

# “Ephesians”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 5

## “Ephesians 4:1-16”

**Objective:** To understand the message that Paul meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context in light of the message it contains.

**Materials:** We will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Ephesians, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, and any other sources along with the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. We will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding for our contextual situation.

#### Procedures

1. We will begin by translating the text from Greek into English
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural and social settings in order to understand the message.
3. From here we will seek to find out how to best apply the calling that Paul has for the early disciples to our modern contextual framework in order to do our very best to live as disciples of Christ in our modern era.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

# Translation


Ephesians 4:1 **Therefore, as the prisoner in the Lord, I urge you to walk as worthy of the calling for which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But each one of us was given favor (*χάρις* - *charis* - *grace*) according to the measure of the gift of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is said, *After He ascended on high He made captive, captivity, He gave gifts to humans.* <sup>9</sup> Now what does *He ascended* mean, if not that He descended into the lower [parts] of the earth? <sup>10</sup> The one who descended, He is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, in order to fill all things. <sup>11</sup> And He Himself gave some apostles, and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for equipping the holy ones for the work of**

**service, for the building up of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all arrive at the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto mature men, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> in order that we are no longer children, being tossed to and fro carried about by every wind of teaching in the trickery of humans, in craftiness of deceitful scheming, <sup>15</sup> but telling the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into Him, who is the head, Christ, <sup>16</sup> out of whom all the body is being joined together and is being united by every ligament of support according to the working in the measure of one, of each part of the growth of the body working unto the building up of the body into the building up of itself in love.**

## Lesson

As we come to chapter 4 in Ephesians, we have crossed the threshold into the section of this letter where Paul will now focus on admonition of his audience (chapters 4-6). This is a change from the first three chapters where the focus was upon highlighting what God had done for those who had been rescued through the favor of God. Paul has built a foundation that leads to the admonitions that he will now lay out here more fully. He will seek to challenge his audience to grow up, to mature and to be unified as one people devoted to their calling as followers of Jesus. He will challenge them to grow into the fullness of being like Jesus in attitude, humility, gentleness and most importantly in love.

As Paul begins his admonitions, he will not begin where one might expect. He begins by telling them where he is and why: <sup>4:1</sup> **Therefore, as the prisoner in the Lord, ....** Paul does not hide the fact that he is a “prisoner,” but wears it as a badge of honor. It is not the fact that he is a prisoner that makes it a badge of honor, but the reason that this is the case. It is because he is “the prisoner in the Lord.” Paul is willing to stand firm even in the face of great odds and against even the power of the Roman governing



machine that is accustomed to melting people into a semblance of unity that is only on the surface and not in fact a present reality. Paul stands against the facade of deceit and treachery and is willing to stand even in the face of his own imprisonment. Paul will not comply with the status quo or submit to anything that inhibits his mission as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

For Paul there is a clear connection between “being in the Lord” and the sense that because of this fact, it is indeed a badge of honor to be a prisoner. The idea being that doing the will of God is the proper response to understanding what God has done for Paul in granting him favor. The implication then is that for the audience this should be of critical importance. Paul seeks to ingrain at every level the understanding that because of what has been done through Christ the old understandings of honor, love, and the measuring of what is good, and desirable in life are different. There is a new measure revealed in Jesus, and that measure comes not as a duty but as the privilege of living life to glorify and honor God.

Paul will then begin to spell out for his audience exactly what this means. He challenges them to walk in a manner that

was “worthy” (ἀξιῶς - *axios*), or “deserving” of their “calling.” I **urge you to walk as worthy of the calling for which you have been called, ....** This concept of being “worthy” is characteristic of Pauline terminology (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 4:1, 12; Galatians 5:16; Romans 6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 7:17; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 5:7; 10:2, 3; 12:18; Philippians 3:17, 18; Colossians 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5). Paul here introduces the standard, or criterion, to which the audience is expected to conform. The followers of Jesus are expected to live their lives in this manner because of what Paul has previously outlined in the first three chapters. The passages in the Letters to the Philippians (1:27<sup>1</sup>) and to Colossians (1:10<sup>2</sup>) are the closest in wording to what we find here in Ephesians.<sup>3</sup> This was a common theme in Paul’s letters.

