

THE CALL TO UNITY IN THE FAITH A SERMON SERIES BASED ON EPHESIANS 4

EPHESIANS 4

Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ

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.

Humility, gentleness, patience, Love

HUMBLE= *tapeinophrosune*, coined by Christians originally.

Originally, in Greek and especially Roman culture, seen as something negative, debasing.

To the Greco-Roman world, *Tapeinos*, the root word, was negative in connotation, “slavish, cringing, fearful, weak, servile”.

Bases for humility:

Knowing who we truly are;

knowing that everything we have comes from God;

knowing that our knowledge is always partial, and being aware that later on we might discover we were wrong;

knowing that there are many who are much holier, knowledgeable, and nobler than we are.

Knowing that God is often doing things that we're not aware of. Our understanding is limited.

Gentle. Meekness. **Prates**, noun.

In the time we are living, it is a **rational** word.

Presupposes self control.

To respond or react softly and patiently when we are angry.

To wait for the appropriate time to act, instead of in the heat of emotion, so that we can control our response.

To choose not to strike, offend or neutralize our opponent when we easily could.

Not to raise our voice unnecessarily. Not to take offense easily when we could.

PATIENT. *Makrothumia*. long suffering. In the sense of taking the long-term view of people and relationships.

Giving God time to act before we take retaliatory or corrective action.

Not striking back at the first opportunity. Waiting for all the facts to come in before making a conclusion or taking action.

These three qualities require and presuppose the conviction on our part that God wants to intervene in our relationships. That He is real. That he is capable of intervening on our behalf, so that we don't have to fight all our battles by ourselves.

That he is in control, and that our job is to release Him to act in any situation and to give him space to bring about the best solution possible.

SECOND SERMON

Bearing with one another in love suggests the result and the sum total of these three virtues.

“Bearing with one another” has the idea in it of putting up with each other’s imperfections, tolerating our differing ways of seeing the same reality, the way you put up with an imperfect roommate, or someone with a different temperament.

Marriage is the perfect illustration of this. You put up with each other’s imperfections and differences.

Church is the ultimate form of this relationship. You interact intimately with people who are very different from you and who are not even blood relatives.

In the times we are living presently in America, this need of bearing with one another in love becomes more important than ever.

Political polarization, for example, invites us to seek the easy way out. We often end up demonizing people, and refusing to consider the possible validity of their viewpoints. We end up ascribing evil or sheer obstinacy to their position.

Or we take the easy way out and just erase them from our book. We end up avoiding them, eliminating them emotionally from our lives, taking refuge in our own social silos.

But Paul calls us to **bear with** one another **in love**.

As Christians, who are part of a single sacred family, break sacred bread together and occupy and worship in the same sacred spaces, we do not have the option of bolting out the door when we find ourselves in deep disagreement.

We are called to lovingly wrestle with each other, to assume best motives, to force ourselves to see the nobility in those who disagree with us.

The Bible calls us to stay in relationship with each other because we are family, because we share the same spirit and have been saved by the same blood.

Bearing with each other has the connotation of bearing a load, of supporting a burden. And sometimes that's the way it feels. Carrying a load can sometimes be exhausting. After a while, it becomes unpleasant. It can wear us out.

But bearing loads can sometimes strengthen us. It forces us to develop muscles. It increases our resistance and our resiliency. It can make us more patient. It can make us stronger and Christ-like.

If we take and interpret the present state of political and social tension within the Church of Christ in this manner, then we might see it as a spiritual exercise, as a unique opportunity to develop Christian virtues.

We might take advantage of this moment to develop self dominion, to reflect before we act, to put principle before emotion, to act in a way that is different from the world.

If the Church cannot give an example of how to act when we are in conflict within our community, then we have failed miserably. There is no hope for the world.

This is a moment of testing for us. Do we remain in relationship only when we are in agreement? Can we forgive the pain and discomfort that others cause us when they hold views that we regard as offensive and inconsiderate? Can we tolerate each other even when we say things to each other that cause pain and discomfort?

It is the perfect moment to put into practice some of the most exalted values of the kingdom of God.

It's important to remember that the apostle Paul speaks in this passage of "bearing with one another." and then he clarifies, "*in love.*"

This is an important distinction.

We can bear with each other while gritting our teeth and holding on for dear life.

