

P 100 EPHESIANS 4

Paul's detailed, robust theology and his personal witness to which the reader has been treated in the last three chapters has been leading up to his call in 4:1—to walk worthy of who you are in Christ. Carefully articulated theology must at some point be applied, and it is to this job that Paul now turns. The ethics enjoined upon believers is in keeping with the theological claims of the earlier chapters, and so we are not surprised to read about walking rightly and keeping unity and above all demonstrating love, for these traits are characteristic of the Godhead whom believers serve. The goal of good theology, then, is an upright life, moving to maturity, able to discern spiritual matters and understand God's wisdom. Paul asks the Ephesians twice to walk in a particular manner (4:1, 17). These calls serve to organize the chapter into halves, the first dealing with the one God giving specific gifts for the one body (church), and the second looking at the new person renewed by the Spirit to be one with other members of the body. In the chapter, Paul's burden is to encourage believers in a holy lifestyle based on key theological truths. First, the God who calls is the one God; hence the believers ought also to live in unity. Second, the Christ who calls has the full measure of grace for each believer, and from that grace gives gifts to spur on wisdom and growth.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST, DIVERSE GIFTS (4:1–16)

¹ 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 p 101 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 in all things grow up into 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.

Christians rightly stress the importance of understanding God's work in Christ, and the centuries of creedal formation attest to the critical nature of getting theology correct. Far too often, however, believers stop at that point, resting complacently in their (false) assumption that to know the right answer is to be right with God. Paul's injunctions to the Ephesians suggests otherwise. Right theology leads to right living; indeed the two are not easily compartmentalized, as Paul's comments attest. His argument begins with a call to walk uprightly, but quickly grows to include a declaration of God's oneness and the church's one calling. Theological truths support ethical behavior: to have the former without the latter is the height of arrogance, and to have the latter without the former is hollow legalism. The structure of his argument flows from a call to walk in a manner consistent with their calling as believers (4:1–6), followed by two p 102 additional notes. First, that each believer is given grace by Christ, who also gives to his body gifts of theological leadership in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (4:7–12). Second, each person being thus equipped for ministry will grow into Christ (4:13–16).

One Calling by the One God (4:1–6)

In this single sentence in Greek, Paul exhorts his readers to grab hold of, in an experiential way, the unique standing they enjoy in Christ. Paul uses the indicative form of *parakaleō* (to encourage or exhort) here and in a similar phrase in Rom 12:1. In both places, the exhortation to holy living follows immediately after a doxology. The vision of the exalted God leads Paul to urge believers fervently to act in such a way that their lives testify to the truth of that awe-inspiring vision. Paul stresses several key terms that will guide his argument throughout the chapter: calling, love, and unity. And he imagines this unity in love being realized in the daily lives of believers. Paul speaks of walking one's calling, of having humility and meekness which models the character of the Triune God and reflects the hope of our salvation. His status as prisoner in the Lord operates in the background and will serve as an example of leadership when he speaks of gifts in 4:11.

Paul's metaphorical use of the term "walk" (translated in TNIV as "live a life") reveals his deep Jewish heritage. Often Jewish writers speak of a faithful life as walking with God. The image creates a picture of action, effort, and purpose. Paul uses the verb elsewhere (5:2, 8, 15) as he envisions the believers' faithful, fruitful lives in Christ. He also uses the word once (2:2) to reference the habits and lifestyle the Ephesians previously engaged in prior to their calling. Paul strongly urges the Thessalonians to walk worthy of their calling in God's Kingdom (1 Thess 2:11–12; see also Phil 1:27; Col 1:10). In describing this life, Paul does not offer here a list of dos and don'ts, but sets before them holy attitudes that should govern all actions. Paul highlights three: humility, gentleness, and patience. Interestingly, in his speech to the Ephesians in Acts 20:19, Paul uses the same rare term for humility that we find here. In this speech, he points to his own actions among the Ephesians, how he served the Lord by courageously preaching the good news in the teeth of tough opposition. Paul is speaking to them on his journey to Jerusalem, expecting that hardships, imprisonments, and afflictions await him (he was correct). He encourages p 103 them to help the weak, and quotes a saying of Jesus not in our gospels that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Fusing the Horizons: Paul's Sermons and Letters

