

Ephesians 4

A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss

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Live Worthy of the Calling

Ephesians 4:1-6

Limits of the Text

Chapter 4 begins the application portion of the book of Ephesians. Most of the sections in this part of the book begin with an exhortation to live (walk) a certain way. 4:1-16 is the first such section, in which Paul urged his readers to live worthy of their calling. In the first half of the section, 4:1-6, a single sentence in Greek, he explained how to live worthily, emphasizing the unity of believers.

Translation

1 Therefore I, a prisoner in the Lord, am urging you to live in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 *There is one body, one Spirit—just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling—* 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 *and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.*

Interpretation

The structure of this book is very typical of Pauline letters. The first part is theology; the second practice. The knowledge of God drives the conduct of his people.¹ This chapter begins the practical part of the letter.

1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε,²

1 Therefore I, a prisoner in the Lord, am urging you to live in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called,

The “therefore” (οὖν) looks back to the entire first half of the book; everything God had done—he saved them, made his power available, made them alive, and formed the church—directly impacts how they should live. If any one of God’s actions were

¹ Hoehner, 500. In a sermon on this text, John MacArthur noted the difference between law and grace. Law says, “If you obey me, then I will bless you.” Grace says, “I have already blessed you, now please obey me.” Gratitude is a powerful motivator.

² The Greek is NA27.

foremost in Paul's mind, it would probably be the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one new body, the church (2:11-3:11); much of Paul's application in chapters 4-6 is on how to live together. "Individual spiritual growth that is not shared with the rest of the body is not true spiritual growth or maturity."

Paul again referred to himself as a prisoner. Back in 3:1 he called himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles," and in 3:13 he mentioned his "afflictions on your behalf." Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome, so he was a literal prisoner, but he referred to himself in 4:1 as a prisoner in the Lord. The phrase "in the Lord" is probably dative of association, meaning that Paul believed his imprisonment was a result of his relationship with his Lord, Jesus. Why would Paul refer to himself this way as he gives his first exhortation to the Ephesians? I think it was a subtle reminder to his readers of the seriousness of being called by God, the total commitment that is required to say, "Jesus is Lord." Obedience could cost the Ephesians their freedom and perhaps their life, but even this would be a reasonable price to pay, considering all that God had done for them.³

Paul urged (Παρακαλῶ) his readers. He was begging and pleading with them.⁴ This verb indicates that Paul wanted his believers to do something (i.e., live worthily), that what he wanted them to do was important to him, and that it was so important that he would repeatedly⁵ urge and implore them to do it.

Paul urged his readers to live in a manner worthy. The verb "to live" (περιπατῆσαι) has the literal meaning of walking around, but Paul used it figuratively meaning to live, behave, or conduct one's life;⁶ this word has a sense of an ongoing behavior, something that is a habit or a custom. "In a manner worthy" is translated from a single adverb in the Greek (ἀξίως). It has the literal idea of putting something onto one side of a set of scales to bring it into balance with the other side, thus meaning equivalence or equilibrium.⁷ Louw defines this word as "pertaining to having a relatively high degree of comparable merit or worth."⁸ Paul wanted the value of the Ephesians' living to be comparable to the value of their calling, thus the word here could be translated as worthily, suitably, or properly. The Ephesians were not the only people that Paul wanted to see living worthily; he wrote something similar to the Colossians and Thessalonians:

³ For a reminder of what God had done, read chapters 1-3.

⁴ Swanson, DBLG 4151. Paul often begged his readers to do something: 1 Co 1:10, 4:6, 16:15; 2 Co 2:8, 6:1, 10:1; Php 4:2; 1 Th 4:1, 4:10, 5:14; and 1 Ti 2:1.

⁵ The present tense indicates ongoing action.

⁶ Arndt, 803.

⁷ Hoehner, 504.

⁸ Louw, 1:621.

“For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects – bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:9-10, NET).

“You know very well that we treated each of you the way a father treats his children. We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to live in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Th 2:11-12, ISV).

Paul urged his readers to live in a manner worthy of the calling to which they were called. Calling (κλήσεως) and called (ἐκλήθητε) are cognates and have the idea of calling someone by name or inviting or summoning a person; while Paul used this word in this sense, he filled the word with theological meaning. Calling refers to a role of God in salvation; he invites and summons sinners to salvation through his son Jesus. Those he chose and predestined (1:4-5), he also called; those who listened and believed (1:13) are those who were called. Those who are called have hope (1:18), knowing that their salvation has been made secure by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (1:13), that they are God’s inheritance (1:11), and that God has a plan for administrating all things at the end of time (1:10).

This kind of calling sets a very high standard; when we consider everything that God has done in salvation (chapters 1-3), we realize that there is a heavy weight on one side of the scale. To live comparably is a very high standard! In fact, it’s an impossibly high standard, which is exactly why Paul had prayed for supernatural help at the end of the chapter 3. He prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened with power (3:16), would have Christ residing in their hearts (3:17), and would comprehend and know the love of Christ (3:18-19). God’s help is a prerequisite for living worthily.

2 μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραΰτητος, μετὰ μακροθυμίας, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ, 3 σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης·

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul modified his exhortation to live worthily with four phrases; each phrase describes how to live in a manner worthy of their calling. The first two contain attitudes: humility, gentleness, and patience; the second two contain activities: bearing with one

another and maintaining unity. The first way to live worthily is to be humble and gentle. These words are synonyms; their meaning is so close that both words could be translated as humility. The first word, humility (ταπεινοφροσύνης), perhaps, is more of a way of thinking; it is a “lowliness of mind, the esteeming of ourselves small, inasmuch as we are so, the correct estimate of ourselves.”⁹ In Php 2:3, it is the opposite of selfishness and empty conceit; in 1 Pt 5:5, it is the opposite of pride. Mankind does naturally not value humility, and this word didn’t even exist in the Greek language until New Testament times.¹⁰ Jesus is the supreme example of humility (Php 2:3-8). The second word, gentleness (πραΰτης), is both a way of thinking and of acting towards others; it is “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance”¹¹ and the behavior of being mild when dealing with other people instead of being harsh.¹² This word was used of well-trained animals. A wild stallion that was broken so that he could be ridden was said to be gentle; a dog that attacked his master’s enemies but never his master’s friends was said to be gentle. A gentle person is considerate towards others and is willing to waive his own rights.¹³ The “all” (πάσης) modifies both humility and gentleness and has the idea of complete and total humility and gentleness.

Humility and gentleness are not so much about considering oneself to be low as they are about considering oneself rightly and acting accordingly. On the one hand Paul’s readers were dead and unable to come to life. They were subject to the ruler of the domain of the air and lived in their lusts (2:1-3). On the other hand they had a high calling; they were chosen, redeemed, assigned to be God’s inheritance, and sealed with his Spirit (1:3-14). They were made alive, raised with Christ, and seated in the heavenly places (2:5-6). They were joint heirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus (3:6). When believers remember where they were and what Christ (alone) did for them, they are humble and gentle with each other.

The second way to live worthily is to be patient. Patience (μακροθυμίας) is a people-focused word. It is being emotionally calm in the face of provocation and responding without complaint or irritation;¹⁴ there is a sense of self-restraint in this word.¹⁵ It makes allowances for shortcomings in others rather than flying into a rage or desiring vengeance.¹⁶ In a parallel passage, Paul wrote:

⁹ Zodhiates, G5012.

¹⁰ Hoehner, 505.

¹¹ Arndt, 861.

¹² Louw, 1:748.

¹³ O’Brien, 278.

¹⁴ Louw, 1:306.

¹⁵ Zodhiates, G3115.

¹⁶ O’Brien, 278.

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Co 3:12-13, NASB95).

“God is the greatest example of all. He stayed his wrath when he was wronged by human sin (Rom 2:4). Thus must the believer stay his or her impatience or vengeance when wronged by another believer, exhibiting patience one toward another.”¹⁷

The third way to live worthily is to bear with one another in love. Bearing with (ἀνεχόμενοι) is synonymous with being patient; it means to be tolerant with others¹⁸ and patient with their weaknesses.¹⁹ Jesus asked how long he should bear with his unbelieving disciples (Mt 17:17). Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, was not willing to bear with the Jews who were accusing Paul (Ac 18:12-14). Paul said that when the apostles were persecuted, they endured it (1 Co 4:12). In particular, Paul wanted his readers to be bear with each other. Being church together does not guarantee perfection or uniformity of opinion, but “differences between believers are to be tolerated.”²⁰ So how do God’s people bear with one another? They bear in love. Love (ἀγάπη) is an other-centered word. It begins with having a high regard for someone²¹ and taking an interest in them,²² and then it moves to acting upon that regard and interest. When God’s people have a high regard for each other, when they have each other’s best interests at heart (i.e., God’s will for them), then they are willing to bear with each other.

The fourth way to live worthily is to make every effort to maintain unity. Making every effort (σπουδάζοντες) is from a verb that has two closely related meanings. The first meaning is a sense of eagerness, a being ready to do something.²³ The second meaning is a sense of being very conscientious to fulfill an obligation,²⁴ doing “something with intense effort and motivation.”²⁵ Both of these meanings come into play in this verse; Paul wanted his readers to work hard at being unified and to be eager to do so. Unity (ένότητα) is “a state of oneness or of being in harmony and accord.”²⁶ Those who have

¹⁷ Hoehner, 509.

¹⁸ Arndt, 78.

¹⁹ Zodhiantes, G430.

²⁰ Hoehner, 509.

²¹ Louw, 1:292.

²² Arndt, 6.

²³ Swanson, DBLG 5079.

²⁴ Arndt, 939.

²⁵ Louw, 1:661.

²⁶ Arndt, 338.

been sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13) possess the unity that belongs to the Spirit.²⁷ The Spirit has unity; there is perfect harmony within the Godhead. When the Spirit seals and indwells a believer, he brings that same unity to the believer as a member of a church; thus, the Spirit is the source or the author of unity.²⁸ This unity moves every church member to work together to glorify their Father by trusting and obeying their Lord and Savior. What created such a need for unity? In 2:11-22, Christ brought Jews and Gentiles together into one new man, the church. People who were naturally diverse were brought together by the gospel, and suddenly they needed to live in unity.

Although this unity is a natural thing, there is a sense in which it is a fragile thing, because it must be maintained (τηρεῖν). To maintain something is to keep it, preserve it, and hold onto it so it's not lost.²⁹ Although the church has a natural unity, they are still sinners who have a tendency to exult themselves and pursue their self-interests above others and above God. Unity is maintained in the bond of peace. Peace (εἰρήνης) can have the sense of wholeness, welfare, and health, particularly where it inherits the Old Testament concept of *shalom*, but in this verse it has more to do with the lack of conflict and thus harmony in personal relationships.³⁰ Peace is a bond (συνδέσμω); it brings believers together into a unified relationship.³¹ Believers have a natural peace with God, who is Father, and with each other, who are brothers and sisters, and this peace binds them together. This peace is the environment, the setting in which they maintain unity.³² In summary, believers have unity from the Spirit in a context of peace, but they must be diligent to keep this unity.

Although Paul gave four ways for his readers to live worthily, he emphasized the final way, make every effort to maintain unity, over the others by expounding upon it further in verses 4-6.

4 Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἓν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· 5 εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα, 6 εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν.

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

²⁷ This is the possessive genitive.

²⁸ This is genitive of origin.

²⁹ Arndt, 1002.

³⁰ Arndt, 287.

³¹ Arndt, 966. Love is another such bond: “Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Co 3:14, NASB95).

³² This is dative of sphere.

Although 4:1-6 is a single sentence in Greek, I started a new sentence here for readability. It's important to know this is actually the same sentence, because it means that verses 4-6 are closely related to verse 3. In fact, there's a play on words that is not seen in the English translations. The word for unity (ἐνότητα) is derived from the neuter form of the word for one (ἓν).³³ It could be translated like this: Keep the *oneness* of the Spirit; there is *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* Lord, etc. 4:4-6 provide a theological foundation for why a church should keep the unity of the Spirit. In these verses, Paul listed seven, non-negotiable items that provide the basis for unity. Unity is very important, but not at the expense of the fundamental truths of the gospel.

The first item is one body. The body (σῶμα) is the universal church. The church is the body of Christ (1:22-23, 4:12); they are members of his body (5:30). Christ is the Savior of the body (5:23). Jews and Gentiles are both in this body (2:16), and Paul included himself in this body (4:13). There is only one church; people are either part of this church, or they aren't. It's the fundamental dividing line of humanity. All believers are unified because they are in the same universal church.

The second item is one Spirit. All three members of the trinity are in this list, and it's interesting that Paul mentioned the Spirit first. Hoehner suggests this is due to the context, which mentions the unity of the Spirit (4:3).³⁴ The Spirit (πνεῦμα) seals believers (1:13), provides access to the Father (2:18), builds believers together into the dwelling of God (2:22), strengthens them with power (3:16), provides them with unity (4:3), fills them (5:18), and helps them to understand God's word (6:17-18). All believers are unified because they receive their spiritual resources from the same person. No one has a unique source of knowledge or power that makes him different or more special than any other believer.

