where such a mix of motifs of debauchery, ignorance, darkness, and hardness of heart is used to depict *Israel's* apostasy (cf., e.g., Isa. 59, which furnishes an important background to Eph. 6:10–20).

The author thus attempts to create a chasm between who the readers *once* were and who they are *now* to be. Another example of how such stereotyping of a life of vice could be used *within* the church is found in 2 Peter 2, which characterizes false teachers in much the same way: ignorance, deceit, falsehood, and moral turpitude (Charles: 237–44). In short, the walk of the Gentiles is perilously near for both new and seasoned believers.

#### Learning Christ by Putting on the New Human 4:20–24

##### 4:20–21 *Learning Christ, the Truth in Jesus*

Pointing a finger at others is not at the heart of the exhortation. Instead, at its heart is a summons to a new life, reminding readers what it means that they were baptized into Christ and thereby have embarked on a course of learning and discipleship. Again, the contrast to the former way of life is stated emphatically: *But you did not so learn Christ*. As Barth puts it, “You have become students of the Messiah” (1974:504). Being faithful believers is a matter of learning how to walk in the school of Christ. The term for *learning* (*manthanō*) is the verb form of *disciple* (*mathētēs*).

The turn of phrase—*learning Christ*—is surprising and indeed unparalleled. Some versions try to clarify it: *learning about Christ* (TEV) or *coming to know Christ* (NIV). Most correctly retain the peculiar *learning Christ*. Similarly, Colossians 2:6–7 combines “receiving” with “being taught.” “As you therefore *received* Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in faith *just as you were taught*, abounding in thanksgiving” (TRYN).

Does “learning Christ” mean learning the tradition “about Christ”? (so Lincoln: 279; Schnackenburg: 199). Yes, but that is too limited. In Colossians, what has been taught and what has been received is a *person* rather than a teaching *about* him—though that surely would not have been excluded from any instruction in the faith. We recall the prominence given to teaching ministries in the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11. Clearly, teaching is more than imparting facts and dogmas; learning is more than the acquisition of information. It is *growing into Christ* (4:13, 16), becoming more fully a part of Christ as *members of Christ's body* (cf. the similar “Christ being formed in believers,” Gal. 4:19). To *learn Christ* is to encounter and commune with the risen Christ present in the church (so also Best, 1998:426–7). Hence the clause *You were taught in him* (Eph. 4:21).

Verse 21 repeats the clause encountered in 3:2, *if indeed you heard*. Here it is a reminder of what the author can assume has been heard and taught to the recipients of the letter. It is the premise upon which the author builds his appeal (*if indeed you heard and were taught in him*). However, just as in 3:2, the turn of phrase carries an implicit invitation to self-examination. Also as in 3:2, the phrase serves to introduce a



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major emphasis: there it was to rehearse the content of the apostolic legacy; here it refers to what it means to *learn Christ*.

Believers are said to have been *taught in him*, meaning *in Christ*. *In* can have spatial and instrumental meaning, but can also express agency [*“In”*]. Believers learn *within* Christ as members of his body (1:23; 2:15–16; 3:16–17; 4:15–16); they learn as those who have been raised to life *with* Christ (2:5–6); they are taught to live by what they see *in* Christ; finally, they are taught *by* Christ. We should resist choosing one interpretation over another. Through his example (2:14–18; 5:21–33), his gifts (*apostles ... and teachers*, 4:11), and his Spirit (1:17; 3:5, 16; 4:3–4; note that in 5:18–21, *being subject to each other* is a consequence of *being filled with the Spirit*; cf. 6:4, notes), the risen Lord is himself the teacher of the church.

The following phrase is as puzzling as *learning Christ*. *As truth is in Jesus* ties truth to the specific person of Jesus. It is relatively rare in Pauline letters to refer to *Jesus* without the addition of “Lord” or “Christ” (Rom. 3:26; 8:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:10–11, 14; 11:4; Gal. 6:17; Phil. 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14). Surely the author intends to draw specific attention to Jesus in a way “Christ” or “him” would not have accomplished. But why? He may want to point to the content of what is to be learned, in particular the life, death, and resurrection of the man Jesus (Schnackenburg: 199). The evidence is too scanty for us to see the phrase as referring to traditions of Jesus’ sayings and deeds as recorded in the Gospels.

More likely, it refers to the faithfulness of Jesus in giving himself entirely to God and to humanity, to the point of giving the ultimate gift of love, his life (2:14–16; 5:21 cf. Phil. 2:6–11). In other words, *learning Christ* must have content in terms of the life of the man *Jesus*. It is that man who is to be followed (so also Best, 1998:429–30). Such *truth* (known in following Jesus) is vulnerable to being ignored in favor of truths *about* Jesus, which more easily allow believers to avoid the implications of that example for them as participants *in Christ*.

#### 4:22–24 “You are What You Wear”

With three interrelated infinitives, verses 22–24 continue the sentence begun in verse 20. They are sometimes translated as imperatives (e.g., REB), but should be seen as dependent on the verb *you were taught* (so correctly NIV, NRSV, and most versions). The essential gist is as follows: *You were taught, in keeping with the truth which is in Jesus*, first, *to have taken off the old human*, second, *to be renewed in mind*, and third, *to have put on the new human*. The exhortation is thereby inextricably related to the identity believers have in Christ.

One might well choose as rubric for this motif Letty Russell’s “a change of uniform” (81) or the well-known aphorism “You are what you wear.” The specific vocabulary of *taking off* and *putting on* likely reflects the baptismal ritual in Pauline churches (TBC). Here it is dependent on the imagery and thought pattern found in Colossians 3:9–10, where it is part of a larger context of having died and risen with Christ (Col. 2:20; 3:1; note also the baptismal formula in Col. 3:11; cf. Gal. 3:27–28; Best, 1998:431–3, doubts the connection with Col.). Dependency on Colossians is by no means simple copying, however, as the following chart illustrates (e.g., see how the terms for *new*, *kainos* and *neos*, can be interchanged):

#### Ephesians 4:22–24

#### Colossians 3:9–10

put off (*apotithēmi*)

take off (*apekduomai*)

the old human (*anthrōpos*)

the old human (*anthōpos*)

renewed (*ananeoomai*)

renewed (*anakainoomai*)

in the spirit of your minds

in knowledge



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put on the new human

put on the new [human]

**(*kainos* anthrōpos)**

**(*neos* [anthrōpos])**

created according to (*kata*)

according to (*kata*)

God

the image of its creator

Together these texts are witness to the importance of baptism in Pauline churches and to the creativity with which exhortation could appeal to baptism.

The basis of exhortation is that believers have left behind an old life and taken up a new one (the first and third infinitives are in the past tense), expressed in terms of *taking off the old human (anthrōpos)* and *putting on the new human (anthrōpos)*. Does this refer to the individual's nature or orientation? Or is something larger at stake? Romans 6:6 speaks of *our old anthrōpos* being crucified with Christ, which lends a somewhat individualistic understanding to *anthrōpos* ("self," NIV, NRSV; cf. 2 Cor. 4:16, referring to the "outer" and the "inner *anthrōpos*"; Shillington: 105–7). Most versions cast this phrase in Ephesians 4:24 individualistically as *self* (NRSV, NIV, NASB, TEV) or psychologically as *human nature* (REB).

However, chapter 2 already introduced *kainos anthrōpos* as referring to hostile and fractious humanity reconstituted in Christ as *the new human* (2:15, notes). The NJB recognizes this by making a distinction, translating *old anthrōpos* as the *old self* and the *new anthrōpos* as the *New Man [sic]*, indicating an awareness of the connection to 2:15 and also to 4:13 (*the perfect Man*). There is no reason, however, to conceive of the *old anthrōpos* as any less comprehensive than the *new*.

At the core of this imagery is the fundamental issue of what it means to be human. In Ephesians, this is definitely *not* understood individualistically. Human identity is understood both negatively and positively to be shaped by corporate experience (cf. 2:1–3, 15–16; 4:1–16, 17–19). People either participate in "the first Adam," to put it in language not used here but which informs the author's "anthropology," or they participate through Christ's peace in the "new Adam" (cf. esp. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49). To speak of *the old human* and *the new human* is a way of describing a "culture of humanness" more than any one individual's character (so also Martin, 1993:152, on Col. 3:9–10).

The *old* way of being human is marked by decay, by the rot that sets in through deceitful desire (cf. 4:17–19; 2:1–3). This is "life" lived in a pact with death (cf. Prov. 8:36; Isa. 28:15, 18; Wisd. of Sol. 1:16–2:24). It is the "life" readers of this letter *once* lived. The presence of this urgent exhortation shows that they *still* struggle not to live it. After all, their *new* life takes place in the midst of and alongside sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2). Believers in Christ are "in the world but not of it," as John 17 says, and for that reason are in a constant struggle to define themselves over against the world (5:3–21). Such a struggle takes place in each individual, to be sure. However, both *old human* and *new human* point to an intricately interconnected social and cultural existence in which values and imagination are forged on an anvil much larger than the individual human mind or heart.

