

Sermon Study
for the week of July 26 to August 1

Ephesians 4:17-32 • A Community of Contrast

Check-in: Each person share what emotion from the following list best describes their feelings:

1. **SAD** (grief, a sense of loss; sorrowful, depressed)
2. **ANGRY** (mad; blocked from something I want; irritated, frustrated)
3. **AFRAID** (scared; fear of danger or loss; threatened, dread)
4. **CONTENTED** (peaceful, at ease, comfort, resting)
5. **JOYFUL** (glad, pleased, sense of well-being, delighted)
6. **EXCITED** (eager, hopeful; positive anticipation or expectation,)
7. **TENDER** (caring, sense of connectedness, contemplative)
8. **OVERWHELMED** (exhausted, beleaguered, overcome)
9. **WORRIED** (anxious, nervous, troubled, apprehensive, bothered)
10. **GRATEFUL** (appreciative, thankful, gratified)

Pray: Thank God for what he is going to reveal through this study

Read: Ephesians 4:17-32

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe together what it might look like for our church to be a Community of Contrast; with specific attention to the core communal practice of speaking truthfully to one another.

KEY VERSE:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood
and speak truthfully to your neighbor,
for we are all members of one body.
Eph 4: 25

In Ephesians chapter four, the Apostle Paul sketches out a picture of a new humanity whose collective manner of life stands in contrast to the surrounding culture. Thus, following Jesus is not an optional extra. Jesus called followers, not converts. In fact, God's kingdom way of life in Christ is not conceivable separated from discernment and practice *in community*.

So, Paul addresses the church to say all of you "put off" that old humanity (that way of thinking, feeling and behaving) and "put on" a new humanity, the righteousness and holiness of Christ.

Look at the words Paul chooses to describe how people living without Christ thought and acted:
(Read each definition and take a moment to talk about what it was like, or would be like, to live and work around a people exhibiting these negative traits:)

1. *porosis* = a petrified, hardened heart (stone harder than marble). So futile in mind that our conscience loses all power of feeling the consequences of sin.
2. *aselgeia* = a disposition of the soul so consumed with an insatiable lust and desire that no words or behavior is too shocking. You do not care what people think; you even boast about it.
3. *pleonexia* = the irresistible desire to have what you have no right to possess; an arrogant greediness that offers no care for those whose life you injure or destroy as you strive to get what you want.

Have you ever been around or belonged to a group of people who thought or acted like this?

The underlying problem of individualism . . .

How many of us, as we heard the descriptions of sin, thought . . .

- "I'm not like that."
- Or, maybe you thought, "I used to be a little like that, way but I'm not like that anymore."

Ephesians 4:17-32 • Community of Contrast

Most of us have been “disciplined” to think as hyper-individualists. If the description does not fit me I can skip it. I might think about someone else in the church who needs to hear it but not me. Further, we often think “that is their problem, not mine,” maybe even, “It’s none of my business.”
(Ever think like that?)

Why is individualism a problem? *Spend some time thinking and talking about how individualism hides us from truth or hinders our discipleship.)*

Now, imagine that you are hearing Paul’s words as they would have been heard in Ephesus—through a collective, honor-shame culture where the words and actions of one person in the group impacts all members of the group.

How does this change our perspective?

What difference does this make?

If we have been “disciplined” by individualism we have little or no capacity to *recognize and address systemic sin*. We lack the skill to see underlying social structures of sin that we participate in, maybe even benefit from.

This can lead to spiritual blindness. Unable to see ourselves or others truthfully we cannot speak truthfully to one another. We either avoid difficult topics altogether or engage them the same way non-Christians would—with anger, bitterness and division—speaking and acting in ways that grieve God’s Spirit.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:30-32

AN EXERCISE in imagining kind and forgiving conversations in a community of contrast:

Choose a difficult topic in our culture today, such as racism, abortion, greed or the objectification of women:

1. *Note how you started to think and feel just hearing the topic. Describe this.*
2. *Laying your opinion aside, describe what it would look like if we spoke truthfully to one another.*
3. *How could conversations that are kind, compassionate and forgiving lead to mutual discernment, prophetic witness and counter-formation?*

What could/should we (our small group/our church) do to nurture speaking truthfully to one another, especially now when our country and culture is divided by antagonisms?