The third item is one hope. Paul said that the Ephesians were called to the one hope of their calling. Called (ἐκλήθητε) and calling (κλήσεως) are the same words he used in 4:1, and this is nearly the same language he used in his prayer back in 1:18 where he wrote, "(I pray) that you may know what is the hope of his calling." God invites and summons sinners to salvation, and this calling brings hope. Hope (ἐλπίδι) is "the looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment,"³⁵ something good and beneficial. Hope is the result of the realities described in the eulogy of 1:3-14. God chose us and predestined us before time began. He adopted, redeemed, and forgave us. He revealed his will regarding the future, when everything

³³ Zodhiates, G1520.

³⁴ Hoehner, 521.

³⁵ Arndt, 319.

will be brought together again in Christ. God assigned us to be his inheritance and sealed us with his Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance. Though we were without hope before salvation (2:12), these realities give hope, the total confidence that God will finish in us the salvation that he started. In his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Php 1:6, NASB95). All believers are unified because they have the same calling from the same God and confidently look forward to the same completion of their salvation and the same eternity in heaven.

The fourth item is one Lord. Lord (κύριος) refers to one who is master or owner; it’s a reference to Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, and his authority over believers. Although there is a sense in which Jesus is Lord of everything (Ac 10:36; Co 2:10) and everything will be brought together again in him (1:10), I think Paul was writing about a more personal lordship. Salvation requires one to accept Jesus as Lord, making him complete ruler of one’s life. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Ro 10:9, NASB95). And once saved, that lordship makes demands upon a believer’s lifestyle. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Co 6:19-20, NASB95). All believers are unified because they have the same Lord and must live under his authority.

The fifth item is one faith. Faith (πίστις) can have a *subjective* meaning, which would be “believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted.”³⁶ In this sense we say that all followers of Jesus have believed and are believing in him. Faith can also have an *objective* meaning, which would be the content of what is believed, the faith we contend for (Jude 3). We believe Jesus is God in the flesh and that he lived a perfect life, died to save us, and was raised by God; this is the gospel. In this sense we say that all followers of Jesus have believed the same faith; truth is objective and agreed upon, and those who do not believe are not followers. Either of these meanings, which are not unrelated, could be in view here, and it’s difficult to determine which one Paul referred to. I lean towards the objective meaning, simply because the other items in the list are objective in nature. All believers are unified because they believe the same truth of the gospel.

The sixth item is one baptism. Baptism (βάπτισμα) is another word that can have two meanings, one spiritual and one physical. As Paul wrote in Ro 6:4, “We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead

³⁶ Arndt, 818.

through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (NASB95).³⁷ That is a spiritual reality, as we could not have been physically present with Christ at his death. All believers have experienced this reality. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Co 12:13, NASB95). Water baptism is a physical representation of spiritual baptism; it is a picture that points to a reality. So which baptism does Paul refer to? It’s difficult to know without additional context; it could be either. In the end, perhaps it doesn’t matter, because they are so closely linked. Whether Paul referred to the reality or the picture of the reality, we wind up in the same place. All members of the church have been immersed in physical baptism in water, publicly testifying that they have been saved by spiritual baptism in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. All believers are unified because there is no way to be saved except to be crucified, buried, and raised with Christ (Ro 6:4-6).

The seventh item is one God and Father of all. Here is the third part of the Trinity; he is God, particularly the person of the Father (πατήρ). The word Father has the sense of family and recalls Paul’s previous words about God’s adopting us into his family (1:5), thus giving us the right to approach him in prayer (2:18, 3:12). God is the Father of all, where “all” refers to everyone in the church. All believers are unified because they have been spiritually adopted by the same Father and go to him for help and forgiveness.

Paul further described the Father with three prepositional phrases. First, God is over (ἐπι) all, which refers to his transcendence. God is above his church, the supreme ruler over it. Second, God is through (διὰ) all, which refers to his immanence. God works in this world through his church, who were created for good works (2:10). Third, God is in (ἐν) all, which refers to his relationship with us. The Spirit indwells believers, giving his intimate presence and allowing access to the Father.

Hoehner nicely summarizes this section by emphasizing the triune nature of God: “The one body of believers is vitalized by one *Spirit*, so all believers have one hope. That body is united to its one *Lord* (Christ) by each member’s one act of faith, and his or her identity with him is in the one baptism. One *God*, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all.”³⁸

³⁷ A similar passage is Co 2:12; see also Ga 3:27.

³⁸ Hoehner, 520-521.

Abridged Structural Diagram

(ch 1-13)

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Therefore

I am urging you to live
 in a manner worthy
 of the calling
 with which you were called
with all humility and gentleness,
with patience,
bearing with one another in love,
making every eff. to maintain the unity
 of the Spirit
 in the bond of peace.

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

Tracing the Argument

External – In the first three chapters Paul gave the rights and privileges of being in the church; in chapter four he began to tell them the requirements, the standards for living as part of the church. Doctrine inevitably leads to duty.

Internal – Paul urged them to live worthy of their calling, and then gave four ways to do so. The fourth way was to be unified, so he gave 7 bases for unity.

Textual Outline

1. Paul commanded the Ephesians to live worthy of their calling (1-2).
 - a. By being humble and gentle (2).
 - b. By being patient (2).
 - c. By bearing with one another (2).
 - d. By being unified (3).
2. Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand the basis for unity (4-6).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 4:1-6 to exhort believers in Ephesus to live a life worthy of their calling.

Teaching Outline

God desires for his people to live in a manner worthy of their calling, and this morning I want to challenge us to live lives worthy of our calling. From our text in Ephesians, I want us to see 4 ways to live worthily:

1. Live worthy of our calling by being humble (1-2).
2. Live worthy of our calling by being patient (2).
3. Live worthy of our calling by bearing with one another (2).
4. Live worthy of our calling by maintaining unity (3-6).

Ephesians 4:7-16

Limits of the Text

In the first application section, 4:1-16, Paul urged his readers to live worthy of their calling. In the first half of this section, 4:1-6, he explained how to live worthily, emphasizing the unity of believers. In the second half, 4:7-16, he explained how the gifts that Christ gives his church enables the members to live worthy of their calling.

Translation

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 This is the reason it says, "Having ascended to a high place, he captured captives, *and* he gave gifts to men." (9 Now what does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth? 10 The **one who descended** is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

11 And **he** gave some *to be* apostles, some *to be* prophets, some *to be* evangelists, *and* others *to be* pastors and teachers 12 for the purpose of the preparation of the holy ones for the work of serving, *that is*, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 until we all obtain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, *and* to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result we would no longer be infants, being tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, by the trickery of people, *or* by craftiness towards error-filled strategies, 15 but, communicating truth in a loving manner, we would grow in everything into Christ, who is the head, 16 from whom the entire **body**, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament according to the measured activity of each individual part, brings about the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Interpretation

7 Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

After expounding upon the theological basis for making every effort to maintain unity, Paul then focused upon the variety of gifts that Christ gave to the church. The first gift that Christ gave the church was the grace given to each one of us. The verb give

(ἐδόθη) implies voluntary giving based on good will towards another.³⁹ It is in the passive voice, so there is an implied giver, Christ.⁴⁰ It is also aorist tense, meaning the giving is a completed action; Paul and his readers had already been given this grace. Grace (χάρις) is “a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver.”⁴¹ Christ’s giving to his church is the key theme in these verses;⁴² he gives the gifts of grace, and he gives the gifts of leaders (4:11).

Grace was given to each one of us (Ἐνὶ...ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν), which includes every believer (1 Co 12:7; 1 Pt 4:10). What grace was given? This verse does not specify the exact grace that was given, but the following verses refer to them as gifts that are to be used to serve one another in the church. It would seem to refer either spiritual gifts or perhaps an enabling to use spiritual gifts. This verse is very similar to Ro 12:6, a text on spiritual gifts, which says, “And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us” (NET). The Ro 12 text goes on to list specific spiritual gifts, as do other passages like 1 Co 12:4-11.

Grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. By what standard did Christ give grace? He gave according to the measure of the gift of Christ. “Of Christ” denotes the source of the gifts;⁴³ it is Christ who gives. Gift (δωρεᾶς) is cognate to the verb “was given;” the emphasis of this word is on the way a gift is given: freely. Christ has freely given grace to each one of us, and when he gives, he gives according to what he has measured out. He allots the type of gifts and amounts of gifts to each one as he chooses.

8 διὸ λέγει· ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

8 This is the reason it says, “Having ascended to a high place, he captured captives, *and* he gave gifts to men.”

Having asserted that Christ gives gifts, Paul proved his assertion using a quote. The primary difficulty in interpreting this verse is finding the source of Paul’s quote. It is similar to Ps 68:18; in that chapter, God is pictured as the conquering hero, returning from war with his enemies. He went to Sinai, freed his captive people from their

³⁹ Zodhiates, G1325.

⁴⁰ That Christ is the giver is stated explicitly at the end of the verse.

⁴¹ Zodhiates, G5485.

⁴² O’Brien, 287.

⁴³ This is genitive of source or agent.

captors (a reference to Moses and the Exodus), and came to conquer Zion. He ascended to his mountaintop city (a reference to David), escorted by countless chariots of angels. He brought with him the freed captives, paraded the defeated enemies who had been captured, and then received the tribute of his conquered foes. Ps 68:18 says, “You have ascended on high, you have led captive your captives; you have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell there” (NASB95).

The big difference between Ps 68:18 and Paul’s quote is that God *received* gifts in Ps 68:18, but he *gave* gifts in Ep 4:8. When we compare the original texts, we find that Paul was not quoting verbatim from the Hebrew Old Testament nor from the LXX. So where did he get his quote? Scholars have generated an abundance of theories,⁴⁴ three of which seem more likely to me.

One possibility is that Paul quoted from the Old Testament textual tradition that was written later in the Jewish Targum. In this tradition, the events in Ps 68 are interpreted to be the events at Mount Sinai, where Moses ascended Mount Sinai, learned the words of the Torah, and gave them as gifts to men.⁴⁵ If Paul quoted from this tradition, then he was saying that as God gave the law (through Moses) to the Israel, so Christ gives gifts to the church.

A second possibility is that Paul didn’t quote Ps 68:18 but rather summarized the main idea of the psalm, and his summary just happened to be similar to one of the verses in the psalm. God is doing a lot of giving in this psalm: He gave homes to the lonely (68:6), rain to Israel (68:8-9), his goodness for the poor (68:10), the spoils of victory (68:12), deliverance (68:20), and strength and power to his people (68:35). It’s not difficult to see that one theme running throughout the psalm is that God gives gifts to his people. If Paul was summarizing the chapter, then he was saying that as God was a gift-giving God to his people, Israel, so is Christ a gift-giving God to his people, the church.

A third possibility is that Paul made explicit what the Psalmist said implicitly; that is, a king receives the spoils of war for the purpose of giving them to his loyal subjects. Thus “you received gifts” has the idea of “you received gifts in order to give gifts.” To be fair, the linguistic and textual evidence does not support this position very well,⁴⁶ but it is possible. If Paul was making this explicit, then he was saying that as God received tribute in order to give gifts to his people, so Christ received honor and authority (1:20-23) in order to give gifts to the church.

⁴⁴ See Hoehner, 526-528, or O’Brien, 289-293.

⁴⁵ Hoehner, 526.

⁴⁶ O’Brien, 291-292.

Wherever the source of Paul's quote, he linked this verse to Christ. It does not appear that Paul believed Ps 68:18 to be a Messianic psalm, one that predicted something about Christ.⁴⁷ Instead, he simply observed that God's actions were similar to Christ's actions; as God did things for Israel, so Christ does things for the church. As God ascended to Zion, so Christ ascended from the grave to heaven (1:20-22). As God rescued Israel from Egypt, so Christ rescues those who are prisoners of sin, death, and Satan (2:1-7). As God was victorious over his enemies, so Christ was victorious over sin, death, and Satan. And most importantly, as God gave gifts to his loyal subjects, so Christ gives gifts to the church, particularly the gifts of grace (4:7) and the gifts of leaders (4:11).

9 τὸ δὲ ἀνέβη τί ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; 10 ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστίν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.

(9 Now what does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth? 10 The **one who descended** is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

In these verses, Paul justified linking the Ps 68 reference to Christ. Because these verses interrupt Paul's main thought, which flows from 4:7-8 to 11, I've enclosed them in parentheses.

Paul began with a rhetorical question. The first part of the question is literally, "Now this he ascended what is it?" As this doesn't translate smoothly into English, my translation is a bit of a paraphrase.⁴⁸ Paul's rhetorical question has an obvious answer: Of course! If Christ ascended, he first had to descend. The ascent of Christ referred to his resurrection and exultation, which Paul had written about in 1:20-33.⁴⁹ The descent of Christ refers to his incarnation and his death. The final or ultimate descent of Christ was into the lower regions of the earth, which is a reference to the grave, where he was buried for three days.

Having described Christ's descent, Paul then emphatically linked it to his ascent in 4:10. The one who descended is exactly the same one who ascended; the use of αὐτός ("the one who") places an emphasis upon the one who descended. Some translations attempt to make this emphasis explicit, but the wording tends to be awkward and redundant. "He who descended is Himself also He who ascended" (NASB95). "He, the very one

⁴⁷ MacArthur, 138.

⁴⁸ Hoehner has a similar translation, "Now what is the meaning of 'he ascended'..." (531).

⁴⁹ See also Php 2:9-11.

who descended, is also the one who ascended” (NET). I’ve chosen to simply boldface the participle.