In contrast to *the old human*, *the new human* is Christ. Christ is the *head* attached to a *body* (4:15) made up of many individual members (4:7, 16). Christ is *the new human* (2:15) *created according to God* (4:24; 2:10). This is a new "self," but a self large enough to encompass the whole church and more—the same *new anthrōpos (human)* in (to) whom all things are being gathered (1:10; contra Best, 1998:439–40, who individualizes the *new anthrōpos* radically throughout Ephesians). The identity of individual believers is defined by the whole—Christ. So the struggle to live as *the new human* in a world in which the *old human* is still much "alive" is not one engaged in alone but *together* with other members of the body of Christ. *Putting on the new human* (4:24) is another way of referring to becoming one with the body of Christ and together with others growing into Christ (4:15–16).



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The use of the past tense in the first and third infinitives (*to have taken off* in 4:22, and *to have put on* in 4:24) can leave the impression of a past momentary experience of conversion and/or baptism. In these verses, however, the radically transformative imagery of baptism is linked with the motif of *hearing, teaching, and learning* (4:20–21). This implies a *moment* of transformation and also a *process* of formation. While initiated and undergirded by grace (cf. 2:5, 8), life in *the new human* requires all the energy, discipline, and effort believers can muster, individually and together (4:11–16).

In keeping with this insight, the second infinitive *to be renewed* (passive) or *to renew [yourselves]* (middle, acting on oneself) is in the present tense, implying ongoing present experience. Recall the similar Romans 12:2: “Be transformed by the renewing of [your] mind.” Surprisingly, such a “passive” experience as the renewal of the mind is stated in Romans 12 as an *imperative*. Here the reminder about *having been taught* (past tense, 4:21) *to be renewed* (present tense! 4:23) carries an implicit imperative. Renewal of *the spirit of the mind* is an ongoing process related to *hearing, teaching, and learning Christ*.

The phrase *the spirit of your* (pl.) *mind* is as puzzling as it is unique. Notice the variety of translations. NRSV translates fairly literally *in the spirit of your minds*. Others are more interpretive: *in the attitude of your minds* (NIV); *acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking* (NAB); *your mind renewed in spirit* (NJB); *in mind and spirit* (REB); *hearts and minds* (TEV). Interpreters typically take one of two paths. One is to take *spirit* as more or less synonymous with “mind,” “heart,” or “inner person” (cf. 4:18; 3:16–17, but see notes; cf., e.g., Barth, 1974:508–9; Best, 1998:436; Lincoln: 287). The other takes *spirit* to refer to the divine Spirit, whatever the grammatical difficulties (e.g., Houlden: 319; Schnackenburg: 200).

Gordon Fee has taken into account both interpretations. In his view, early readers would have taken *spirit* to refer first to the “human spirit,” as we should. But they and we should “be prepared also to recognize the Holy Spirit as hovering nearby,” the agent and power of renewal (Fee, 1987:712). As stated repeatedly in this commentary, where grammatical ambiguity invites equally important and illuminating readings consistent with the gist of the letter as a whole, one should resist resolving the ambiguity.

Verse 24 draws attention specifically to the creation of *the new human* (cf. 2:10, 15). *The new human* has been created *according to God* (*kata theon*) *in* (or *with* [“In”]) *righteousness* (or *justice, uprightness* [NJB]), *and in* (or *with*) *holiness of the truth*. NRSV and many other versions correctly understand the phrase *according to God* as referring to the image of God: *according to the image of the one who created him* (cf. Gen. 1:26; not as obvious as in Col. 3:10). Believers put on *the new human*—Christ—and thus become *like God* (cf. 5:1!); they become part of the *new human* who has been *created in justice and holiness of the truth*.

Translations vary greatly in how they render this last phrase. Along with the NIV and NRSV, most take *the truth* adjectivally (e.g., *true righteousness*). There is every reason, however, to allow *the truth* a higher profile, as the following contrast in verse 25 regarding *the lie* will show. *The truth* is characterized by both *righteousness* or *justice* (both equally well translate the Greek *dikaïosunē*) and *holiness*. This is a familiar pairing. God, for example, is characterized by *justice* and *holiness* (Deut. 32:4, LXX; Ps. 145:17 [144:17, LXX]; cf. also Luke 1:75; Wisd. of Sol. 9:3).

*Truth* and *God* are inextricably linked as well, as are *doing* or *speaking the truth in love* and *growing into Christ* in 4:15. *Truth* is thus intended to encompass reality as shaped and re-created by God in Christ. *Truth* is a rubric for life as the *new human*. Should we be surprised to find it as the first item of the armor of God in 6:14? To speak of *righteousness* and *holiness* as “virtues” (Lincoln: 288) is not wrong, but it does undervalue their roles as divine gifts and as modes of participation in the *new human*.

#### **No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth 4:25–32**

##### *4:25 Saying No to the Lie and Speaking Truth*

*Putting off the lie* in verse 25 echoes *putting off the old human* in verse 22. Several translations (e.g., NIV, NJB, REB) take the aorist participle as an imperative, as is grammatically possible. However, the aorist participle can also serve, as I have translated, to express the basis for the subsequent appeal: *Since you have put off the lie,* where *the lie* is the equivalent to *the old human*.

As in the case of *the truth* in verse 24, translators typically underplay the significance of *the lie*. No doubt under impact of the subsequent command *to speak truth with the neighbor*, they see in this little more



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than a prohibition against lying, the first in a series of prohibitions running to the end of verse 31 (cf. Col. 3:8–9). However, the use of the noun *the lie* and the strong echo of *to put off* or *take off* in 4:22, suggest that in Ephesians *the lie* stands for much more than making statements that are not true. This parallels *the truth* in verse 24 being much more than a matter of words that are trustworthy (notes on 4:15, 21; and 6:14). *The lie* represents nothing less than *the old human* in rebellion against God (cf. Rom. 1:25; so also Barth, 1974:511; contra Best, 1998:445; Lincoln: 300).

Deception of self and of others is often used in the Bible to describe a society in rebellion against God. Zechariah, from where the injunction to *speak truth with the neighbor* is taken (Zech. 8:16; cf. Lev. 19:17–18), identifies love of “false oaths” as a fundamental characteristic of rebellion against God (see esp. Zech. 8:17; cf. also Lev. 19:11, 15–16). Isaiah 59, which underlies 6:14–17, also makes the absence of truth the hallmark of an unjust society ripe for judgment (esp. Isa. 59:3–4, 13–15). *The lie* is thus not simply “telling a lie”; it is shorthand for the life of the *old human*. *The lie* refers to callous disregard for truth in relationships, inside and outside the church, in both private and public spheres. But it refers just as well to the fundamental misreading of reality by those who mistake slavery for freedom, and such “freedom” for impunity (cf. 2:1–3; 4:17–19; 5:3–5).

In verse 14 the author has warned about no longer living as infants vulnerable to the deceits and wiles of those who would lead them astray. Now 4:25–32 treats old and new ways of walking, the old human and the new human, and the truth and the lie as an essential part of exhortation. And the exhortation is directed to those who already have (past tense!) *put on the new human*—Christ.

This tells us that, despite all the reminders of what was *once* the case and assurances of what is *now* true, the “culture” of the old way of being human remains the context in which the *new human* learns to exercise *justice* and *holy truth*. However much believers are *holy ones already in the heavenlies with Christ* (2:5–6), their identification with Christ is lived out in immediate proximity to *the lie*. Light shines in and into the darkness (5:8–14; cf. John 1:5), even when found in the lives of believers.

The reference to *speaking the truth with the neighbor* (4:25) must then also mean more than simply “telling the truth to the neighbor.” It is surely shorthand for living the life of *the new human* (cf. 4:24). The words are virtually identical with Zechariah 8:16. But since there is no quotation formula that introduces the phrase, we cannot be absolutely sure the author is specifically quoting Scripture. He may have simply drawn it from Jewish ethical tradition (so Best, 1998:446; Lincoln: 300; cf., e.g., Test. Dan 5:1–2). However, since Ephesians frequently cites the OT, and since Zechariah 8 resonates with the concerns in Ephesians, it is likely that the author is consciously quoting Zechariah.

There is, however, one small difference between Ephesians 4:25 and Zechariah 8:6, LXX. Zechariah has “to (*pros*)” rather than *with (meta) the neighbor*, as in Ephesians. Speaking “to” the neighbor is of course to be speaking “with” or “in the presence of” the neighbor. But the nuance is somewhat different. *Speaking truth* is what believers do together, *each with his neighbor, since we are members of each other*. This can imply the sometimes hard words of loving confrontation (see Eph. 4:26!), but it can also suggest the truth members of the body speak together—to each other and to the world, including to the powers (3:10; 6:14).

Notice, incidentally, that in Zechariah 8, *truth* and *peace* are practiced before an audience of Gentiles who through this witness have their interest in God awakened (8:18–23). So also in Ephesians the good news of peace goes out to the *near* and the *far* (see esp. 2:13, 17). Hence, though *neighbor* should be taken first to refer to a fellow member of the body of Christ (so also Lincoln: 300; Schnackenburg: 206), nothing precludes the term from having much wider resonance (so also Best, 1998:447). A truthful corporate life is an inherently evangelistic enterprise.

Several exhortations now illustrate what it means to say “No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth.” They are not simply prohibitions, however. They are accompanied by a positive alternative to the old way of being human. The prohibitions are in some ways no more than a foil for the real point of the exhortation, to encourage participation in the life of *the new human*.

