

Ephesians 4
The Significance of the New Man
How Dramatic is the New Life!

We have seen that the Christian life is something that God has prepared for us to walk in. The power of God is available to us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. We are seated with Him in heavenly places. Jew and Gentile have been reconciled into one new creation through the Cross. It is God's intention to reveal that which has been hidden. This includes God's manifold wisdom to be revealed through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 4

Sentence 23 (4:1-3) I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling to which you have been called, with all humble-mindedness and gentleness with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul is a prisoner in the Lord. He is suffering for the Gospel. His endurance is a model for their endurance. He wants their behaviour to be consistent with the message of the grace of God (the gospel). As Christians they have been called by God. This represents the two sides of the predestination debate: as we choose God He calls us. There is something deeper to the Christian life than just our choosing God (for whatever reason). God is calling us to something deeper than we could ever imagine. What is at work in the Christian life is God's purpose not our imagination. This calling is grasped and obeyed with a humble mind (as Christ had, see Phil 2:5-11) and gentleness with a capacity to suffer long (endure) persevering with one another in a spirit of love. Love is the sign of the Christian (Jn 13:35). As Christians we need to be unified under one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and to hold each other (be bonded) peacefully (in the peace of God). This love and peace are the gift of God and not simply the cessation of human hostilities. This makes for a profoundly deep fellowship beyond human capacity to create. It is supernatural.

Sentence 24 (4:4-6) There is one body and one Spirit as you were also called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

The emphasis here is upon Unity. Whatever the variety God can create unity. Christians are not going all in different directions with different expectations, different beliefs and different experiences. We all come under the one Lordship, the one system of belief and the one means of entry. All this has been made possible by the Father heart of God in no matter what circumstance.

Sentence 24 (4:7) But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Grace is the mechanism of God's gift. Grace itself is the gift. Grace is the spiritual DNA. Grace in us by the Holy Spirit generates the gifting. In scripture there is the measure that we measure to others (Mtt 7:2), a measure of faith (Rom 12:3), the measure of our field of influence (2Cor 10:13), the measure of Christ's gift (Eph 4:7), the measure of the stature of Christ (Eph 4:13) and the measure of our part in the Body (Eph 4:16). To those who are given much, much will be required (Lk 12:48). Our gifting is not for our esteem but for our responsible use (1Pet 4:10).

Sentence 25 (4:8) Therefore He says 'When He ascended on high He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men' (Ps 68:18).

This verse from the Psalms is seen to speak of the activity of Christ in His ascension glory. This is seeing Christ in the OT.

Sentence 26 (4:9-10) (Now this, 'He ascended' what does it mean but that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.)

The Apostle's Creed asserts that Jesus descended into hell. Peter says that by the Spirit Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison (1Pet 3:19, 2Pet 2:4). There is very little information about Christ in hell. The main emphasis is that the deeper the descent the greater the ascent. Christ physically plumbs the greatest depths and is above the greatest heights. This is both His descended and ascended glory. He rules in all places.

Sentence 27 (4:11-16) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful wiles, but (speaking the truth in love) that we may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

These are the Ascension Gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These giftings are for 1) the equipping of the saints 2) the work (labour) of ministry and 3) the building up of the Body of Christ (the Church). The intention is that we all come to 4) the unity of the faith 5) the knowledge of Jesus 6) to complete manhood 7) to the full extent of Christ's infilling. This is so that we may 8) resist childishness 9) resist doctrinal novelty 10) resist human craftiness 11) resist clever deceptions. When we do this and speak the truth in love, it is intended that, no matter what the circumstance, we will grow up into Christ, who is the head of the Body. Any body is knit together by joints and ligaments, which, when functioning properly and when every thing fulfils its proper function, cause the body to work as intended. This strong image of the church of Christ as a body argues for the power of the Christian fellowship as a fully designed, fully functioning body that grows, matures and is purposely equipped for every good work (labour, struggle) expressed best of all in love.

Sentence 28 (4:17-19) This I say therefore and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness with greediness.

