# Ephesians

Ephesians 4: 1-13

## Introduction

Paul’s epistles tend to fall into two parts. Ephesians is no exception. The first part usually contains his theological argument to counter some issue going on in the target church. The second part is usually the practical outworking of everything he has been saying in the first half of the letter.

In the case of Ephesians, the letter falls neatly into two halves of three chapters. Thus, as we begin chapter 4, we are commencing our journey into the application of everything he has said in the first half of the letter. So let us just remind ourselves what has been said so far.

In chapter 1, he began by reminding us how blessed we are, but that we are blessed as part of God’s great plan to bring all things under the authority of Jesus the Messiah. Then we were told that Jesus has been exalted to heaven to sit at God’s right hand for the sake of the church. In other words, he is there, so that God can work out his purposes through the church to bring all things under his authority.

In chapter 2, Paul reminded us first that we are saved by grace and not by works, but that we are saved for works that God has already prepared for us to do. Then he reminded us that God has created one new people for himself from Jews and Gentiles whom he is building together to be ‘the dwelling place of God by His Spirit’. Thus, our unity together is important for this to happen.

In chapter 3 he told us that this joining of Jew and Gentile together in the church is God’s ancient mystery which has now been revealed, and that his purpose in doing it was to make known his many splendored wisdom to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. We are where his amazing wisdom is displayed. Then he finished chapter 3 with a prayer in which he prays for us that grasp ‘how wide and long and high deep is the love of Christ’, and that we might understand that he is able to do super-abundantly more than we might ask or think.

All of this builds a platform for the next three chapters in which he will apply some of these themes to how we do church.

## Live worthy of your calling

He begins in v.1 of chapter 4 by instructing us to ‘live a life worthy of the calling you have received’. What does that mean? The word translated ‘live’ in the NIV there means ‘walk around’ and the word ‘called’ here means invitation. In other words, in our journeying through life, what we do and where we go needs to reflect the grace that has been poured out on us through Jesus which has invited us into the family of God. We need to live appropriately as members of the family who are recipients of God’s grace. In other words, in the light of all that he has been saying in the first three chapters, our response should be to live appropriately as people who are saved by grace and part of God’s plan for the renewal of the cosmos. This requires action on our part. It is a call to positive action. It is an exhortation against passivity.

When a child comes into a family, there are norms and behaviours that are appropriate to being part of that family. As the child grows they are expected to conform to those norms and behaviours. They might include such things as table manners, bed times, or the way they speak to siblings or parents. Each family will set for itself appropriate ways of behaving. In the same way, in the household of God there are ways of behaving that are appropriate and there are ways that are inappropriate. Our behaviour should reflect the grace of God that has been given to us as a result of his love for us. Such behaviours should work their way out in the way we are with each other – not bearing grudges, forgiving each other, being kind to each other. They will also be demonstrated in the world outside of here as we reflect the love of God for his world.

Paul goes on to tell us how this will be reflected and in v.2-3 he gives us a list:

* Humility – not being proud or conceited but putting others before ourselves. True humility comes from self-knowledge. It comes from being honest with ourselves and acknowledging that we are not perfect, but are a work in progress just like everybody else.
* Gentleness – are we gentle in the way we speak and respond to one another? This word means to be in a place of self-control where we do not let our anger boil over.
* Patient – the KJV says ‘longsuffering’. The Greek suggests someone who has the power to take revenge on another yet refrains from doing so. It is the person who bears insult and injury without bitterness or complaining.
* Bearing with one another – similarly, this word means holding back for the sake of the body.
* Love – love is the reason for this and is the glue that holds it all together. The word used, of course, is ‘Agape’ which is a love that loves expecting nothing back.

Then he says, ‘make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’. In other words, do everything in your power to stay in unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Why? Because we all are recipients of God’s grace; we all have the Holy Spirit who seeks unity amongst us; and because we are bound together in peace through what Jesus has done for us.

Being out of fellowship with one another when we have the power to do something about it is a luxury we cannot afford in the Body of Christ. This is both at a local and at a global level. It is why I attend Churches Together meetings both locally and nationally. It is why I dialogue with those from other traditions who I might not agree with. Our divisions are a scandal to the body of Christ. We need to strive towards unity in every way possible because this reflects the purpose of God through Jesus who ‘broke down the wall of division’ through his death so that we might be one.