The question left for us is: What is the calling, to which you have been “called?” Paul does not spell this out as there was no

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<sup>1</sup> **Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I’m absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, united in one spirit and mind as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel.** CEB.

<sup>2</sup> **We’re praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; ....** CEB.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, in the Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 42 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), pp. 234-235.

need for doing so. His audience will have known full well what this means. This meant they were to live a life that reflected their becoming more and more fully people that “imaged” or lived into the “fullness Jesus. A modern way of stating this is that they are to be 3 dimensional copiers. They are to recreate Christ in their lives, in their thoughts, in their actions, in their hopes and in their aspirations. To become like Christ stands at the core of what it means to “walk as worthy” of “the calling.” Often it is the case that people have viewed becoming a Christian as something that happens instantaneously like the flipping of a light switch, but Paul understands that the reality is that it is more of a process that continues throughout the lifetime of the believer. The creative birth process of becoming a Christian does not happen in just a single point of time, but over a period of time. We are in the state of becoming.

Paul understands that this message is going to be a hard message for some in his audience to take. The culture of his audience will be hugely disparate with the “calling” of Christ. He admonished them to “walk” <sup>2</sup> **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,** <sup>3</sup> **making**

**every effort to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** Paul highlights here some of the essential attitudes that will need to be applied in order for the walk of the believers to be successful. Their walk must be conducted with “humility” and “gentleness.” These were not traits generally prized by Greco-Roman culture. Their idea of justice and ethics differs hugely from what we would be willing to state as the ideal for today in our culture, though in reality, it is perhaps the case that they simply reflect more honesty than we are willing to state overtly.<sup>4</sup> I think many still believe that what is originally attributed to Homer and Simonides about “... doing good for friends and harm to enemies” is the way many today live their lives and evaluate justice in our culture.

Paul challenges his audience to reorient their ethical and moral compass toward traits and values that are to be nurtured and grown by the follower of Christ. His audience is challenged to bear with one another in “love.” This is the essential element in something and is a crucial mark of the people of God. It is this (love) that will mark the people out as His people more than any

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, Republic 1.334c - “Yet this I still believe, that justice benefits friends and harms enemies.” Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Paul Shorey, Vols. 5 & 6, Loeb Classical Library series 237 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 30-31.



other, this and “oneness,” or “unity.” These two things will be reflected as the major emphasis of Paul here. Unity is only possible with “love.” Without love there is no possibility of “unity.” Without love people will turn away from the pursuit of unity and will turn once again to the pursuit of the things that humans have always pursued, selfish interests. This is the opposite direction from where Paul is coaxing his audience to travel. Instead he is seeking to challenge them to continue to pursue the way of Christ, the way of “love,” the way of “oneness.”

It is in the midst of this “oneness,” that can only come about through contact with the Spirit, that they can progress toward the goal. As the people more fully live into the way of “keeping oneness with the Spirit in the bond of peace” they will be more and more fulfilling their calling. As Paul continues, this emphasis on of focusing on the Spirit will be compounded with the focus on “oneness.” This focus is a critical element in the message of Paul. Many times, during its history the people of God have forgotten

the words of Jesus in His high-priestly prayer in John 17.<sup>5</sup> This aspect of “oneness” is the distinctive mark of the presence of God. It is the mark of fellowship with Him and the mark of His presence, and His glory. Paul calls them to live into the fulfillment of this great prayer of Jesus. He tells them that: <sup>4</sup> **There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