Christ did not merely ascend; he also ascended above all heavens. “Above all heavens” is not so much a geographical reference as an authoritative one. God exalted him to a place far above everyone else, “far above every ruler, authority, power, and dominion and every known title not only in this age **but** also in the *age* to come, and ‘he put everything in subordination under his feet’” (1:21-22, JPG). The magnitude of Christ’s ascent establishes his right to give gifts; as his authority exceeds all other authorities, he can give whatever gifts he wants to whomever he wants in whatever measure he wants.

Paul concluded with the ultimate purpose of Christ’s ascension: to fill all things. Similarly in 1:23 Paul wrote that Christ is “the One filling everyone in every way.” Although Christ is filling all things, the context emphasizes the church; thus O’Brien rightly observes, “The church is his instrument in carrying out his purposes for the cosmos.”⁵⁰ What does it mean, “Christ fills the church”? It means that he is completing the church, giving her everything she needs to accomplish her goal;⁵¹ in the immediate context, he gives the gifts of grace (4:7) and the gifts of leaders (4:11).

Rabbit Trail: Some link the phrase “he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth” with 1 Pt 3:18-20. They say that while Christ was in the grave, he triumphantly proclaimed his victory to imprisoned demons.⁵² While admitting that the grammar in 1 Pt 3 is difficult to follow, I believe a better interpretation is that Christ made his proclamation through Noah and his righteous life. Thus I do not believe these texts are connected in this manner.

Rabbit Trail: Many early church fathers equated “lower [regions] of the earth” with Sheol (aka Hades) and paradise (aka Abraham’s bosom), the two-part waiting place of the dead (Lk 16:22-23, 26). They believed that when Christ died, he went to paradise, gathered up the Old Testament believers, and then took them with him when he ascended. They would be the captives that he led captive. Lk 23:43 seems to offer some support for this idea. The difficulty with this theory is equating lower regions of the earth with Sheol/paradise; there isn’t any textual or linguistic reason to connect them, thus this theory strains the text. I believe the better interpretation is to let the lower regions simply be the grave.

⁵⁰ O’Brien, 297.

⁵¹ See my translation and interpretation of Ep 1:20-23 for more information.

⁵² MacArthur, 139.

11 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους,

11 And **he** gave some *to be* apostles, some *to be* prophets, some *to be* evangelists, and others *to be* pastors and teachers

This verse resumes Paul's main thought from 4:7-8. The second gift that Christ gave the church was four offices, or more specifically, the gifted leaders who fill these offices.

This verse has a series of μὲν...δὲ particles, which delineate items in a series.⁵³ The basic idea is that some are of one type, while others are of a different type. The ISV captures this idea well, "And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers."

This verse and 4:7 are similar in that Christ is giving gifts to the church. These verses are, however, different in at least two ways. One, the gifts are given to different people. The grace that was given in 4:7 was "for each one;" every believer has at least one spiritual gift. The gifts in this verse, however, were only given to some; not everyone fulfills one of these offices. Two, they have different requirements, which John Piper highlighted in a sermon. On the one hand, everyone has a gift direct from God and can serve the church with it; on the other hand, everyone requires help from the leaders of the church to be fully trained to use their gift well, thus walking worthy of their calling.

The first two offices are the offices of apostles and prophets. Although distinct, these offices overlap and are often mentioned together in the New Testament.⁵⁴

The word apostle comes from a verb that means to send, thus an apostle is one who is sent; it could be translated as a delegate, an envoy, or a messenger.⁵⁵ The word was used in Greek writings to refer to ships sent out for cargo or military expeditions and to people sent out as envoys and emissaries.⁵⁶ The writer of Hebrews refers to Jesus as an apostle (He 3:1), a messenger sent from God.

The New Testament mentions two types of apostles, apostles of Jesus and apostles of the church. The apostles of Jesus were the twelve disciples selected by Jesus and sent out into Israel (Mt 10:1-4) as well as Mathias who replaced Judas (Ac 1:26); these men

⁵³ Arndt, 630. When there is only one μὲν...δὲ, it indicates a contrast.

⁵⁴ See 2:20 and 3:5; 1 Co 12:28-29; Re 18:20.

⁵⁵ Arndt, 122.

⁵⁶ Hoehner, 134.

accompanied him during his ministry and witnessed his resurrection (Ac 1:21-22).⁵⁷ Paul was an unusual addition to this group. Although he had not accompanied Jesus during his ministry, he was handpicked by Jesus (Ga 1:1, 11-12) and saw his resurrected body (1 Co 9:1, 15:8), thus he referred to himself as an apostle born at the wrong time. The apostles of the churches were those selected and sent out by the early churches (2 Co 8:23); examples include Titus, Barnabas (Ac 14:4), Silas and Timothy (1 Th 2:6). It's interesting to observe that these groups were not self-perpetuated; indeed, the office of apostle is not mentioned after Ac 16:4.

The word prophet comes from a verb that means to tell before or tell forth,⁵⁸ thus a prophet is one who reveals or proclaims the will or purpose of God.⁵⁹ In Ac 11:28 the prophet Agabus predicted a famine, which moved the church to send a relief offering. In Ac 21:10-11 he predicted that Paul would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles. Although prophets might foretell the future, their ministry wasn't limited to such.

The primary purpose of an apostle was to proclaim the gospel in places that had never heard of Christ before and start new churches. Their message was validated by signs and wonders (2 Co 12:12) and studied by the early church (Ac 2:42). The primary purpose of a prophet was to ensure that the churches, old and new, clearly knew God's message. In Acts we see that prophets worked with teachers in the local church (Ac 13:1). Paul asserted that a genuine prophet would recognize the authority of his apostolic message (1 Co 14:37).

The ministries of apostles and prophets overlapped in at least two areas. Both were part of the foundation of the church (2:20), and both received revelation from God (3:5). From this revelation they wrote (or helped their companions to write) the New Testament (2 Pt 1:19-21). Though they overlap, they are distinct. Hoehner distinguishes their ministries in terms of emphasis: For an apostle, the emphasis was on the commission to proclaim truth, whereas for a prophet, the emphasis was on the communication of truth.⁶⁰ MacArthur distinguishes their ministry in terms of location: Apostles were sent forth and thus started new churches, whereas prophets worked within existing churches.⁶¹ MacArthur also believes that the apostles had precedence over the prophets, both chronologically and authoritatively; he bases this in part upon Paul's numbering in 1 Co 12:28: "And God has placed these in the church: first

⁵⁷ Some have argued that the Eleven were wrong to add Matthias (Ac 1:23-26), since he was not chosen by Jesus, but the text offers nothing to suggest that they did wrong; in fact, Peter quotes a psalm to support the idea (Ac 1:20).

⁵⁸ Zodhiates, G4396.

⁵⁹ Arndt, 890.

⁶⁰ Hoehner, 542.

⁶¹ MacArthur, 141-142.

apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” (HCSB). There is probably truth in all three of these distinctions.

The third office is the office of evangelist. The word evangelist comes from a verb that means to announce good news, thus an evangelist is one who proclaims the good news of the gospel, salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The verb form of the word was used both of God, who proclaimed the gospel to Abraham (Ga 3:8), and Jesus, who proclaimed the gospel as he taught in the temple (Lk 20:1).

The noun form of the word is used in two other places in the New Testament. Luke recorded some of the activities of Philip the evangelist in the book of Acts (Ac 21:8).⁶² In Ac 8:5 Philip went to Samaria and proclaimed Christ; many believed and were baptized (Ac 8:12). In Ac 8:26, an angel sent him to a desert road where he led an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. In Ac 8:40 he proclaimed the gospel in every city as he traveled to Caesarea. The second use of the word is in 2 Ti 4:5, where Paul commanded Timothy, a pastor, to do the work of an evangelist. From these examples it is seen that evangelists work both apart from and within the context of the local church. Those who work apart from the local church we sometimes call church planters; they lead people to Jesus, disciple them, and form them into new churches. Those who work within the context of the local church lead people in the community to Jesus, bring them into the local church, and either disciple them or connect them to others to be disciplined.

MacArthur holds the conviction “that each local assembly should raise up evangelists, to send some out in mission enterprises and to have others remain permanently in the church fellowship...Every church should be led by a combination of evangelists and teaching shepherds—men gifted to bring the lost in and men gifted for feeding believers and leading them in the Word to build them up.”⁶³

Each office in this verse has its own article (τοὺς) except for shepherds and teachers, which share an article; this indicates that there is a connection between these two offices. What is the connection? It might be that the office of pastor-teacher is one and the same, thus emphasizing two of the main responsibilities of this office, pastoring and teaching. Or it might be that pastors are among the teachers; that is, all pastors are to be teachers (1 Ti 3:2, 5:17; Tit 1:9), though not all teachers in the church are pastors (Ro 12:7). These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and I believe both are true.

⁶² He was also one of the first “deacons” (Ac 6:3-5).

⁶³ MacArthur, 143.

The fourth office is the office of pastor and teacher. The word pastor literally means one who is a shepherd, a person who cares for flocks of sheep or goats; in this context it metaphorically refers to one who cares for a group of people. Jesus asserted that he was the good shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11-14); Peter and the author of Hebrews both referred to Jesus as a shepherd (Hb 13:20; 1 Pt 2:25). In the first part of his classic psalm, Ps 23, David called God his shepherd and described how he cared for him: God provided nourishment (23:1-3a), guidance (23:3b), and protection (23:4).⁶⁴ These three things are still true of pastors today. They feed the church by teaching the word of God and by teaching the church to study the word for themselves. They guide the church to find and follow God's will. And they protect the church by warning them about false teachings (Ac 20:28-29). A good pastor is a man who cares for his people, like a shepherd cares for his flock.⁶⁵

A teacher is one who teaches and instructs; in ancient days teachers taught facts and skills as well as morals. Jesus referred to himself as "the teacher" (Mt 26:17), and his disciples called him Rabbi, a Hebrew title which meant teacher (Jn 1:38). The role of a teacher is to exposit and apply the message given to the church by the apostles and prophets (1 Co 4:17; 2 Ti 2:2). The spiritual gift of teaching is a requirement for a pastor, and teaching is one of the primary means by which a pastor pastors. He nourishes, guides, and protects the church by teaching the word. Thus pastors are to work hard at teaching and be rewarded for it (1 Ti 5:17).

12 πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

12 for the purpose of the preparation of the holy ones for the work of serving, *that is*, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Why does God give gifted leaders to the church? He gives them for the purpose⁶⁶ of preparing the church. The noun preparation (καταρτισμὸν) comes from a verb whose root idea is to finish, complete, or make ready.⁶⁷ In ancient literature it was used of setting a bone or furnishing a room;⁶⁸ in the New Testament it was used of mending fishing nets (Mt 4:21) and training students (Lk 6:40). It has the idea of being prepared and trained to the point of being fully qualified, sufficient, or adequate for something.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ In the latter part of the psalm, verses 5-6, David changed his imagery of God from a shepherd to a gracious host, thus I have not included those aspects of God here.

⁶⁵ MacArthur, 145.

⁶⁶ The preposition πρὸς is accusative of purpose.

⁶⁷ Zodhiates, G2677.

⁶⁸ Hoehner, 549.

⁶⁹ Swanson, DBLG 2938.

The writer of Hebrews used this word to express his desire that the God of peace would equip his readers with every good thing to do his will (Hb 13:20-21).

The something that the holy ones need to be prepared for is the work of serving; that is, serving is the goal of preparation.⁷⁰ The members of the church are to be serving (διακονίας) each other; they help, assist, and support one another⁷¹ using the gifts that God gave them (4:8). The work of serving is not the exclusive responsibility of pastors or deacons or some select few; everyone is to be prepared, and everyone is to serve. And this serving is work (ἔργον), an action word that means getting something done; it describes the effort and energy involved in serving.⁷² MacArthur has a good observation about the interaction between pastor and church: “Obviously the leaders share in serving, and many of the congregation share in equipping, but God’s basic design for the church is for the equipping to be done so that the saints can serve each other effectively.”⁷³ In summary, “the ministry of [these offices] does not find its fulfillment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister.”⁷⁴

The prepositional phrase “for the edifying of the body of Christ” is appositional to the previous phrase “for the work of serving;” both begin with the same preposition (εἰς). The work of serving is edifying the body of Christ; as the church serves, the church is edified. Edifying (οἰκοδομῆν) has a literal meaning of building or constructing, but Paul used it metaphorically to mean to spiritually strengthen and make a group of people more able. Christ used this word when he said he would build his church (Mt 16:18). When the members of the church serve each other they are spiritually strengthening each other as a whole; there is a very corporate aspect to this word.

13 μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

[13 until we all obtain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, and to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ.](#)

God gave gifted leaders to the church for the purpose of preparing the members of the church to use their gifts to serve each other, and when leaders prepare and members

⁷⁰ The preposition εἰς, used twice in this verse, is also accusative of purpose

⁷¹ Swanson, DBLG 1355.

⁷² Louw, 1:511.

⁷³ MacArthur, 155.