#### 4:26–27 Sinless Anger

At first glance, the prohibition not to sin in relation to anger seems to be mostly negative: readers are *not* to sin, *not* to let the sun go down on their anger, and *not* to give room for the devil. When read this way, these verses anticipate the prohibition of anger or wrath in 4:31 (cf. Col. 3:8; James 1:19–20). Nursed or



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unresolved anger appears to be the central concern. To paraphrase: *Deal with your anger before the sun sets, or the devil will get a foothold in your life!* This is, however, not the only or even the best understanding of the text.

The prohibition not to sin in relation to anger is taken verbatim from the Greek translation (LXX) of Psalm 4:4. In the Hebrew, the Psalm text is a warning against sinning when angry, and that is how translators render the Psalm text (NIV: *In your anger do not sin*; NRSV: *When you are disturbed [or angry], do not sin*.) In short, deal with your anger before it becomes sin! The Greek, however, has an imperative: *Be angry, but do not sin!* Ephesians evidently employs the Greek version of the Psalm.

One way of explaining this strange text is to understand the imperative as a “concessive” imperative, and thus not really an imperative at all: *Be angry [if you must], but do not sin* (so NIV, NAB, NJB; Barth, 1974:513; Best, 1998:449; Lincoln: 301; Schnackenburg, 207). In this case there is no real difference between the Greek and the Hebrew text of Psalm 4:4. The following clause *Do not let the sun set on your anger* only reinforces the urgency of dealing quickly with anger. In this interpretation it is *anger* that is the problem (cf. 4:31!). And it is sin not to get anger out of the way by sundown. Such anger is an open door through which the devil will find entry.

An alternative interpretation emerges, however, when careful attention is given to the vocabulary of the second sentence in verse 26, in particular the term usually translated as *anger*—*parorgismos*—which appears only here in noun form in the NT, but several times in the Greek OT. It is best translated as “provocation to anger” rather than “anger” (this is even the case in Jer. 21:5, where it can very well denote God’s furious baiting of Zedekiah; contra Lincoln: 302). That is also its meaning when it appears in verb form in Ephesians 6:4: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger!*

If *parorgismos* is translated in 4:26 as “that which provokes to anger,” then the focus shifts from anger to that which provokes it. The problem is “out there,” an objective offense that requires a response, and not the emotional response to that offense. The devil gains a foothold less through anger than through leaving the provocation to anger in place past sundown.

Whose anger is being provoked? On one hand, the command to be angry in verse 26 suggests that it is the readers who are to deal with what has provoked *them* to anger. Without attributing any inherent value to anger, there are things that will and *should* anger those whose view of life is shaped by *the new human*, the indwelling Christ. Injustice and falsehood are provocations to those who have been created for *justice* and *truth* (4:24). More importantly, however, such violations of God’s will provoke *God’s* anger or wrath. *God’s* judgment urges dealing with such matters before sundown.

That understanding of God’s will and wrath raises questions: Is it the neighbor’s provocation of yourself and/or of God that must be pointed out and dealt with? Or is it your own provocations to anger that must be confessed and corrected? (cf. Eccclus./Sirach 5:4–7!). In either case, these provocations should be dealt with *immediately*.

Ephesians 4:25–26 should be seen as part of a tradition running from Leviticus 19 to Qumran and to Matthew 18 (so also Gnllka: 235–6; TBC). It sees sin as provocation to anger, most importantly, God’s wrath. It also draws the implications of Leviticus 19:17 for life in the communal *new human*. In the process, one of the most central concerns of the law—the love of neighbor—has moved to the center of the elaboration of life in the *new human* (2:11–22, notes on the ongoing relevance of the law).

The command in 4:27, *Do not give room to the devil*, is thus more than a call to avoid giving the devil an opening. Speaking *the truth with the neighbor* and dealing with *provocations to wrath* before the sun sets reflect the courageous if sometimes conflictual intervention of love. Just so, *not giving room to the devil* is a matter of courageously opposing the devil. Indeed, this little phrase anticipates the full picture in 6:10–20 of the armed body of Christ confronting *the devil* and his minions with truth, justice, peace, faith, and salvation. The way the devil is denied space is through the courageous and sometimes angry speaking of truth in love whenever there are provocations to divine wrath. We catch a glimpse here of the conflictual dimensions of the gathering in of all things.

*4:28–29 Meeting Need with Hands and Words*



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On the surface the commands against *stealing* and *foul language* appear ill suited to serve as paradigmatic or representative exhortations for life as *the new human*. One might, of course, see *stealing* as representing selfishness and greed (cf. 5:3, 5). Likewise, rather than simply “speaking garbage” (Fee, 1987:712), *foul language* might be viewed as communication alienated from *the truth*. It emerges from the mouth of the *old human* (cf. 5:4, 6; cf. also James 3:1–12; 1QS 7.2–11).

The real weight in these two exhortations falls not on stealing and rotten speech, however, but on the alternative. *The new human* does not steal, but *works the good with the hands*. Such labor is not for self, which can itself be a form of stealing within God’s economy. It is performed *in order to have something to share with the one who has need*. Members of *the new human* do not speak *rotten* words, but *good* words, again, not for the sake of personal purity, but *for the building up of that which is lacking, so that [the words] might give grace to those who hear*. The references to stealing and trash talking are thus little more than foils (contrasts) to bring out the real emphasis in these exhortations—living for the well-being of others.

Here we encounter up close the *good works* prepared by God for those who have been *saved by grace* (2:8–10): laboring to meet the needs of others, building up those in need, and dispensing grace to those with ears to hear. Although the injunctions are general and find echoes in many other biblical and nonbiblical texts, they are powerful. Indeed, the specific wording may hint at the imitation of Paul, who says that he “worked hard with his own hands” (1 Cor. 4:12; cf. 9:6).

Speaking words that bring grace to those who hear is also evocative of the prime task of the apostle: to bring words of healing, grace, and salvation to those who hear (e.g., 3:7–10; 6:19–20; cf. Rom. 10:5–17; 2 Cor. 5:20–6:13). In short, an apostolic mission awaits those who turn their back on the old ways of being human.

#### 4:30 On Not Grieving the Holy Spirit

Verse 30 is a clear and unambiguous warning not to *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*. That exhortation can stand on its own, and it is often read that way. Pauline writing often groups exhortations that do not have any relationship to each other. That does not take away from their importance. It only means that there is no clear progression of thought or logic.

Nevertheless, there is ample reason to interpret this warning in the larger context of life as *the new human*. For one, the exhortation touches on the power that undergirds living as *the new human*. Second, the emphasis on speech in both the preceding and immediately following verses reflect the close relationship between *Spirit* and speech elsewhere in this letter (5:18–19; 6:17; cf. e.g., Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 5:18–19).

At the basis of this exhortation lies the awareness that God’s empowerment through the *Spirit* is vulnerable to callous disregard in both deed and word—this despite the reminder that it is the *Spirit* by which believers have been *sealed for the day of redemption*. *Sealing* may refer to the experience of baptism (e.g., Perkins: 110; Russell: 83–5; Schnackenburg: 210; contra Barth, 1974:521; Lincoln: 40; Best, 1998:458, believes the sealing relates equally to baptism and prior conversion). This would imply, on the surface, that the status of believers on that *day of redemption* is assured: they *were sealed* (cf. 1:13). But the warning here not to grieve that Spirit is intended to dispel any glib sense of security. Indeed, the exhortation may be heard as a warning of dire consequences for grieving the Spirit of God. Callousness can impede the power of God to transform.

It will be understood as such an obstruction especially by those familiar with the words of Jesus in Mark 3:29: “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (cf. Matt. 12:32). The context of that warning is clearly different from Ephesians. In Mark 3, Jesus responds to the accusation that he is empowered by an unclean spirit. In Ephesians, the concern is the betrayal in word and deed of the empowering and re-creating presence of God (cf. 3:18).

The consequence of such betrayal is to subvert and undo the work of the Spirit. The Spirit brings unity to the body of Christ (4:3), assures access to the presence of God for those who have been reconciled through the peacemaking Christ (2:18), makes them into a fit dwelling for God (2:22), enlivens their worship (5:18–19), and provides them with the needed armaments for struggling with the principalities and powers (6:17–18). So, even though the context is different, the heavy weight of Mark 3 is felt with reason.



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The gravity of the exhortation is heightened by the fact that the wording echoes Isaiah 63:10, LXX, where the prophet decries Israel's rebellion as *grieving* [God's] *Holy Spirit* (Fee, 1987:713, n. 175; Lincoln: 306). In response, God becomes Israel's enemy (Isa. 63:1–6). Evoking that important prophetic warning is quite intentional.

The logic is straightforward: You have been liberated from the sway of the evil spirit now at work among the sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2). You have been brought to life, empowered by the Spirit of God (3:18), brought into unity with Christ by the Spirit (4:3), brought near to God by the Spirit (2:18, 22), and sealed for the great day of redemption by the Spirit (cf. 1:13). You insult God if you return to the old ways of being human, or do not avail yourselves of the spirited power of God for life in *the new human*. Such sinning is *grievous* because it happens in the presence of God, in full view of God's enabling grace—"murder in the cathedral."

The presence of this exhortation is a sobering reminder that life in *the new human* this side of the *day of redemption* is fraught with vulnerability, danger, and struggle for faithfulness. It is a life that believers begin with the promise of God's enabling nearness in the Spirit, but also against the backdrop of God's judgment. It is a life marked by countless daily choices that either draw on the power of the Spirit or give room for the devil to wreak havoc.