In this great list of “ones” the audience is challenged to a new way of life, a new way of seeing the cosmos, to a new order. This is not meant to disclose some form of mechanistic formula or set of steps to arrive at a point of safety, instead this is a challenge, a call, for the audience to become participants in the great plan of God. In this plan, order and relationship will be restored to the cosmos. As God brought order forth from the chaos in the first days of the first creation now God calls for His children to be a part of calling forth order from the chaos of a fallen and broken

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<sup>5</sup> I'm not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. <sup>21</sup> **I pray they will be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. <sup>22</sup> I've given them the glory that you gave me **so that they can be one just as we are one.** <sup>23</sup> I'm in them and you are in me **so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me.** CEB.

world, in the new creation. The basic idea of the Greek word *cosmos* means “order,” or “arrangement.” “One” is the greatest manifestation of order. God calls His people to truly be His image-bearers in the cosmos as representations of His nature as “one.” It is highly likely that the original audience will have made some connection here with the *Shema*.<sup>6</sup> This will have inspired in them a sense of continuity and connection with the goal of God in building relationship and building a community of faith and trust in Him.

So many times, our modern tendency has been to analyze, to categorize and to systematize things to such an extent that we lose the mystery and the magic of the quest to answer the calling of God. From the very beginning God has been calling His children into a “oneness” with Him. He is the creator, the Father, the source, and definition of order. The calling of Paul, here, is to pursue God’s “unity” in such a way that His children will become participants, with God, trusting, serving, and acting as His agents, who in trust, love, patience, and humility, are seeking to be “one” with one another and their God. They are called to become a part

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<sup>6</sup> This is the *Shema*, “Hear or Israel” is the Hebrew word *Shema*. Deuteronomy 6:4 **Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!** NET.

of God's filling all, being above all, and becoming all, and in all. All of this will require patience, humility, and gentleness, from those that pursue this path.

All of this comes about not due to the merit of the recipients, but because of the "favor of God." This great favor is made manifest "in Christ." Christ is the "gift" of God. This is a gift that is beyond the measure of any other gift imaginable. There is no frame of reference by which one might measure this gift, it is unique and precious beyond all comprehension. <sup>7</sup> **But each one of us was given favor (χάρις - *charis* - grace) according to the measure of the gift of Christ.** Christ "is" the immeasurable gift; and it is in this gift that change and transformation will take place. This understanding stands at the heart of all that Paul writes in His letter. It is "in Christ" that things will be transformed and put right. He is the crucible of change and transformation that will initiate and complete the transformation of creation and all of those who occupy it into what God always intended and dreamt could become reality.

This next verse is among the most difficult and misunderstood for modern minds to understand and

comprehend. Paul writes: <sup>8</sup> **Therefore, it is said, After He ascended on high He made captive, captivity, He gave gifts to humans.** Some have searched for the source of these words in order to comprehend Paul's intent here. Though there have been many attempts at this, none are totally convincing. Especially over the past 150 years the understanding of this verse has been transformed from any previous understanding to mean something that will have been incomprehensible to its original audience and I believe to the original intent of Paul. In antiquity there was not a sense of confusion and dismay about the meaning of this verse.<sup>7</sup> In antiquity, as in many other cultures, the realm of the dead was usually located in the underworld (*Hades, Sheol, sometimes Gehenna*). A descent into the underworld was considered to be a way of visiting the dead. Descents to the underworld are common features in the myths and traditions of many cultures and are often attributed to the gods and heroes of myths and legends.<sup>8</sup>

Bales makes the supposition that the phrase "he descended to the lower regions of the earth," (Ephesians 4:9) represents a

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<sup>7</sup> William Bales, "The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72:1 (2010), pp. 84-100.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 145-159.

