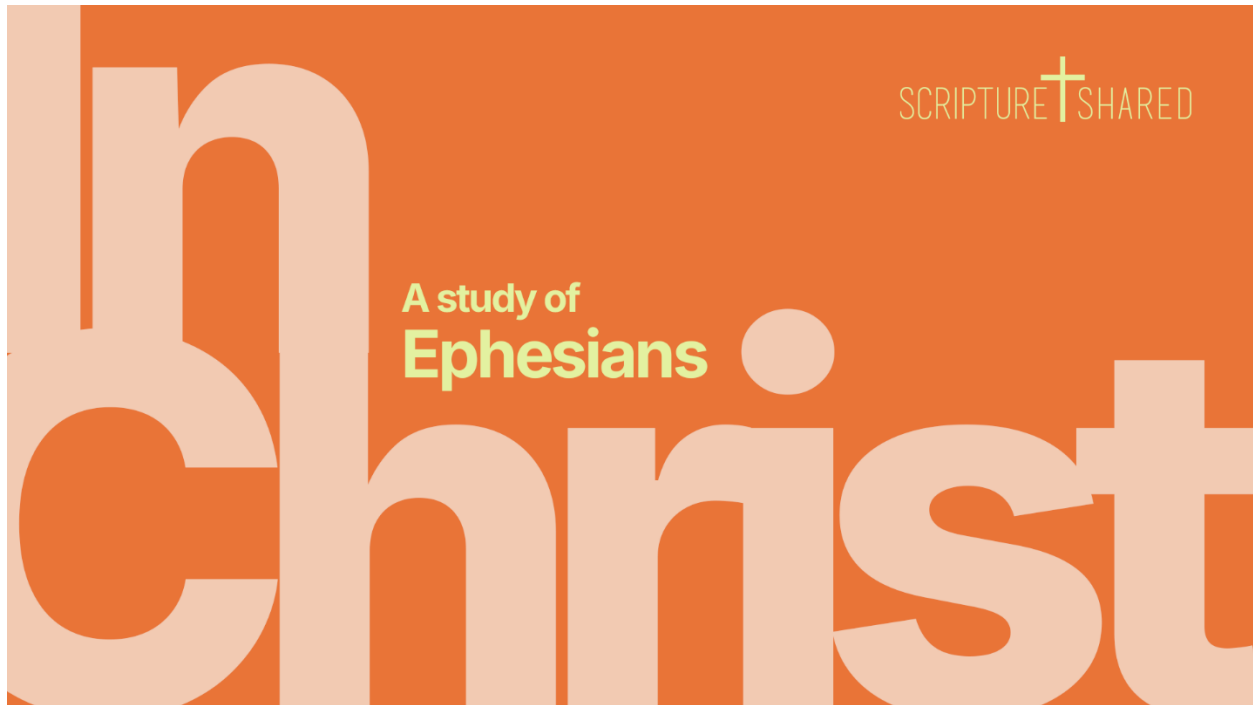




Week 4

Week 4, Day 1

Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: ⁴ there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Understanding the Passage:

E Pluribus Unum, the first motto of the United States, means “out of many, one.” It was included on the first seal of the country to represent the hope that a group of very different colonies could become a single nation. Ephesians 4 suggests it might work just as well as a motto for the church.

This chapter represents a turn in Paul’s letter. Chapters 1–3 are a retelling of the gospel story, and narrate that the Gentile believers, who were once outsiders to God’s people, are now fully in Christ and members of one family. At this halfway point in the letter, Paul focuses on what that adoption in Christ means for how the Ephesians are to live.

Paul begs them “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” We tend to hear “worthy” as “deserving,” as if we have to earn God’s call. But the Greek word, *axios*, comes from the world of weights and scales, where two sides balance against each other. Paul is telling them to live in a way that matches the call God has placed on their lives and who God has already made them to be.

The first task Paul sets before the Ephesians is to make “every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” He tells them that they will be able to do this through humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.

Note that he doesn’t tell them to create unity, but to maintain it. The unity is God’s work. It was done through Jesus when he reconciled the Jews and Gentiles “to God in one body through the cross” (2:16). But Paul tells the Ephesians that they have to work at keeping it. That is still a message for us as well – in a world that seems to reward arrogance, harshness, and short tempers, we are meant to choose the counter-cultural path of humility, gentleness, and patience.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Where do you see unity being strained right now in your church, family, or friendships? What would it look like for you to help maintain it?
2. Do you feel like you’re living a way that matches who God has made you to be? If you feel out of balance, take a few minutes to write down some reasons that may be. Ask God to help you realign with God’s calling on your life.

Week 4, Day 2

Ephesians 4:7-16

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

Understanding the Passage:

If you’ve ever been late getting out the door with a four-year-old, you know the temptation: just tie their shoes yourself. It’s faster and they will likely stay tied all day... it also guarantees you’ll still be tying them next week.

Plenty of churches run the same way. Staff teach classes, stay late to clean up after events, count the offering, and write the prayer notes. It’s quicker than training someone else. Ephesians 4 gently reminds us that isn’t the job.

Paul writes that Christ gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” The saints – these are the members of the church, not the staff – do the ministry. Leaders get them ready.

The Greek word for “equip,” *katartismos*, shares a root with the word Mark uses for James and John “mending the nets” (Mark 1:19). It’s about repair and readiness: getting something back into

working shape so it can do what it was made for. In our Wesleyan tradition, we call this the ministry of the baptized. Every one of us “was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v. 7).