#### 4:31–32 *Contrasting Ways of Relating to Others*

"Exhortation by catalogue" (Barth, 1974:550) was a common tradition of moral education in Jewish and Christian circles. The use of lists of vices and virtues was typical of what is often referred to as "the doctrine of the two ways." It provided a handy way of contrasting faithfulness and rebellion. We find this well-known motif in the Sermon on the Mount: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13–14; in Pauline writings, see also, e.g., Rom. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 5:9–11; Gal. 5:16–26; beyond the NT, cf. Ps. 1; Prov. 2:12–13; esp. Ep. Barnabas; Lincoln: 296–7, with texts and literature).

In this case the author is highly dependent on Colossians 3:8 and 12. As in Colossians, the list of vices comes first, immediately following the warning about not grieving the Holy Spirit. Again the matter of *anger*, already identified in Ephesians 4:26, emerges as a major concern. In verse 26 *anger*, or not dealing with the *provocation to anger*, had the potential of giving a foothold for the devil. In 4:31 anger in its various guises constitutes the sure way to grieve the Holy Spirit, to frustrate and undermine the work of God. Thus believers are, literally, to *remove* or *get rid of* (GNB, NIV, NAB) all forms of anger from their midst (Col. 3:8 uses the term *putting/taking off*, familiar from Eph. 4:22, 25).

Verse 31 is a virtual catalog of anger: *bitterness, rage, wrath, angry yelling, slander, and every (other) evil*. Evidently at least some terms are synonymous. At the same time, we can observe a certain progression in a "cycle of anger" (so also Best, 1998:460–2). Anger emerges out of a disposition of bitterness and resentment; it bursts forth in fits of rage, but is also nursed as persistent hostility; it is abusive and destructive of others, knowing no limit in its destructive potential (*every kind of evil*).

We entertained the possibility that the imperative in 4:26, *Be angry but do not sin!* reflects a context in which there are provocations to anger that need to be dealt with, where anger is *not* the opposite to the love of the neighbor (4:26, notes). What is being criticized in 4:31 is anger that grows out of the *absence* of love (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 13:5), anger that is *not* a result of witnessing the breaking of covenant and community, but is out to destroy relationships.

Just as in the case of *stealing* and *rotten speech*, an alternative is held out to those who have chosen to walk the way of *the new human*, again by means of a catalog: *Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave you (us)* (5:32). Over against bitterness and anger are placed *kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (or graciousness)*. The focus is less on actions than on the disposition out of which actions emerge. It is a matter of character. Importantly, the character of *the new human* who has been created in God's own image (4:24) is patterned after the divine creator.

Though the terms together describe a positive and generous disposition to fellow members of the community of faith, each term retains important dimensions of meaning. Kindness translates *chrēstos*, a common term for a good person (Best, 1998:462). Significantly, it often appears in the Greek Bible in



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expressions of praise to God, frequently translating the Hebrew *tob* (“good,” as in Pss. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 136:1; cf. also Wisd. of Sol. 15:1–3). To say that the Lord is good is to describe God in his kindness toward humanity. In the context of relationship, “good” becomes kind, generous, and gracious (cf. esp. 2:7! also Rom. 11:22; Titus 3:4; 1 Pet. 2:3)—even to enemies! (Luke 6:35). It is this kindness that is to characterize humanity made in the image of God.

*Compassionate* translates *eusplanchnos* (lit., “good intestines,” cf. “gut feeling”), which appears in the NT only here and in 1 Peter 3:8, and not at all in the Greek OT. A very telling if rare use of the term appears in the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh 7 (Ode 12:7, LXX), where the arch-sinner, King Manasseh, appeals to God for mercy, describing him as *Most High, of great compassion (eusplanchnos), long-suffering, and very merciful*. *Tenderhearted* gets closer anatomically to the literal meaning of *eusplanchnos* than does *compassionate*. But since the guts were understood to be the seat of feeling, the term refers literally to a “gut feeling” for others.

In his blessing of God for the birth of a son, Zechariah refers to God’s “bowels of mercy” (*splanchna eleous*, Luke 1:78). God’s saving intervention in the affairs of humanity emerges out of deep feelings for humanity. It is this kind of love for others that is to define the character of those who are on the way to becoming more fully *the new human* created in God’s image.

*Forgiving* translates *charizomenos*, which can mean “to grant favor” in the sense of “to grace” or “to be gracious,” but can also mean *to forgive*, the translation of choice in most Bibles. While that may be the best reading, it is important to note that *charizomenos* is a verbal (participial) form of the meaning-laden *charis* (*grace* or *gift*) encountered frequently in Ephesians (e.g., 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7). One should therefore think of forgiveness first as practicing grace in imitation of God. Notably, in 2:7 the limitless wealth of God’s *grace (charis)* comes to expression in God’s *kindness (chrēstotēs, a cognate of chrēstos)*.

<sup>1</sup> Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). [Ephesians](#) (pp. 169–226). Herald Press.



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#### Imitating God and Walking Like Christ 5:1–2

The first two verses of chapter 5 bring this section to a climactic conclusion. Ephesians 4:17 exhorted the readers *no longer to walk as the Gentiles*; now 5:1–2 exhorts them *to imitate God and walk in love, just as Christ loved them*.

The close connection to what immediately precedes these two verses is shown first in the repetition of the emphatic *Be, therefore ...* (cf. 4:32). And just as 4:32 grounds the positive disposition of graciousness in God's own grace, so now readers are exhorted to *be imitators of God*. The specific command to *imitate God* is unique in the Bible and relatively rare in Judaism generally (extensive discussion in Barth, 1974:556, n. 10; 588–92; Best, 1998:466–8; Lincoln: 311). Its rarity is no doubt related to the deference shown to God in Judaism. Recall that the sin of the first humans was to want to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5).

Such deference notwithstanding, the implicit call to imitation of God is there already in the Holiness Code of Leviticus 19:2: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” This finds a striking echo in the Sermon on the Mount: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The parallel “Be merciful” in Luke 6:36 comes close to Ephesians. That familial connection is evident also in our text. Readers are to imitate God *as beloved children* (cf. Matt. 5:45).

In Paul's letters, *imitation* is an important concept. Usually it is a matter of imitating Paul and his associates (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9), and thereby Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6); but Paul can also speak of believers imitating other congregations (1 Thess. 2:14). Also for Paul, the familial dimension of parent-child marks much of this tradition of moral formation as imitation (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14–16; Best, 1998:467; Perkins: 114).

Only in our present text do we find the call to imitate God directly. This reflects the thoroughly theocentric perspective of Ephesians. But it also reflects the exalted view of the church as sons and daughters, *beloved children* created in the divine parent's image. Here the parent of these beloved children is depicted as a model of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. The imitation of God is breathtaking in 6:10–20, where the new human receives God's own armor for the task of combating the principalities and powers.

This is not to say, however, that believers are to imitate God in all the ways in which God is active in the affairs of humanity. There are hints at believers' participation in divine judgment in the command to be angry in 4:26, in the summons to expose the works of darkness in 5:11, and in the call to enter into battle with the forces of evil (6:10–20). Yet *grace* and *love* rather than judgment (e.g., 5:5) are the principal areas of imitation.

Nowhere does God's love and grace come to greater expression than in verse 2 in the self-offering of God's Son, the Christ. The nature of Christ's love is described in cultic terminology: *He handed himself over for us as an offering and sacrifice to God, as a pleasing odor*. In contrast to the Gentiles who *handed themselves over to licentiousness, impurity, and greed* (4:19), Christ *handed himself over for us as an offering and a sacrifice*. Just as Christ offered up his life as a pleasing sacrifice to God *for us*, so *we too* are to *walk in love*, to offer ourselves as a pleasing sacrifice for the sake of each other and God (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; Ezek. 20:41). God's *beloved children* are to *walk in love, just as Christ loved them*. *Just as* appears already in 4:32 and is sometimes called a “conformity pattern” (Lincoln: 309, 311).

Christ's walk was marked by love and boundless generosity, but it was a costly walk (2:16). The reference to *sacrifice* may echo Colossians 1:24: “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (NRSV; cf. Rom. 8:17). Christ's death was *for us* (cf. Rom. 5); and it was *for us* also in the sense that it provides the model for what it means for us to love, to take up our own crosses, as Jesus puts it in the Gospels (Mark 8:34 and par.). Most immediately, however, the language of Ephesians 5:2 is drawn from the realm of worship, a reminder that the true and faithful *walk* is a grateful offering of a *living* sacrifice in imitation of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; on ethics and worship, see Eph. 3:20–21, notes; “Doxology,” TBC for 3:14–21; for more on imitation of Christ in the NT, see J. H. Yoder, 1994:112–33; Swartley, 2000:218–45).

#### THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT



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As manifest throughout the analysis, there is much resonance in this passage with other parts of Ephesians as also with Pauline letters. These verses retrace the steps taken in 2:1–10, which begins with a description of life apart from God as *walking in trespasses*, obeying the evil ruler of the air, following the desires of the flesh (2:1–3; cf. 2:12). God’s merciful raising of these dead *sons and daughters of disobedience* (2:5–6) parallels the *taking off* of the decaying *old human* and the *putting on* of the *new human*—Christ (cf. 2:15). The purpose of being re-created in Christ into God’s image is *good works* (2:10). Our present text can rightly be viewed as an elaboration of what it means to practice “the good” (esp. 4:28–29).