journey of Christ to the realm of the dead between the time of his death and the time of his resurrection. The belief that Christ made just such a journey is attested in the writings of a number of the Church Fathers.<sup>9</sup> Bales also points out that there are other places in the New Testament where it appears that such a descent of Christ is also attested (1 Peter 3:18-20;<sup>10</sup> 4:6<sup>11</sup>). However, since the Reformation, and especially in the last 150 years or so, the view that the descent in Ephesians 4:9 refers to the incarnation of Christ has taken hold. It is understood variously as the earthly ministry of Christ and/or his redemption death and/or His burial in the ground. A third proposal is that Ephesians 4:9 refers to His coming to the church at Pentecost (subsequent to his ascension) via the person of the Holy Spirit. This view has garnered a good deal of support in recent decades.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, 9:3; *Epistle of Polycarp of Philippians*, 1.2; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.27.2; 5.31.1; Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, 55:2. This viewpoint also appears in a creedal formula for the first time in the Fourth Formula of Sirmium (A.D. 359).

<sup>10</sup> **Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. 19 And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. 20 In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water.** CEB.

<sup>11</sup> **Indeed, this is the reason the good news was also preached to the dead. This happened so that, although they were judged as humans according to human standards, they could live by the Spirit according to divine standards.** CEB.

<sup>12</sup> William Bales, "The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72:1 (2010), pp. 84-100.

The consensus also of modern scholarship is that in the Old Testament, Hebrew cosmology included an “underworld,” a locale to which persons went after death. There are a number of terms and phrases in the Old Testament that are used to indicate this place.<sup>13</sup> The depictions of the underworld indicate that it is a place to which the dead go down, under the earth, or from which the dead must be brought up - this is where we get the English word “underworld.” The most commonly used Hebrew term for this locale is “*Sheol*” (שְׁאוֹל - *sheol*, Masoretic Text ). Despite the fact that the Old Testament in fact lacks a unified and consistent view of the underworld, several important notions can be stated with some degree of confidence. First, the underworld is perceived of as a place “under” the world. Second, the underworld is a place inhabited by the dead. Third, the Old Testament uses many different terms when indicating a going down to it.

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<sup>13</sup> Here is a sampling: “the depths of Sheol,” שְׁאוֹל תַּחְתִּית - *sheol tachtith* (Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalm 86:13); “the pit,” בּוֹר - *bor* (Psalm 28:1; 30:3; Proverbs 1:12; Isaiah 38:18); בְּאֵר - *beor* (Psalm 69:16); and שַׁחַת - *shachath* (Psalm 16:10; 49:9; Isaiah 51:14); “the lowest pit,” לִבְאֵר שַׁחַת - *libear shachath* (Psalm 55:23); the “depths of the pit,” בּוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת - *bor tachtyoth* (Psalm 88:6; Lamentations 3:55) and יַרְכְּתֵי בּוֹר - *yarcethey bor* (Isaiah 14:15; Ezekiel 32:23); “the lowest parts of the earth,” תַּחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרֶץ - *tachthiyoth erets* (Psalm 63:10; Isaiah 44:23), תְּהִמוֹת הָאָרֶץ - *tehmoth harets* (Psalm 71:20), מְחַקְרֵי אֲרֶץ - *mechkerey erets* (Psalm 95:4); “the roots of the mountains,” קִצְבֵי הָרִים - *kitsvey harim* (Jonah 2:7).

Fourthly, sometimes these words are used metaphorically, as in to refer to death or the grave.<sup>14</sup>

In the New Testament the words “Hades” and the “abyss” as well as the phrase “from the dead” are important for understanding the New Testament view of the underworld. The Old Greek Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint) commonly translates the Hebrew term *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) with the Greek word *Hades* (ᾍδης). The Greek word *hades* occurs ten times in the New Testament (Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). As might be anticipated the New Testament conception of *Hades* closely resembles the conception of *Sheol* in the Old Testament. “Like Sheol, Hades in the NT is an “underworld,” a place to which persons go after death.”<sup>15</sup>

In the New Testament, *Hades* is still described as a place to which one descends or goes down. At times, *Hades* can be understood as the “lowest depths” as contrasted with the “highest heights: **And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?**

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<sup>14</sup> William Bales, “The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72:1 (2010), pp. 84-100.

