# Ephesians

Ephesians 4: 14-32

## Introduction

In the first part of Chapter 4, Paul has laid out for us the importance of unity. He has also informed us that the fivefold ministries – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher – are Christ’s gifts to the church in order that the church may:

* Stay in unity
* Do the works appointed for us to do (individually and collectively
* Become mature (perfect, complete)
* Come to a greater knowledge of Jesus

He then continues in this chapter to outline for us the effect of these ministries functioning amongst us, and what our response should be, This should take us through to the end of the book.

## The effect of the Fivefold Ministries

The first effect of the fivefold ministries is that we grow up. Paul is telling the church to stop acting like babies.

The world around us is full of immaturity. People mature much later than when I was growing up. The expectation on my generation was that we finished school at 16 and got a job, unless we were academically a bit more able, in which case we stayed onto the Sixth Form. Only 10% went to University – the rest of us went to work, got married and settled down usually by our early twenties. These days, there is no expectation on people to settle down until they are in their early thirties and there is a culture of staying young (immature) as long as possible. Growing up is boring. The problem with this is that it makes for a much less stable society.

Paul is saying something similar to us as Christians: if we stay immature we will be unstable. We will be open to deception and manipulation by false teachers and by people with mixed motives. My observation of our Charismatic churches is that there is a tendency to be just as Paul describes. What is the latest new teaching from America? Let’s adopt that. How about this great new book that tells us how to overcome in life, how to see your church double in a year, or how to become prosperous? You only need to look on the book stalls at any Christian celebration to see a deluge of such books. My observation this year at One Event was that I had to search for a long time before I found any books that had any serious exposition of the Word. This is symptomatic of the Christian culture.

But Paul says, if you want to be mature and not ‘blown about by every wind of doctrine’, be open to the fivefold ministries doing their work amongst us. Then we can truly be Christ’s body with each one of us doing our part to build up one another so that together we come to maturity. If we don’t, we will be like a rudderless boat in the middle of a stormy ocean being blown this way and that. We will be open to tricksters out to exploit us or to draw us over to their brand of teaching. The role of the fivefold ministries is to bring us to a level of maturity where we can see through such stuff and live as God intends us to live in the good of all that Jesus has done for us.

## Comparison between our old life and our new life

Next Paul gives a comparison between living as the world lives and living as we should live now that we are born again. He says that people in the world are hard hearted towards God. They are insensitive about knowing what is right and what is wrong. They are not able to comprehend how to live properly due to ignorance of God. As a result, they give themselves over to sensuality, impurity and greed. Is this not a picture of the world around us?

If we translate this into 21st Century language, the world is generally not interested in God or in eternal realities. In order not to have to face the reality of nothingness and futility, the people around us fill their lives with pleasure so that they do not have to think: sex, drugs and rock and roll; T.V., sport, hobbies, foreign holidays – all things that will fill the void. There is nothing wrong with most of these things in the right context, but if they are the only things that give meaning to our lives, then we are pretty empty.

Paul tells us we are no longer to live like that. Instead we are to put off that kind of lifestyle once we are in Christ, like putting off an old set of clothes (v.22). Living for those things is just indulging this body which is dying anyway – it is feeding a corpse. If we are living our life driven by our appetites and the desires of our body, we are building into that which is passing away.

Instead we are to put on our new clothes which is our new life ‘created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’. In other words, what he is saying is that we should spend our time, money and resources in that which is building into our future destiny which is to be like Christ – that which is of eternal value and worth. We are to choose to live today out of our new self that is being transformed into the perfect image of his son. This has to affect everything in our lives.

Let us be clear here: Paul is telling us that good behaviour starts in our mind and in our heart. We have to make a choice as to how we will live, either as the world around us lives, or as members of the kingdom that is coming (and is already here). This is not automatic. It requires our participation and our active engagement in the process. Now we are in Christ, we have the responsibility and the power in the Spirit to do this.

From here, he begins to list some of the behaviours and attitudes that should typify this new way of living.

### Attitudes and behaviours

Firstly, he tells us to get rid of falsehood and speak truthfully to one another. We are to be a people typified by honesty and integrity in our relationships with each other.