In addition to recalling chapter 2, the author appears to draw on Colossians 3:5–15, with its baptismal imagery of “taking off the old human” (*anthrōpos*) and “putting on the new” (3:9–10). Notice also lists of vices (Col. 3:5, 8–9) and virtues (3:12–15), matched by several items appearing in Ephesians 4:17–5:2. Romans 1:18–25 likely also figures in the formation of this passage, as may Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 (see below).

#### Negative Stereotyping of Gentiles

The negative characterization of Gentile existence in Ephesians 4:17–19 owes much to a common tradition in Judaism that served to mark off the people of God and to reinforce that boundary (2:11–12, notes; discussion in Best, 1997:143–6, 152; 1998:416–25). Romans 1:18–32 (esp. vv. 21–25) provides a precedent in the Pauline letters for a characterization of Gentile life as vacuous and futile. Such character sketches are found in other roughly contemporaneous Jewish writings, most accessibly in Wisdom of Solomon 13–17.

The elements of such a benighted existence are a life of mindless and ruinous self-indulgence, accompanied and precipitated by a morally bankrupt and self-deluded consciousness. Practice and thought, body and mind, go hand in hand. Ignorance is thus more than simply lack of information (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14). It is chosen and therefore culpable ignorance (cf. Rom. 1:20–22), masquerading as knowledge and wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–25). In our text this tradition serves as reminder and warning more than it does as an accurate and balanced depiction of Gentile life. It was and remains a common device in moral exhortation (on Jewish and Gentile examples, see Best, 1998:423–5).

One danger in such stereotyping is the exaggeration of the *other’s* badness; just as dangerous is the exaggeration of one’s own goodness. The rest of the exhortation in the present passage is intended to dispel such blindness.

#### Taking Off and Putting on

At the root of the motif of *putting* or *taking off* and *putting on* (4:22–24) lies the drama of the baptismal ritual (Meeks: 155; so also Lincoln: 284–5, despite his skepticism on how much we know about specific Pauline baptismal practice; Best, 1998:432–3 is even more dubious). While we have hard evidence only for later years, it is a safe guess that in Pauline churches those being baptized took off their old clothes to symbolize leaving the old way of being human (so also Jeschke: 126). They were then immersed as a symbol of their participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom. 6). Emerging from the watery grave, they put on new clothes, symbolizing investment with a new identity as participants in the body of Christ, *the new human* created in the image of God (4:24).

Chapter 2 shows the same movement from a “living death” under the tutelage and dominion of the ruler of the air to life as a new human *created in Christ Jesus for good works* (2:1–10). And chapter 6, with its clarion call to *put on the armor of God*, will show with what militancy baptismal vows could be taken. Paul earlier speaks similarly in Romans 13:12 of “taking off the works of darkness” and “putting on the weapons of light,” synonymous, it turns out, with “putting on Christ” in 13:14.

#### Anger and Speaking Truth

In the notes, the interpretation of Ephesians 4:26–27 regarding provocations to anger—whether one’s own provocations of God or another’s provocation of oneself or of God—finds support in Leviticus 19:17. Members of the covenant community are to “reprove” or “expose” the sin of the neighbor lest it bring judgment on themselves as well (on exposing sin, see Eph. 5:11; cf. also Prov. 17:10; 27:5–6). *Speaking* such painful *truth* is nothing other than a deep if potentially conflictual expression of love for the neighbor, required (!) of members of the same covenant community. Leviticus 19:17 no doubt underlies the command



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taken from Zechariah 8:16 and quoted in Ephesians 4:25, to *speaking truth each with his neighbor*. In Zechariah 8:14, LXX, the sins of the fathers are referred to as *provoking [God] to wrath (parorgisai, "to be angry!" Cf. the rare parorgismos in Eph. 4:26).*

Such neighborly love is reflected also in the Community Rule of the Dead Sea covenanters at Qumran. That rule repeatedly appeals to Leviticus 19:17 as a warrant for members of the community to deal straightforwardly and quickly with the sins of others. This means handling provocations to anger or wrath—*one's own and God's*—by reproaching the erring fellow member of the community (e.g., 1QS 5.24–6.1; CD 20.4–6, 17–19; 4QDe [4Q270] 10.3.13; 4.11–12). To be sure, such reproof is not to be done in the spirit of vengeance but rather “in truth, in meekness, and in compassionate love for the man [*sic*]” (1QS 5.25; cf. CD 20.4, 17–18; cf. Eph. 4:15, 25, 32).

Responding to such provocations must not be delayed; they must be dealt with “before sunset” (CD 9.6; 1QS 5.26). In striking similarity to Ephesians 4:27, the covenanter pledges that he “will not retain Belial within [his] heart” (1QS 10.21). The urgency is rooted in the concern for the covenant partner in light of the wrath or vengeance of the divine judge. “I shall enclose him with a solid fence to maintain faithfulness and staunch judgment with the justice of God” (1QS 10.25).

That same urgency to deal with the sin of the brother or sister through truthful and loving confrontation finds expression in the familiar Rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15–20. The objective is twofold. First, it is an act of love, motivated by the desire to win back the brother or sister, and thus to reconcile with the erring sibling and to reconcile the sinner with the family of God (18:15). The second objective is intricately related: to reclaim the erring brother or sister in light of the otherwise inevitable judgment or wrath of God. Indeed, “binding and loosing” (Matt. 18:18) amounts to participation in both the mercy and the judgment of God (on Matt. 18 and related passages: J. H. Yoder, 1992:1–13; 1997; in relation to church discipline: Huebner, 1997; Schroeder, 1993).

#### THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

This text has evident interest for a believers church tradition born from the conviction that faithfulness means taking the road less traveled, the *renewed* way of life (4:23–24; cf. 2:10, NRSV) instead of the *former way* (4:22). The stark contrast of the two ways of “walking” resonates strongly with the values of nonconformity and separation from the world (4:17; 5:2; see also 5:3–21).

#### Baptism as Ritual of Transformation and Re-Creation

The central image of “taking off” and “putting on,” rooted in the drama of baptism, represents a major point of contact with Anabaptist and believers church traditions (4:22–25). This will be of special interest to churches that practice baptism by immersion. They witness an oft-repeated ritual of transformation, of clothes that need to be replaced after being drenched in the waters of baptism.

This text is a reminder that baptism is more than a membership rite, or even an act of obedience. It is the point of entry into the body of *the new human*—Christ, together with whom we have been raised to new life (2:5–6). As such, baptism marks the beginning of a new way of walking, a pledge of fidelity to participate in the life of *the new human* marked by justice, truth, and holiness (4:24; the Latin word *sacramentum*, from which comes the English term *sacrament*, referred to the military oath of Roman soldiers). Just as baptism represents a pledge of loyalty and faithfulness on the part of a believer, the new creation is *God's* act of grace. (On baptism, TLC for 2:1–10; cf. Finger, 1989:342–8; J. H. Yoder, 1992:28–46, 71–3; McClendon, 1986:255–9, esp. relevant on relating baptism to “resurrection ethics.”)

#### Struggle *Inside* the Church with Old Ways of Walking

Our text can leave the impression that the problem with *the old human* (4:22) lies out there with *the Gentiles* (unbelievers, 4:17–19); truth, justice, and holiness prevail inside the church. Churches, including those that are heir to a tradition of radical commitment to holiness and separation from *the old human*, are deeply conscious and increasingly willing to admit openly that the old ways are still much in evidence in their homes and congregations. One need think only of the areas of consumerism, entertainment, and especially sexuality (TLC for 2:1–10). Two disparate responses to this reality vie with each other.

#### *Realism Versus Perfectionism*



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One response is to become more “realistic” about the church. “Perfectionism” has thus been roundly criticized as arrogant and self-deluding (cf., e.g., Block; Sawatsky and Holland, 1993). A more pervasive example is the virtual disappearance of church discipline in many churches of the (once) radical stream (see, e.g., Resources Commission: 97–103; Huebner, 1997).

In response, it is important to observe that in our text the exhortation to *walk* (conduct ourselves) like *the new human* is inseparable from the conviction that the church—made up of mostly reclaimed sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2–3)—is the *body of the new human*—Christ. The indicative (the church *is* the body of Christ) is the premise for the imperative (it therefore *ought* to walk like Christ). To paraphrase Galatians 5:25: “If you are the new human, walk like one!” (5:8–10, notes). The discomfort with perfectionism easily becomes an attack on that premise, re-creation in Christ. Grace becomes then absolution for persistent stumbling rather than empowerment to walk like Christ in imitation of God (cf. 2:1–10, notes). Thereby the messianic character of the church is fatally subverted, and the Spirit is grieved.

#### *Zero Tolerance*

Another response runs in the opposite direction, mostly in relation to a specific set of concerns. There is quite rightly growing alarm in the church about abuse—abuse of power, privilege, and of sex. In that context, a consensus has emerged in both church and society about the importance of naming the reality of abuse, establishing rigorous standards of behavior, and developing stringent disciplinary procedures for dealing with those who have violated others, especially in the area of sexual behavior (see, e.g., Heggen, 1993; Melissa A. Miller). In short, in the context of dealing with matters of abuse, the church is rightly rediscovering the importance of truth, justice, and holiness.

In some measure the church is beginning to live by the wisdom of Leviticus 19 and its offspring (TBC). Sadly, it is often the broader social consensus that has pulled the church kicking and screaming into dealing with these issues. “Gentiles” have been holding the feet of the “saints” to the fire. However ironic, the “world” is giving the church an opportunity to rediscover the hard work of “walking” like *the new human*.