Or we can bear with each other generously, extending grace to each other, waiting patiently until we get to the other side, where resolution and reconciliation await.

The word that the apostle Paul uses for *love* is, of course, *Agape*, one of the most sublime words in the entire New Testament.

On the topic of loving and bearing with one another - Ephesians 4:2-3, William Barclay makes this profound statement:

"The real meaning of 'agape' (love) is unconquerable benevolence. If we regard a person with agape, it means that nothing that he can do will make us seek anything but his highest good. Though he injure us and insult us, we will never feel anything but kindness towards him. That quite clearly means that this Christian love is not an emotional thing. This agape is a thing, not only of the emotions, but also of the will.

It is the ability to retain unconquerable good will to the unlovely and the unlovable, towards those who do not love us, and even towards those who we do not like. Agape love is that quality of mind and heart which compels a Christian never to feel any bitterness, never to feel any desire for revenge, but always to seek the highest good of every man no matter what he may be" - William Barclay

In this moment of profound disagreement and polarization that we are experiencing as families, churches and communities, we must apply

like never before the call of the gospel to bear with one another in *agape* love.

It is there that the true nature of God's love reveals itself. And we have the opportunity in moments like the one we are experiencing to put into practice the way God loves us.

God doesn't just love us when we are lovely, when we are obedient and holy. He doesn't just love us when we have performed well. He doesn't reach out to us only when we seek him first. The Bible says that:

Ephesians 2

*2 you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

God loved us even when we did not deserve it. We must extend that privilege to each other!

Believers who love Donald Trump must bear in Agape love with those who detest him and see him as the incarnation of the antichrist.

Undocumented immigrant believers who are deeply offended and who suffer under the present government policies, must bear in agape love with those who believe that enforcing those policies is legitimate and necessary.

Joe Biden Democrat Christians must extend the hand of peace to their counterparts who will vote with glee for a second Republican administration.

Republican diehards must make every effort to acknowledge the sincerity and piety of those who will vote Democrat out of genuine biblical conviction.

Jesus was very clear that the highest manifestation of love is one in which we extend our kindness and benevolence to those who, according to our understanding, do not deserve it or cannot give anything to us in return:

Luke 6:32-36

32 *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. **Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

It is that kind of love based on principle, that may have very little emotion and self-regard attached to it, that Jesus’ words point to.

It is a Grace that may not be easily felt or spontaneous, but that is extended in sheer obedience to the teaching of the gospel.

It is kindness that goes beyond mere human biology and our natural capacity to love those who are like us, and that connects with the *superhuman capacity* to love sacrificially that is a distinctive of the Divine.

This is what God is calling our church and every Christian in our nation that is either scandalized, or offended, or resentful or tempted to

demonize those other believers who see things differently during this election season.

As convicted Christians and especially as members of this very diverse congregation, we must promise ourselves to acknowledge our tendency to resent and to distance ourselves from our brothers and sisters who think differently, and then resolve to lay our natural feelings at the foot of the cross, and to enter into that heroic domain of *agape* love.

It is there, in that dimension where we deny ourselves and choose to love out of obedience to Christ, that we truly become children of the Most High.

The **unity of the Spirit** that Paul speaks about in **verse 3** evidently does not come naturally. Paul calls us to “make every effort” to keep that unity.

It requires work. It requires prayer. It demands lots of reflection and biblical instruction. Above all, it requires the empowerment of the Holy Spirit working within us, and enabling us to exercise that superhuman love that preserves the unity of the Spirit within a congregation.

The unity that we enjoy as God’s family is sublime, and beyond anything that could be found in the world. Paul describes it in the most spiritual of terms:

THIRD

SERMON

Ephesians 4:4-6

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.*

When looked at this way, a mere election seems flimsy and insignificant by comparison. We cannot allow anything of this world to break this divine bond that holds us together.

Even as we acknowledge that we may be irritated with our fellow believers, we must know that sooner or later we must forgive each other, embrace each other, and recognize that we are *family*.

After all, we have the most precious **blood** of all holding us together. We are **one Body**, inseparably joined together by the energy of **God's spirit**. We have **one faith** in Christ, which is the vehicle that leads to our salvation. We all share **one Father**, who reigns supreme, and who is above every principality and power and human government, and even history.

