

Ephesians 4 - New International Version (NIV) translation to English

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. **8** This is why it^[a] says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”^[b]

9 (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions^[c]? **10** He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) **11** So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. **18** They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. **19** Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Footnotes:

- a. **Ephesians 4:8 Or God**
- b. **Ephesians 4:8 Psalm 68:18**
- c. **Ephesians 4:9 Or *the depths of the earth***
- d. **Ephesians 4:26 Psalm 4:4**

POINTS OF INTEREST:

- “There is one body and one Spirit...”
 - Paul uses the word “one” in this paragraph seven times as he calls the Ephesians to treat each other with humility, patience, and gentleness. He seems to be saying: you WILL feel at odds with other people inevitably, and if you want to respond to that healthily and gracefully, your heart must be reminded of the ways in which you and “those people you feel at odds with” can both trace yourselves back to “one” origin.
- “This is why it says...” (Footnote [b])
 - Paul is quoting a Psalm from the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament, as its usually known today) here, which would have been a way to enhance his argument with the Jewish side of his audience. The Hebrew Bible was their authority, and he is trying to demonstrate that what he’s saying is not straying from what they believe, but upholding what they believe.
- “He took many captives and gave gifts to his people...”
 - Quoting Psalm 68, Paul says he’s experienced Christ to be someone who frees people from captivity and gives people gifts.

- “(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)”
 - This is another puzzling sentence. Our translation has it in parenthesis, which seems to indicate it was an off-handed comment Paul just kind of throws in. It must have had some obvious, impossible-to-miss meaning to his original audience, but to us today, it’s a bit mysterious. One good guess from scholars is that this is another reference to Jesus’ pre-eminence among all the other manipulative and suspect spiritualities in Ephesian culture (remember all those “heavenly realms” references from previous chapters?). Maybe he was saying: “there is no place down here on earth or up in heaven where Jesus isn’t present and powerful.”
- “... to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity... and become mature...”
 - According to Paul, Christ gives gifts to people (like us) so that we can mutually equip and build each other up. Unity goes hand in hand with maturity (the personal growth that comes from letting others equip and build me up).
- “Then we will no longer be... blown here and there by every wind of teaching...”
 - A real danger Paul sees is the propensity for people to just be taken by whatever “the next big thing” is. Walking in our gifts to help build up unity and maturity apparently will give us sure footing and sound judgment to determine what actually leads to life and what is just a passing fad.
- “You must no longer live as the Gentiles do... They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God”
 - Earlier in this letter, Paul spoke incredibly meaningful words to the Gentile side of his audience affirming their equality with Jews before God. And yet, here he makes clear that, just as the Jews have been guilty of things hindering unity in the Ephesian churches, so have the Gentiles. The Ephesian Jews’ problem was their claim to special-ness (over and against the Gentiles) because of the way they kept the Law of Moses. The Ephesian Gentiles’ problem appears to have been a greedy, insatiable appetite. By Paul’s use of the word “sensual”, many scholars suppose this was a reference to that day’s far-too-common practice of temple-prostitution (which we might think of as an ancient, religious equivalent to human trafficking). Throughout history, sexual abuse in religious contexts has been a recurring-story that sadly will not die. The recent clergy-child sexual-abuse scandals of the Catholic church come to mind. Paul wants the Ephesians to be aware of the danger of linking the divine with the sensual. That is a road in the opposite direction of unity and maturity in Christ.
- “You were taught... to be made new in the attitude of your minds, to put on your new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
 - This chapter ends with a great deal of what might seem at first just like moral advice (Don’t do that. Don’t do that. Instead do this.) But it’s notable that Paul starts this section of advice with an encouragement to “put on your new self, created to be like God”. This gets back to how Paul started this chapter -- talking about Christ giving gifts to people to promote unity and maturity. One gift God is offering anyone, it seems, is a “new self” - a new identity, a new sense of empowerment from God and connection to God. It seems that living out the sort of advice this section ends with is not a matter of sheer will-power. Rather, it’s a matter of feeling regular and consistent closeness to a God who wants to equip us and gift us with whatever we need.