Ironically, those who are critical of perfectionism and of the old church discipline are often wholeheartedly supportive of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, whether in homes or church institutions. Might churches, whether mainstream or radical, see in the broad social consensus around the importance of dealing with sexual abuse, an opening to recover truth, justice, and holiness in relation also to *other* dimensions of life? These include relational, economic, political, and institutional dimensions. Churches might thereby recover what discipline could look like in a community committed to being *the new human* in an old world.

#### **Anger: Virtue or Vice?**

Our text suggests that anger is an inevitable and even mandatory response to injustice and violence, both inside and outside the church (4:26). Such anger is the experience of pain and the expression of outrage at the experience of violation or at witnessing it happen to others. In the same breath, our text warns us not to nurse anger into bitterness and vengeance (4:31). Instead, anger is to give way to loving if forceful speaking of truth to the neighbor (Augsburger on “care-fronting”) so as to bring about confession and transformation, and finally lead to forgiveness.

Anger, truth, love, and forgiveness are a volatile mix in relation to the abuse of power and sex within the church. Presently the issue of abuse is getting a lot of attention in North American churches. In the struggle for wholeness and healing, we are learning not to discount anger and not to coerce forgiveness. We are learning to work in a context of truth and to search for justice and holiness. Ephesians is wholly supportive of such a search. But, as stated above, it encourages us to expand that learning to other dimensions of life in the community of the new human. There are places on the globe where members of Christ’s body identify economic and political oppression and violence as primary arenas in which truth, justice, anger, and love are to be exercised. In such places it may be that the hunger for justice needs to be expanded into the more private arenas of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The stress in Ephesians falls fundamentally on what makes for wholeness in the body, what builds up, what meets needs, and what communicates grace (4:28–29). Nothing quite succeeds at this like the imitation of a merciful, kind, and compassionate divine parent (4:32–5:2). It is of critical importance for churches in the “meekness” stream of tradition (TLC for 4:1–16) that such kindness, compassion, and



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forgiveness must never be severed from justice, truth, and holiness—the hallmarks of the *new humanity*. If they are severed, they leave the provocations to anger in place and expose brothers and sisters to abuse and their abusers to the judgment of God.

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**4:17–19 The Ephesians were admonished** to avoid the lifestyle typical of unbelieving Gentiles all around them. This lifestyle was characterized by “futility,” being empty and without purpose. The understanding of unbelievers had been darkened because they had chosen not to receive God’s revelation (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4); they were “alienated” or separated from the life of God and so were unable to hear His voice; they were willfully ignorant of God and His truth (see 2 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:4); and their hearts had become blinded and calloused so that they were insensitive to God and had no fear of the consequences of their actions (see John 12:37–40). They had given themselves over to self-indulgent immorality characterized by an insatiable desire for more.

**4:22–24 Unlike the unbelievers described**, the Ephesians had learned life-changing new truth in Christ: Believers are to put off “the old man,” a phrase referring to the sinful lifestyle driven by desires that deceptively promised joy but did not give it; they are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew their thought patterns, changing them from impurity to holiness (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8); they are to put on “the new man,” a phrase referring to a new lifestyle of holiness and righteous living. This new lifestyle is put on positionally when a person receives Christ and needs to be lived out experientially through the Spirit’s empowering (Col. 3:9, 10).

**4:26, 27 God has a plan for dealing with anger** (see Ps. 13, Healing; Eccl. 7, Anger; chart, How Can You Prevent Inappropriate Anger).

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#### ENCOURAGEMENT: A GIFT FOR YOUR HEARER

Paul’s words admonish us to speak only good, not corrupt, words—ones that build up, encourage, and edify. Our words are to constitute a gift to the hearer (Eph. 4:29).

Jesus and Paul are examples for us in their use of uplifting words to encourage. Even when his ship started to sink, Paul gave words of encouragement (Acts 27:22). When Jesus’ disciples were sinking, He spoke encouragement to them (Matt. 14:27). When Paul was being persecuted, the Lord appeared beside him and encouraged him (Acts 23:11).

Many people are bowed down under heavy emotional loads and are weary of life’s struggles. How eager they are to hear a word of encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)! Often we turn the other way, but the Lord wants to give us kind words to say if we are willing to make ourselves available (Is. 50:4).

In Proverbs, the book of wisdom, much is written about the value of encouraging words (Prov. 16:24; 25:11). Not only do pleasant words taste sweet, but their use can lift us up to high places (Prov. 22:11). Whether we want to be encouragers because Jesus said “be of good cheer,” because Paul urged us to “take heart,” or because we are simply called to lift up the weary, edify the saints, and evangelize the lost—whatever our reason for wishing to bring sweetness to the soul, now is the time to start (James 4:17). See also Deut. 1:21, 29, 30; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 145:14; Mic. 2:7; Luke 22:32; Acts 13:15, note; Heb. 3:13; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Love (1 John 4); Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12)

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**4:30 Believers should not grieve the Holy Spirit** through sins such as unwholesome speech (v. 29) and the outpouring of repressed anger (v. 31). Since only persons can be grieved, this verse affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

**4:32 The basis for believers forgiving others** is the fact that they themselves have been graciously forgiven by God (Gk. *charizomai*), and released from any *obligation* to make restitution (see Ps. 133, Healing).

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<sup>5</sup> Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 169–226). Herald Press.



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### Week 12: Defining Family Dynamics Part I - Ephesians 4

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#### GOD'S WILL: *CONFORMING TO HIS PURPOSE*

A mature Christian seeks God's will and asks for God's wisdom when she is facing a major decision. Believers must pray about decisions—especially life decisions such as “Where shall I go to college?” “Should I marry this man?” “Should I bring my ailing parent to live in my home?” Such decisions have serious consequences, and they deserve the prayerful seeking of God's perfect wisdom. But knowing God's will does not happen solely in prayer. It also requires a commitment to knowing His Word.

The Bible teaches that realizing (or proving) God's will is the result of habitually conforming your thinking and behavior to God's Word over a lifetime. As a Christian woman reads the Bible day by day, her mind is renewed with a new way of thinking about life. Worldly ideas, attitudes, and prejudices are replaced by thoughts that conform to God's ways. This process takes time, and there are no shortcuts. The transformation is never complete until death.

The Christian who has ongoing fellowship with the Lord through His Word comes to decisions equipped with a biblically informed way of thinking. Knowing God's will at major decision points is much easier if you are seeking God's will every day in Bible reading and prayer.

See also Dan. 2:23, note; Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:9; notes on Access to God (Rom. 10); Change Points in Life (Eccl. 3); Decision Making (1 Cor. 8)

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#### CHILDREN: OBEDIENCE: *Do It God's Way*

Children are to obey both their parents. This relationship exists “in the Lord,” and the implication is that children and parents live under the authority of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:1). Children cannot be subject to their parents in a way that is contrary to the obedience they owe to Jesus Christ. They should obey their parents because this is “right” in God's eyes, as illustrated by the fourth Commandment (vv. 1, 2). A child's education would typically include the Ten Commandments; so Paul is drawing attention to truth children would already know. The word “honor” includes the ideas of respect and esteem (v. 2). Life lived in submission to legitimate authority would benefit the child with a better and longer life (v. 3; see Deut 5:16). The term “father” can be used to represent both parents (see similar usage in Heb. 11:23). Unreasonable demands by parents will provoke children to anger and can push them to perpetual bitterness with the result that children lose hope of ever performing well enough to please (Col 3:21). Parents should instead rear their children in an atmosphere of nurturing: godly training in what is right, correction of what is wrong, and encouragement at every turn.

See also chart on The Ten Commandments Throughout Scripture; notes on Children (Ps. 128); Parenthood (Prov. 10)

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**5:18 The command to be filled** applies to all believers. The passive voice of the verb indicates that this is not a manufactured experience; the Holy Spirit fills and controls them. Further, the present tense of the command indicates that there can be many, successive fillings. This filling is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the point of conversion.

**5:19–21 As a result of the Spirit's filling**, believers will communicate with one another in an edifying manner. The Greek verb used includes all sorts of speech—singing of “psalms” (OT psalms), “hymns” (praises composed by Christians), and “spiritual songs” (spontaneous, Spirit-inspired praise). Second, they will sing praises to the Lord (see chart, Hymns and Songs Associated with Women). Third, they will continually give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Fourth, they will mutually submit to one another.

**5:22–6:9 As Paul elaborated on the subject of submission**, he showed what would happen in specific relationships within the family (see 1 Pet. 3, Submission; charts, Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission).

**5:22–24 The exhortation** specifies that wives are to submit themselves to their “own” husbands (v. 22). Paul in no way suggests that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they, as women, must submit to all other men. The



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wife's submission is voluntary rather than forced (v. 22). God does not ask a wife to submit herself to her husband in violation of her Christian responsibility to walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. The marriage relationship is raised to lofty heights as Paul compared it to the relationship of Christ and His church (v. 23). The husband is not the Savior of the wife's body. Nevertheless, the analogy holds that the husband is to be the protector of his wife (see Gen. 2:15–17, note). In voluntary submission, the wife can serve her husband, just as the church serves Christ, with freedom and dignity.