As we prepare to share in **the Lord's Supper** this morning, let's covenant with each other once more. Let's commit to stay in profound fellowship, in agape love.

No matter what happens on November 3rd or afterwards, we resolve to continue loving each other, and confess that God is in control of this church and of our nation.

(Lord's Supper with **RALPH KEE**.)

FOURTH SERMON

Ephesians 4

Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ

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 says:

*“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”*

9 (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? **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.

BEGINNING OF SERMON

After the **exalted images** of Ephesians 4:1-6 Paul enters into **very concrete considerations.**

As always, he goes **from the theological and abstract** to the behavioral and operational.

The “but” suggests that there is a connection with the preceding, but there’s also a going beyond it, to new considerations.

There is still the element of unity, but now **we are told what unity is for.** We’re also told what maintains it, what concrete elements keep it in place.

This passage calls for **functional unity.**

The unity of the body is **not just sentimental. It is robust and concrete.** It has consequences and obligations.

It is founded on truth.

This is very different from the kind of **mushy, sentimental, ambiguous unity** that often Christians today speak about.

It is often a unity built on **willful ignorance and suppression of the truth of the word** of Scripture.

It often tempts us to mute and minimize the clear distinctives of the faith which define us and which clarify our identity.

But unity needs to be doctrinal. It needs to be based on clarity and biblical truth. It requires a clear understanding of the word of God.

Unity as a complex, purposeful phenomenon is presented here. It is not sentimental or amorphous, spineless. It is dynamic and tense. It presupposes:

- 1) A diversity of gifts,
- 2) It is given **to build the body**,
- 3) It should **promote effectiveness** of the church in service,
- 4) It presupposes **theological unity**,
- 5) It is there for, and **requires resistance to, error and heresy.**

Unity, therefore, **requires diligence** (“*spoudazo*”). This is why Paul earlier says “make every effort”.

True unity is **not easy to achieve** and maintain. Not the unity that the Bible speaks of.

Unity is **hard work**. It requires intentionality, striving and planning.

To achieve unity, there has to be **previous reflection and visioning**. It has to be programmed into our ministries and lives.

Unity may even involve, ironically, a certain level of preliminary conflict at least in the beginning. It may require purification and even some division and separation, as I suggested earlier **when I spoke of crisis and definition**.

Unity requires **a strong stomach**.

The complexity of 21st century life, like never before, requires unity from the church.

We have **a unified enemy**, highly efficient and well-defined like never before. We face a highly organized opposition,

and the **Church finds itself in a weak position**, with **a diversity of conflicting doctrines**.

Today, we have **a fractured Church**, especially in America, with heresy rampant and present in the most subtle of ways.

This divided, fractured, disorganized Church will never be able to accomplish the things that God requires from it in the complex, antagonistic world that we live in right now.

In this passage we have **a working vision of the church**.

This text gives us **guidance as ministers as to why we exist**, why we have been gifted and called, and what we are supposed to achieve and pursue in the kingdom.

The Church is presented here as having both **an internal and an external purpose**.

External—to glorify God and to extend his kingdom and proclaim his truth.

Internal—to provide all the nutrients and instruction necessary so that the saints, “regular believers,” may enter into their intended identity and function, that they may function correctly.

Notice that **the gifts are not provided just so that we might enjoy them** and show them off. They are provided for “**works of service.**” What does this mean? Define.

Paul begins this passage with an exalted vision of Christ, emphasizing **the victorious, risen Christ, who fills all things.** He cites **Psalms 68, verse 18.**

He provides this sublime vision of **a magnificent sovereign who magnanimously distributes gifts** among his people.

There is **complexity in this verse**, but we don’t have the time to dwell on it right now.

Notice **some important elements** of those gifts:

The **supernatural origins of the gifts.** See **1 Corinthians 12.**

The divine, external origin of the gifts. Not from men. Contingent upon good use; requiring humility and dependency on God; requiring a seeking and praying for them (seek the best gifts).

Romans chapter 12 is a parallel passage to this one. In both passages we see the intentional, specific nature of the gifts. (Ephesians says “**he apportioned**”.)

We should **not resent, question, force, or try to supplant or second-guess the gift** that we have received. God is the one who does the distributing.

Sometimes **people want a certain gift**, and they begin to function in it, but God is not necessarily giving it to them. It is their pride at work.