This represents the Progress of Unbelief. Paul describes the condition of the Gentiles or those without God. (See also Rom 1:18-32 particularly :21-25). This moral progress is as follows: 1) We commence with the futility of their minds. Futile thinking creates the setting for corrupt living. It commences with the Mind. 2) Then their capacity to understand is clouded (darkened). They are given over to confusion and are the prey of false teaching. 3) Then they are alienated from the life of God. They are estranged from and hostile to God-ideas. 4) This is because of the growing ignorance in them. Their knowledge becomes ignorance. They are locked out of learning.

5) This becomes a genuine blindness of their heart and their inability to discern the deeper issues of life. They cannot see with their heart. They lack discernment.

6) This means that they are past feeling. They have lost contact with themselves. They cannot sense remorse nor can they bring themselves into correction. They have abandoned themselves to the energies, conflicts and stimulations of the vast spirit world.

7) The result is that they hand themselves over to greater and greater stimulation which is found in lewdness (moral licence) which is morality without boundaries. They resent boundary.

8) This means that they practice every kind of impurity and they look for ways to plunge themselves into ever deeper forms of depravity.

9) This they do with a greediness and an intensity that craves a superabundance of over-indulgence.

This is a picture of moral and spirit decline. It is a tendency of our flesh. The spirit of God in us wars against this gradual decline in personal definition and purpose. This is not Christian!

Sentence 29 (4:20-24) But you did not so learn Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus; that you put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt with deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your mind and that you put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

The truth that we learn in Jesus Christ is that

1) We can put off the old man. This is the old familiar humanity. This unconverted behaviour is the sign of the corrupt nature established as original sin. This corruption or breaking down of human character and personal definition, results from living under the influence of deceiving lusts, perverted ambitions and the goals of self-engineering. The character of the old nature is corruption.

2) We are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Our mind is generated (inspired) by a spirit (or spirits). Our ideas are assembled around a spirit image (or force). What spirit is driving my mentality (intelligence)? The Christian needs the Holy Spirit.

3) We put on the new man. The new man (humanity) was created already according to God. The new humanity is already created for us to walk in being styled in the righteousness and holiness of truth. This truth is the Word of God which is incorruptible. Our nature corrupts but the Word of God cannot corrupt. Peter says that we were born again not of corruptible but incorruptible seed through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1Pet 1:23).

Sentence 30 (4:25) Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each man of you speak the truth with his neighbour' (Zech 8:16), for we are members one of another.

As a Christian group we should be known for speaking the truth (in love), pursuing the truth and standing for the truth.

Sentence 31 (4:26) 'Be angry and do not sin' (Ps 4:4), do not let the sun go down on your anger, nor give place to the devil.

Anger in itself is not a sin: God gets angry (Deut 4:21, 1Kings 11:9, Ps 7:11). But our anger must not be a provocation to offending (aggressive) behaviour. Resolve your angers quickly. Otherwise a root of bitterness can get established which can defile many (Heb 12:15). Sin committed grants territory (place) to the devil. Avoid Satan occupying territory in your spirit space. He will have to be driven out.

Sentence 32 (4:28) Let him who stole steal no longer but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need.

The thief is converted into the productive citizen.

Sentence 33 (4:29) Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification that it may impart grace to the hearers.

To corrupt is to demolish (break down); to edify is to build up. Let our conversation always impart grace and install goodness. This is a severe constraint on our negative, casual, critical and self-justifying conversations.

Sentence 34 (4:30) Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

It is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. The holy Dove flies away. 'Return, O holy Dove return / Sweet messenger of rest / I hate the sins that made thee mourn / and drove thee from my breast' (William Cowper). The Holy Spirit is essential to our Christian existence. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our life is the guarantee (seal, proof) of our future redemption.

Sentence 35 (4:31) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, loud quarrelling and slander be put away from you with all malice.

Part of our corruption is the presence of bitterness (beware the bitter root, Heb 12:15), wrath (intense emotion), anger, a quarrelling party spirit (clamour), slander (blasphemy) and all forms of evil intent. These are put away as we put on the new nature.

Sentence 36 (4:32) And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ has forgiven you.

It is a deep Christian instruction that we be kind to one another. The key to being kind is not just being pleasant but actually forgiving one another (not holding grudges). Pleasantness can mask a vicious attitude. The basis of our forgiving is that God has forgiven us. If we want to be forgiven (released) then we must forgive (release) others (Mtt 6:15).