<sup>15</sup> William Bales, “The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72:1 (2010), pp. 84-100.



**No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.**<sup>16</sup> The New Testament also uses the term “abyss” and the phrase “from the dead.” The phrase “from the dead” occurs forty-four times in the New Testament. Thirty-three of the times refer to the rising of Christ from the dead. Phrases that use “from the dead” are used in conjunction with several verbs and nouns having to do with “rising from the dead.” Building upon the Old Testament cosmology a consistent picture begins to emerge which indicates that the people in the period of the New Testament conceived of the dead dwelling in a place that is “under” the earth. In order to get back to the land of the living there is always movement in an upward direction.<sup>17</sup>

This is just the type of language that we find Paul using here of Christ: **<sup>9</sup> Now what does *He ascended* mean, if not that He descended into the lower [parts] of the earth? <sup>10</sup> The one who descended, He is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, in order to fill all things.** There is a great deal more

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<sup>16</sup> NRSV.

<sup>17</sup> William Bales, “The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72:1 (2010), pp. 84-100.

detail that could be examined with regard to such concepts, but I hope that what we have examined up to this point will challenge you to view this passage with the fresh information and from a new perspective. It seems that the ancients will have understood the words of Paul here to indicate that during the time that Christ was dead he will have travelled to the place of the dead. This is a difficult concept for us today as we so often have a different conception of the makeup of the cosmos. Often our scientific understanding gets in the way of our understanding.

Whether Paul intended to reveal the truth about the cosmos regarding the locale of the dead or not is perhaps a discussion for another time. If he did so, it was not his central intent here. His central intent was to convey to his audience information regarding the defeat of the realm of the dead by Jesus. This is central to Paul's message to his audience. This is a concept that can also be found in Revelation 1:17-18.<sup>18</sup> In the New Testament the message implied is that in His death, and subsequent resurrection, Christ has gained power over death and Hades. There were indeed many pagan myths regarding descent into the underworld by heroes

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<sup>18</sup> **When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. NRSV.**

and gods, but Bauckham indicates that in his view these had very little impact on the Christian idea of Christ's descent into Hades.<sup>19</sup>

The concept of the descent of Christ into *Hades* was powerful and important for early Christians, not simply because it provided a solution to the problem of salvation of the righteous of the Old Testament (and some perceived that it opened salvation to good pagans of the past), but in addition it represented that definitive defeat of death from which Christian believers benefit had taken place. "The harrowing of hell" became a powerful dramatization of *Christus victus* (Christ as the victor) for medieval Christians in regard to soteriology (concepts of salvation).<sup>20</sup> It seems highly probable that very similar perceptions will have influenced the original audience. It appears that Paul used such concepts to indicate the great gifts that Christ bestowed upon His community of believers.

Paul lays out some of these gifts: **11 And He Himself gave some apostles, and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, 12 for equipping the**

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, in the Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. XCIII (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, pp. 43-44.

**holy ones for the work of service, for the building up of the body of Christ,....** In His triumph, Jesus bestows magnificent gifts for the equipping of His holy ones. He gives these great gifts in order that His people are properly equipped for their “work of service.” God’s people are to serve in a manner that works towards the “building up” of the “body of Christ.” Paul uses this imagery to convey the unfolding of Christ’s working in the world to expand the plan of God more fully into the world. Paul has not lost sight of his goal to challenge his audience to grow in their faithfulness to God and their unity of the faith.