⁷⁴ Best, quoted in O’Brien, 304.

serve there are three results in the church. The first result of preparing and serving is unity and maturity.⁷⁵ Paul wrote that leaders prepare and the church serves until the entire church obtains; this verse is not about individual growth but corporate growth. Until (μέχρι) is an adverb acting as a conjunction; when used with a verb in the subjunctive mood (as here), it has the sense of something that has not yet happened and is uncertain. The church has something to accomplish, though reaching the goal is not a given, thus leaders prepare and members serve until the goal is obtained. To obtain (καταστήσωμεν) has a literal meaning of arriving somewhere, but Paul used it figuratively to mean to possess, reach, or attain some goal. In this verse he gave three obtainable goals for a leader-prepared, member-serving church, goals that should be obtained by everyone.⁷⁶

The first goal of the church is unity. Unity (ένότητα) is a word that Paul has used earlier in this chapter; to walk worthily is to make every effort to maintain unity (4:3). Unity is “a state of oneness or of being in harmony and accord.”⁷⁷ In 4:3 individuals pursue unity; in this verse the entire church pursues unity together. But Paul qualified this corporate unity two ways: it is unity of faith *and* unity of knowledge.⁷⁸

The church should obtain the unity of the faith, which is the same idea as the “one faith” in 4:5. Although faith can have a subjective meaning, one’s personal faith, Paul was referring to an objective faith, the content of what a church believes. It’s “the faith that was passed down once and for all” (Jude 3, ISV). “Unity of the faith comes with the realization that we all have one faith in the one person, Jesus Christ;”⁷⁹ furthermore, “oneness in fellowship is impossible unless it is built on the foundation of commonly believed truth.”⁸⁰ When gifted leaders prepare the church and gifted members serve each other, the entire church will move towards a unified understanding of the one faith.

The church should also obtain the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. This word for knowledge (ένπιγνώσεως) is nuanced by the idea of personal involvement.⁸¹ This knowledge is not just what one knows, but how one comes to know it. The church helps each other get to know Jesus; they don’t want to merely know about Jesus, but to know him personally. Paul expressed this same desire this back in 3:18-19 when he prayed that the Ephesians “might be fully able to comprehend with all the holy ones

⁷⁵ The other two results are found in verses 14 and 15.

⁷⁶ Hoehner believes that these are really different aspect of the same goal, which could be true (553).

⁷⁷ Arndt, 338.

⁷⁸ Knowledge is genitive, which means it refers back to unity, not back to the verb obtains.

⁷⁹ Hoehner, 553.

⁸⁰ MacArthur, 156.

⁸¹ Zodhiates, G1922.

what is the width, length, height, and depth, and so to know the love of Christ.” Similarly, in Php 3:8 he wrote, “More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (NET). When gifted leaders prepare the church and gifted members serve each other, the entire church will grow in their experiential knowledge of Jesus.

The second goal of the church is to be a mature person. The word translated person (ἄνδρα) is the word for man or adult male, but it can have an emphasis on being full-grown and mature as opposed to being a boy. Because it is modified by the adjective mature (τέλειον),⁸² the latter idea is what Paul had in mind. Kids are immature; grown-ups are mature. Kids have a limited ability to think and understand; grown-ups have a more complete ability to think and understand. But Paul emphasized the collective church, not individuals within the church; the noun is singular, not plural. The church does not become mature people; it becomes a mature person. The entire church is a single body, the body of Christ, one new man (2:15). When gifted leaders prepare the church and the members of the church serve each other, they become mature together, like a boy who has reached mature manhood. And “as the body matures unity results.”⁸³

The third goal of the church is have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is the desired characteristic. Paul has already used the word fullness (πληρώματος) in this manner twice in his letter. In 1:23 he prayed that the Ephesians might understand the power of God, which gave Christ to the church, which is the fullness of Christ who is filling everyone in every way. In 3:19 he prayed that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. In 1:23 we find Christ, the head of the church, filling (completing) everyone in it; in 3:19 we find God filling (imparting) believers with his own character, thus making them spiritually mature. In 4:13 we find God giving gifts and leaders to the church to help make these happen. The word measure (μέτρον) literally means a quantity or number that comes from measuring something.⁸⁴ Stature (ἡλικίας) refers to physical stature or body size and can have the idea of being full-grown and mature.⁸⁵ When we put these together we get this idea: God gave gifts and leaders to the church to help them obtain to the same amount of spiritual maturity that is found in Christ; “the glorified Christ provides the standard at

⁸² *Telios* can mean perfect, but in the context of growing together it has the idea of maturity; see 1 Co 14:20 and Hb 5:14.

⁸³ Hoehner, 556.

⁸⁴ Arndt, 642.

⁸⁵ Arndt, 436.

which his people are to aim.”⁸⁶ When gifted leaders prepare the church and the members of the church serve each other, the body obtains a Christ-like maturity.

14 ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης,

14 As a result we would no longer be infants, being tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, by the trickery of people, *or* by craftiness towards error-filled strategies,

The second result of preparing and serving is stability. Although I have started a new sentence here for readability, Paul continued the thought of his previous verse. A church that believes the one faith and is mature like Christ is a church that won't behave like spiritual infants. Infants (νήπιοι) literally refer to babies and children, but it can also apply to those who lack understanding and experience (Mt 11:25); Paul used this word figuratively to refer to spiritually immature believers⁸⁷ (1 Co 3:1). He further described infants as those who are tossed about by waves and blown along by wind. To be tossed about (κλυδωνιζόμενοι) refers to a small boat going back and forth, to and fro, wherever the waves push it; the idea is one of constant fluctuation.⁸⁸ To be blown along (περιφερόμενοι) literally means to be carried, but here it figuratively means to be driven or borne by something. In Jude 12, Jude used this verb to describe false teachers as “waterless clouds carried along by winds” (HCSB). Both of these participles are passive, indicating that outside forces move the spiritual infants. Those who are spiritually immature are easily confused in their thinking and are easily influenced by others.⁸⁹

In the remainder of the verse, Paul further describes these outside forces and how they toss and blow the church. First, what is it that tosses and blows a spiritual immature church? It is every wind of teaching. Paul used wind (ἀνέμῳ) in a figurative manner to mean “a tendency or trend that causes one to move from a view or belief.”⁹⁰ False teaching, which includes “every new religious fad or novel interpretation of Scripture,”⁹¹ comes from every direction, trying to “undermine or dilute the apostolic gospel”⁹² in order to confuse and influence the church. In 4:7 Paul said Christ gave gifts

⁸⁶ O'Brien, 308.

⁸⁷ Arndt, 671.

⁸⁸ Zodhiates, G2831.

⁸⁹ Hoehner, 561.

⁹⁰ Arndt, 77.

⁹¹ MacArthur, 158.

⁹² O'Brien, 309.

to the church, including the gift of teaching (Ro 12:7), and in 4:11 he gave teachers to the church. God has his people teaching truth to the church, but they are not the only ones who are teaching. There are always others, both within the church and without, who have something different to teach to anyone who will listen. And if the church listens, false teachings will cause them to doubt truth and constantly change their views and beliefs. But when God-given leaders prepare the church and the church uses their gifts, including the gift of teaching, then the church will be stable, believing the one faith, and resilient to change.⁹³

Second, how do these false teachers teach? They teach by trickery. Trickery (κυβεία) comes from a verb that means to play with dice. Then, as now, dice were often loaded, thus this term became synonymous with dishonest trickery of any sort.⁹⁴ I had a friend who asked to come over and talk with me about a business idea, making it sound like it was very important and official. When he arrived he began to talk about the importance of family and spending time together and raising kids, but it wasn't until he was twenty minutes into his talk that I realized he wanted me to sell Amway for him. He wasn't honest about what he wanted; he resorted to trickery to get me to listen to him. In the same way, false teachers bring their teaching under the guise of doing something good and helping. They will say whatever it takes, true or not, to get an audience to listen to them.

Third, where does their teaching lead? Their teaching leads to error. Craftiness (πανουργία) is synonymous with trickery; it has the idea of using whatever means is necessary to accomplish a goal and thus being shrewd, cunning, and crafty.⁹⁵ Craftiness is modified by a prepositional phrase beginning with the preposition πρὸς, which typically has a sense of moving towards something. Although most English translations translate this word as "in,"⁹⁶ I think the idea of movement exists in this verse. When the craftiness of false teachers achieves its goal, infant believers are blown along towards the error-filled strategy of the false teachers; that is, the believers begin to embrace the methods of the false teachers. Strategy (μεθοδείαν) is from a verb that means to work by method;⁹⁷ you can see the word method when the noun is transliterated: *methodeian*. So the word has the idea of an orderly or methodological approach to something and could be translated as scheme, craft, strategy, or wile. Paul used this same word in 6:11, where he wrote, "Put on the whole armor of God so that

⁹³ MacArthur believes an easy-believism gospel and contentless preaching are the reasons why so many in the church today are tossed and blown (159).

⁹⁴ MacArthur, 158.

⁹⁵ Zodhiates, G3834.

⁹⁶ For example: "by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (ESV).

⁹⁷ Zodhiates, G3180.

you may be able to stand firm against the devil's strategies" (ISV). In 4:14 the strategies of the false teachers is further described as error-filled (πλάνης). This noun has the base idea of wandering from the path of truth,⁹⁸ and it has two related meanings. One, it can describe the act of causing someone to stray from the path of truth and thus could be translated as deception or delusion.⁹⁹ Two, it can describe the teaching or belief that causes someone to stray from the path of truth and thus could be translated as error, deceptive belief, or mistaken view.¹⁰⁰ Many translations translated this phrase as "deceitful schemes" or "deceitful scheming,"¹⁰¹ which is fine, but I chose to translate it as "error-filled strategies" instead. The former focuses on how immature believers are led from the path of truth: deceit; the later focuses on what causes immature believers to be led from the path of truth and where they wind up when they leave truth: error. So the idea is this: false teachers use trickery and craftiness to get people to listen to their teaching, they do so because their beliefs are full of errors, and when they succeed others embrace and perpetuate their strategies.

To summarize this verse: when a church is prepared by its leaders and are serving each other, they will be able to detect false teaching, resist following it's beliefs, and remain on the path of truth. They will be stable. They will walk worthily.

15 ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ,
Χριστός,

15 but, communicating truth in a loving manner, we would grow in everything into Christ, who is the head,

The third result of preparing and serving is growth. In many ways, this result restates the previous result using positive statements instead of negative statements, as Paul gave four contrasts between false and true teaching. The first contrast is that instead of spreading false teaching, we communicate truth. Communicating truth (ἀληθεύοντες) means to speak or tell truth. In Ga 4:16, the only other use of this verb in the New Testament, Paul asked, "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (NET); he told the truth when he proclaimed the gospel among them. This phrase in 4:15 is often quoted out of context to say if we have bad news or unpleasant news, we should tell the truth and do so in a loving way. Or if we desire to criticize someone, we can do so as long as it's the truth and done in a loving a way. That's not the point of this phrase. When considered in context, the truth is the gospel. John Piper, in a sermon on

⁹⁸ Ardnt, 822.

⁹⁹ Swanson, DBLG 4415.

¹⁰⁰ Louw, 1:366.

¹⁰¹ So NASB95, NET, ESV, NIV.

this text, gave three contextual clues as to why truth is the gospel. First, communicating truth is one of the results of being prepared by gifted leaders (4:11), and these leaders are gospel-givers. Second, the second result was obtaining a knowledge of the Son of God (4:13) who died, was buried, and was raised again; Paul defined this as the gospel (1 Co 15:1-4). Third, communicating truth stands in contrast to every wind of teaching (4:14); truth is more than bad news or criticism because it's the antithesis of false teaching. The church that is well prepared by its God-given leaders hears the gospel and speaks the gospel to each other. Each member of the church lives by the truth of the gospel and encourages one another to do the same.

The second contrast is that instead of tricking each other, believers love each other. When believers communicate truth, the gospel, to each other, they do so in a loving manner (ἀγάπη).¹⁰² The members of a church love one another and thus have each other's best interests at heart; this is why they speak truth. And even the speaking of truth is done in a loving manner by considering the best way to bring the gospel to bear in a situation so that the hearer will respond rightly to the truth. Communicating truth isn't done to make me feel good, it's done to help my brother grow.

The third contrast is that instead of being infants, the church would grow (αὐξήσωμεν). This verb is in the subjunctive mood and expresses something that might happen and should happen. When pastor-teachers prepare and the church serves, the church should obtain unity (4:13), should no longer be infants (4:14), and should grow.¹⁰³ To grow literally means to increase in size and was used of plants (Lk 12:27) and children (Lk 2:40). Paul used it here metaphorically, describing how a church matures spiritually, just as he did in 2:21. The church grows in maturity in everything, that is, in every area of our spiritual walk.¹⁰⁴

The fourth contrast is that instead of being blown towards error, the church grows into Christ. This prepositional phrase gives the goal of growing: Christ. A growing church becomes more like Christ. This verse is very similar to 4:13, which said that one of the goals of the church is to obtain to the same amount of spiritual maturity that is found in Christ. Note that the goal of growing is not numerical growth, but spiritual growth.

Paul further described Christ as the head. In 1:22, Paul wrote that God gave Christ, who is the head over everything, to the church. Being the head over everything has the idea of preeminence and leadership, thus Christ is preeminent in the church and the leader of the church. But in 4:15, the word head is used as part of an analogy. The

¹⁰² For a more complete definition of love, see the commentary on 4:2.

¹⁰³ All three of these verbs are subjunctive.