We should **be satisfied with our particular gift** and move comfortably in it, seeking to develop it fully. This is what **Romans 12** suggests.

In verse 11, we are told that Christ **apportions** these gifts in a balanced, intentional, coherent manner.

Each of **the five supernatural offices** that are mentioned provide a coherent nutritional system for the church.

Each office addresses a particular need of the church body as a whole. Together, they provide sufficient resources for the work of the church in the world.

The list of gifts here is **not exhaustive**. There are other lists in other passages.

FIFTH SERMON (Nov. 22, 2020) EPHESIANS 4:12-16

The importance of Christian service:

In **verse 12 we see the real purpose of the gifts**. They are to prepare the seeds **for works of service**. Everything that God does is to make us useful.

It is important that we understand this. God gives us his grace and saves us **so that we might be useful to his kingdom**.

If we are not preparing ourselves, and **if we're not involved** in some sort of service to the kingdom of God, then we are useless. We are being unfaithful.

We are **squandering the gift of God** that is in us. Let us remember the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy in this respect.

The word in the original Greek that is translated "equip" is ***katartismos***. It refers to **the idea of restoring in order to make it functional and useful**, to fashion something; to configure, repair, equip, enable, and power.

Most important meaning: to **set or configure something in such a way** that it functions appropriately, *according to its nature or intended purpose*.

It is a **very intentional word**. It is a functional word. We are being equipped to perform a function, to achieve a purpose.

That's **why we exist as believers**. This is why the gifts of the spirit is given to us. It is **not to sit in a chair**. Or live an ambiguous Christian life. We should be full of purpose, meaning and action on behalf of the Kingdom.

We should never ignore **the importance of verse 12** and following verses. This is where it really gets thick and important.

Verse 12 tells us that **God wants the Body of his church to be built up**. That means he wants us to be strong, like a weight lifter with strong muscles. God wants his people to be powerful and effective, filled with the Spirit and productive

This process of growing up and becoming powerful for the Kingdom means that **we will have unity in the faith** (The result).

Again, it is important to emphasize that **this unity has to be *in the faith* (see v. 13).**

The word “faith” (*pisteōs*) here refers to **a system of beliefs**, (as in the “Christian Faith”), not so much “confidence or trust in God.”

If we are not united by **common belief** then we are lost. This is crucial in the time that we are living in.

This means that we need **to have a common doctrine**. We can no longer tolerate a church where people believe whatever they want.

If a congregation is not unified in the things it believes, then it is rendered ineffective. It cannot have true power as it seeks to accomplish the will of God. Its efforts will be diluted and scattered.

We may have **differences on certain issues** that are not crucial to the faith or to the effectiveness of the church. But on others, there are things that are not negotiable.

If we say that there needs to be doctrinal unity, this begs the question,

What is doctrinal, and what is merely secondary or horizontal?

Paul **will continue to develop this further** in the following passages, which we will explore in a couple of future sermons.

But it is important that we touch on a couple of additional issues.

In several places in the Bible, Paul speaks about this idea of **being infants, of being immature** in the truth of God.

1 Corinthians 3

3 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.

2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.

Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? **4** For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

An immature Christian becomes prey to the doctrinal fluctuations of the time. He is **influenced by the prevailing culture**, instead of being grounded on scripture. Let’s remember here the words of **Romans chapter 12**, verses one and two.

I believe that right now, many Christians are allowing themselves to be shaped by false ideas about **what constitutes true justice**, true unity, true morality, true biblical diversity, true gender identity, and true tolerance, for example.

In this sense, they are being contaminated by the virus of **secular thinking**, rather than reasoning biblically and theologically.

More than ever, the church needs to be preaching **correct doctrine in a very intentional way**. This is necessary, in order to produce mature, solid, effective Christians.

Also because we are entering into a time of **great heresy**, where more than ever before the church will be tempted to go astray into false doctrine.

We must discern the times that we are living in. And as the Church of Jesus Christ, we must then set our course accordingly.

Creeping Apostasy. See 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, **10** and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing.

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. **11** For this reason **God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12** and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

This is why Paul says to Timothy,

2 Timothy 4:1-5

*1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage**—with great patience and careful instruction. **3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.** Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.** **5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.***

God expects his servants to **speak the truth in love, verse 15**, so that the church of Jesus Christ will be able to grow in a balanced, organic, effective way. Not in the schizophrenic way that we are now growing.