He will also challenge them to “arrive” both at unity and at “knowledge.” <sup>13</sup> **until all arrive at the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto mature men, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ....** Paul’s desire for his audience is that they will grow into maturity. The goal is for them to grow into the “fullness” (*πληρώματος - pleromatos*) of Christ. The implication here is that they are not yet “mature.” This challenge stands as the reasoning behind why Paul writes his letter. He intends to spur them on toward maturity. The measure of that maturity is the “fullness of Christ.” A lofty

goal to be sure, but one that God calls His children to strive for and to seek. There is no sense of arrival at a destination here during this lifetime. This goal will entail a continual striving toward growing into being more and more like Christ throughout a lifetime. There is no sense of relaxing and taking it easy in Paul's words. He challenges his audience into continual action and continual attentiveness to pursuit of the quest. That quest is to continually mature more and more and become more and more like Christ.

Paul does not sound as though he believes this is what is currently happening among those in his audience; at least not to the extent that he hopes to happen. It appears that currently the audience is susceptible to the winds of clever teachers and tricksters who are deceiving them. **<sup>14</sup> in order that we are no longer children, being tossed to and fro carried about by every wind of teaching in the trickery of humans, in craftiness to the deceitful scheming, ...** Rhetoric and polished speech were highly prized in the Ancient world. There were many talented and highly trained speakers and debaters. They could, through their techniques and eloquence, be extremely persuasive.

Some appear to have challenged the teachings of Paul and there is concern that for some this challenge has been successful. Such matters stand at the core of why Paul writes his letter. He seeks to ground his audience in such a way that such winds of deceit do not disorient the believers onto a different path.


Paul indicates that the way to stay securely on the right path is through, first of all telling the truth in love (*ἀγάπη* - *agape*). The love that Paul calls for here is a love that expresses deep and powerful concern for the welfare and well-being of the other. This is powerfully and passionately expressed by Jesus in His incarnation, His life, and in His death. Jesus lived a life in service of others. His welfare and comfort were put aside for others. He was willing to be inconvenienced, and even to lay down His life for the benefit of others. <sup>15</sup> **but telling the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into Him, who is the head, Christ, <sup>16</sup> out of whom all the body is being joined together and is being united by every ligament of support according to the working in the measure of one, with each part of the growth of the body working unto the building up of the body into the building up of itself in love.**

In this final part of this section Paul will continue to call for growth in his audience. He wants them to grow not simply as individuals, but he calls them to a unity of purpose and being connected as “the body.” This is a body that has as its “head” Christ. He is the face, the first part recognized, the top of the body; and though the ancients did not comprehend the workings of the brain and the nervous system the way we do today they do understand the importance of the head. Without the head there is no life in the body. The body cannot live without the head. Paul calls for this “body” to build itself up in love (*ἀγάπη* - *agape*). This willingness to be self-sacrificial will run as a stream through all that Paul says in his letter. It was the motivation for what God did in sending Jesus.<sup>21</sup> This same love still challenges and calls for the church to follow the way of God in loving the world and this is to be powerfully and blatantly expressed in the midst of the body of believers (the church).

The church is to be a building held together and formed by love in such a way that this is apparent to all who see it or encounter it. This is not just to be any care and concern, but deep

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<sup>21</sup> John 3:16 - “**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**” NRSV. John will use the verbal form of *agape* (*ἀγάπη*) here when speaking of the love that God has for the world.



and passionate concern for the well-being of others. This concern is to be expressed in a manner that is connected to the way Christ lived His life and gave of Himself for others. Paul is calling his audience to be willing to die for one another, but also to live for one another. Dying for another is often a split-second decision, Paul is challenging his audience to decide, very deliberately and consciously, to live and breathe for the benefit of others and if necessary to lay down one's life for others. This is the example of Jesus, who is the "head." This is what it truly means to express love in the way that Paul is calling for them to express love. Everything here is connected and drawn toward unity of purpose and will into Christ.




# Synopsis

As Paul begins this section, he will remind his audience that he is in fact imprisoned “for the Lord.” This will stand as an emblem of his trust, commitment, and belief in Jesus Christ. This is the path that Paul walks as he serves the cause of Christ. He will then challenge his audience “to walk as worthy of the calling,” which stands in the context of how he is doing this. He challenges them to do this in humility and gentleness, with love. These are essential attitudes of the believer. They reflect the nature that must be lived in order to be “worthy.” Of course, the Spirit is also an essential element as these things are beyond the power of us as humans.

