

Ephesians Chapter 4

A Deep Expository Study: Walk Worthy -- Unity, Gifted Ministry, Maturity, and the Putting Off of the Old Self in the Renewal of the New

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 4

The Hinge of the Letter -- Where Theology Becomes a Way of Walking

Ephesians chapter 4 is the great turning point of the letter. Everything in chapters 1 through 3 -- the eternal election, the redemption through blood, the adoption to sonship, the sealing of the Spirit, the resurrection from death in trespasses, the creation of one new humanity, the cosmic mystery revealed, the prayer for the fullness of God -- all of it has been the foundation. Chapter 4 is the structure that rises from that foundation. The architecture of grace now becomes the architecture of life.

The opening word of chapter 4 in the original Greek is 'therefore' -- and it is one of the most weight-bearing 'therefores' in all of Scripture. Paul uses it to make the connection explicit: because of everything God has done in Christ, described across three chapters of sustained theological wonder, there is a corresponding way of living. Not an optional way. Not a supplementary way. The only way that is coherent with what God has done. The theological indicatives of chapters 1 through 3 demand the ethical imperatives of chapters 4 through 6. You cannot say you believe what chapters 1 through 3 declare and then live as though chapter 4 does not follow from it.

The chapter unfolds in three broad movements. First, the call to walk worthy of the calling -- specifically, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, grounded in seven foundational 'ones' that describe the church's irreducible common identity (vv. 1-6). Second, the doctrine of the gifted church -- the risen and ascended Christ has given gifts to His body for the specific purpose of equipping the saints for ministry, building up the body, and bringing the community to maturity in Christ (vv. 7-16). Third, the call to put off the old self and put on the new -- the specific behavioral and attitudinal transformation that follows from the renewal of the mind (vv. 17-32).

Why the Transition From Chapter 3 to Chapter 4 Matters

Chapter 3 ended with a doxology: 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.' Chapter 4 begins with a prisoner asking the church to walk in a manner worthy of its calling. The connection is not accidental. The glory that is to be displayed in the church is not a passive glory -- it is displayed through a community that is genuinely walking worthily, genuinely maintaining unity, genuinely growing to maturity, genuinely putting off what belongs to the old self and

putting on what belongs to the new. The doxology of chapter 3 is only credible if the walk of chapter 4 is real.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 4 knowing that the theology of the first three chapters is now asking something of us. The grace that found us dead and made us alive, that broke down the dividing wall and created one new humanity, that promised to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine -- that grace is now calling us to walk in a manner worthy of it. Lord, we know how wide the gap is between the calling described in this chapter and the way we actually live. We know what our speech is like when we are under pressure. We know where bitterness lives in us. We know how quickly we revert to the old self that was supposed to have been put off.

So we ask for what this chapter ultimately calls for: the renewal of the spirit of our minds. Not a surface adjustment of behavior, but the deep transformation of the inner orientation from which behavior flows. Let Christ form us from the inside out. Let the new self You have created after Your own likeness become the increasingly dominant reality of who we are. And as we study this chapter, let it be more than information -- let it be formation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-3 -- The Call to Walk Worthy

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

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I am writing to you as a prisoner -- but not Rome's prisoner. I am the Lord's prisoner. And because of that, I am urging you, from the bottom of my heart: live in a way that actually matches the calling you have received. That means being genuinely humble -- not performing humility, but actually thinking rightly about yourself. It means being gentle -- having the strength to stay calm and controlled. It means being patient -- long-tempered, not easily set off. It means bearing with one another in love -- holding up the weight of other people's humanity even when it is hard. And make it a priority -- press hard at this -- to maintain the unity that the Spirit has already created, keeping it held together by peace.

"As a Prisoner for the Lord, I Urge You"

Paul opens the ethical section of the letter by reidentifying himself as a prisoner -- not of Rome, but 'for the Lord.' He established this framing in 3:1, and he returns to it here because it is crucial for the authority and the weight of what follows. Paul is not

speaking from a position of comfort and security, offering theoretical advice about how to live. He is speaking from chains, from custody, from the cost of faithful gospel proclamation. The man urging the Ephesians to walk in humility and gentleness and patience is a man who has practiced those qualities in conditions far more demanding than anything most of his readers have faced. The word for urge (parakaleo) is one of Paul's most characteristic words for pastoral appeal -- it means to call alongside, to encourage, to exhort with warmth and urgency.

"A Life Worthy of the Calling You Have Received"

The phrase 'worthy of the calling' requires careful theological handling. Paul is not saying that the Ephesians need to earn or repay their calling through worthy living. The calling is already received -- it is a past-tense gift, already given, already secured. What he is saying is that there is a correspondence -- a coherence -- between the calling and the life. The Greek word for worthy (axios) was used of the two pans of a balance scale being in equilibrium with each other. To live worthily is to bring your daily life into equilibrium with your calling -- to let the weight of what God has done press down on the side of daily behavior until the two pans balance. The question is: does the way I am living correspond to the person God has declared me to be in Christ?

Four Qualities of Worthy Walking

Paul immediately specifies the qualities that characterize the worthy walk. Humility (tapeinophrosyne) -- the settled, genuine assessment of oneself as dependent on God and as a servant of others, without the need to assert one's own importance or protect one's own status. In the Greco-Roman world, humility was not a virtue -- it was associated with weakness and servility. Paul makes it the first quality of the worthy walk, because without it none of the others are possible. Gentleness (prautes) -- the same word translated as meekness, this quality describes strength under control. Not weakness -- power that has been submitted and directed. Patience (makrothumia) -- literally 'long-tempered,' the opposite of short-tempered or easily provoked. This is particularly the quality needed in community -- with other believers who are different, who fail, who frustrate, who sometimes act in ways that are genuinely difficult to tolerate. Bearing with one another in love -- the word for bearing (anechomenoi) means to hold up, to carry, to endure what is burdensome. Community life requires this.

"Make Every Effort to Keep the Unity of the Spirit"

Verse 3 adds the imperative of effort to the call for unity. The phrase 'make every effort' (spoudazontes) means to exert yourself, to press hard, to be diligent and urgent about something. Unity is not automatic. It is a gift of the Spirit -- 'the unity of the Spirit' -- that must be actively and strenuously maintained. It already exists as a spiritual reality, created by the one Spirit indwelling every genuine believer. But it must be actively preserved against the forces that constantly threaten to fracture it -- pride, offense, doctrinal disagreement, personality conflicts, cultural differences, and the persistent activity of the enemy who knows that a divided church cannot display the manifold wisdom of God to the watching cosmos. Peace is the binding agent, the ligament that holds the body of unity together.

Key Observations

- **'Worthy' describes correspondence and coherence between calling and conduct** -- not earning but embodying what has been given.
- **The four qualities of the worthy walk (humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another) are all relational** -- they describe how the gospel shapes us toward other people.
- **Unity is the Spirit's gift, but its preservation requires strenuous human effort** -- the two are not in tension.
- **Peace is the bond that holds unity together** -- not the absence of difficulty but the active pursuit of reconciliation.

Ephesians 4:4-6 -- The Seven Foundations of Unity

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

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Here is the foundation of everything: there is one body -- one community of all who are genuinely in Christ, no matter what the dividing lines look like from the outside. One Spirit dwelling in every genuine believer. One hope you were all called into -- the same resurrection, the same new creation, the same eternal future. One Lord -- Jesus Christ, the One to whom every knee will bow. One faith -- the same gospel, the same apostolic truth. One baptism -- one entry into the community. And over all of it: one God and Father of all -- over everything, working through everything, personally present in everyone who belongs to Him. Seven ones. One community. One source. One destination.

The Architecture of Christian Unity

These three verses constitute one of the most compressed and architecturally precise statements of Christian identity in the entire New Testament. Paul lists seven foundational 'ones' -- the irreducible, non-negotiable, theologically grounded unities that constitute the church's common identity. These are not aspirations. They are declarations of what is already true about every genuine believer -- the bedrock on which the call to maintain unity rests. The seven are arranged in a Trinitarian structure. Three center on the Spirit's work. Three center on the Son's work. One names the Father's comprehensive sovereignty over all.

"One Body and One Spirit"

The one body is the church -- the single, universal community of all those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, ancient or modern. There are not two bodies -- one Jewish Christian and one Gentile Christian. There are not multiple bodies divided by tradition, denomination, or culture. There is one body. Every genuine believer, regardless of their ecclesial address, belongs to this one body. The practical implication is that the divisions between Christians are always, from this perspective, contradictions of a unity that has already been established. The one Spirit is the Holy Spirit -- the same Spirit indwelling every genuine believer, producing the same fruit, distributing diverse gifts for the common good, crying the same 'Abba, Father' in every heart. We are one body because we share one Spirit.

"One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism"

The one hope is the shared eschatological destination of all believers -- the resurrection, the new creation, the final inheritance, the face-to-face vision of God. Every genuine believer is moving toward the same destination. Sharing a destination creates a traveling community. The one Lord is Jesus Christ -- the Lord before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess (Philippians 2:10-11), the Lord whose name is above every name. Every genuine believer confesses the same Lord. The one faith is the body of belief -- the apostolic gospel, the content of what is believed -- that was entrusted to the saints (Jude 3). The one baptism is the rite of initiation into the body of Christ -- the outward, visible sign of the inward, invisible work of the Spirit in regeneration and union with Christ.

"One God and Father of All, Who Is Over All and Through All and In All"

The seven 'ones' culminate in the most comprehensive declaration: one God and Father of all. The three prepositions that follow -- over all, through all, in all -- describe the Father's relationship to creation and to His people in three dimensions. He is over all -- transcendent, sovereign, above everything that exists. He is through all -- immanent, actively working through every person, every event, every circumstance. He is in all -- intimately present within the community of His people, dwelling in the temple He has made of their lives. The three prepositions together describe a God who is simultaneously above the universe, at work through the universe, and personally present within His people -- a God of unqualified sovereignty and unqualified intimacy. This is the final ground of unity. There is one God. He is the Father of all who are in Christ. The family has one Father, and that one Father holds the one family together.

Key Observations

- **The seven 'ones' are not aspirations but declarations** -- they describe what is already true about every genuine believer.
- **The Trinitarian structure (Spirit, Son, Father) grounds the church's unity** in the eternal community of the Godhead.

- **The 'one Father' who is over all, through all, and in all** combines divine transcendence and divine immanence in a single comprehensive declaration.
- **The practical implication is that every division among genuine believers** is a contradiction of a unity that the Trinity has already established.

Ephesians 4:7-16 -- The Gifted Church: Christ's Descent, Ascent, and the Equipping of the Saints

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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. 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. 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. 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.

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Now here is something important: every single one of us has been given a grace-gift -- personally calibrated and given by Christ Himself. The Scripture says that when He ascended on high, He gave gifts to His people. And for Him to have ascended, He first had to descend -- all the way down into human existence, into death -- and then ascend higher than all the heavens so that He could fill everything. From that position He gave specific gifted people to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But here is the key: He gave them not to do all the ministry while everyone else watches. He gave them to equip God's people for their works of service, so that the body gets built up -- until we all reach real unity, real knowledge of Christ, real maturity measured by the fullness of Christ Himself. That way we stop being spiritual infants knocked around by every new teaching that comes along. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head. From Him the whole body is held together, and each part doing its work builds the body up in love.

"To Each One of Us Grace Has Been Given"

Having described the unity of the body in verses 4-6, Paul now introduces the diversity within that unity: 'to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.' The 'each one' is emphatic and inclusive -- no member of the body is ungifted. Grace -- the specific, personal, divinely calibrated enabling that equips each believer for their particular contribution to the body -- has been given to every member. The distribution is 'as Christ apportioned it.' The gifts are not randomly distributed. They are not self-selected. They are personally and purposefully given by Christ Himself, the head of the body, in exactly the measure and kind that He has determined serves the body's needs. This removes both pride (your gift is a gift, not an achievement) and envy (the gift given to another was given by the same Lord who gave yours to you).

The Gifted Leaders: Not for Their Own Ministry but for Equipping

Verse 11 lists the specific gifted people Christ gave to the church: 'the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.' These are specifically the gifts that relate to the ministry of the Word -- the gifts of proclamation, teaching, and pastoral care that shape the community's understanding of the gospel. The crucial verse is 12: these gifted people were given 'to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.' The grammar of verse 12 is decisive for understanding the nature of church ministry. The gifted leaders are not given to do all the ministry while the congregation watches and receives. They are given to equip the saints -- to prepare, train, and enable every member of the body for their own ministry. The professional clergy model -- in which the minister does ministry and the congregation receives it -- is a distortion of this text.

The Goal: Maturity -- the Fullness of Christ

Verses 13-16 describe the destination toward which the gifted, equipping, member-ministering church is moving: '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.' The telos -- the goal, the end -- of all the gifting, all the equipping, all the ministry is a community that has grown to the measure of Christ's own fullness. The destination of the church's growth process is not a polished organization, not an impressive program, not a culturally influential institution. The destination is Christlikeness -- collective, communal, measured not by human standards but by the stature of Christ Himself.

"Speaking the Truth in Love"

Verse 15 contains one of the most important and most misused phrases in the pastoral vocabulary of the church: 'speaking the truth in love.' It is misused in two directions simultaneously. Some use it to justify harsh truth-telling -- 'I'm just speaking the truth' - with the 'in love' part functioning as permission rather than as a genuine modifier. Others use the 'in love' part to avoid speaking difficult truths at all -- love becomes a reason for silence rather than a motive for courageous speech. Paul's meaning is held together by both components equally. The truth must be spoken -- genuinely, clearly, without dilution or evasion. But the speaking must be in love -- genuinely motivated by the welfare of the person being spoken to, shaped by the relationship and the context. The mature community is one that can hold truth and love together.

The Body Building Itself Up in Love

Verse 16 closes this section with one of the most beautiful and most demanding descriptions of church life in the New Testament: '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.' Three things are said simultaneously. The source of the body's life and growth is Christ -- 'from him.' Every gift, every grace, every spiritual vitality flows from the Head into the body. The mechanism of the body's growth is the contribution of every part -- 'as each part does its work.' There is no spectator Christianity in this vision. Every member has a role. And the atmosphere of the building is love -- 'builds itself up in love.' Love is not merely the attitude in which ministry is done. It is the substance of which the building is made.

Key Observations

- **Every member of the body has been given grace apportioned by Christ** -- there are no ungifted spectators in the community of faith.
- **The descent and ascent of Christ grounds His authority to give gifts** -- He fills all things from the position of universal lordship.
- **The gifted leaders exist to equip saints for ministry, not to do all ministry themselves** -- the building happens when every part does its work.
- **The goal of all ministry is corporate maturity** -- the community grown to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- **Spiritual infancy is instability; spiritual maturity is the rootedness** that can assess new teachings against the apostolic foundation.
- **'Speaking the truth in love' holds two equally necessary commitments together** -- neither the cowardice of silence nor the cruelty of harshness.
- **The body builds itself up in love** -- love is both the atmosphere and the substance of the church's growth.

Ephesians 4:17-24 -- Put Off the Old, Put On the New: The Renewal of the Mind

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. 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. 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. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

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I am telling you straight, and I mean it seriously in the Lord: stop living the way people who do not know God live. Their thinking is empty and going nowhere. Their understanding is dark. They are cut off from the life of God because of the ignorance that comes from a heart that has become hard toward Him. They have lost the ability to feel the moral weight of things, and they have handed themselves over to whatever feels good -- impurity and greed in every form. But that is not what you learned when you came to know Christ. What you were taught was this: strip off your old self -- the person you used to be, the one being eaten away by desires that lie to you -- and be completely transformed in the deep orientation of your mind. Then put on the new self -- the self that has been created to actually look like God, in real righteousness and real holiness.

"No Longer Live as the Gentiles Do"

The second major movement of the chapter opens with Paul insisting that the worthy walk involves a fundamental break with the way of life that characterizes those who are outside Christ. It is important to notice that Paul does not condemn the surrounding Gentile culture with contempt. He describes it with sober accuracy and traces its condition back to its root. The Gentile way of life is characterized by 'the futility of their thinking' -- not primarily by sexual immorality or greed (though these follow), but by a fundamental disorder in the way reality is perceived and processed. Futility of thinking means that their mental life is disconnected from truth -- it is going through the motions of reasoning without arriving at what is real.

The Anatomy of Spiritual Darkness

Paul traces the progression of spiritual darkness with a clinical precision that is one of the most searching passages in the New Testament for understanding how human beings move from God into moral destruction. Hardening of the heart -- The root condition is not intellectual but volitional: 'the hardening of their hearts.' The hardening is the result of repeated choices to suppress the truth (Romans 1:18), to prefer the creature over the Creator, to refuse the knowledge of God. Over time, these choices produce a calloused, rigid interior that can no longer be penetrated by normal means. Ignorance -- The hardened heart produces ignorance: 'separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.' This is not ignorance of information but ignorance of God -- the inability to genuinely know God as He is. Loss of sensitivity -- 'Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality.' When the conscience has been repeatedly silenced, when its warnings have been consistently overridden, it eventually loses its ability to function. And when the internal corrective has been silenced, the person gives themselves over to sensuality and every kind of impurity and greed.

"Put Off the Old Self -- Be Renewed -- Put On the New Self"

Verses 22-24 present a three-part structure for Christian transformation. Put off the old self -- The old self is to be put off like a garment. The image is intentional -- a garment can be taken off and set aside. The old self is not the permanent, irreducible identity of the believer. It is something that can be removed, that has been rendered obsolete by the cross, that does not belong to the person you now are in Christ. The old self is 'being corrupted by its deceitful desires' -- not merely bad, it is deteriorating, moving toward greater and greater corruption. Be made new in the attitude of your minds -- Between the putting off and the putting on is the renewal of the mind -- the deep interior transformation that makes the behavioral change sustainable. This renewal is described in the passive voice, something that is done to us, by the Spirit, through the Word, through community, through suffering, through prayer. But it is also something we must cooperate with. Put on the new self -- The new self is 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.' This echoes the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27 -- made in the image and likeness of God. The new self is not a patched-up version of the old. It is a new creation -- the image of God restored and renewed in Christ.

Key Observations

- **The Gentile way of life traces back to the hardening of the heart** -- a volitional problem before it is an intellectual one.
- **The anatomy of spiritual darkness (hardening, ignorance, loss of sensitivity, self-surrender) is a progression**, not a sudden fall.
- **Christian ethics is grounded in a Person** -- 'you learned Christ' -- not primarily in a rule system or a code of behavior.
- **The three-part structure (put off, be renewed, put on) describes transformation as both decisive action and ongoing process**, with the renewal of the mind as the hinge.
- **The new self is not a better version of the old** -- it is a new creation, the image of God restored in Christ.

Ephesians 4:25-32-- Specific Transformations: Speech, Anger, Work, Words, Bitterness, and Forgiveness

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no more, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every

form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

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Here is what putting off the old self and putting on the new actually looks like in practice. Stop lying. Tell the truth to one another -- we are all part of the same body, and a body that lies to itself cannot function. When you get angry, do not let it turn into sin. Do not carry that anger overnight -- deal with it before the day ends. Unresolved anger is the devil's open door into your life. If you used to steal, stop. Work. Do something productive with your hands -- and work specifically so you will have something to give to people who are in need. Be very careful about what comes out of your mouth. No rotten, tear-down talk. Only what is genuinely helpful to build the person up, calibrated to what they actually need. And here is what is at stake: do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who sealed you for the day of redemption. Now, sweep out all the bitterness -- every kind of it. All the rage. All the simmering anger. The quarreling. The slander. Every form of malice. Get rid of all of it. Instead: be kind. Be tenderhearted. Forgive each other -- the same way God in Christ has forgiven you.

"Put Off Falsehood and Speak Truthfully"

The first specific application of the old-self/new-self framework is speech -- specifically, the speech of truthfulness versus falsehood. The command is grounded in community: 'we are all members of one body.' Falsehood in the community of faith is not merely a personal moral failure -- it is a form of self-destruction. A body whose members cannot trust what each other says is a body that cannot function. The nerve signals are corrupted. The communication that should coordinate the body's movement is distorted. Truthful speech is the prerequisite for functional community. This does not mean the brutal, weaponized 'honesty' that uses truth as a vehicle for cruelty. Paul has already specified the framework: speaking the truth in love (verse 15). Truthfulness in community means that your speech accurately represents reality so that those with whom you live and serve can trust and rely on what you say.

"In Your Anger Do Not Sin"

The handling of anger is one of the most pastorally practical instructions in the chapter. Paul quotes Psalm 4:4 -- 'in your anger do not sin' -- and follows it with a specific application: 'Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.' Two things are notable here. First, Paul does not tell the Ephesians not to be angry. He tells them not to sin in their anger. Anger is an emotion, and emotions are morally neutral in themselves -- what matters is what they are directed toward and how they are handled. Second, the command not to let the sun go down on anger is a time limit. Anger that is not resolved becomes something else -- resentment, bitterness, an open wound that the enemy can infect. The phrase 'give the devil a foothold' is literally 'give the devil a place' (topos) -- unresolved anger creates a space in the community and in the believer's inner life that

the devil occupies and exploits. The resolution of conflict before the day ends is not merely good relational hygiene. It is spiritual warfare.

"Only What Is Helpful for Building Others Up"

The speech instructions continue and intensify in verse 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.' The word for unwholesome (sapos) means rotten, decayed. Unwholesome speech is not merely crude or offensive speech. It is speech that does not serve the building up of the listener -- speech that tears down, discourages, corrupts, or simply fills the air with emptiness. The positive standard is extraordinary: 'only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.' The standard for speech is not merely the avoidance of harm but the positive contribution to the growth and welfare of the person being addressed. 'According to their needs' -- calibrated to what this specific person, in this specific moment, most needs to hear in order to be built up.

"Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit"

Verse 30 introduces one of the most sobering statements in the letter: 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' The word for grieve (lypeo) is an emotion word -- the Holy Spirit experiences grief when believers sin. This is not a metaphor for a mechanical process of spiritual failure. It is a description of a personal relationship in which one party is genuinely, emotionally affected by the behavior of the other. The Holy Spirit is a Person. He has been given to the believer as a seal of adoption, a guarantee of inheritance, a bond of relationship with the Father and the Son. When the believer engages in the unwholesome speech, the unresolved anger, the falsehood, the bitterness described in this section -- they are not merely violating a code. They are hurting a Person who loves them, who has committed to them, who is the very guarantee of their eternal future.

"Forgiving Each Other as God Forgave You"

Verse 32 is the positive replacement for the negative list of verse 31: 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' Forgiveness is described in its most demanding and most liberating terms: the standard is theological -- the measure of how God in Christ has forgiven you. And the measure of God's forgiveness is total, unconditional, irreversible, and costly. It cost the death of the Son. It was given to people who deserved judgment. It was not withheld until the recipients had sufficiently demonstrated their remorse. It was given freely, completely, at enormous cost, to the undeserving. This is the standard Paul sets for human forgiveness in the community of faith. Not because human beings have the natural capacity to forgive this way -- they do not. But because the One who forgave this way lives in them, and His Spirit is producing in them the same quality of love that characterized His own self-giving for them.

Key Observations

- **Truthful speech is essential to the functioning of the body** -- a community of false speech cannot coordinate its members.
 - **Anger is not forbidden but must be resolved quickly** -- unresolved anger gives the devil the space he needs to corrupt the community.
 - **The transformation of the thief is total -- from taking to working to giving** -- a complete reversal of relationship to material goods.
 - **The standard for speech is not the avoidance of harm** but the positive building up of the listener according to their specific needs.
 - **Grieving the Holy Spirit is a personal, relational offense** -- sin against the Spirit is not a mechanical failure but a wounding of a Person.
 - **Bitterness is a comprehensive category requiring total removal** -- selective retention of grievances is not permitted in the new self.
 - **The standard of forgiveness is God's forgiveness in Christ** -- total, costly, freely given to the undeserving.
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What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Walk Worthily -- Let Theology Change the Way You Actually Live

The central demand of Ephesians 4 is one that every believer must reckon with personally: does your daily life correspond to your calling? The three chapters of theology that precede this one were not written to be believed academically and then set aside as the practical section begins. They were written to produce a people whose ordinary, daily, relational, communal life is shaped by the realities they describe. The test of whether you genuinely believe what chapters 1 through 3 declare is whether you are walking in the way chapter 4 describes. Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Truth-telling in love. Forgiveness calibrated to God's forgiveness in Christ. These are not supplementary virtues for the spiritually advanced. They are the basic, daily expression of a life that has genuinely received the grace of the gospel.

2. Invest Yourself in the Local Community -- Every Part Must Do Its Work

The body-building vision of verses 7-16 is one of the most countercultural calls in the New Testament for contemporary Christians who are accustomed to choosing a church the way they choose a service provider -- based on what is offered, how the experience is, and whether their needs are being met. The vision of Ephesians 4 is a community where every member is equipping others, contributing their grace-given gift, and building up the body through their faithful service. You were given a gift. That gift was given for the body. The body needs what you carry. To withhold it -- through passivity, through the consumer mentality of church attendance, through the false humility that

says 'I don't have anything to contribute' -- is to impoverish the community Christ purchased with His blood.

3. Guard Your Mind -- The Renewal Is Real and Requires Effort

The renewal of the mind described in verses 22-24 is both a divine work (something done to us by the Spirit) and a human responsibility (something we cooperate with through deliberate choices). In a media-saturated, stimulus-saturated culture that is constantly feeding the patterns of the old self, the renewal of the mind requires active, sustained effort. What you feed grows. What you starve weakens. The old self is being corrupted by deceitful desires -- and those desires are fed by what you give your attention to. The new self is being renewed by the Spirit through the Word, through prayer, through community -- and those means of grace require active, consistent pursuit.

4. Take Your Speech Seriously

Of all the specific applications in verses 25-32, the speech instructions are perhaps the most immediately and universally relevant. Falsehood, unwholesome talk, bitterness expressed in speech, slander -- these are not exotic sins confined to particularly corrupt people. They are the daily temptations of every member of every community. The standard Paul sets -- speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs -- is one that most believers have never seriously attempted to apply to every conversation. But this is the standard of the new self. Take your words seriously. They either build up or tear down. They either grieve the Holy Spirit or serve the community. Every conversation is an opportunity for the speech of the new self.

5. Forgive Completely -- The Debt Has Already Been Cancelled

The forgiveness command at the close of the chapter is both the most demanding and the most liberating instruction in it. The most demanding because it sets a standard -- God's forgiveness in Christ -- that we cannot meet by natural capacity. The most liberating because it reminds us of what is true: we have already been forgiven that way. God in Christ has already cancelled a debt against us that was infinitely greater than any debt another human being could owe us. To refuse to forgive another person is to act as though our own debt to God was smaller than theirs to us -- which is always false. The person who genuinely understands the measure of God's forgiveness toward them finds that the refusal to forgive others becomes increasingly incoherent.

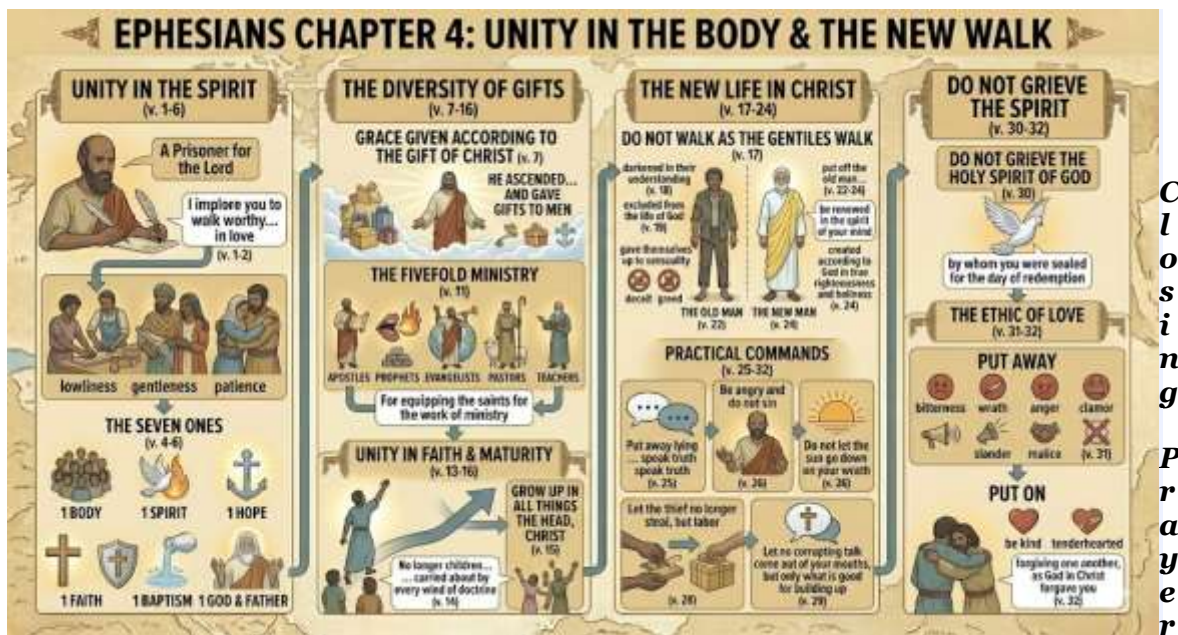
How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 4 presents a vision of Christian community that is simultaneously ancient and urgently contemporary. In a culture of radical individualism, it insists on the

priority of community. In a culture of tribal division, it insists on the unity of the one body. In a culture of self-expression and self-promotion, it insists on the priority of building up others. In a culture of grievance and resentment, it insists on forgiveness calibrated to God's forgiveness in Christ. In a culture of curated digital speech designed to project a carefully managed self-image, it insists on truthful, edifying, other-centered words.

The church that takes Ephesians 4 seriously will look genuinely strange to the surrounding culture -- not strange in the sense of alien or unapproachable, but strange in the sense of being governed by a different set of values, shaped by a different identity, oriented toward a different goal. It will be a community where people are growing toward maturity in Christ rather than toward the maximization of personal experience. It will be a community where leaders invest themselves in releasing the ministry of every member rather than building their own platform. It will be a community where speech is used as a tool for building up rather than a weapon for self-assertion or self-defense.

And because it will look strange, it will be noticed. The manifold wisdom of God, displayed in a community that actually lives this way, will be as compelling in the twenty-first century as it was in the first. The world is not looking for a more competent religious institution. It is looking -- whether it knows it or not -- for the one new humanity that the cross created and that Ephesians 4 describes.



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Heavenly Father, we have come to the end of Ephesians chapter 4 knowing that what we have read is not information to be filed away but a calling to be walked in. Walk worthily. Be humble and gentle and patient. Bear with one another in love. Make every effort to maintain unity. Use your gift for the building of the body. Put off the old self. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on the new self created after Your likeness. Speak truth in love. Resolve anger before the sun goes down. Refuse bitterness. Forgive as You have forgiven.

Lord, we confess the gap between this chapter and our actual daily lives. We have been harsh when You called us to be gentle. We have been proud when You called us to humility. We have carried bitterness we were commanded to release. We have spoken words that tore down when we were called to build up. We have withheld our gifts from the body when every part was needed to do its work. We have grieved Your Spirit. Forgive us -- in Christ, as this chapter instructs.

And then do what only You can do: renew the spirit of our minds. Not the surface of our behavior but the deep interior orientation from which behavior flows. Let the new self You have created after Your own likeness become the increasingly dominant reality of who we are, individually and together.

Let our communities be places where every member is equipped and every member contributes. Let our speech be only what is helpful for building others up. Let our forgiveness be as wide and free and unconditional as Yours. Let the unity of the Spirit be visibly, compellingly real in the bond of peace that holds us together across every human difference. Let us walk worthy of the calling -- not as people trying to earn what they have received, but as people whose daily lives are coming into equilibrium with the inexhaustible grace that has been given to them. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.