

CORE Seminar
Spring 2024
Paul's Letter to the Ephesians
Week 6: Ephesians 4

ICE BREAKER

Choose an ice breaker from the *Spring Community Group Guide* or go to www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers to select an ice breaker to ask your group.

- Spend about 5 minutes discussing the question – this is a great way to “warm up” your group.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we're going to continue our study in Ephesians by picking up in **chapter 4**. In this chapter, Paul shifts the focus from what Jesus has done for believers to how these truths should shape our daily lives. Previously, Paul emphasized salvation, blessing, and redemption for all believers, Jew and Gentile. But now, he urges us to live in a way that reflects God's work in us, impacting every aspect of our lives [private & public]. This includes our roles as spouses, parents, children, and workers, as well as our interactions with other believers and our response to spiritual challenges. Paul's message is clear: we're called to live in a manner that showcases the transformative power of God's love and grace in our lives.

So, let's pray and we'll get started...

PRAYER

Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:1

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,

What's it “therefore”?

In this context, Paul is saying that in light of everything that God has done for His people – as Paul shared in **Ephesians 1-3** – **therefore**, go live your life in such a way that we reveal what God has done in them/ us.

When we really understand how much God did for us – **WHEN WE ARE TRULY ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE NOW THROUGH CHRIST** – it should humble us and empower us to “walk in a manner WORTHY of the calling to which you have been called.” We will naturally want to serve and obey Him out of gratitude.

When we are able to understand who we are **NOW** through Christ is really the basis for this “worthy... calling.” We aren’t who we once were – an unregenerate stuck in our sin nature. NOW – because of Christ – we are regenerate and forgiven of our sin. We are able to “walk in a manner WORTHY of our calling.”

Martin Luther used to advise men – when they were tempted by Satan – that they should boldly proclaim the Latin phrase, “Christianus sum!” Which means, “I am a Christian!” Whenever they were tempted, just declare, “I am a Christian!”¹ Basically, because of who Christ has called us to be – we can’t live our old lives any longer. We are Christians now, and we should walk in the manner worthy of our calling.

And listen, Paul isn’t telling us to “walk worthy” **SO THAT** God **will love** us. No, we “walk worthy,” **BECAUSE** He **showed us love** – while we were sinners. To “walk worthy,” is a heart of **gratitude** – not an attempt to **earn** His affection.

QUESTIONS: After reading verse 1, how can this verse be read as a kind of purpose statement for the second half of the letter?

- **How would it be difficult to read the and obey the commands of chapters 4-6, without understanding the context/ the foundation of chapters 1-3?**

Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:2-6

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

¹ David Guzik. https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/ephesians/ephesians-4.cfm

Paul then goes on to tell the church what this “worthy walk” looks like. Those who are regenerate and have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior walk humbly, and gentle, and patient. They bear one another in love and are eager to maintain unity.

And remember, this is a letter to the church in Ephesus. So, when the Ephesians read this letter... when they read that they should be humble, gentle, patient and bear one another in love – eager to maintain unity – it told them something...and it should reveal something to us. It should reveal - that possibly - there was some tension possibly some disagreement going on in the church.

And this is a GREAT word for the church today – a great reminder! Paul is telling his reader that there’s a great chance that there will be disagreements among Christian’s – there there’s going to be some difficulty. So, when this happens, humble remember the walk we were called to and work to get along with each other. When we do this – when we “bear one another in love” - we “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

We maintain unity [*not create it*] because of what we share – the bond of peace through Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we share one **body**, one **Spirit**, one **hope** of our calling, one **Lord**, one **faith**, one **baptism**, and one **Father**. Each of these common areas is **GREATER** than any potential church conflict.

QUESTIONS: Why do conflicts happen among Christians within the church?

- **According to Paul, should these conflicts be expected?**
- **What should be the difference in church conflicts and worldly conflicts?**
- **Why is unity a trait that the local church should pursue?**
- **Describe a time when you were a part of a group, a team or a staff that had a strong sense of unity and purpose.**
 - **What were some of the characteristics of the group that led to a sense of unity and purpose?**

Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:7-16

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

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

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

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until 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, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.

We all have **grace** given to us according to the measure of Jesus’ gift. Grace is basis for God’s distribution of spiritual gifts through His church. This means that we cannot earn our gift and we don’t deserve our gift. It was given to us for this purpose – to give glory to God and so that the church might be **equipped**, AND so that the body of Christ would be **strengthened**.