¹⁰⁴ Hoehner, 566.

church is like a body (1 Co 12:12-26), which has ligaments (4:16), and Christ is the head of the body. The church grows to be like Christ, and Christ enables that growth, as will be seen in the next verse. Thus, head describes Christ as being the source of life and power to the church.¹⁰⁵

Note that I have slightly reordered the wording of the last part of this verse to make it easier to read in English; a more literal translation would read, “We would grow in everything into him who is the head, Christ...”¹⁰⁶

16 ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβασόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

16 from whom the entire **body**, being joined together and held together by every supporting ligament according to the measured activity of each individual part, brings about the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

In this final verse, Paul brought the themes of this section together in a summary statement. As for grammar, this verse is a convoluted dependent clause; the subject is at the beginning but the verb is at the end. The main thought is this: The entire body brings about the growth of the entire body. And this growth is enabled by the head (4:15), who is Christ.

In this clause, Paul first described the church as a body,¹⁰⁷ giving two characteristics of it. First, just as a physical body has a physical head that directs and controls and enables the body, so the church has a head, Christ, who directs and controls and enables her. “From whom” (ἐξ οὗ) denotes source of the growth of the body;¹⁰⁸ without the headship of Christ, the church would be directionless and powerless, unable to grow and to be like Christ (4:15). Thus the church grows to become like Christ and grows because of Christ.

Second, the body is joined and held together;¹⁰⁹ these words, though not synonymous, are complementary. Both begin with the preposition *suν* (συν), which has the idea of togetherness. Joined together (συναρμολογούμενον) means “to fit together in a

¹⁰⁵ MacArthur, 160.

¹⁰⁶ For example, the ISV says, “We will grow up completely into the one who is the head, that is, into Christ.”

¹⁰⁷ As he did in 2:16. At the end he switches to a building metaphor with the verb edifying, as he did in 2:21.

¹⁰⁸ Hoehner, 569.

¹⁰⁹ See also Co 2:19.

coherent and compatible manner.”¹¹⁰ This word was often used of a stone construction; since they did not use mortar, “the stones were cut and smoothed by an elaborate process so that they fit exactly with each other.”¹¹¹ Paul used this same verb in 2:21 to describe the growth of the church using a building metaphor. Held together (συμβιβάζομενον) means to bring things together and unite them into one unit.¹¹² It was used of lawyers who brought together evidence to make a clear case and of teachers who brought together a series of facts to demonstrate a theory.¹¹³ The parts of the body, the church, are to be joined together and held together. Paul further described this togetherness with two phrases.

What is it that joins and holds the body together? The body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament. Ligament (ἀφῆς) is a medical term that refers to a part of the body that makes a connection or contact (Co 2:19). Hippocrates¹¹⁴ used this word to describe tissue connecting to bones and to muscles. Paul further described these as supporting ligaments, where the world supporting (ἐπιχορηγίας) has the idea of helping or supplying a need. This verb was used in ancient times of supplying an army with provisions and of a wife providing for her husband.¹¹⁵ It is used in the New Testament of God providing the Holy Spirit (Ga 3:5) and believers supplementing their faith with moral character (2 Pt 1:5). The idea is that the parts of the body, the members of the church, support each other; they supply the prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, etc. that each other needs (Ro 12:6-8). They use their spiritual gifts, which come from the head, for the common good of the church (1 Co 12:4),¹¹⁶ to help each other walk worthily.

How well is the body joined and held together? The body is joined and held together according to the measured activity of each individual part. Each individual part refers to the members of the church, all of whom are to be working while using their spiritual gifts (4:7). Working (ἐνεργεῖαν) is power in action; it means to be active and to get things done. Paul used this word to describe God’s power in 1:19 and 3:7. The working of the church is measured, which describes how much activity the church accomplishes. Measured (ἐν μέτρῳ) refers to a measured quantity and in context has the idea of an allotted proportion. This is the same word Paul used back in 4:7, where Christ measured out gifts to everyone. Thus the actions of each believer, as they serve in the

¹¹⁰ Louw, 1:611.

¹¹¹ Hoehner, 569.

¹¹² Louw, 1:613.

¹¹³ Hoehner, 569-570.

¹¹⁴ Hippocrates was a Greek physician born around 460 BC; he is thought to be the author of the Hippocratic oath.

¹¹⁵ Hoehner, 573-574.

¹¹⁶ To be fair, some think that the ligaments refer only to the gifted leaders of 4:11, who are the ones to connect the church together and supply their needs. See O’Brien, 315.

church, are in proportion to the gift Christ gave them, not more, not less. “These [words] emphasize the individual’s responsibility to do his or her part and not depend on others to do the work of ministry nor to think that he or she is to do all the work of the ministry.”¹¹⁷ See 1 Co 12:14-26 for a similar argument. Paul’s point is that when the church actively serves each other according to their gifts, it is united together.

When the body is actively serving each other, the result is growth (αὐξῆσιν). This is the noun form of the verb used in 4:15 and refers to an increase in spiritual maturity. Although this sounds very independent—the body brings about the growth of the body—everything depends upon the head, Christ; still, the body has a role to fulfill. When the church brings about its own growth, it is edifying itself. With this verb, Paul switched metaphors from a human body to a building. Edifying (οἰκοδομῆν) has the literal idea of building or constructing, but Paul used it here, just as he did in 4:12, to mean spiritual strengthening. All of this growth occurs in the context of love. Believers in the church must be selfless and have each other’s best interests at heart, spiritual interests, in order for growth to occur. “Even the fullest demonstration of gifts has no spiritual value if love is lacking.”¹¹⁸

With this verse, Paul has brought his argument full circle. When the body serves as their leaders have trained them to serve, the body grows and thus is edified.

¹¹⁷ Hoehner, 576.

¹¹⁸ O’Brien, 316.

Abridged Structural Diagram

Now

grace was given to each one of us
according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

This is the reason it says, "Having ascended to a high place,
he captured captives,
and
he gave gifts to men."

Now

| what does "he ascended" mean except that
he also descended
into the lower [regions] of the earth?

The one who descended is also the one who ascended
above all the heavens,
so that
he might fill all things.)

(grace was given v 7)

And

he gave some to be apostles,
| some to be prophets,
| some to be evangelists,
| and
| others to be pastors and teachers
|
for the purpose of the preparation of the holy ones
| for the work of serving,
| that is,
| for the edifying of the body of Christ,
|
until
we all obtain to the unity of the faith
| | and
| | knowledge of the Son of God,
| to a mature person,
| and
| to the measure of the maturity of the full. of Christ.

As a result

we would no longer be infants,
| being tossed about by the waves
| and
| blown along by every wind of teaching,
| by the trickery of people,
| or
| by craftiness
| towards e-f strategies,
but,
communicating truth in a loving manner,
we would grow
in everything
into Christ,
who is the head,
from whom

| being joined
 | | and
 | | held together
 | | by every supporting ligament
 | | according to the measured activity
 | | of each individual part
 | |
 the entire body brings about the growth
 of the body
 for the edifying
 of itself
 in love.

Tracing the Argument

External—Paul exhorted his readers to live in a manner worthy of their calling. To live worthy they must have the right attitudes, the right actions, and the right theology. Additionally, trained by their spiritual leaders, they must use their spiritual gifts to serve each other, helping each other to live worthily.

Internal—Christ graces every believer with a spiritual gift. He has the authority to give gifts because he ascended above all heavens to fill all things. He also gave gifted leaders to the church. The leaders prepare the people to use their gifts to serve each other. When the church serves, the church as a whole will obtain unity and maturity. A unified, mature church is not easily swayed by various false teachings; on the contrary, enabled by Christ they grow to be like Christ, so long as everyone uses their gifts.

Textual Outline

1. Christ gives a spiritual gift to every member of the church (7-10).
2. Christ gives gifted leaders to the entire church (11).
3. Gifted leaders prepare the church, and the church serves each other (13-16).
 - a. The church obtains unity and maturity (13).
 - b. The church remains stable (14).
 - c. The church grows (15-16).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 4:7-16 to encourage believers in Ephesus to serve each other with the gifts that Christ gave them.

Teaching Outline

The members of a church serve each other using the gifts that Christ gave them, and today I want you to understand why it's so important to serve each other using your gifts and begin to serve. From our text in Ephesians 4, we are going to see 3 results that occur when we serve each other using the gifts Christ gave us.

1. Serve each other, so we will obtain unity and maturity (13).
2. Serve each other, so we will remain stable (14).
3. Serve each other, so we will grow (15-16).

Live As You Learned Christ

Ephesians 4:17-24

Limits of the Text

Verse 17 begins the second application section in Ephesians. Paul urged his readers not to live like the Gentiles, and then described their thoughts and actions. In contrast, he reminded them that they had learned Christ and were taught to take off the old self, renew their thinking, and put on the new self. Verses 17 to 19 are one sentence in the Greek; 20 to 24 are another.

Translation

17 Therefore in the Lord this is what I say and insist upon: **You** are no longer to live as the Gentiles live in the futility of their thinking, 18 darkened in their understanding *and* estranged from the life of God because of their ignorance *and* the hardness of their heart. 19 Having become calloused, they handed themselves over to extreme immorality for the practice of every kind of impurity with an insatiable desire for more.

20 But **you** did not learn Christ like that, 21 seeing that you heard about him and were taught in him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 to take off, with regard to *your* former way of life, your old self, who is being corrupted in accordance with *its* deceptive desires; 23 to be continually renewed in the way your mind thinks; 24 and to put on the new self, who was created in conformity to God in true righteousness and piety.

Interpretation

17 Τοῦτο οὖν λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι ἐν κυρίῳ, μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν, καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν,

17 Therefore in the Lord this is what I say and insist upon: **You** are no longer to live as the Gentiles live in the futility of their thinking,

Paul began his second application section with a “therefore” (οὖν), an inferential conjunction, which makes a deduction or conclusion about the preceding section.¹¹⁹ Since they were to live in a manner worthy of the calling with which they were called

¹¹⁹ Wallace, 673.

(4:1), they should not live as the Gentiles lived; this is the first of many sections that detail how churches and families live out the command to live in a worthy manner.

Paul insisted (μαρτύρομαι) that they not live as the Gentiles lived. This Greek verb has two possible meanings. The first is to testify, which means to “make a serious declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge.”¹²⁰ The second is to “urge something as a matter of great importance.”¹²¹ In this context, Paul was telling his readers how to live, so the latter meaning is more likely, though some translations prefer the former (ESV, HCSB, LEB). Insist is in the middle voice, emphasizing Paul’s personal participation in insisting how his readers live. Paul insisted “in the Lord,” emphasizing the authority by which he wrote and exhorted his readers. Paul’s insistence was directed at all of his readers. The “you” (ὕμᾱς) is both plural and emphatic; he wanted all of them to do something together.

Paul insisted that his readers no longer live as the Gentiles live. Live is a key word in this letter; many of the application sections in chapters 4-6 begin with this word.¹²² In the previous section, for example, believers are to live in a manner worthy of their calling (4:1); in the next section, believers are to live in love (5:2). As discussed in 4:1, Paul used this word figuratively to mean to behave or conduct one’s life; it has the idea of a habit or a custom. Paul insisted that his readers have a particular kind of lifestyle, one very different from how they used to live.

So if his readers were not to live as the Gentiles live, who were the Gentiles and how did they live? Most of Paul’s readers were ethnic Gentiles,¹²³ but the term Gentiles in this context meant “not Christian” more than it meant “not Jewish.” A Gentile is one who does not know God (1 Th 4:5). Paul gave four descriptions of how the Gentiles lived, starting with their thinking and moving to their actions.

The first description of Gentile living is that they lived in the futility of their thinking. Thinking (νοῶς) can refer to the mind,¹²⁴ the facility for understanding, reasoning, and deciding.¹²⁵ In this context though, it refers to the way a person thinks, especially as it leads to how he acts. Paul described the way the Gentiles thought as futility (ματαιότητι). This word means to have no use or value because a goal or purpose cannot be achieved; it could be translated as emptiness, uselessness, or

¹²⁰ Louw, 1:412.

¹²¹ Arndt, 619.

¹²² See also 2:2 and 2:10, which use this word to contrast how the Ephesians lived before and after salvation.

¹²³ He even addressed them as such in 3:1.

¹²⁴ And it does in 4:23.

¹²⁵ Swanson, DBLG 3807.

purposelessness.¹²⁶ The goal of the mind in creation was to know God and communicate with him, but the fall changed that. Futile thinking “conveys the idea of not being able to perceive the revelation of God for which it was designed.”¹²⁷ And “because it lacks a true relationship with God, Gentile thinking suffers from the consequences of having lost touch with reality and is left fumbling with inane triviality and worthless side issues.”¹²⁸ This futility of thinking is the root cause of immoral behavior.

18 ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὄντες, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν αὐτοῖς, διὰ τὴν πώρωσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν,

18 darkened in their understanding *and* estranged from the life of God because of their ignorance *and* the hardness of their heart.

The second description of Gentile living is that they lived darkened in their understanding. Understanding (διανοία) is synonymous with thinking in 4:17. Darkened (ἐσκοτωμένοι) is used figuratively and means “to become unable to perceive and thus unable to understand”¹²⁹ and to be “spiritually or mentally confused.”¹³⁰ Gentiles lack the ability to think spiritually. In Ro 1:21 Paul wrote, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (ESV). The Ephesians, however, had the ability to think spiritually, and Paul wanted them to mature in this area. He prayed that God would give them “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what *is* the abundance of the glory of his inheritance in the holy ones, and what *is* the incomparable greatness of his power to us who are believing according to the working of the might of his strength” (2:17-19; JPG).

