

Study 5: Ephesians Chapter 4

Introduction

Sometimes we need to make big changes in our lives, and sometimes smaller changes. Paul is calling us to “make the big changes” in our lives as Christians. To “*put off the former ways*” and “*put on the new man*” in Christ. It is about who we are as God’s people. It is practical Christianity.

As God’s people, who have changed for the better – why would we want to go anywhere else?

Body of the Study

Homework and preparation for next week:

Unity in the Church

The Seven Ones

Individuals Make Up the Church

Reaching Maturity

We’ve Been Born Again

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read through chapter 4 again

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read through the notes for this study, particularly the contrasts that Paul draws and the “Do’s and Don’ts”.

Make a list of the areas of your life that you need to improve on (You don’t have to show this to anyone). Pray about it, and ask for God’s help. Work out a plan as to how you are going to improve.

Read chapter 5 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 5: Ephesians Chapter 4

Sometimes we need to make big changes in our lives, and sometimes they are smaller changes: We pack up and move house interstate or overseas, We get married, We make a total career change, We start a family. The smaller changes might be: We change our diet, Decide on a new exercise and fitness regime, Decide to quit smoking, Get some other sin in our lives under control.

Often the big changes are easy to make. If we have moved overseas, our lifestyle has changed and we can't continue doing the things we used to do (going out with the same friends to the same places "every week") because the change has prevented it. The birth of a child forces an irreversible change in lifestyle, and won't quit demanding to be fed at 3:00 am in the morning, whether we want to sleep or not!!!

The small changes are a lot harder to make. Our "New Year's resolution" was to get fit and start a fitness regime. It was great the first week, and the second week wasn't bad either. But I was so tired after working late on week three, and then it was raining on week four, and we had visitors for dinner on week five, and the Olympic Games were on TV on weeks 6 and 7... Our "normal" lifestyle interferes with the changes that we have the best of intentions of making in our lives.

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Unity in the Church

Paul has revealed the church as God's eternal purpose to reconcile all of mankind (both Jews and Gentiles) to Himself. Apparently, one of the problems (either already existing, or a problem in the making) in the church in Ephesus was division and discord. The discussion in Acts 20:30 identified that this was going to be a problem. Paul gives the Ephesians a strong call to unity.

As a prisoner under house arrest for the sake of Christ, Paul identifies himself as being *chained to the Lord*, and as such, he did not have the freedom to do whatever he liked, but only what Christ allows. As Christians, we are also in the same condition. "...*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...*" (4:1 NIV). As a result of our relationship to Christ (bound to Him), we must live our lives in a manner that represents Christ, and shows Him as we live our lives by His example.

We cannot claim to live our lives as Christians, and not have a bonded relationship with our brethren. Christianity is about developing the same kind of relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we have with Him. "...*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love...*" (4:2 NIV). Jesus came as a servant with gentleness and humility. As His people, we should be the same way – not looking to put ourselves in pre-eminent positions. Whilst there are times that our brethren might annoy and irritate us, we need to be patient and bear with them – *IN LOVE*. This takes a great deal of patience – but we need to stop and think about the patience that God shows to us – and remember that we all totally depend on God's grace. We are all in the same basket!

Christians must put up with each other's faults and idiosyncracies, knowing that all of us have our own. "Love" (GK G27) is a recurring theme in Ephesians. The four graces Paul recommends here are all aspects of love and are exemplified to perfection in Christ (Php 2:2, 5). (NIVBC).

There is a hint of the problems in the Ephesian church, as Paul directs them to unity – especially that they make an effort to put it in place. "...*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...*" (4:3 NIV). Paul refers to the *bond* that we have which should lead us to peace with each other.

The Seven Ones

Paul shows his specific call to unity through his mention of the seven “ones”. The call is for “complete unity” (and hence his use of “7” which symbolizes completeness). In the church there are no longer Jews or Gentiles (or Proselytes) but we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). The fragmentation was inherent in the culture – some were Jews (and probably saying that the rest needed to become Jews), some were Gentiles (some Greeks and some Romans). The Greeks were probably looking to stray away from the others as they sought for “new things”, and “new challenges”. “...*There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--*⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all...*” (4:3-6 NIV). The seven ones could be described as:

One God	Unity in Worship
One Lord	Unity in Authority
One Spirit	Unity in Life
One Faith	Unity in our message
One Baptism	Unity in obedience
One Body	Unity in our organization and fellowship
One Hope	Unity in our desire and expectation

There are some obvious “structural” and practical issues for the church in maintaining unity across a worldwide brotherhood. That unity can only come when we are united in Christ – with Him as our head, or focus, our Lord, and our model. As such, we can only be truly united when we have unity in the application of God’s word (the Bible) and its work and authority in our lives.