#### **ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

<b>Original Relationship: Creation</b>	<b>Distortion of the Relationship: The Fall</b>	<b>Restoration of the Relationship: Redemption</b>
Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).	The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).	Jesus Christ as Redeemer models both servant leadership for the man and selfless submission for the woman (Eph. 5:23–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

According to the egalitarian position, no difference existed between the man and the woman prior to the Fall. They were equal in personhood (as is also true in the complementarian position) and the same in role and function (while the complementarian position maintains a difference in role assignment for the man and for the woman).

*See also Gen. 1:26; 2:24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–24, 25–31, notes; notes on Headship (Gen. 1); The Creation of the Woman (Gen. 2); Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Submission (1 Pet. 3)*

**5:25–31 Paul's exhortation** is equally clear to husbands: They are to love their wives (an admonition expressed six times in vv. 25–33) in the same manner in which Christ sacrificially loved the church (v. 25). Husbands must not be “bitter” or harsh with their wives (Col. 3:19). Christ's love for His church is presently manifested in His work of atonement (Eph. 5:25) and sanctification (v. 26) so that He might in the end times present her as a pure and spotless bride (v. 27). Returning to the marriage relationship, Paul explained that the husband should love his wife as his own body because the two are actually one (v. 28; see Gen. 2:24). “Body” is used here, as elsewhere, to refer to the whole person (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 1:20). God prescribed that marriage provide a picture of the ultimate and eternal love between Christ and His church.

**5:33 Paul summarized** by reminding each husband to love his own wife sacrificially as himself and by reminding each wife to show respect to her husband as the God-ordained leader of the family “as to the Lord” (v. 22; see charts, Role Relationship Between Men and Women; Theological Foundation for Headship).

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#### **CAN THIS BE? EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT? ISN'T EQUAL JUST THAT? DOES THE WORD DIFFERENT SUGGEST...LEVELS?**

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##### **COMPLEMENTARITY: EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT**

Male and female were created as equal and complementary expressions of the image of God. Both bear His image fully, though in different ways. Their different roles in relationship to each other provide a picture of who God is and how He relates to His people.

Christ Jesus is equal with God the Father, yet submissive and responsive to Him (Phil. 2:6–8). God the Father loves the Son and exalts Him. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ provides loving, servant leadership; the church responds with respect and submission as



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Christ's "Bride" (Eph. 5:22–33). Another counterpart to the picture is the relationship between church leaders and local bodies of believers (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sin has distorted the relationship between man and woman at every level, but believers are called to relate according to the Creator's plan instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:15–25). This plan is marked by a holy reciprocity in which the husband's loving headship awakens a responsive submission from the wife just as a wife's submissive cooperation draws from her husband sensitive leadership. The realities of headship and submission are to be enacted within loving, equal, complementary male-female roles. In this, the image of God is properly reflected.

See also Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; charts on Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission; notes on Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

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#### FATHERHOOD: *PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER*

The earliest concept of God for a child is greatly impacted by the relationship she has with her own father. Fathers in the Bible were the supreme authoritative figures in their families. With but a word they could determine the fate of their offspring. In contrast to this autocratic image of fatherhood, Paul's advice to fathers emphasizes patience (Eph. 6:4). The father Jesus describes, just as our heavenly Father, loves unconditionally, forgives without strings attached, and gives abundantly (Luke 15:11–32). Still, Scripture presents a tender side to fatherhood: A temple official came to Jesus frantic for his daughter's healing (Matt. 9:18–26); Jacob and David displayed deep sorrow at the loss of their sons (Gen. 37:33–35; 2 Sam. 13:35–39); both<sup>6</sup>

Ephesians 5:18

**5:18** The tense of the Greek for **be filled** makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by "continually being filled," as commanded here.<sup>7</sup>

Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

<sup>18</sup> *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, NKJV*

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## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS: A *QUALITY* *PRECIOUS TO GOD*

Those who walk in the Spirit possess a quality of gentleness that is one of the hallmarks necessary for Christian unity. Paul challenges believers to a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus that is characterized by lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, mutual forbearance, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3).

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Eph 3:1–5:33). Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.



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### Week 12: Defining Family Dynamics Part I - Ephesians 4

“Gentleness” or “meekness” (Gk. *prautes*) refers to a humble, submissive attitude that is the opposite of pride. Not to be confused with weakness, gentleness is strength that is submitted to God and channeled into service to others. The Old Testament characterizes God as gentle (2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35). The New Testament describes Jesus as “gentle and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Believers, like their Lord, should pursue gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11) and wear it like a garment (Col. 3:12).

The godly virtue of gentleness, which is a quality of the heart, is counted as being more influential than outward beauty in winning an unbelieving husband to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1–4). A gentle spirit is precious to God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit necessary for godliness (holy, Christlike living), goodness (kindness toward others), and giftedness (service in the name of Jesus).

See also notes on Encouragement (Eph. 4); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Humility (Phil. 2); Submission (1 Pet. 3); Wives (Prov. 31)

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**4:17–19 The Ephesians were admonished** to avoid the lifestyle typical of unbelieving Gentiles all around them. This lifestyle was characterized by “futility,” being empty and without purpose. The understanding of unbelievers had been darkened because they had chosen not to receive God’s revelation (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4); they were “alienated” or separated from the life of God and so were unable to hear His voice; they were willfully ignorant of God and His truth (see 2 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:4); and their hearts had become blinded and calloused so that they were insensitive to God and had no fear of the consequences of their actions (see John 12:37–40). They had given themselves over to self-indulgent immorality characterized by an insatiable desire for more.

**4:22–24 Unlike the unbelievers described,** the Ephesians had learned life-changing new truth in Christ: Believers are to put off “the old man,” a phrase referring to the sinful lifestyle driven by desires that deceptively promised joy but did not give it; they are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew their thought patterns, changing them from impurity to holiness (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8); they are to put on “the new man,” a phrase referring to a new lifestyle of holiness and righteous living. This new lifestyle is put on positionally when a person receives Christ and needs to be lived out experientially through the Spirit’s empowering (Col. 3:9, 10).

**4:26, 27 God has a plan for dealing with anger** (see Ps. 13, Healing; Eccl. 7, Anger; chart, How Can You Prevent Inappropriate Anger).

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## ENCOURAGEMENT: A GIFT FOR YOUR HEARER

Paul’s words admonish us to speak only good, not corrupt, words—ones that build up, encourage, and edify. Our words are to constitute a gift to the hearer (Eph. 4:29).



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Jesus and Paul are examples for us in their use of uplifting words to encourage. Even when his ship started to sink, Paul gave words of encouragement (Acts 27:22). When Jesus' disciples were sinking, He spoke encouragement to them (Matt. 14:27). When Paul was being persecuted, the Lord appeared beside him and encouraged him (Acts 23:11).

Many people are bowed down under heavy emotional loads and are weary of life's struggles. How eager they are to hear a word of encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)! Often we turn the other way, but the Lord wants to give us kind words to say if we are willing to make ourselves available (Is. 50:4).

In Proverbs, the book of wisdom, much is written about the value of encouraging words (Prov. 16:24; 25:11). Not only do pleasant words taste sweet, but their use can lift us up to high places (Prov. 22:11). Whether we want to be encouragers because Jesus said "be of good cheer," because Paul urged us to "take heart," or because we are simply called to lift up the weary, edify the saints, and evangelize the lost—whatever our reason for wishing to bring sweetness to the soul, now is the time to start (James 4:17). See also Deut. 1:21, 29, 30; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 145:14; Mic. 2:7; Luke 22:32; Acts 13:15, note; Heb. 3:13; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Love (1 John 4); Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12)

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**4:30 Believers should not grieve the Holy Spirit** through sins such as unwholesome speech (v. 29) and the outpouring of repressed anger (v. 31). Since only persons can be grieved, this verse affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

**4:32 The basis for believers forgiving others** is the fact that they themselves have been graciously forgiven by God (Gk. *charizomai*), and released from any *obligation* to make restitution (see Ps. 133, He<sup>8</sup>)

**7:9 Anger can cause us to act foolishly.** The wise woman controls her temper rather than being controlled by it. Undisciplined anger can destroy our lives. *Qoheleth* warns us not to get angry too quickly (see Prov. 14:7; James 1:19; chart, The Answer to Inappropriate Anger).

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## ANGER: ACT OR REACT

Anger can most often be defined as an emotional response to a perceived wrong or injustice. Hence, anger is normally expressed when a woman misinterprets circumstances, makes a mistake in judgment, or reacts quickly because she feels threatened or hurt. This anger is unjustified and sinful. This anger, in effect, denies the power of God to care for your needs and hurts and can even completely take over your life. There are many warnings about the danger of anger in Scripture (Eccl. 7:9; Matt.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Eph 4:1–32). Thomas Nelson.



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5:22; Eph. 4:26, 31). Most often, you should leave your anger or wrath at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to act in your behalf.

God's anger is always perfectly controlled and expressed (Ps. 30:5; 78:38). There are examples of righteous anger given in Scripture, such as Moses' anger toward the children of Israel for not trusting God and following Him (Ex. 32:19). Righteous anger can be described as one that results when God's laws and His will are knowingly disobeyed. The concern must be for righteousness and reconciliation, never for personal vengeance coming out of our own hurts. We must be careful to take our anger to the Lord for Him to analyze and manage.

Do you act or *react*? The answer to this simple question will most likely reveal any weaknesses you have in expressing the emotion of anger. A person who *acts* knows who she is, what she believes, and how she should behave (Col. 3:23, 24). She not only knows this information, but she chooses to act upon it. Another person's actions do not dictate her reactions, but rather the wisdom of the Lord is her mainstay (Col. 3:16, 17).