The third description of Gentile living is that they lived estranged from the life of God. Estranged (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι) means to be alienated or excluded from something; Paul used this word in 2:12 where he said the Gentiles were excluded from the citizenship of Israel and in Co 1:21 where he said the Colossians “were once alienated and hostile in mind because of your evil actions” (HCSB). In the current verse Paul said the Gentiles were estranged from the life of God. This implies that the Gentiles were spiritually dead—“you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (2:1)—and that there is a type

¹²⁶ Ardent, 621.

¹²⁷ Hoehner, 584.

¹²⁸ O’Brien, 320.

¹²⁹ Louw, 1:385.

¹³⁰ Zodhiates, G4656.

of life that they did not possess, a life that comes from God and was made possible by Jesus' death. In 2 Ti 1:10, Paul wrote that Jesus "abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (HCSB). In Ro 5:18, he wrote that "through the one righteous act came righteousness leading to life for all people" (NET). Those who believe have a God-led, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led life that will last forever.

Both of these participles, darkened and estranged, are in the passive voice, which means something caused the darkening and the estrangement; in this verse, two prepositional phrases supply the cause.¹³¹

The first cause of darkened and estranged is ignorance (ἄγνοϊαν).¹³² Ignorance is a lack of information about something, ignorance that leads to a darkened understanding and exclusion from the life of God. Thus their ignorance was a refusal to acknowledge God and the salvation he provided through Jesus. Hoehner believes this phrase parallels Ro 1:18-23, where mankind rejects the knowledge of God through creation and becomes purposeless in their thinking and hardened in their heart.¹³³ Thus ignorance has a deliberate, not innocent, connotation.

The second cause of darkened and estranged is hardness of heart (πώρωσιν τῆς καρδίας). The heart, as described previously in 1:18, is the central part of a person, the source of feelings, moral and religious conduct, will, and understanding. A hard heart is figurative expression that refers to a dullness or insensitivity towards God and spiritual matters brought on stubbornness and obstinacy.¹³⁴ Hardness prevents something from penetrating to the heart, which in turn leads to a darkened understanding and exclusion from the life of God. Thus their hardness was a refusal to allow God's truth to penetrate, "and an obstinate rejection of the truth of God is the beginning of the terrible downward path of evil."¹³⁵

19 οἵτινες ἀπηληγότες ἑαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν τῇ ἀσελγείᾳ εἰς ἐργασίαν ἀκαθαρσίας πάσης ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ.

19 Having become calloused, they handed themselves over to extreme immorality for the practice of every kind of impurity with an insatiable desire for more.

¹³¹ They are accusative of cause.

¹³² A more literal translation might be "the ignorance being in them."

¹³³ Hoehner, 587.

¹³⁴ Arndt, 900.

¹³⁵ O'Brien, 322.

Verses 17-19 are all one sentence in Greek, but I broke it here for readability. Paul insisted that his reader not live as the Gentiles live, and then described the Gentiles as having become calloused (ἀπηλγηκότες). To be calloused, figuratively speaking, is “to lose the capacity to feel shame or embarrassment;”¹³⁶ it could be translated as dead to feeling or desensitized. “This is the word from which the English ‘analgesic’ is derived, meaning that which takes away pain.”¹³⁷ This expression is synonymous with hardness of heart. This participle is in the perfect tense, meaning that the callousness occurred in the past, but its effects are still be felt in the present; this lack of shame is what allows them to plunge into the immoral conduct described in the remainder of the verse.

The fourth description of Gentile living is that they handed themselves over to extreme immorality. Handed over (παρέδωκαν) has the idea of giving up someone to someone else who now has power or authority over them.¹³⁸ Calloused Gentiles handed themselves over to extreme immorality (ἀσελγεία). This word refers to “lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable,”¹³⁹ “behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness,”¹⁴⁰ and an “insatiable desire for pleasure.”¹⁴¹ It could be translated as debauchery, lasciviousness, or licentiousness and is listed as one of the works of the flesh in Ga 5:19. When a person is no longer embarrassed by their actions, all inhibitions leave, and every option to find satisfaction is open; there is no “concern as to what God or people think.”¹⁴²

Rabbit Trail: This verse says that the Gentile handed themselves over to extreme immorality, but in Romans it says that God handed them over (same Greek word) to impurity (1:24), dishonorable practices (1:26), and a debased mind (1:28).¹⁴³ Do people hand themselves over to immorality, or does God hand them over? These are not a contradiction but rather views of different parts of the same process. People harden their hearts, and then at some point a line is crossed and God hardens the heart, preventing a return to the line. Pharaoh is a clear example.

When they are handed over to extreme immorality, they practice every kind of impurity. Impurity (ἀκαθαρσία) has the literal idea of dirt or filth and is used here with the figurative idea of moral uncleanness, corruption, or vileness; it is synonymous

¹³⁶ Louw, 1:309.

¹³⁷ Zodhiates, G524.

¹³⁸ Swanson, DBLG 1384.

¹³⁹ Arndt, 141.

¹⁴⁰ Louw, 1:770.

¹⁴¹ Zodhiates, G766.

¹⁴² Hoehner, 590.

¹⁴³ ESV.

with extreme immorality. The Gentiles attempted to satisfy their lusts with every type of immorality, even those that were nasty and filthy; it might include things like wife-swapping, bestiality, and drunken orgies.

Even when a calloused Gentile practices every kind of impurity, they desire to have more and more. An insatiable desire to have more (ἐν πλεονεξία) is a prepositional phrase that could literally be translated as “with greediness,” but the root idea is broader than just wanting money. It is “desiring to have more than one’s due,”¹⁴⁴ “wanting more of whatever one desires irrespective of need,”¹⁴⁵ and “the longing of the creature which has forsaken God to fill itself with the lower objects of nature.”¹⁴⁶ In the immediate context, the desire is not for money or things but for practicing impurity; thus my translation follows the HCSB, which captures the idea well when it says, “...the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.” Those who practice every kind of impurity find that it never truly satisfies.

How do the Gentiles live? They are absolutely self-absorbed. Their entire life is centered on pleasing themselves all the time. It is exactly the opposite of a Christ-centered life, which loves God and neighbor.

20 Ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν,

20 But you did not learn Christ like that,

In this verse Paul contrasted the Gentiles and their immoral living with his readers who had learned Christ.¹⁴⁷ This word for learning (ἐμάθετε) implies teaching; it means, “to acquire information as the result of instruction, whether in an informal or formal context.”¹⁴⁸ In the New Testament, people learned lessons (Mt 24:32) and songs (Rv 14:3); they learned from the Father (Jn 6:45) and the apostles (1 Co 4:6). This is the only place this verb is used where the direct object is a person. The apostles had preached and proclaimed Jesus (1 Co 1:23, 2 Co 4:5, Php 1:15), and the Ephesians had come to know him in a personal way. “Learning Christ means welcoming him as a living person and being shaped by his teaching. This involves submitting to his rule of righteousness and responding to his summons to standards and values completely different from what they have known.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Arndt, 824.

¹⁴⁵ Hoehner, 592.

¹⁴⁶ Zodhiates, G4124.

¹⁴⁷ The “you” is plural.

¹⁴⁸ Louw, 1:326.

¹⁴⁹ O’Brien, 324.

Pauls said they had not learned Christ like that, which is a reference to how the Gentiles lived in the previous verses. They had not come to know Christ by refusing God's revelation and indulging in self-pleasure. They had been taught something very different.

21 εἶ γε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε, καθὼς ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ,

21 seeing that you heard about him and were taught in him, just as truth is in Jesus,

Paul knew that the Ephesians been taught something very different. The opening words of the clause (εἶ γε) have the sense of something that is taken for granted.¹⁵⁰ Though some translate the words as "if indeed," the combined force of these words do not indicate any doubt in Paul's mind. To capture the sense of these words, I translated them as "seeing that," even though there is no Greek word that literally means to see; other possibilities would be "in view of the fact" or "since." These same two words are used elsewhere by Paul in Ep 3:2 ("Surely you have heard" JPG) and 2 Cor 5:3 ("Since...we will not be found naked" HCSB).

Paul's readers heard about (ἠκούσατε) Christ through the teaching of Paul and others. After they believed they were taught in him (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε); they received additional instruction on how to live as a follower of Christ.¹⁵¹

The Ephesians had been taught in Christ just as truth is in Jesus.¹⁵² "Just as" (καθὼς) is an adverb of comparison; they were taught in a manner that was similar to or in accordance with the fact that truth is found in Jesus. Truth (ἀλήθεια) can be used in a general fashion to mean corresponding with reality or the absence of falsehood, or it can be used to refer to a specific truth, such as the truth of the gospel. Paul used this word in the latter sense in 1:13, where he said the Ephesians had heard the word of truth, which is the message of salvation. But in the current verse truth has the former idea; the more general truth of who God is and what he has revealed to mankind is found in Jesus. In 1 Cor 11:10 Paul wrote that the truth of Christ was in him; in 1 Jo 5:20 John wrote that we can know Him who is true, Jesus.

Why does Paul switch from Christ to Jesus? It almost sounds like he is setting up a dichotomy: The Ephesians learned Christ, but truth is found in Jesus. Paul's intention was just the opposite; he was connecting them. The promised salvation-bringing Christ

¹⁵⁰ Ardent, 190.

¹⁵¹ The alternate translation "by him" (HCSB, LEB, ISV) is unlikely, as they were never taught personally by Jesus.

¹⁵² They had been taught in Christ in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

(i.e., Messiah) is the historical Jesus; God's truth was revealed most clearly in the God-man, Jesus. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hb 1:1-2, ESV).

22 ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς κατὰ τὴν προτέραν ἀναστροφὴν τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν φθειρόμενον κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ἀπάτης,

22 to take off, with regard to *your* former way of life, your old self, who is being corrupted in accordance with *its* deceptive desires;

Paul's readers were taught three things regarding how to live when learning Christ. The first thing they were taught was to take off their old self. "To take off" (ἀποθέσθαι) was literally used of clothes but has here a figurative meaning of getting rid of or renouncing something.¹⁵³ "To take off" is in the aorist tense (as is "to put on" in 4:24), indicating that this is a completed action. The word picture supports this idea; either one has their old clothes on, or one does not. The parallel passage in Co 3:9 gives the same idea when it says, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices." Paul's readers had been taught to take off the old self, and they had done so. If taking off the old self is a completed action, why does Paul bring it up here? All three infinitives have an "implied imperatival force," meaning the Ephesians were to "live out the implications of their mighty break with the past."¹⁵⁴

Their taking off was with regard to their former way of life; in other words, they were to change something with respect to their pre-Christ conduct and behavior, the way they used to live. The verb form of this word, lived, was used in 2:3, which says, "We all also lived in the lusts of our flesh."

They were taught to take off their old self. The word self (ἄνθρωπον) can be translated as person or man, but in this sense it refers to inner being of a person, the human nature. Paul reminded his readers that a change in behavior must begin with a change of nature.

Taking off and putting on (verse 24) are word pictures that Paul used to describe regeneration, something that happens at the time of salvation. When the Ephesian readers had repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus, they had taken off their old self and put on their new self. Paul used other word pictures to describe this

¹⁵³ Ardnt, 123-124.

¹⁵⁴ O'Brien, 327.

reality. In Ro 6:6 he wrote, “We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us” (NET), and in Ro 13:14, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” 2 Co 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (LEB). In Ga 3:27 Paul said, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (LEB).

This old self, the pre-Christ nature, is being corrupted (τὸν φθειρόμενον), which means to be depraved, perverted, and ruined.¹⁵⁵ Being corrupted is in the present tense, which means the old self is actively, continually being corrupted; human nature is bad and getting worse. It’s also in the passive voice, which means something is corrupting it; this text doesn’t specify what is doing the corrupting, but it does give a standard to measure how this corruption is taking place: In accordance with deceptive desires. Desires (ἐπιθυμίας) are longings, cravings, and lusts, deep desires to have or do something.¹⁵⁶ These desires were deceptive (ἀπάτης); they “cause someone to have misleading or erroneous views concerning the truth.”¹⁵⁷ The desires of the old self promise happiness and fulfillment, yet they deliver only depravity and perversion.

23 ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν

[23 to be continually renewed in the way your mind thinks;](#)

The second thing they were taught was to be made new. To be made new (ἀνανεοῦσθαι) to is to be made different or superior and could be translated as “to be renewed.”¹⁵⁸ The infinitive is passive, meaning that someone external is doing the renewing, a reference to the Holy Spirit. It is also in the present tense, thus there is an on-going sense to this action, which is why I added the modifier “continually.”

The Ephesians had been taught to be made new in the way their mind thinks. “Way of thinking” (πνεύματι) is a word that has multiple meanings, two of which might be in view here. One has the idea of the inner being or human personality; the other has the idea of a state of mind or a way of thinking. Both of these need to be made new, but in the context, the latter seems to be the stronger choice. First, Paul had already used “old self” to refer to the inner man in verse 22, and he used “new self” in verse 22. Second, spirit is modified by “of your mind,” which refers to thinking. Third, the idea of this verse is very similar to Ro 12:2, where Paul said, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (NET).

¹⁵⁵ Louw, 1:769.

¹⁵⁶ Louw, 1:289.

¹⁵⁷ Louw, 1:366.

¹⁵⁸ Louw, 1:593.