Next, if we do get angry with one another (and it does happen from time to time), we must not let it lead us into sin. In other words, we should not gossip about each other or plan evil towards someone, or even just take our bat and ball home because we are upset with someone. Instead, we are to deal with our anger quickly: ‘do not let the sun go down on your wrath’. In other words we are not to stew over it for days but to sort out our issues with one another quickly, even if that is agreeing to disagree. If we do not, we ‘give the devil a foothold’ – that is we give the devil an opportunity to get in amongst us and spoil our unity. This is something we all need to take responsibility for. Holding onto our anger is a luxury we cannot afford.

The next issue Paul addresses is dishonesty: ‘anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer’. Here Paul is asking, not just for honesty with our words, but also honesty in our actions. You say, ‘but I don’t steal’. Paul is reminding us that that has to be more than a commitment not to rob houses. Honesty must pervade our lives in every area from illegal downloads to adding a bit to our insurance claim. Instead, we need to get our income from honest means, that way we will have something to share with others who are in need and we won’t begrudge giving it to them.

Next on the list is ‘unwholesome talk’ (rotten, worthless, bad, corrupt) *logos*. This can be interpreted in different ways. Most translators suggest Paul is referring to bad language here – inappropriate words, dirty jokes, etc. I think that is certainly included in what Paul is warning us against, but I believe there is something else that he is getting at because he contrasts it with ‘building others up according to their needs’. I think the corrupt speech Paul is referring to here is primarily that which will break others down, will undermine them, will show them in a bad light to others. This comes back to what has gone before in terms of being honest with one another, not staying angry and not stealing from one another. In other words, he is addressing those things that need to typify our behaviour in order for us to stay in unity – the theme of the whole chapter / book.

It is incumbent on each one of us to watch what comes out of our mouth – especially when we are talking about a fellow brother or sister. We must not malign another. We must not gossip about them. We must not destroy their reputation in the eyes of another. This is the nub of what Paul is saying here. Instead, we should be looking for opportunities to big one another up. This is not to get us to a place of false pride, but so that we can operate out of a position of confidence in whom we are in Christ, instead of from a negative position.

Paul says that if we do not act like this, we make the Holy Spirit cry. He is preparing us for our coming perfection and wants to see the fruit of that already being exhibited in our lives now. If we act otherwise – if we still behave as the world does with one another, we make the Holy Spirit sad as we are undoing the work that Christ has saved us for.

Instead Paul tells us to ‘get rid’, eliminate, walk away from the old ways of behaving. These include bitterness, rage, anger, fighting, slander and malice. In other words, everything that breaks down our relationships with one another must be dealt with.

Over the centuries, the Church has not heeded these words. We have fallen out (e.g. the Great Schism of 1054). We have fought with one another (e.g. the post-reformation religious wars that raged across Europe for nearly 150 years). We have separated from one another (e.g. the denominations) – even our own church exists as a result of a split from the Minster (I have been blessed over the last two years to be Moderator of CTB and to see the links with the churches reinforced and made strong). And yet all of this is the complete opposite to how Paul tells us to behave in this passage.

There is no room for bad attitudes in the body of Christ. There is no room for unforgivness. There is no room for speaking badly of one another. We need to be building one another up not breaking one another down, and Paul concludes this passage with the kind of behaviour which should typify our relationships:

’be kind and compassionate to one another’. In other words, treat each other like members of the family and act towards each other in a way that will meet each other’s needs.

‘Forgiving each other’ - not holding onto hurts but dealing with them. Why? Because we are recipients of the forgiveness of God through what Jesus has done for us on the cross and we need to extend that same grace to others.

## Application

In all of this, Paul is giving us a choice: we can live as the world lives, or we can live as God intends us to live. This has to extend down to our relationships with one another, and these must be safeguarded. If we allow those relationships to be spoiled or marred, we do the devil’s work for him.

If we are out of fellowship with anyone this morning, deal with it. If you need strength to do so, go and see the prayer team.

Let the Holy Spirit do his work amongst us so that we behave as mature people as God intends.