Part of the problem of the Christian church over the centuries is that we have been too quick to separate from one another, whether that has been individually or denominationally. Some of this has been necessary to preserve truth, but a lot has been because we are sinners who do not know how to get along with each other. Separation is not part of God’s ultimate plan. Wuite the opposite – it is to bring all things in unity under Jesus’ control. This is why Paul emphasises our need to be one in this passage.

Paul then goes on to tell us about this unity:

* One body
* One Spirit
* One hope
* One Lord
* One Faith
* One baptism
* One God and Father

Division is a Satanic ploy to undermine the plans and purposes of God. If you are out of fellowship with your brothers and sisters this morning, whether in this church, or in another church, it needs to be dealt with. That does not mean we have to agree with them on everything but it does mean that we should be able to look them in the eye and say, ‘through Jesus Christ, I love you’.

There is no room in the Kingdom for rivalries, grudges, unforgiveness, harbouring hurts, destructive talk or separation. We are one in the Spirit because that is the way God has created us in Christ Jesus.

## The Grace given us

In the second part of this passage, Paul moves from a statement about unity to how God has ordained that it should be achieved. We are one body, therefore each one has...

He begins by telling us that each one of us individually receives grace. That grace may include gifts of various kinds that will help build up the body of Christ, and in a moment he is going to tell us about some of those major giftings. But first, he alludes back to chapter 1 and the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God in order to bring all things under his authority. As a result of that ascension, Jesus has given specific gifts to his church in order to complete his plan.

So Jesus the Messiah himself (the Greek here is very strong here – it means Christ by himself and for himself) gave Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers to the body of Christ. I do not at this stage want to go into a major teaching on all of those ministries. I have plenty of notes on them if you are interested. However, I do want to emphasise their collective purpose.

Firstly, it is the person himself / herself who is the gift of Christ to the church. Within the Body, Jesus has placed people with these ministries, and they are his gift to His church. That is why they should be received, honoured and respected. When we receive a gift, we treat it with respect and give it our attention. In the same way we should respect and give attention to Jesus’ gifts to us.

Secondly, they are given to ‘equip his people for works of service’. They are not here to do all of the work. Their role is an equipping role. In other words (and this is where Paul is getting to), all of us have the grace of God; all of us have ‘works prepared in advance’ to do; all of us have a role to fulfil in the Body of Christ. But the purpose of the ministry gifts is to equip, enable and release the rest of the body to be able to do the work God has given them to do.

An example is the evangelist gift. We think of evangelists as people who hold big meetings and see loads of people put their hands up for salvation at the end of the meeting. That may be part of their role – bringing people to faith, but just as much as that, their role is to equip others in the body to be able to witness and bring other people to faith. The same goes for all the other ministry gifts: an Apostle will build churches so that they can reproduce themselves; a prophet will bring the word of God to the Body but will also raise up other prophets; a pastor will care for the sheep and raise up others to care for the sheep; a teacher will teach but will also train others to teach.

If you do not know what your role is or where you can serve within the body, come and speak to one of us – to Sean, Nat, Carolyn or myself. We will happily talk it through with you and help you to function. As I teach on a Sunday morning, or as we invite outside ministries amongst us, that is all part of the equipping of the body for service. It is not the sum total of our service as a body of God’s people. It is the preparation time so that we can all do what we are called and equipped to do.

Next Paul gives us the objective of all this equipping and serving:

* So that the body may be built up (edified, strengthened, enlarged)
* To bring us to unity in the faith
* To increase our knowledge (that is our relationship with) Jesus
* To bring us to maturity
* To make us full of Jesus

So all of these ministries gifts are given to the body to make it stronger, larger, united, in deep relationship with Jesus, mature and full of Jesus. That is Paul’s vision for the Body of Christ.

Paul started this passage speaking about our need for unity and he finishes it talking about the means God has given to facilitate that unity – the ministry gifts of the body of Christ. However, none of this can work unless we recognise and embrace those gifts, and unless we receive them as the means by which my individual gifting will be made available to benefit the rest of the body of Christ. As I do this, I will be brought to maturity and will be full of Jesus.

## Application

As we consider this passage, there are many challenges in it. There are challenges regarding our attitudes and behaviours as those who are invited by Jesus into His body. There are challenges regarding our relationships with others in the body of Christ. There are challenges regarding our role and service in the church. There are challenges regarding how we progress towards Paul’s vision of unity and maturity as the people of God.

I pray this morning that we might, individually and collectively, take seriously the challenges that flow out of this passage and take a further step towards being the people who can display the many coloured wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in heavenly places.