The central calling here is to “oneness” or “unity.” And Paul will focus on this long list of “ones” in a manner that challenges his readers to strive for “oneness.” This is in fact a calling to unite with the creator who is Himself described as “one.” There is likely intended to be a connection in the minds of the readers to the idea of the “oneness” that is reflected in the Hebrew *Shema*.

All of this is only possible because of the “favor” (grace) of God and it is given according to the measure of the great gift,




Christ. This is all set in the context of what Jesus has accomplished and as a part of His ascension He will bestow gifts to empower and enable His people to fulfill their destiny as children of God, being built into a community that will be a part of God's redemption of the cosmos.

There is considerable misunderstanding regarding Paul's meaning in the descent and ascent of Christ, but for the original audience this will likely have been seen as an expression of His victory over death, and power over death. This will likely have been conceived of as a descent by Christ to the realm of the dead and His then rising from that place to ascend to heaven.

Paul then lists some of the gifts bestowed by Christ which focus on unity and building community (the body). The challenge is given to the audience to strive to maturity and toward the full measure of the "fullness of Christ." This is so that they will not be tossed to and fro by those who deceive them and draw them away from the true path. They are to grow in unity, in love, to be like Christ.

# Questions

1. When you think about people being in prison, what is your perception of them as people? Do you tend to see them as good or as bad people? Why?
2. Who is someone you have known that for you personifies humility and gentleness? What one way did they express this that was the most memorable to you?
3. How would you define “unity” or “oneness?”
4. Why do you think Paul emphasizes “one” so much in this section?
5. What is a way that people can contribute to creating “unity?”
6. What is a way that people detract or draw away from unity?
7. When you think of the “favor” or “grace” that God has given to you what are some things that come to mind? Why?
8. How would you define the “favor” of God?
9. How do you see Christ as a gift from God?
10. What does it mean for Christ to have conquered “death?”
11. What are some ways that God is equipping you for service in His kingdom?
12. How do you see yourself as “building up the body of Christ?”
13. What are some ways that you need to be challenged to mature into the fullness of Christ?
14. What are some ways that you see people being deceived or tricked in the church today?

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15. What does it look like to “tell the truth in love” to another person?
  16. What are some things that you are personally doing to grow into the fullness of Jesus?
  17. What are some obstacles that inhibit you from growing into the fullness of Jesus?
  18. What are some ways that you seek to build up the body of Christ in love?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that becoming a follower of Christ is something that is continually pursued throughout life and not something that just happens or is a one-time decision. Some people think that they decided to accept Christ and that was done and now they rely solely upon grace in order to get them what they want. Such a perspective totally misses the point. What are some ways that you have pursued a meaningful and long-lasting relationship with another person?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words calling for His children to understand the true nature and quality of “love” (ἀγάπη - *agape*). This is expressed by God in His persistent pursuit of relationship restoration with His creation (humans). God does not give up but pursues relationship relentlessly and at great personal cost to Himself. This demonstrates the power and the depth of His love in a manner that should challenge us in our perceptions of what love truly is? What are some ways that you see true expressions of love in our world today?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

In this section of Paul’s letter he is challenging his audience to change the way they live their lives, the priorities that they set and the way they pursue those goals. He holds up to his audience the goal of maturing into “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?” He sets an extraordinarily lofty goal this is the challenge that he is calling his audience to take up and pursue with diligence and conviction. What are some ways that you are seeking to take up this challenge from Paul in your own life?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us into a life of service and self-sacrifice that stands in stark contrast to our human nature and the standards set by the world. Paul is fully aware that the things he is asking of his audience are extremely challenging and require more strength and power than is humanly possible. He expects his audience to be empowered by God. What are some ways that you seek to be empowered by God when you are challenged beyond your own strength?