Discuss what it means to preach the truth in love.

The last image in verse 16 is a very accurate, **anatomical understanding** of the church. Notice here the functional, very concrete understanding of what the church is. It is almost scientific.

It is robust and muscular. It is the image of **an effective, organic machine** having reached coherent functioning, with a well coordinated neurological system, moving in a unified direction, directed by the brain/head, who is Jesus Christ.

I love **that last image in verse 16**: the church as a robust, healthy body, “held together by every supporting ligament, growing together, and building itself up in love as each part does it work.”

These “ligaments” prevent the bones of the body from flying off in different directions. They provide structure, a solid foundation for coherence and effectiveness in service.

Those ligaments that hold the church together are the elements of wholesome, clearly defined doctrine, taught by pastors and teachers and prophets, who have been appointed to train and teach the church for the service of the kingdom.

SIXTH SERMON

Begin with verse 17. **“So I tell you this, and insist on it.”**

As a **consequence** of the **preceding v. 17**. In other words, in **no uncertain terms!**

The contrast between **corrupt Gentiles**, their corrupt way of **living and thinking**, and the way **the godly mind** thinks.

The **futility of the Gentile mind (*mataiotes*)** which is corrupt and reprobate. See **Romans 1:21, 28 and 32**.

The mind that God gives, on the contrary, is a **sound mind**, that thinks well and precisely. See **2 Timothy 1:6**.

Men’s minds have become **hardened**. They have **become obstinate**. They refuse to acknowledge the truth that they know.

Therefore **God gives them over** to a defective way of living and thinking. See **Romans 1:21,28, 32, and Rom. 2:5**.

This is why, when we hear the **truth** we must **not resist it**, but rather submit to it, even if it is unpleasant sometimes.

Verse 19 shows the inevitable end to this attitude: a mind of **sensuality, impurity and greed**. This is what we also see in Romans, the same trajectory. **see verses Romans 1:24-27**.

Verse 21 introduces **an important truth**:

Who is Jesus? **He is *the truth that is in Jesus***. The truth contained in his words, and his actions, in his life, and in his gospel as fleshed out by the teachings of the New Testament.

Not some invented, generic, vaporous Jesus, but one who is truth incarnate.

It is not enough to say “**just give me Jesus**”. Jesus is **a concrete being**, who is the incarnation of truth. He says “I am the truth”. We cannot falsify who he is and make him fit our own preferences. Jesus is photographed in the Bible, both through his own words and actions, and through the teachings of the apostles. And we must obey his truth, and act like he acted.

SEVENTH SERMON

January 10, 2021

Ephesians 4:17-32

Instructions for Christian Living

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.

Verses 22 through 24 show us what that life in Jesus should look like. It means a renewal of the failed mind that Paul describes earlier, and the adoption of a new self, a new personality, a new way of thinking and being (**a new creation**).

This is totally foreign to the carnal way that the Gentiles who don't know Christ live in.

See Romans 6:6-14 and Galatians 5:16-21. Comment.

Verses 25 through 32 unfold in detail, and give us examples of, the kind of behavior that constitutes this new self, this new way of living, animated by a mind that is receiving its perceptions directly from the Spirit of God.

There are **eight concrete admonitions, invitations to godly behavior**, that the apostle gives us in the following verses.

Discuss each one of these behaviors briefly, and draw out what kind of a moral portrait they produce together.

- 1) Put off falsehood and **speak truthfully**.
- 2) Don't let **anger** control you.
- 3) **Don't give the devil excuses** to attack you. Paul connects this with anger.
- 4) Live an **honest, hard-working life**. And be generous with your possessions.
- 5) Let your **words and your conversation** be healthy and constructive. The opposite of unwholesome, **saprás (gr.)**—rotten, corrupt, destructive.
- 6) **Don't grieve the Holy Spirit**.
- 7) Live a **gentle, peaceful lifestyle**.
- 8) A **life of kindness** and compassion.

In the end, what we have here is an exposition of **the works of the flesh and the contrast with the fruit of the Spirit that we see in Galatians 5:16-25**.

Read this and finish!