See also Ps. 85:4-7; 103:8, 9; Prov. 15:1; 22:24; 29:22; Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:26, 31; chart on The Emotions of Jesus (Mark 1); notes on Attributes of God (Deut. 32); Bitterness (Heb. 12); Competition (1 Cor. 4); Conflict (Song 5; Matt. 18); Emotions (Ps. 42); Forgiveness (Ps. 51; Luke 17); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Jealousy (Song 8<sup>9</sup>)

**4:17** Five traits of a worldly walk are summed up in the word **futility** (emptiness, purposelessness): darkened understanding, alienation from God, ignorance of God's way, hardened heart, and an unfeeling state. (The Greek word means "to have ceased to care.")

**4:17** See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

**4:20** This section asserts each believer's accountability to live in contrast with the surrounding culture, since the five traits of the worldling are no longer true of him.

**4:22** The old man . . . the new man contrasts the old life-style dominated by the spirit of disobedience (2:1-3) with the believer's newly created capacity for a life-style of obedience by the Holy Spirit's power (2:10; 3:16).

**4:25** See section 3 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

**4:26** Being **angry** may win a moment, but it is not to be allowed to win a day.

**4:27** The Greek word for **place** (*topos*) emphasizes that believers can actually give ground in their lives to satanic control. This is a warning against theologized suppositions that argue against the possibility that demonic vexing or oppression may succeed with Christians. But the surrounding commands balance the issue (v. 17-5:14), making clear that responsible believers cannot glibly blame the Devil for sin they yield to in carnal disobedience.

**4:28** See section 7 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [\*The Woman's Study Bible\*](#) (Ec 7:9). Thomas Nelson.



## Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

### Week 12: Defining Family Dynamics Part I - Ephesians 4

**4:28** Note that the first motive for a believer to earn money is **that he may have something to give**. The occupational enterprise of Christians is not simply to make a living, but to make possible their being instruments of God's service to mankind through their work and giving.

**4:29** See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

**4:29** Corrupt is literally "decayed, rotten," as used for spoiled meat, rotted fruit, or crumbled stones.

**4:30** The Holy Spirit has **sealed** ("authorized as a representative," 1:13) and dwells in the inner man (3:16). If He is grieved, the believer will be the first to know. **Grieve** means to cause injury or distress, the precise feeling the believer senses when sin or disobedience finds its place.

**4:32** Jesus taught the duty of **forgiving . . . even as God**, and showed it to be fundamental to having one's own prayers for forgiveness answered (see Matt. 6:14, 15; 18:21-35).<sup>10</sup>

## Women in the Early Church

Attitudes toward women in the 1st-century church were heavily influenced by two major sources—the history of Judaism and the example of Jesus. Jewish Christians knew, and Gentile Christians were quickly taught, the major themes of the Old Testament. On the one hand, God had created man and woman alike in his image to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26–31) and had created Eve to be a suitable helper for Adam (2:18), an expression that suggests equality more than subordination. On the other hand, the first couple fell into sin, after which God promised the woman, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (3:16). No debate surrounds the fact that after this point gender relations throughout the Old Testament were highly patriarchal.

But Jesus came to reverse the effects of the fall, and his teaching and example regularly challenged the conventions that had come to characterize 1st-century Judaism. He regularly treated women with a dignity that surprised or upset men in his culture. Perhaps the two most dramatic examples involved his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42) and his acceptance of Mary of Bethany in the role of a rabbi's disciple (Luke 10:38–42). Jesus risked the perception of scandal by allowing women to travel with him and his disciples (and to support them financially; Luke 8:1–3), and one of these, Mary Magdalene, formerly demon-possessed, became the first witness to the resurrection and an "apostle to the apostles" (John 20:1–2, 18). Still, Jesus did not choose a woman among his 12 closest followers, though the significance of this observation remains disputed.

The book of Acts contains no instructions regarding gender roles, but it does present a significant number of examples of women in prominent positions. Women as well as men prophesy (Acts 2:17–21), Priscilla (with her husband Aquila) teaches Apollos "the Way of God more accurately" (18:26), and Paul is willing to preach to an all-female assembly, from which the first European convert, Lydia, emerges (17:11–15). From the epistles we learn of numerous other prominent women leaders in the church and coworkers with Paul during this first Christian generation: Phoebe is a deacon and a patron (Rom. 16:1–2); Junia is an apostle, in

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<sup>10</sup> Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 4:1–32). Thomas Nelson.



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the broader sense of missionary or church planter (v. 7); Chloe and Nympha and their (apparently fatherless) households figure prominently (1 Cor. 1:11; Col. 4:15); and Euodia, Syntyche, and others are fellow laborers in the gospel whom Paul values (Phil. 4:2–3; cf. Rom. 16:6, 12).

#### **Mosaic of Saint Perpetua from the Euphrasius basilica in Pored, Croatia.** (*Wikimedia Commons*)

Paul does continue to command women to submit to their husbands, not simply as a vestige of the old order but comparable to the church's submission to Christ (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18). But he also commands mutual submission (Eph. 5:21) and radically redefines male authority as not greater privilege but greater responsibility (vv. 25–33). The most probable interpretation of Peter's reference to married women as "weaker vessels" (1 Pet. 3:7) highlights their greater vulnerability in their voluntarily adopted role of subordination. On the other hand, 1 Cor. 12:7, 11 makes clear that God's Spirit gives his gifts as the Spirit determines, none of which appear to be gender-specific. Galatians 3:28 clearly declares that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." At the very least, these texts suggest that men and women, as in creation, are equally valuable in God's eyes; neither is inherently inferior to the other.

Whether Paul means more than this and is in principle abolishing all role differentiation in the church remains debated. At least in his world, he never takes this step. He commands women to cover their heads as a sign of respect in worship (1 Cor. 11:3–16). He assumes that women may pray and prophesy in church (11:5), but instructs that they should refrain from specific kinds of speech (14:33b–38)—perhaps asking questions during the evaluation of prophecy or expressing views contrary to his own. "Prophecy" in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts could refer to spontaneous utterances of messages believed to be from God (or a god) but also to thoughtfully prepared addresses equally attributed to the divine. Apparently Paul allowed women to do what today would be called preaching.

In the most scrutinized text of all, Paul forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). But the grammatical construction used here, coupled with the observation that teaching and exercising authority are two distinctives of the office of elder/overseer in 1 Timothy (3:2; 5:17), suggest that Paul is merely prohibiting women from the single office of elder or overseer. A discussion of the criteria for overseers and deacons immediately follows, with probable references to women deacons but not to women elders (3:1–13). Nevertheless, the word for having authority in 2:12 is found nowhere else in Scripture and in other Greek literature can mean "to domineer," so perhaps Paul is prohibiting only an overly harsh use of authority, especially in light of the false teaching with which Timothy's church in Ephesus was infected.

Debate also continues over Paul's reasons for his various prohibitions. On the one hand, he regularly refers to the order of creation to buttress gender role distinctions, suggesting that his teaching cannot be dismissed as limited to his time and culture (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34). On the other hand, it is possible that new creation in Christ goes beyond even original creation (Gal. 3:28), so the question of contemporary application is by no means settled.



## Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

### Week 12: Defining Family Dynamics Part I - Ephesians 4

#### For Further Reading

Beck, James R., and Craig L. Blomberg, eds. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Belleville, Linda L. *Women Leaders and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991.

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG

#### 4:17–5:20 Christian Conduct

Paul disparages the spiritually unenlightened, “impure” behavior of non-Christian Gentiles (4:17–19) and exhorts his audience of believing Gentiles to abandon their own similar, preconversion conduct. The renewal of their minds should issue in actions characterized by Godlike righteousness and holiness. The practical specifics of such living include telling the truth; getting properly angry (at unrighteousness) without letting such anger fester and lead to sin; working hard and sharing with the needy the fruits of one’s labor, instead of stealing; refraining from vulgar talk, and instead uplifting others with one’s speech (4:29; 5:4, 19–20); shedding divisive feelings and conduct toward fellow Christians and instead extending to them Godlike kindness and forgiveness; filling one’s heart with the Holy Spirit rather than overindulging in alcohol (as typical during Hellenistic religious orgies; 5:18)—in short, imitating God as children do their parents. Paul warns against the foolish notion that sinners who persist in their disobedience to God will inherit eternal life anyway. On the contrary, they will incur his wrath—incentive enough to “awake” from spiritual deadness (5:14) and “live as children of light,” not “darkness.” Behaving wisely means translating one’s moral knowledge into action and requires making the most of one’s time to do so (5:15–16).<sup>11</sup>

#### Incommunicable Attributes

- Omnipresent – All Present      **Psalm 139:7-16**
- Omnipotent – All Powerful      **Revelation 19:6**
- Omniscient - All Knowing      **Psalm 33:13-15**
- Immutable – Never Changing      **Revelation 1:8**

Ephesians 4:8-10

**Luke 11:22** Jesus portrays Himself as someone **stronger** than Satan who overruns Satan’s house and gives the spoils of victory to those who are His (see Eph. 4:8, 9 for a similar concept).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (2011). [Women in the Early Church](#). In G. D. Fee & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (pp. 671–673). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>12</sup> Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). [The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version](#) (Lk 11:22). T. Nelson Publishers.