

EPHESIANS

ENGAGING THE POWER OF GOD'S AMAZING GRACE



ABUNDANTLIFE
FOURSQUARE CHURCH

THE GRACE OF OUR UNITY YET WITH AMAZING DIVERSITY

Week Four

Ephesians 4:1-10

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all. However, He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, "When He ascended to the heights, He led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to His people. Notice that it says He ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same One who descended is the One who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that He might fill the entire universe with Himself. (NLT)

COMMENTS AND THOUGHTS

Here the focus is on the practical. The challenges for churches today parallel the challenges that faced first-century churches like the one in Ephesus. We must remain unified as believers, incorporating our diversity so that we can serve and glorify our Lord.

CALLED: God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, we should live worthy of the calling we have received — the privilege of being selected as Christ's very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. People are watching your life.

Ephesians 4:2 *Be completely humble and gentle (NIV).* This verse lists four characteristics of a person who is "worthy of the calling." Believers make up the church and by the privilege of their responsibility, must be together, serve together, and worship together.

Both the Greek and Roman cultures considered humility and gentleness to be weak character traits showing a lack of self-respect. Jesus exalted humility as a virtue when he said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:13-15 NIV).

Christ expected His followers to be humble not only before God, but toward one another — serving one another and not putting themselves "above" anyone else. Humility is an attitude, and gentleness is the action derived from it. Gentle people are considerate of others. If everyone in churches had the characteristics of humility and gentleness, conflicts would disappear and members would have strength and power in their service.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love (NIV). Patience conveys the quality of being able to handle one another's faults and failures and refusing to avenge wrongs. No one is ever going to be perfect here on earth, so believers must be patient with one another despite their faults. Bearing with one another in love is the action side of patience.

Ephesians 4:3 *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (NKJV).* Love for each other, which the presence of the Spirit causes, makes peace possible. The bond of peace includes the idea of uniting the members into one body. This "bond" holds people together. Peace functions as the "binding" of unity. God gives it to us, producing equality and understanding.

UNITY: There are an infinite number of issues that divide us — doctrinal beliefs, worship style, race, language — and only one force that will keep us together: *"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* Unity can come only through the Spirit; it will remain only if we are diligent to maintain it. Unity is like a fire — it tends to die out if unattended. "We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians," - Francis Schaeffer

Ephesians 4:4 *There is one body and one Spirit (NRSV).* Christians belong to one body, through one Holy Spirit (see 1:13-14; 2:11-22; 3:6). In a pagan culture, people can choose from any number of cults to join and gods to worship. For Christians, however, there is only one body, unified by one Spirit. The unity in the body of believers occurs because one Spirit indwells them. The Holy Spirit lives in all Christians and gives to the church its true oneness (2:18). Without the Spirit, the body could not exist. Christianity is not a club to join, nor is it some mystical, but unreal entity. Instead, true Christianity is a spiritual relationship with Christ as well as with other believers.

Ephesians 4:5 *One Lord, one faith, one baptism (NRSV).* This verse focuses on Christ. "One Lord" refers to Jesus Christ, whose lordship (headship) forms the basis of unity in the body. Christians worship one Lord. Wherever people believe in Jesus Christ alone and trust in His death and resurrection for their salvation, they are joined with all other believers because of this one faith. This faith alone saves; this faith is the one and only "way" (John 14:6).

The act of believing is manifested through the act of baptism, the symbol of being brought into the body. "Baptism" refers here to baptism in water, as opposed to baptism by the Spirit, because of the word's placement in this verse. Christians need only "one baptism" by which they publicly acknowledge their one faith in one Lord.

Ephesians 4:6 *One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (NRSV).* This verse focuses on God the Father. As the only God, He alone deserves our worship and praise. Father of all means that He is the Creator. All people were made in His image. The sovereign God completely controls His creation. Christians understand themselves as God's creation and as God's "called." God is above all — supreme, transcendent, the ruler over all of His creation. God is through all — actively present and pervasive in every part of His creation. God is in all — He himself lives within His people.

DIVERSITY: Ephesians 4:7 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (NIV).* Although the church is one unified body, each of its members has a special ability to be used for the good and growth of all. No one is overlooked; everyone is important to building up the community. Although Christians are called to be unified, God in His wisdom did not make believers photocopies of one another. Instead, each believer is given grace (one or more gifts) as Christ apportioned it. In His infinite wisdom, Christ gave different gifts to different people. Every believer has a gift; no one has all the gifts. In this way, believers need one another in the church as they seek to accomplish the work of the Kingdom.

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore it is said, *"When He ascended on high He made captivity itself a captive; He gave gifts to His people" (NRSV).* The work and authority for apportioning spiritual gifts rightly belongs to the ascended Christ. The statement "He made captivity itself a captive" has the meaning that He captured the captors (that is, He reversed the captivity; He enslaved the enslavers). Christ vanquished our enemies (such as death, Satan, and sin) and captured them. He returned in triumph to heaven (ascended on high) and, in turn, gave gifts to His people.

Ephesians 4:9-10 *What does "He ascended" mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe (NIV).* The phrase "lower, earthly regions" represents the farthest extreme from the heights of heaven. These "lower regions" refer to the earth, the place where the Son came in His incarnation. The "captives" (4:8) then would be either Satan and his hosts or the saints who were taken "captive" or "called" (a reference to election).

All things are subject to Him; no realm in heaven or earth is beyond His control. That He "ascended" means not that He left the earth and involvement in it but rather that He completely fills all things. That Christ will fill the whole universe refers to His power and control over all of His creation. Christ is Lord of the whole universe — past, present, and future. He fills all things with Himself as their sovereign Head, yet He fills the Church, His Body, with the blessings of His Spirit, grace, and gifts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can others see Christ in you? How well are you doing as His representative?
2. How can one live worthy of the calling?
3. When we understand what God has done for all of us in Jesus Christ, how should we respond?
4. Practically, what does it mean to live godly lives in love and unity?
5. How do we see this principle of love and unity violated in some churches today?

WHAT WILL YOU
DO WITH WHAT
YOU HAVE LEARNED
???