The word for mind (νοῦς) can refer to thinking, what a mind does; Paul used the word this way in 4:17 when he said, “You are no longer to live as the Gentiles live with their worthless thinking” (JPG). But this word can also refer to the mind itself, the thing that does the thinking. Most likely the latter is in view, because Paul used “way of thinking” to refer to how their state of mind or the way they think. To paraphrase: “allow your mind to begin thinking in a new way.”

Change in behavior begins by taking off the old self, but it continues as the Holy Spiritually changes the mind by revealing truth, convicting sin, and exalting Jesus.

24 καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὀσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας.

24 and to put on the new self, who was created in conformity to God in true righteousness and piety.

The third thing they were taught was to put on the new self. “To put on” (ἐνδύσασθαι) is the opposite of “to take off” in verse 22. It was used literally of putting on or wearing clothes, but in this verse it has a figurative meaning of assuming the characteristics of something. Just like the infinitive in 22, this one is in the aorist tense, also indicating that this is a completed action. When the Ephesians took off their old self, they also put on their new self. Self (ἄνθρωπον) is the same word used in verse 22 and has the idea the inner being of a person, human nature. Co 3:9-10, a parallel passage, says, “Do not lie to one another, because you have taken off the old man together with his deeds, and have put on the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him” (LEB). In 2 Co 5:17 Paul wrote, “So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come!” (NET). In Ga 2:20 he said, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (HCSB).¹⁵⁹

Paul described the new self as someone who was created. To create (κτισθέντα) is to make something that has not existed before,¹⁶⁰ and Paul used it here in a spiritual, not physical, sense. In 2:10 Paul used this same word when he said that believers are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Here created is in the aorist tense, which gives the idea of a completed action; thus, the new man already exists for those who learned Christ, but he had to be appropriated (i.e., put on). Created is also in the passive voice, meaning God created this new self, and the Ephesians were the recipients.

¹⁵⁹ A rabbit trail to pursue: Since a Christian has a new nature, why does he still sin? Paul answered that question in Ro 7:13-25.

¹⁶⁰ Louw, 1:513.

Paul gave two details about the creating of this new self. The first detail about the new self is that it was created in conformity to God (τὸν κατὰ θεὸν). The preposition κατὰ has the sense of corresponding or relating to something, having similarity or homogeneity.¹⁶¹ Additionally, the parallel text in Co 3:10 says, “and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator.” So the new self has a relation or similarity to God. Hoehner says, “What Adam lost in the fall, has been regained by Christ, a new creation in the likeness of God’s image.”¹⁶² For these reasons most English translations add a word such as likeness or image to help clarify the text; for example, the ISV says the new self was “created according to the likeness of God.” MacArthur calls this a staggering statement, noting that “those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord are made like God!”¹⁶³ Peter wrote, “He has given us his precious and wonderful promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, seeing that you have escaped the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pt 1:4, ISV).

The second detail about the new self is that it was created in true righteousness and piety. These words have overlapping meaning. In this context, righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) refers to character and conduct, living as one should.¹⁶⁴ Piety (ἀληθείας) is having a proper attitude toward God that is exhibited in one’s actions;¹⁶⁵ it is “holiness manifesting itself in the discharge of pious duties in religious and social life.”¹⁶⁶ This phrase gives the sense that the new self is characterized by living a God-pleasing life.

Righteousness and piety are modified by the word “true.” Paul used this word in 4:21 to refer to a specific truth, namely the truth of the gospel, but in this verse it has the more general idea of corresponding with reality or the absence of falsehood. Note the contrast from 4:22: The old self was corrupted by desires that are deceptive, but the new self was created righteousness and piety that is true.

Why does Paul exhort his readers to live differently than the Gentiles live? They have been transformed by the truth of the gospel that was taught to them. They have lost an old nature and gained a new, and their mind is being renewed by the Holy Spirit as they study his word and obey.

¹⁶¹ Ardnt, 512.

¹⁶² Hoehner, 611.

¹⁶³ MacArthur, 178.

¹⁶⁴ Zodhiates, G1343.

¹⁶⁵ Ardnt, 728.

¹⁶⁶ Zodhiates, G3742.

Internal—Paul contrasted the way the Gentiles live with the way believers live. The former have a mind that ignores God’s revelation and thus practices immorality and impurity; the later have a new self with a renewed mind that heeds God’s revelation.

Textual Outline

1. Paul commanded the Ephesians to not live as the Gentiles live (17-19).
 - a. They have futile thinking (17).
 - b. They have a darkened understanding (18).
 - c. They do not have God’s life (18).
 - d. They participate in extreme immorality (19).
2. Paul commanded the Ephesians to live as they learned Christ (20-24).
 - a. They took off their old self (22).
 - b. They were being renewed in their minds (23).
 - c. They put on the new self (24).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 4:17-24 to explain to believers in Ephesus why they could live as they learned Christ.

Teaching Outline

God’s people can live as they learned Christ, so today I want you to understand why you can live like you learned Christ. From our text in Ephesians 4, we are going to see 7 reasons why we can live as we learned Christ:

1. Know that since we learned Christ, we can know God’s purpose (17).
2. Know that since we learned Christ, we can understand God’s thinking (18).
3. Know that since we learned Christ, we can live God’s life (18).
4. Know that since we learned Christ, we practice God’s morality (19).
5. Know that since we learned Christ, we have taken off our old self (22).
6. Know that since we learned Christ, we can be renewed in our minds (23).
7. Know that since we learned Christ, we have put on the new self (24).

Ephesians 4:25-32

Limits of the Text

Back in verse 17 Paul began the second application section in Ephesians. He contrasted the mind and actions of Gentiles (4:17-19) with those who have learned Christ (4:20-24). Starting in verse 25 he gave specific examples of what it looks like to live within a Christian community in the reality of having learned Christ.

Translation

25 Therefore, having removed falsehood, “each of you speak truth with his neighbor,” because we are members of one another. 26 “Be angered yet do not sin;” do not let the sun set on your festering anger 27 nor give an opportunity to the Slanderer. 28 Do not let the thief steal any longer, but let him work hard, doing what is good with his own hands, so that he might have *something* to share with the one in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome words go out of your mouths **but** whatever *words are* good for the purpose of edifying someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear, 30 and do not grieve God’s Holy Spirit by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let every kind of bitter resentment, rage, anger, quarreling, and malicious talk together with every kind of hateful feeling be removed from you. 32 Instead be kind *and* compassionate to one another *and* forgive each other, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Interpretation

This section is a series of short sentences, commands that epitomize how those who learn Christ are to live together in the church.¹⁶⁷

25 Διὸ ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν ἕκαστος μετὰ τοῦ πλησίον αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσμὲν ἀλλήλων μέλη.

25 Therefore, having removed falsehood, “each of you speak truth with his neighbor,” because we are members of one another.

Paul began this section with a “therefore” (Διὸ), a self-evident inference. Since his readers had learned Christ—they were taught to take off their old self, be renewed in the way their mind thinks, and to put on the new self—obviously they should live

¹⁶⁷ A similar list appears in Co 3:8-14.

different from the way the Gentiles live. What does it look like to live differently? In this section Paul gave eleven commands describing how they should live, commands that are generally grouped together and follow a pattern: a negative command (an action to avoid), a positive command (an action to embrace), and a reason for the positive command.¹⁶⁸ There are five groups of commands in this section.

The first group of commands is about honesty, speaking truth instead of lies. The negative in this group is not a command, but a statement of reality. Those who learned Christ and took off the old self have already removed falsehood. Falsehood (ψεῦδος) refers to a lie or deception, and Paul asserted that when believers took off the old self, they removed¹⁶⁹ their old lifestyle of lies and deception. MacArthur gives examples of falsehood: cheating in school, lying on income tax returns, betraying a confidence, flattery, and embellishing a testimony.¹⁷⁰

The positive command is to speak truth. Paul has already used the word truth (ἀλήθειαν) twice in his letter. In 1:13, it had the idea of a specific truth (his readers had the word of truth, the gospel of salvation), but in 4:21, it had the idea of general truth, the opposite of falsehood (truth is found in Jesus). In this verse, like 4:21, Paul was referring to truth in general. Those who learn Christ have removed falsehood and embraced truth, so they develop the habit of always speaking the truth to each other. The quote is from Zec 8:16, where God was reminding his people to do what he loved (speak the truth and practice justice in the courts) and avoid what he hated (plotting evil against people and loving perjury). Religious rituals alone were insufficient; they must love each other. This was true of God's people in Zechariah's time, and it was still true in Paul's time.

Paul commanded each of his readers to speak truth with his neighbor, and while there is a sense in which everyone they came into contact with was their neighbor—as Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10:29-37—his focus in this text was speaking truth to others in the community of believers.

The reason for speaking truth is that they were members of one another. Members (μέλη) has the idea of parts of the whole, like ears and arms and toes are part of the human body. Each person in the church is a part of the church. In other words, they were a community living in unity (4:3), and the members of a community should not lie and deceive each other. Hoehner explains this rationale well when he writes, “Deception by one member not only harms that member but the whole body suffers as

¹⁶⁸ Hoehner, 614.

¹⁶⁹ This is the same word translated as “take off” in 4:22.

¹⁷⁰ MacArthur, 183.

well...If the eye sees a serpent does it lie to the foot? Or if the nose smells a deadly drug will it lie to the mouth? Or if the tongue tastes something bitter will it lie to the stomach?"¹⁷¹

26 ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε· ὁ ἥλιος μὴ ἐπιδυέτω ἐπὶ [τῶ] παροργισμῶ ὑμῶν, 27 μηδὲ δίδοτε τόπον τῶ διαβόλῳ.

26 "Be angered yet do not sin;" do not let the sun set on your festering anger 27 nor give an opportunity to the Slanderer.

The second group of commands is about anger, getting angry at sin without sinning. Breaking the pattern, Paul gave a positive command first: Be angered. "Be angered" (ὀργίζεσθε) is a verb in the passive voice, thus it has the idea of something external provoking a person to be enraged or furious. In the New Testament, being angry is often a sin. Jesus said anyone who is angry with a brother would be judged (Mt 5:22). In 4:31 Paul commanded the Ephesians to let anger be removed from the church along with bitter resentment, anger, quarreling, and malicious talk. Yet in this verse Paul made it clear that not all anger is sinful; in fact, he's commanding his readers allow themselves to get angry.

The first part of the verse is a quote from Ps 4:4. Some men in an exalted position had unjustly accused David of a crime or a sin, and thus they had turned David's honor into shame and had loved what was worthless and deceptive. David had cried out to God and was expecting God to respond and vindicate him, and then he commanded the men to respond correctly. Though they were angry at him, they should have controlled their anger and not sinned. They should have meditated on the matter, repented of their sin, offered sacrifices, and trusted God. Hoehner suggests that this may have become a proverbial statement with the sense of "control your anger and don't sin."

So what should provoke a believer to get angry? God is our example. He hates pride, an evil lifestyle, and perverse word (Pr 8:13). He gets angry with ungodliness and unrighteousness (Ro 1:18). His anger against sin will lead to a day of judgment (5:6; Mt 3:7; Ro 5:9). When Jesus found that the temple, a place of worship, had been converted into a marketplace, he made a whip and drove them out and overturned the tables (Jn 2:14). So sin, especially sin within the community of believers, should provoke a believer to anger. The NET Bible refers to this as righteous indignation.

¹⁷¹ Hoehner, 618.

The negative command is do not sin. Although Paul wanted his readers to be provoked to anger, he did not want them to sin in response. As the old adage goes, two wrongs don't make a right. Anger should be controlled, and a response to it should be measured. The sight of sinning believers moves God's people to loving confrontation and correction (Ga 6:1-5) and if necessary to discipline (Mt 18:15-17), but it does not justify more sin.

The next command, do not let the sun set on your festering anger, provides a sense of urgency to the situation. When sin continues in the community, it tends to become a source of irritation or exasperation; the anger festers (παροργισμῶ) and could lead to sinful responses, thus the sin should be dealt with swiftly. O'Brien notes that this phrase was proverbial and employed by non-biblical writers as well.¹⁷²

Verse 26 is an imperative, but it gives the reason why the Ephesians should not let the sun set on their anger: Sin that is not dealt with gives an opportunity to the Slanderer. The word for opportunity (τόπον) could refer literally to a room or a place, but here it figuratively refers to a "favorable circumstance for doing something."¹⁷³ When there is sin in the community and God's people do not respond and confront and correct quickly, then Satan is given a chance to work in their midst.¹⁷⁴ Satan is known here as the Slanderer (διαβόλω), the one who twists and distorts the truth;¹⁷⁵ his native language is lying (Jn 8:44), and he deceives the entire world (Rv 12:9). If he gets an opportunity, he will lie and deceive God's people, which will create even more anger and a desire for revenge until the situation has escalated out of control; this is one of his schemes (6:11). Paul told the Romans "Do not avenge yourselves, dear friends, but give place to God's wrath" (Ro 12:19; NET); "place" is the same word as "opportunity" in 4:26. Instead of getting back, give God the chance to respond.

28 ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω, μᾶλλον δὲ κοπιάτω ἐργαζόμενος ταῖς [ιδίαις] χερσὶν τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρείαν ἔχοντι.

28 Do not let the thief steal any longer, but let him work hard, doing what is good with his own hands, so that he might have *something* to share with the one in need.

The third group of commands is about stealing, working hard instead of taking things. The negative command is do not let thieves steal any longer. This might be a reference to professional thieves, and if so they would require a change in profession. But more

¹⁷² O'Brien, 340.