This is also true *within* the local congregation. We often come from different cultures (even within the same country, we can have “cultural” differences from our families), we are individuals with different personality drivers, and importantly, different understandings about the word of God, and what it means. Paul calls us to a proper understanding of who we are as God’s creation, and as a result, the blessed position that we occupy. With a proper understanding of “why we are here” in the church, and of God’s plan and His revelation through Jesus, we are called to unity with the rest of our family who are walking along the same journey.

Unity requires several things. Most importantly it requires *submission*. The greatest cause of disunity is the ego of individuals who want to push a particular point or direction without regard for others. Jesus calls us to the role of *servants*. When he came, *he came not to be served, but to serve* (Mt 20:28). So much so, that he gave His life for those He loved. When we have a proper understanding of Jesus, of His sacrifice, what it means to serve others, and the proper place that we are placed in relationship to His example, **THEN** we will understand how we are to work together with each other in Unity.

Unity also requires *understanding*. We are (hopefully) walking along the road to heaven. Some of us have been walking longer than others, and some are walking at a different pace than others. We are all at different places along the journey. As a result we have different understandings of how to handle the “trials and tribulations of life”, and different understandings of God’s revelation to us. We need to help one another on our journey, rather than “yell at and attack” others because they are not at the same place in the journey as where we are. Just think back a while and remember what it was like for you at earlier times on your journey. Hopefully you will see growth in your walk. We need to *listen* to others and *show* our understanding to them.

Unity requires *sharing* with one another. The early church continued to grow *and had all things common* (Acts 2:44). It was “...*of one heart and one mind; no-one said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things common...*” (Acts 4:32). We need to learn to *share* with one another. Not only the things that we have, but to also share our time (helping one another).

Unity requires *communication*. One of the greatest causes of disunity is not talking to others and letting them know where we are on our walk with God, and helping and encouraging them on their walk. We can communicate best when we get together often, and in informal associations. (How long is it since you just dropped by on some of your brethren to have a cuppa and chat? How long since you invited them over for a meal? Or went on a picnic or outing together?)

Individuals Make Up the Church

Paul moves from a discussion of the church as a corporate body to consider the individuals who make up the church. “...*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...*” (4:7 NIV). We must not forget that we are only who and what we are because of God’s grace. As a direct outworking of that grace, we receive differing measures of blessings from God. “...*This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men”...*” (4:8 NIV). Paul is referring to the spiritual gifts, which have been given in different measures to different people (see 1 Cor chapters 12-14). The gifts are complimentary, and together combine to make up a complete (or at least partially complete) revelation from God. Paul tells us that the gifts are partial (1 Cor 13:9, 12), and although no-one had God’s complete revelation, they were sufficient to ensure that the first century church could function effectively (ie completely).

Paul explains the gifts that he has in mind by explaining the timing of when they occurred “...(*What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions*¹⁰ *He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)?...*” (4:9-10 NIV). Jesus came to earth, and then went back to heaven. It was at the time of His ascension that He sent the miraculous spiritual gifts. We can see them occur on the day of Pentecost – just 10 days after He had ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3; 2:1, 4).

The gifts are not just the miraculous spiritual gifts that were given to Christians in the first century, but were also the establishment of differing roles within the church “...*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...*” (4:11 NIV). Some had a special gift and calling – the apostles, and others as prophets. These people had a very special role in delivering God’s revelation to man. Others have a gift to be evangelists (preachers of the gospel), which is a role to last as long as the gospel is to be preached. Others have the role of pastors (elders) to shepherd and teach the church. Not everyone has the same gift, and we all need to use our gifts (talents) in our special place to serve the Lord.

The gifts are given so that the church might become self supporting and sustaining “...*to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...*” (4:12-13 NIV). Notice the way that Paul structures this towards self-sustainability: (The gifts are given) *so that* God’s people might be prepared for service. Why? *So that* the body might be built up (encouraged, edified, or strengthened). Why? *Until we all reach unity* in the faith. How far must we go? *And become mature*. How mature do we have to get? *To attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. The gifts are essential to help us grow to maturity.