This seems a little backward for most of us. In America, we are accustomed to hiring and paying a staff to do the work of the church. But Paul teaches us that the **apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers**, have one purpose - **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**. Honestly, this provides a little bit of insight into Paul’s methods for church planting and discipleship. He did not spend a lot of time in any one place. He disciplined leadership – put them in place – and he left. Knowing – through Christ - **each part [was] working properly, [and the] body [grew] so that it builds itself up in love.**

QUESTIONS: Deep-ish question – in Ephesians 4:7-12, what is the relationship between the ascension of Jesus and His distribution of gifts to the church? *[They were given by Jesus, by grace and they were given to equip the saints – the church – for ministry, AND for building up the body of Christ. IN the variety of gifts that Jesus is giving – of Himself – He is sharing more of Himself than can be contained in any one person.]*

- **How do we – the church – often view these gifts?** *[They belong only to the “professionals,” the paid staff.]*
- **What would happen in the church – with the mission of the church – if the church viewed these gifts as an opportunity to contribute to “[build] up the body of Christ”?**
- **In verses 13-16, which of the characteristics of spiritual maturity impacted you the most?**
- **Why is it important for every part of the “body” to be working properly?**

- **What does this metaphor imply about the way we should think about the church?**
- **Reflection question: Do you pray for the health AND unity of First Baptist Church?**

Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

In the past, it was taught that it takes 21 days to make or break a habit. Well, recently it was reported that it was a myth! Depending on the individual, it can actually take an average of 66 days for a new behavior to become a habit! ²

In **verse 17**, Paul tells the Ephesian Gentiles to basically quit walking in their old habits! To continue to walk in bad habits is pointless... it is fruitless. To continue to live in your past life – in past sin – Paul says “darkens our understanding and alienates us from the life of God.

Instead of walking in those past sins, Paul again reminds them to “walk in the manner worthy of their calling... to put off the old self... and be renewed in the spirit of their minds.” Paul’s command presents us with an illustrate that is very similar to the idea of changing your clothes – to take off the dirty clothes and put on clean clothes. The idea is to “change into” a different kind of **self** – **one that has been transformed by Jesus Christ**.

QUESTIONS: Why are bad habits – especially habits formed over a long period of time – so difficult to break?

- **What were some of the Gentiles “bad habits” that Paul detailed in verse 19?**
[They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity]
- **In Ephesians 4:20-21, what does Paul assume about the Ephesian Christians?** [that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus]
 - **Do you think we often make the same assumptions in the church today?**

² Phillippa Lally, Cornelia H. M. van Jaarsveld, Henry W. W. Potts, Jane Wardle. “How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world.” European Journal of Social Psychology. July 2009.

- If so, then what should be the message to the church today? [verses 22-24]
- How does Paul explain the characteristics of the “new self” in verse 24?
 - Does it happen by “trying harder”? [Nope – by becoming a new creation!]
- In Colossians 3:5-17, Paul uses the same language of “putting on” and “putting off.” Have someone in your group read those verses.
 - What specific qualities and actions does Paul list in Colossians 3?
 - Do they add anything to what Paul was teaching in Ephesians 4?

Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:25-32

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul closes on **chapter 4** with a summary of how the church and the Christian community should act toward one another: be honest; control our emotions; make sure our speech is productive; and maintain a spirit of kindness, forgiveness, and compassion toward others. Having this heart reflects Jesus Christ – the One who showed kindness, compassion and forgiveness towards us. **James 2:13** says this, “**For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**”

When we show mercy, kindness, and forgiveness to others – as God has shown us – we walk in the manner worthy of our calling. If we treat others as God treats us, we fulfill everything Paul instructed us to do in **chapter 4**.

QUESTIONS: In Ephesians 4:26, how does Paul say that believers should deal with anger?

- Based on verse 27, in what way might Christians give the devil an “opportunity” based on feelings/ anger we have toward others?
- Based on your experiences, what are some of the sinful attitudes/ habits that seem to result in a friendship being destroyed?
 - Why do these attitudes/ habits have such a damaging effect?

- **Why should the forgiveness of others CLEARLY characterize a person who has truly met Jesus Christ? [we would be reflecting Christ and the mercy & grace He showed to us]**
 - **In many cases, what makes forgiving others so difficult?**
 - **Reflection Question - Do you need to forgive anyone?**

Was there anything that stood out to you from **Ephesians 4**?

- Was there any “aha moment” for you?

Next Week: Ephesians 5

CLOSING PRAYER