¹⁷³ Ardnt, 1012.

¹⁷⁴ BDAG paraphrases this clause as "do not give the devil a chance to exert his influence" (Ardnt, 1012).

¹⁷⁵ Hoehner, 623.

likely this referred to people in more ordinary professions whose life was characterized by finding ways to take what didn't belong to them; shopkeepers could cheat customers, day laborers could take tools from the job site, etc.¹⁷⁶ The positive command is to work hard. Working hard (κοπιάτω) refers to exerting oneself physically;¹⁷⁷ fishing (Lk 5:5) and farming (2 Ti 2:6) were occupations described as hard work. Whereas stealing requires little work, working hard has the sense being tired or weary from hard or difficult endeavors.¹⁷⁸

Working hard is further described as doing what is good with one's own hands. The Greek verb for doing (ἐργαζόμενος) can be synonymous with working hard and is defined as "to engage in an activity involving considerable expenditure of effort,"¹⁷⁹ and thus translated as working or labor. But since the direct object, "what is good" (τὸ ἀγαθόν), is generic, I chose a more generic verb, one which has the idea accomplishing something or carrying out a responsibility. The point is to be doing something good, something beneficial, as opposed to not working hard and harming people by stealing.

The conjunction "so that" (ἵνα) gives the reason for working hard. When considered in the context of the Christian community working is not a means to acquire more comforts and conveniences; it's a means to share with those who have a need. Sure, believers provide first for their own families (1 Ti 5:8), but they also provide some for others as well. Paul said, "By all these things, I have shown you that by working in this way we must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Ac 20:35). This was the pattern of the early church (Ac 2:45, Ro 15:25-28). "A Christian's desire to earn more should be for the purpose of being able to give more and help more."¹⁸⁰ The budget of each believer should have a benevolence category.

29 πᾶς λόγος σαπρὸς ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν μὴ ἐκπορευέσθω, ἀλλὰ εἴ τις ἀγαθὸς πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας, ἵνα δῶ χάριν τοῖς ἀκούουσιν. 30 καὶ μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἐσφραγίσθητε εἰς ἡμέραν ἀπολυτρώσεως.

29 Do not let any unwholesome words go out of your mouths **but** whatever *words are* good for the purpose of edifying someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear, 30 and do not grieve God's Holy Spirit by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

¹⁷⁶ Hoehner, 624.

¹⁷⁷ Ardent, 558.

¹⁷⁸ Louw, 1:259.

¹⁷⁹ Louw, 1:514.

¹⁸⁰ MacArthur, 186.

The fourth group of commands is about speech, edifying instead of harming. The negative command is do not let any unwholesome words go out of your mouths. Unwholesome (σαπρὸς) can have the literal meaning of rotten or decayed, so what rotten is to fruit (literally), unwholesome is to words (figuratively). It has the idea of being harmful or corrupting. Some translate this as evil talk, foul words, or bad language, but these attempts miss the communal aspect of the command. Paul's not telling his readers to stop swearing and cussing, he's telling them to stop speaking in a manner that hurts and damages others in the church.

Unwholesome words are strongly contrasted with whatever words¹⁸¹ are good, thus the positive command is to speak words that are good for the hearer. The reason¹⁸² for speaking such is to edify someone in need. Edifying (οικοδομῆν) can have the literal sense of building up a house, but here it has the figurative sense of spiritually strengthening someone.¹⁸³ Paul wanted the Ephesians to help and encourage and even reprove (Pr 25:12) each other, especially those who were in need. Someone in need (τις χρείας) is anyone who has something lacking and thus needs someone to strengthen him. "The purpose of our speech is to supply that which is lacking in other believers' lives by the utterance of beneficial words, thus contributing to the spiritual growth of the body."¹⁸⁴ To do this implies that believers know each other well enough to perceive and understand spiritual needs; this means something more than casual, superficial relationships within the church.

Paul gave a second reason for edifying: It gives grace to those who hear. Paul has already used the word grace (χάρις) ten times in this letter, and every time it has had the sense of the "absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver."¹⁸⁵ God has abundant grace (1:7), God saved us by grace (2:8), and God gives grace in the form of spiritual gifts to each believer (4:7). But in this verse, it is one believer who is giving grace to another, and thus is the "practical application of goodwill,"¹⁸⁶ a kindness or favor. As God graces his children, so they in turn grace each other through edification.

¹⁸¹ When the conjunction εἴ is used with the indefinite pronoun τις it has the sense of whoever or whatever, everyone who or everything that (Arndt 279). "Words" is inferred from the previous clause.

¹⁸² The preposition πρὸς is accusative of purpose.

¹⁸³ Arndt, 696.

¹⁸⁴ Hoehner, 630.

¹⁸⁵ Zodhiates, G5484

¹⁸⁶ Arndt, 1079.

The command in verse 30, do not grieve the Holy Spirit, is connected to the previous verse with a coordinating conjunction (καί); in essence it reads, “Do not let any unwholesome words go out of your mouths...and do not grieve God’s Holy Spirit.” Although the grammar is the language of command, the effect is one of reason. Paul didn’t want the Ephesians to speak unwholesome words, because this would grieve the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁷ To grieve (λυπεῖτε) is to “cause someone to be sad, sorrowful, or distressed;”¹⁸⁸ it could also be translated as vex, irritate, offend, or insult.¹⁸⁹ This is a very personal, emotional word, and it emphasizes the personality of the third person of the Trinity.

What grieves the Holy Spirit? Speaking unwholesome words to others in the church grieves him; to generalize, any sin that one believer commits against another. As the Holy Spirit is the agent of unity in the church (4:3), it is no wonder that he is grieved when God’s people act in a manner that divides the church. In the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah recounted how God saved and redeemed the children of Israel, “but they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them” (Is 63:10, ESV). Grieving is seen as an emotional response to sin in the lives of God’s people.

Paul further identified the Spirit as the one with whom the Ephesians had been sealed. To seal (ἐσφραγίσθητε) is to place a mark of identification on someone, and the Holy Spirit is the identifying mark. Those who hear and believe the gospel are sealed with the Spirit (1:13). God is the one who does the sealing and the giving of the Spirit (2 Co 1:21-22). It is inconsistent for those who have been sealed with the Spirit to act in a manner that would cause him grief.

The Spirit sealed them for the day of redemption. Redemption (ἀπολυτρώσεως) means to be delivered or released from something. The Ephesians had already been redeemed from the power of sin (1:7), but they were yet to be redeemed from the presence of sin (1:14). Being sealed with the Spirit marks those who have been and will be redeemed, and “this reminder that the Holy Spirit is God’s own seal should be an incentive to holy living and speaking.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Paul used this same structure in verse 26, where the command “nor give an opportunity to the Slanderer” functioned as reason for not letting the sun set on your anger.

¹⁸⁸ Louw, 1:317.

¹⁸⁹ Arndt, 604.

¹⁹⁰ O’Brien, 349.

31 πᾶσα πικρία καὶ θυμὸς καὶ ὀργὴ καὶ κραυγὴ καὶ βλασφημία ἀρθήτω ἀφ' ὑμῶν σὺν πάσῃ κακίᾳ. 32 γίνεσθε [δὲ] εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί, εὐσπλαγχοὶ, χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς, καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν Χριστῷ ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῖν.

31 Let every kind of bitter resentment, rage, anger, quarreling, and malicious talk together with every kind of hateful feeling be removed from you. 32 Instead be kind and compassionate to one another and forgive each other, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

The fifth group of commands is about interpersonal relationships, being kind instead of being hateful. The negative command is to let bitter resentment, rage, anger, quarreling, malicious talk, and hurtful feelings be removed. Bitter resentment (πικρία) can literally refer to a bitter taste in the mouth, but Paul used it here figuratively to refer to being angry or rancorous at someone due to an insult or wrongdoing. Rage (θυμὸς) is “a state of intense anger, with the implication of passionate outbursts;”¹⁹¹ this word has a sense of impetuosity. Anger (ὀργή) is “a state of relatively strong displeasure, with focus on the emotional aspect.”¹⁹² While they might be slightly nuanced, in practice these two words are pretty much synonymous. Quarreling doesn't quite do justice the next Greek word (κραυγὴ); the root idea is shouting, so the sense here is to argue or fight while yelling back and forth. Swanson describes it as a verbal brawl.¹⁹³ Malicious talk (βλασφημία) is “to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation”¹⁹⁴ and could be translated as disrespect, slander, defamation, or verbal abuse. Hateful feelings (κακία) refer to having “a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition,”¹⁹⁵ “a feeling of hostility and strong dislike, with a possible implication of desiring to do harm.”¹⁹⁶ This phrase functions as a catch-all, gathering together all bad emotions and desires that lead to wrong actions against other believers. All of these words have a relationship aspect; that is, these are sins that one person perpetuates against another. A similar list appears in Co 3:8.

Paul commanded his readers to let these sins be removed (ἀρθήτω). The basic idea of this verb is to lift something up, but Louw notes that when this verb (αἴρω) is used with the preposition ἀπό (from), it is an idiomatic expression meaning to take away from or remove from.¹⁹⁷ Jesus used this same expression, when he said, “I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you” (Mt 21:43, NET). So these sins, which existed

¹⁹¹ Louw 1:761.

¹⁹² Arndt, 720.

¹⁹³ Swanson, DBLG 3199.

¹⁹⁴ Louw, 1:433.

¹⁹⁵ Arndt, 500.

¹⁹⁶ Louw, 1:763.

¹⁹⁷ Louw, 1:809.

among the Ephesians, could be removed and taken from them; the verb is in the passive voice, meaning that someone else, the Holy Spirit who sealed them, would be the agent of change in their lives. God was working to change them, but they had to choose to cooperate.

The positive command is to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. Kindness (*χρηστοί*) is an attitude that brings results in benevolent actions toward another person. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Ga 5:22). Compassionate (*εὐσπλαγχνοί*) is a feelings-oriented word; the root part of the word referred to the inward parts of a person, a reference to the seat of emotions. It means to have a tender heart towards another person, “sympathetic to the needs of...brothers and sisters in Christ.”¹⁹⁸ John used this word when he wrote, “But whoever has the world’s possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person?” (1 Jn 3:17, NET). To forgive (*χαριζόμενοι*)¹⁹⁹ is to cancel a debt, “to release a person from the obligation of repaying what is owed.”²⁰⁰ When someone sins against another person, a penalty must be paid, but forgiveness eliminates the penalty. The Ephesians’ motivation for forgiving each other was the reminder that God forgave them. The parable of two debtors in Lk 7:42 is a graphic reminder of the crushing debt from which God forgave us, and how we should in turn forgive others.

In summary, Paul has shown clearly that there’s a sharp contrast between the lifestyle of the Gentiles and those who have learned Christ. Falsehood is replaced by truth. Sinful anger is replaced by righteous anger. Stealing is replaced by giving. Unwholesome words are replaced by edification. And resentment and quarreling are replaced by kindness and compassion.

¹⁹⁸ O’Brien, 351.

¹⁹⁹ Hoehner argues that this word should be translated in its fullest sense, to be gracious, which would include the idea of forgiveness (639-640).

²⁰⁰ Louw, 1:583.

Abridged Structural Diagram

(you learned Christ 4:20)
|
Therefore
| having removed falsehood
| |
each of you speak truth with his neighbor
 because
 we are members of one another.

Be angered
yet
do not sin;
do not let the sun set on your festering anger
nor
give an opportunity to the Slanderer.

Do not let the thief steal any longer
but
let him work hard
 doing what is good with his own hands
 so that
 he might have something to share with the one in need.

Do not let any unwholesome words go out of your mouths
| but
| whatever words are good
| for the purpose of edifying someone in need
so that
it gives grace to those who hear
and
do not grieve God's Holy Spirit
 by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let every kind of bitter resentment be removed from you.
 rage
 anger
 quarreling
 and malicious talk
 together with every kind of hateful feeling

Instead
be kind and compassionate to one another
and
forgive each other
 just as
 God in Christ also forgave you.

Tracing the Argument

External—In 4:1 Paul wrote that they were to live in a manner worthy of their calling. In 4:17 he began to detail what living like this looks like by describing believers as those

who have learned Christ. In this section he gave various examples of how believers live and relate to each in light of having learned Christ.

Internal—There are five sections in the text, each centered on an attitude or action. Most sections give a negative command, a positive command, and a reason for the positive command.

Textual Outline

1. Paul commanded the Ephesians to be truthful instead of lying (25).
2. Paul commanded the Ephesians to be righteously angry instead of sinfully angry (26-27).
3. Paul commanded the Ephesians to work hard instead of stealing (28).
4. Paul commanded the Ephesians to edify instead of speaking unwholesome words (29-30).
5. Paul commanded the Ephesians to be kind and compassionate instead of having resentment and quarreling (31-32).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 4:25-32 to show believers in Ephesus how to live as they learned Christ.

Teaching Outline

God's people live in accordance with how they learned Christ, so today I want you to live just like you learned Christ. From our text in Ephesians 4, we are going to see 5 ways in accordance with how we learned Christ:

1. We learned Christ, so live by speaking truth (25).
2. We learned Christ, so live by being angered (26-27).
3. We learned Christ, so live by working hard (28).
4. We learned Christ, so live by edifying others (29-30).
5. We learned Christ, so live being kind and compassionate (31-32).

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