“Let each one speak the truth”— renounce any devious way of dealing with fellow believers, or anyone. Refuse lying, hypocrisy, gossip, dissimulation. Adopt sincerity, transparency, protecting the reputation of others. Being harmless to others.

The reference to “neighbor” means that this type of conduct should be applied to everyone, and not just the members of the family of faith. Christians should be known for their transparency and sincerity, for being above board in all their dealings with others.

“Be angry and do not sin”—There is an acceptance of the fact that anger is an inevitable emotion, and has a certain legitimacy. But it should not take over, linger longer than necessary or control our actions.

“And do not give the devil a foothold,”— this point is connected to the element of anger. Anger can lead to actions that allow Satan to work in us. Anger can lead to words that destroy friendships and even marriages. Unchecked, it can lead to murder and all sorts of violent actions. All of this is the work of Satan, who will use this anger as a foothold, a springboard, to act within and through us.

We should always be aware that we have an adversary, an accuser who takes advantage of every action and every word to accuse us and to attack within us.

Satan is a legalist. He uses our sins to accuse us, to gain entry into our lives and to bring suffering and grief to us and those around us. We should avoid making his work easier for him.

“Do not steal, but rather work.”—(and be generous with the possessions that you gain from your labor.— there may have been people in the Ephesian congregation who engaged in robbing others before they knew Christ.

They are no longer to do that, but rather the opposite. They should work hard *and be generous with others* when God prospers them. Generosity is the opposite of stealing.

“Do not engage in unwholesome talk or comments.”—See **Matthew 12:33-37**.

Matthew 12:33-37

33 *“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.** 35 **A good man brings good***

things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Your words and your conversation reflect what is inside your heart and your mind. When you are clean and generous inside, this will be reflected by the way you talk. The opposite is also true.

Words have consequences. They have extraordinary importance.

We should not waste time with silly conversation lacking in nutrients. We should measure our words. We should think more than we speak.

We consume energy with our words. Therefore we should be economical in our use of them.

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit.”—

We should be careful to not say, feel or do anything that would inhibit the Spirit’s work in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is a source of power and blessing in our lives. His presence inside us is a huge asset. We should be careful not to engage in any kind of speaking or behaving that would distance Him from us.

There is such a thing as grieving the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t necessarily mean offending him or making him angry, but rather muting and reducing His capacity to move within us.

He lives within us and our actions and our words can affect Him negatively. We should be sensitive to this dynamic and guide our words and actions accordingly.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger”— This verse constitutes a list of the works of the flesh. It is the very opposite of a life led by the Spirit. This is a portrait of a carnal sensibility, the very opposite of the gentleness, kindness and generosity that should characterize a godly, Christ-like life.

We should make sure we search out and eliminate every trace of this animal-like sensibility from our life.

“Be kind and compassionate”—This final quality mentioned by the apostle is the very opposite of the one just mentioned. It is the way of love that he describes in 5:1 and 2.

Really, every quality that has been mentioned until now is summarized by this attitude of love that should characterize the life of every believer.

So, from the lofty considerations of the first verses in Ephesians chapter 4 discussed at the beginning of this sermon series, we see that the ultimate result has to be a life characterized by purity, holiness and love. Anything less than that is a contradiction of God’s intention for us and our lifestyle.

We should note that in all of these qualities there is an element of rejecting and an element of embracing and adopting. This is exactly the experience of all believers who are involved in the struggle to free themselves from their old nature, and to embrace the divine nature of the Father.

In summary, let us embrace God’s call to Christian unity, understanding its components and its challenges, as well as its beauty.

This requires virtues of humility and tolerance. It demands that we be aware of the sublime foundation that supports it—one Spirit, one baptism, one Savior, and one God over all.

It demands that we understand that we are all called to Christian service. God has invested His gifts in us for this to become possible.

In order for us to serve God effectively as a Body, we need to be coordinated and coherent in our efforts. And this requires common doctrine and belief. We should never compromise biblical teaching and biblical faith. We should become strong in the Word.

This is the only thing that will keep us from becoming fluctuating and penetrable, easy prey to the many doctrinal viruses that populate the modern spiritual realm.

Finally, we need to live and behave in a way that is different from the way men and women who don't know the Lord live. We must live holy lives, resist the temptation to compromise on this challenge, and more than ever retain this call to holiness as an integral part of the teaching and practice of the Church.