Reaching Maturity

Our aim is to reach spiritual maturity – the same kind of maturity that Jesus exhibited. Spiritually, we will not be childish with basic understanding and behaviours, but have the same kind of understanding and behaviour that a mature adult might show. “...*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming...*” (4:14 NIV). Paul spells out what he means by spiritual maturity – it is not having a solid ground of teaching – *blown here*

and there by every wind of teaching. If we are not mature, we will jump around from one thing to another without being able to discern what is right. By contrast, the mature christian knows what he believes, and *why he believes it.* But maturity is not just about doctrine – it’s about how we live our lives with mature relationships “...*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ...*” (4:15 NIV). We need to become like Christ in the things that we do and practice. Paul specifically has in mind how things work together in the church “...*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work...*” (4:16 NIV). The church is a self-sustaining body that *builds itself up in love,* but it relies on all of the members working together – *every supporting ligament* – to achieve completeness.

We’ve Been Born Again

As christians, we have put off our old man of sin, and been born again. This calls us into a renewed relationship with God, and we need to demonstrate that pattern of living on our lives. “...*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking...*” (4:17 NIV). Paul says that this is not optional – *I insist on it* – that we must not live our lives the way the rest of the world does. We don’t have to do too much thinking about what this sort of lifestyle might be. We only have to look around at what our neighbours are doing – it’s the kind of dress that is not becoming of who we are as one of God’s people. It’s the smoking and drinking, and the wild parties. It’s getting drunk and losing our self-control. It’s the sleeping with our girlfriends/boyfriends, when God says that sexual relationships belong only within marriage. He describes such a lifestyle as *what the Gentiles do,* and then adds “...*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts...*” (4:18 NIV). Such a lifestyle is incompatible with christianity, and if we practice these things, we separate ourselves from Him, and have hardened our hearts towards Him.

Those who practice such things have “...*lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more...*” (4:19 NIV). To live such a lifestyle is to ignore the new birth, and to turn away from God and be consumed with a life of indulgence, impurity, and lust. But in becoming christians, we have been transformed by the life of Christ and have put such a lifestyle behind us. “...*You, however, did not come to know Christ that way...*” (4:20 NIV). Remember that the christians in Ephesus had come from a culture of temple worship to Diana, who was known as a fertility god. The practice to sexual immorality would have been encouraged as a religious rite – but the Ephesian christians have left all of that behind. Paul’s appeal is that having become christians, why would they want to go back to such a lifestyle? “...*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*”²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;*²³ *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;*²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness...*” (4:21-24 NIV). This can be summed up in the simple statement, that if we have become christians, then we need to live a life like Jesus, and leave behind the worldly ways. The two are as incompatible as night and day.

There are practical outworkings of living a christian life, and Paul starts to deal with it here (and he will deal with it further in chapter 5). “...*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body...*” (4:25 NIV). Once again, this is not optional – *you must put off...* and this is specifically because who we are as a member of the church – God’s people – and the bride of Christ.

But it’s not just about putting off the external practices that the world do – it’s about having self-control, and treating others – both inside and outside of the church – with respect. “...*In your anger do not sin*” : *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,*²⁷ *and do not give the*

devil a foothold.²⁸ *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need...*” (4:26-28 NIV). As Christians, we must exercise self-control, and grow into the same type of self-control that Jesus showed. And it’s also about doing good to others, rather than living a self-centred life.

The traits of the Christian life are also exhibited in our speech “...*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...*” (4:29 NIV). On the one hand, it is about using wholesome language (not the kind of filthy language that we hear on the street, and now (sadly) almost constantly on the TV and in the movies). But it is also not just using “bad words”, but also not using “bad thoughts” in telling off-colour stories. In direct contrast to those things, we are exhorted to use our speech to encourage others, and to build others up - *to the benefit of those who listen.*

We can only imagine how God reacts when we betray Him by the things that we do and say. We especially need to remember that our bodies are the temple (dwelling place) of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes intercession to God on our behalf, and is God living in us. Paul tells us “...*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption...*” (4:30 NIV). If our behaviour is contrary to God, then He is grieved by our actions.

The final message is that we should “...*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you...*” (4:31-32 NIV). The ultimate motive is for us to remember that we are forgiven by God, and therefore we must forgive others with compassion.