So, what does this mean for *you*? It’s a call to take your place in the work. God has gifted you. You don’t have to feel “ready,” but you do have to be willing.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Where are you most tempted to just “tie the shoes yourself” instead of equipping other people?
2. Paul says each of us was given grace. What gifts has God given you, and how are you using them?
3. Is there a way of serving you’ve been holding back from because you don’t feel ready?

Week 4, Day 3

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer walk as the gentiles walk, in the futility of their minds; ¹⁸ they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, ²² to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Understanding the Passage:

Do you have an old sweatshirt in your closet that you just can’t get rid of? Maybe from college or some other sentimental time? Fading, stretched, cuffs fraying. You have better clothes, but you find yourself reaching for it because it’s comfortable and familiar.

Paul writes about this tug to the comfortable and familiar even when presented with a better option. “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles walk,” he writes... *to Gentiles*. Their ethnicity hasn’t changed. But where their identity comes from has. They are no longer to live in the comfortable or familiar ways they were used to because now that they are in Christ, the old categories no longer get to set the pattern for their lives.

The word the NRSV translates “walk” (*peripateō*) is the same word Paul used at the beginning of this chapter when he wrote, “lead a life worthy” (4:1). He is talking about the way they are living day to day.

That’s also how he describes drifting away from God. The “hardness of heart” in verse 18 is *pōrōsis*, a word that can describe a callus. If you’ve ever played the guitar or golf regularly, you know how a callus can cause you to “lose all sensitivity” (as he writes in verse 19). The callus causes you to stop feeling pain. In some ways, that’s good because it protects you. But they also keep you from feeling anything. And in the analogy about sin, the inability to feel the pain caused by sin is a death knoll – for our integrity and for our relationships. Like calluses, which develop slowly through repetition, sin is rarely a dramatic plunge. It is more often a slow numbing. It requires you to maintain heightened attention to prevent the callus from forming in the first place.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What's your "old sweatshirt" (a habit or way of thinking) you keep reaching for because it's comfortable, even though you know Christ offers something better?
2. Is there something that used to trouble your conscience that doesn't bother you anymore? What might have numbed you to it?

Week 4, Day 4

Ephesians 4:25-28

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Those who steal must give up stealing; rather, let them labor, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Understanding the Passage:

Each command here follows the same three-part pattern: stop the old behavior, replace it with its opposite, and here's why.

Stop lying and speak the truth. Why? "For we are members of one another" (v. 25, drawing on Zechariah 8:16). Lying to someone in your church is like your hand lying to your foot about where the step is. Somebody's going down, but it's not just the foot – it's going to be the whole body. Paul is trying to convey to the Ephesians that honesty isn't just a matter of personal morality. It protects the community.

"Be angry but do not sin" quotes Psalm 4:4. Anger itself isn't the sin; some things *should* make us angry. The danger is anger that festers. The reformer Martin Luther is credited with saying, "you can't prevent a bird from landing on your head... but you can prevent it from building a nest there." Paul uses the metaphorical phrase "do not let the sun go down on your anger" to remind the Ephesians that they shouldn't let their anger worsen without addressing it. You don't have to hash it out at 11:45 p.m., but you shouldn't go for days and days without facing it and dealing with it.

The third instruction is for the thief. He shouldn't just stop stealing but should work "so as to have something to share with the needy." Paul is telling the one who once took to now be the one who gives.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Has any anger built a nest in you? What do you need to do to face it this week?
2. Paul tells the one who once took to become the one who gives. Where in your life are you mostly taking right now, and what would it look like to shift toward sharing?

Week 4, Day 5

Ephesians 4:29-32

²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Understanding the Passage:

One of the saddest things to me is how quickly a whole pint of raspberries can go bad once a single one grows mold. One morning, everything is fine. The next day, they're all covered.

The word Paul uses for "evil talk" is *sapros*, which means rotten or spoiled. Rotten words don't stay contained. Gossip, sarcasm, and cutting comments spoil everything near them. One snide remark in a meeting changes the whole room. One bit of gossip with a neighbor can shape how we see someone for years.

But Paul doesn't stop at "don't." He continues the pattern in the previous verses. Every time, he takes something away and puts something better in its place. Here, he instructs the Ephesians to replace evil talk with what is useful for building up, as there is need.

That doesn't always mean flattery. The last phrase – "as there is need" – means that the right word depends on the moment. In Proverbs, it says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (25:11). Sometimes the fitting word is encouragement, but sometimes it's a hard truth.

So how do we know which word fits? Paul gives us a test: our words should "give grace to those who hear." Before you speak, it's worth asking: Will this leave them better off? Am I saying this for their good, or to vent, win, or look clever?

Paul shows us where good words come from: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (v. 32). Our words grow out of what's going on in our hearts. If we're nursing a grudge, it will leak into how we talk.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Think back over your conversations this past week. When did your words build someone up, and when did they spoil things?
2. How does remembering that God in Christ has forgiven you change the way you see people you are holding a grudge against?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. What difference does it make in your life to know "why" you should do something?
2. At the beginning of chapter 4, Paul lists traits (humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another) that help maintain unity in community. Which of those do you struggle the most with?
3. What are some things you do to create unity? How do they differ from the things you need to do to maintain unity?
4. Do you feel like your community is more focused on being uniform or unified?
5. Katie mentioned that when left to her own devices, it leads to the hardening of her heart. What leads to the hardening of your heart?
6. Why is it important to focus on putting off *and* putting on, rather than Paul just telling them to stop doing certain things? What is it in your life that you need to put off and put on?
7. What difference would it make in your life if you had a filter for every single word that you said?
8. What is your biggest takeaway this week?

Prayer requests and other notes: