

Ephesians

4:1-16

Introduction

Paul's words read like a commencement speech. You've been studying Bible doctrine for three chapters; now you're going to graduate out into the world and apply what you've learned. Get ready to move your tassel and throw your cap in the air; these are the great apostle's words of exhortation to you as students of the words he's penned.

He concentrates first on your **walk**, then on your **work**:

1. Your walk is the subject of verses one through six. "Walk worthy," Paul says in verse one, then tells you how.
2. Your work is the subject of verses seven through sixteen. You're equipped for the "work of the ministry," Paul says in verse twelve, then tells you how.

Both your walk and your work will depend upon God's **grace**. You'll discover God's grace in your *heart* as you walk with Him, and you'll discover God's grace in the *household* of faith as you work with Him.

We'll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 God's Grace In Your Heart Guides And Guards You In Your Walk, and #2 God's Grace In Your Household Guides And Guards You In Your Work.

#1 God's Grace In Your Heart
Guides And Guards You In Your Walk
(v1-6)

We've learned many things in Ephesians; now it's time to live them.

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Paul again reminds us he was "the prisoner of the Lord." He was under house arrest in Rome. God's grace in his heart was sufficient for him and it will be sufficient for you.

He doesn't use the word "grace" until verse seven, but it is on his mind. His exhortation is one of grace. He does not command or demand; he "beseeches" you. Beseech is a word of appeal, based on what is best for you. It is a word full of grace.

He beseeches you to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." "Calling" is a synonym for salvation. "Walk" has to do with your overall conduct of life; we would say *lifestyle*. "Worthy" is a word whose adjective form means *weight*, as in the measurement of weight on a scale. Picture a balance scale with two trays. There is weight on both trays and they are "worthy" when the scale is in balance. On one tray is your beliefs – what you've just learned for three chapters. On the other tray is your behavior – how to live, examined in the next three chapters. Belief and behavior should be in balance.

A simple way of putting this would be to say, "*Act like a Christian!*" The place to start is in your own heart. In verse two Paul tells you about the effect of God's grace upon your believing heart. God's grace in your heart guides you in your walk.

Ephesians 4:2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

This is how you act like a Christian. "With all lowliness" is having a proper estimate of yourself. You should estimate, or esteem, yourself as a servant – because that is what Jesus did. It is also having a proper estimate of others. As a servant, you put Jesus first, then others, finally yourself. You should be willing to be treated as a servant both without complaint and without recognition. More than being willing – *you should be excited to be treated that way!*

"Gentleness" is translated "meekness" in some of your Bibles. It is sometimes defined as "strength under control." You are gentle when you submit to God's dealings without rebellion and to man's unkindness without retaliation. It is an absence of a disposition to assert your personal rights.

"Longsuffering" means you are not easily provoked by people. "Bearing with" is an active response to them; you should act "in love" towards them, not just patiently ignoring them. The love mentioned is

the supernatural love that is produced in your heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

These qualities and characteristics of grace can be applied in any and every situation. They will guide you.

They will also guard you. In verses three through six Paul discusses a “unity” that already exists but which you must be on guard to maintain.

Ephesians 4:3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The word “one” is used seven times. Every Christian is united with every other Christian, but divisions between us seek to shatter our spiritual unity and must be guarded against. “Endeavoring” means *to make a determined effort*. “The bond of peace” is wanting to be bound together by peace among ourselves.

Every Christian is united with every other Christian because,

Ephesians 4:4 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;*

Ephesians 4:5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*

Ephesians 4:6 *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Paul mentions God the Holy Spirit, God the Son, and God the Father. The first thing we would say about unity is that Christians are one because we were saved by the same operation of the triune God in our lives. More specifically:

1. We are “one body” because of our indwelling by “one Spirit.” The Holy Spirit who indwells me also indwells you and every other believer, uniting us as one community.
2. Our one “hope... one faith, one baptism” is because of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the object of the hope, the faith, and the baptism of every believer. It is Jesus in Whom we have believed, in Whom we were baptized, and for Whose coming we wait with expectant hope. “Baptism” here is probably a reference to identifying with Jesus through water baptism.
3. Then there is “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” God is the Father of all believers in a glorious family – the household of faith.

I know what you're thinking – Christians are *divided*, not united! They are divided into Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox; and Protestants are further divided into thousands of denominations and independent churches. Still, we are far more united than you might think. There are foundational truths we all agree upon.

For example: We are certainly divided over the timing of Jesus Christ's return for us. But every Christian shares the "hope" that Jesus is coming back!

Diversity is good; it's from God. Just look at God's diversity in nature. It is alright to meet in various and separate communities as local churches; and we are under no Scriptural obligation to all seek to meet together as one congregation. But we **are** under obligation to minimize our differences where possible to maintain unity in the midst of our diversity.

The ground of our unity must be the foundational, biblical truths which unite us. We can agree to disagree agreeably on the nonessentials. The real problem is that Christians elevate the nonessentials to being essential, then destroy unity rather than maintain it.

Someone once put it best by saying this: *"In essentials, unity... In doubtful things, liberty... In all things, charity."*

God's grace in your heart produces lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and bearing with one another in love. They guide you at all times – and will guard you as you seek to maintain unity.

#2 God's Grace In Your Household Guides And Guards You In Your Work (v7-16)

You are a member of a particular local Church – a household of faith on the earth. God's grace is supplied to you in order that you might go out from the household to accomplish "the work of the ministry." **You** are the minister, commissioned by God, on a mission for God.

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

“Christ’s gift” to the whole Church was the Holy Spirit, given on the Day of Pentecost. These verses are about the special gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given to “each one of us” as believers, “according to the measure,” or sovereignty, of God.

I know that this is what Paul means because of what he says next:

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore He says: *“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.”*

Ephesians 4:9 (Now this, *“He ascended”*—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

Ephesians 4:10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

The illustration here is of a victorious king who has overcome his enemies. He is ascending a mountain, entering triumphantly into his city. He has freed the hostages held captive by the enemy. He is laden with spoils of war and bestows lavish gifts on his grateful people.

Jesus is our victorious King. On the Cross He overcame His enemies. He “ascended” triumphantly into heaven. From there He sent the Holy Spirit upon believers, Who now bestows lavish spiritual gifts upon us.

Before He ascended, Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth.” This troubles some people, but it shouldn’t. Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, all people who died went to Hades. Hades was divided into two compartments – a place of torment, and a place of rest called Paradise. When Jesus died on the Cross, He descended into Hades, into Paradise. There He revealed Himself to all the righteous dead from all time as the Savior they had put their faith in. Then Jesus led them to heaven in the triumphant ascension we’ve just described; and then He sent His Holy Spirit upon the Church by Whom we receive spiritual gifts.

Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18. The Jews applied this verse to Moses when he ascended the mountain to give Israel the law. Paul tells us it was about Jesus, ascending into heaven and giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, through the Holy Spirit, you are given a gift or gifts in order to do the work of the ministry.

You discover your gift or gifts in the household of faith, the Church. The Church was *established* and it *endures* to *equip* you for the work of the ministry.

The Church was established:

Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets...

Back in chapter two Paul called the Church “the household of God” and said it was established on the foundation of the “apostles and prophets.” These gifted men established the Church for you in the first century. There are no longer any “apostles and prophets” in this sense.

There are other gifted men see that the Church endures throughout the succeeding centuries:

Ephesians 4:11 ... some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

“Evangelists” work outside the Church, leading unbelievers to faith in Christ; “Pastors and teachers” work inside the Church, leading believers in faithfulness to Christ.

Jesus saw to it His household of faith was established and that it endures. All of this has as its goal your equipping:

Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

I passed over the gifted men pretty quickly because the real emphasis of these verses is not them or me; **it’s you!** I can’t emphasize enough that **you** are the minister. You come to Church to be “equipped.” The word means *outfitted*. If you were going on some kind of unusual journey, like a safari, you’d need to be *outfitted* with proper equipment. That’s the idea here. Your home, neighborhood, workplace, school... These are your “unusual journey,” your mission field, for which you are being outfitted.

What is “the work of the ministry?” **It is anything that needs to be done and that you do as unto the Lord.**

As you go about doing the work of the ministry it is “edifying... the body of Christ.” “Edifying” means *building up*. Each of us doing our part contributes to all of us.

Ephesians 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

If every one of us goes about doing the work of the ministry, all of us will grow and mature in “faith” and “knowledge.”

1. “Faith” here refers to walking by faith. When you step out by faith to minister, you grow and mature.
2. “Knowledge” is the application of what you’ve learned. As you go about meeting needs as unto the Lord the things you’ve learned will be tested and refined.

“Perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” is how Jesus sees the whole Church when we take seriously our responsibilities to do the work of the ministry.

The Church guides you into the work of the ministry. The Church also guards you, and that is the warning of verse fourteen.

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

You’ll remain immature, like “children,” never growing up to maturity, if you allow yourself to succumb to these things. “Wind of doctrine” refers to false and heretical teachings that blow through Christianity. They are the product of men who deliberately plot with “cunning craftiness” and “deceitful plotting” to “trick” you. We see this a great deal today as the Church insists on adopting things from the world rather than being content with God’s Word. Psychology is a good example of this trend.

You warn your kids about dangerous people. *So does God!* There are dangerous people in the spiritual realm, seeking to destroy you. The Church should be a place of spiritual safety.

It’s a place of spiritual safety if you apply verse fifteen:

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love...

In the Greek sentence there is no reference to “speaking.” It simply says “truthing in love.” This is in contrast to the dangers of verse fourteen. Let me give you an example.

Let’s say you’re interested in learning how to properly raise and discipline your children. The world tells you to never spank them; God’s Word demands that you do. We are “truthing in love” as we resist the world’s doctrines and remain committed to God’s Word.

In the Church there is a wonderful pressure and accountability among believers. You must love one another; but you must do so with God’s truth.

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ –

Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Each of you “supplies” something to every one of us. As each “part does its share,” all of us grow together. We are built-up “in love” as a new and unique society of people – God’s household of faith on the earth.

Conclusion

As we continue in Ephesians, you are expected to act like a Christian in every area of your life.

If you are a Christian, you can always act like one. You have God’s grace in your heart to guide and guard your walk; and you have God’s grace in your household to guide and guard your work.