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18–35 gets scant attention in commentaries on Ephesians, in large part because the epistle's Pauline authorship is questioned. Even if Pauline authorship is granted, the second hurdle is Luke's reliability in presenting Paul's speech. We have already dealt with the authorship question extensively in the Introduction. Some call into question the authenticity of Luke's rendering of Paul's speech, but in favor of its reliability is its placement in Miletus, not Ephesus. This relatively insignificant venue supports the speech's historicity. Others argue that Luke is a trustworthy preserver of Paul's essential message, even if the wording is Lukan, by pointing to the topics in this speech and similar themes found within Paul's epistles. For example, these terms are used in both: "gospel," "grace," as well as the phrase "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul emphasizes that he spoke to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 20:21) and that he faced trials in Ephesus (see also 1 Cor 15:32). Both in Acts 20:28 and in Eph 1:7, he emphasizes the blood of Christ which brings forgiveness of sins; additionally, he speaks of the building up of the body (Eph 2:20–22; Acts 20:32). He notes that he worked hard among them, not taking any free handouts. This information was not part of Luke's account of Paul's journeys, but is scattered throughout Paul's letters (1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 9:12); in Eph 4:28 he encourages them not to steal, but to work hard that they might be able to take care of needs in their midst. Again, Paul stresses that the Ephesians have an inheritance because they are sanctified (Eph 1:18, Acts 20:32). What we find in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesians is consistent with his letter to them. In both Paul exhorts them to remain steadfast, reminds them of his own work among them, reiterates to them that they (Jew and Gentile) share an inheritance in Christ, and encourages them in the building up of the body of Christ.

It is not by accident that Paul connects in his mind Jesus' teachings and the term humility, for this characteristic is distinctive of Christianity, not [p 104](#) the Gentile Roman world of Ephesus. Indeed, well-known philosophers such as Epictetus (50–130 CE) disparage humility as dishonorable for a free person to display, for it debases them in the eyes of their peers. Yet according to Paul, humility is an appropriate posture for believers, because they do not compare themselves to others but see themselves as servants of God.

Gentleness is the second attitude noted by Paul; Jesus is described as gentle of heart (Matt 11:29), and Paul uses both humility and gentleness in describing Christ (2 Cor 10:1). In Gal 5:23, the characteristic is among the fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness was viewed more positively by the wider Roman world. The term carried the sense of the middle ground between constant anger at everyone and no anger at all. It also had the sense of a trainer taming a wild horse. In any case, it does not have the sense of being weak in the face of struggle or lacking courage. Finally, Paul speaks of patience (see also a list of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22). Together these character traits can be thought of as the necessary traveler's kit for all believers as they embark on their journey of faith. To be faithful to their calling, to express Christian love, to model unity requires the supernatural grace offered by God in Christ through the Spirit, witnessed by the one baptism and one faith shared by all believers.

The oneness in love that should characterize the church is rooted in the gospel claims about the God who calls (see also 1 Cor 1:26). In 1:18, Paul speaks of the hope of our calling that believers might ever more deeply understand and appreciate the riches of God's salvation. The hope of the calling is that all things will be summed up in Christ (1:10), including overcoming both humanity's estrangement from God and creation's decay. It is through the invitation that God calls, and his call reflects his purposes in his redemption plan (Rom 9:11). A foretaste of that hope

fully realized is the unity between Jew and Gentile in the church. If you need proof that our resurrection hope will be actualized fully in God's time, just look at the church, created through the death and resurrection of Christ and united in Christ through the Spirit. While we don't always see this unity within our churches today, the fact of the matter is that the power that raised Jesus is the same power that made Gentiles members of God's family. Christ *is* our peace, and Paul suggests that one sure way to [p 105](#) confirm our resurrection hope that all will be made new is to reflect on the reality of Christ's body, the church.

In 4:1, 4, Paul describes God's call having a calling on the Ephesians' lives. In classical Greek, calling meant a summons to court or an invitation to a feast. So we might rephrase Paul here to say that God summons with a summons or God invites with a particular message of invitation, namely the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Paul uses the term calling in 1 Cor 7:20, where Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to seek to change their social status after they were called by God, for whether or not one was a slave when called, in the Lord all are free. Likewise in Phil 3:14 we have a sense of invitation, wherein Paul speaks of forgetting what is past and straining towards the future, the upward call of God. Further understanding of calling is found in Rom 11:29, "for God's gift and his call are irrevocable." The context is the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ and the conviction that God has not abandoned his people, but has enlarged their numbers (by including Gentiles) through Christ.

In 4:4–6, Paul explains why unity and oneness are critical to the church's witness by listing seven "ones" that form the basis for the church's oneness in Spirit. Paul expresses a similar thought in 1 Cor 8:6, wherein he contrasts the pagan acceptance of many gods and the Christian (and Jewish) steadfast stand on monotheism. Thus when the church lacks unity, it calls into question its proclamation of the oneness of God. The oneness of God is not an intellectual belief only. James 2:19 warns that even the demons believe God is one, and they shudder. The unity or oneness is of a certain type, namely Trinitarian. Without putting too fine a point on it, the three Persons in one Godhead provides a picture of the oneness of the diverse elements in the church—Jew, Gentile; slave, free; male, female.¹

¹ Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 100–105.