

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:1-18

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

As spiritual as Paul was, he did not simply write his letters for the sake of working out his theological ideas. In every one of them, he behaves like a good salesman. He lays out the benefits of his “product,” namely life in Christ, and then closes the sale. Read the first verse of Ephesians 4 and you’ll get the sense of what Paul is trying to sell to the church at Ephesus.

Some scholars note that the words “at Ephesus” are not present in several early manuscripts of this text. They couple this with the lack of personal greetings or other references, like we see at the end of Colossians 4, to suggest that this was a circular letter, intended to be passed among the various churches. Given that Paul spent two years in Ephesus according to Acts, it does seem unusual that he wouldn’t have anything personal to say to that church.

Does all of that matter? If Ephesians wasn’t actually written for the Ephesians, I don’t think our theology or our confidence in the Bible should be shaken. On the other hand, if Paul was really writing to the “saints at _____ (fill in the blank),” then he was much more plausibly writing to the saints at Connection Point Church.

Sometimes we can run astray by applying the specifics of a piece of scripture too tightly to our own situation, but as I read this stretch of Ephesians, I realize that what was presumably true in whatever church Paul was addressing is frequently true in every church I’ve ever visited. Yes, we are united in Christ, but as sinful people we struggle against the forces of division and selfishness that make up human nature.

INTRODUCTION

If you’ve been living under a rock, you might be unaware that Tuesday is election day. Has there ever, in our lifetimes, been a presidential election that seemed bound to prove as divisive of the American people as this one?

Recently, a woman who used to attend church with us, posted on Facebook her intention to “unfriend” anyone who ever in the future expressed support for one of the candidates. Despite all that conversation in Ephesians 4:1-6, seven repetitions of the word “one,” she is apparently going to allow a political matter to divide her from others.

Even though I haven’t mentioned which candidate she supported, it doesn’t matter. I know another person who has shunned everyone who supports the other candidate. Division is easy; unity is much more difficult and more important.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6

1. What is the cause or the rationale behind the “therefore” that leads off this passage? (You’ll have to look back in Ephesians to answer that question.) Are we supposed to do the things mentioned in 4:1-3 just to be nice or for a larger reason?
2. Do Paul’s words here suggest that those who believe in Jesus should never have any disagreement? Why or why not? If disagreement is allowable, what should it look like?
3. What are the seven “ones” mentioned in 4:4-6? How should each one bind us together?

READ EPHESIANS 4:7-18

1. Read the quotation found in 4:8. Then read the source for that quotation (Psalm 68:18). Do you notice the difference? What could explain that difference? (I’ll admit that I don’t have a definite answer for that, although I’ve seen several reasonable ones. Look at Guzik’s commentary for a start.)
2. What does this passage tell us about gifts and callings? What is the purpose of those gifts and callings?
3. How will we know when we have reached spiritual maturity, according to Paul? What is the yardstick?
4. What does Paul suggest will be the effect of us responding to our callings, using our gifts, and maintaining unity?
5. From 4:14 to 4:18 we see a metaphor of human physical maturing. What do we learn from that? What would it look like if we as a body followed Paul’s guidance perfectly?
6. Reading this carefully, does Paul call for all mature believers to be exactly the same? Why or why not?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Of the 168 hours you have each week, how many of them will find you walking worthy of the calling of Christ? What are your best hours? What are your worst?
2. In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to unity that we have within our church? What can you do to remove that obstacle?
3. What person or type of person do you find it most difficult to “bear in love”? Can you honestly say that you have made every effort to keep that peace?
4. What part of the “body” of the church are you called to be? What have your gifts prepared you to do? Are you doing it and doing it to your best ability?

GLOSSARY

Humility (Ephesians 4:2) The KJV renders this very long Greek word as “lowliness.” Strong’s definition uses not just the word “humility” but “humiliation.” This humility gives “a deep sense of one’s moral littleness.”

Meekness (Ephesians 4:2) Is meekness the same as weakness? The dictionary equates it with gentleness and mildness, but there seems to be more. Meekness is not cowardice but an active and aware attitude of restraint. A huge horse, well trained, can be meek.

Patience (Ephesians 4:2) Again the KJV gives us a picturesque word: “longsuffering.” God describes Himself using this word in Exodus 34:6. In Ephesians, the idea seems to be that we are not quickly provoked but wait a very long time.

Bearing (Ephesians 4:2) Read Matthew 17:17. Clearly Jesus is vexed. The word for “bearing with” in Ephesians is the same used for “How long shall I *put up* with you?” Other translations say it as “suffer” or “bear with.” There’s a burden that goes with “bearing with.”

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Background to Ephesians
<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-ephesians/>
- What is an Ephesians 4 Gift
<https://www.four12global.com/articles/theology/what-is-an-ephesians-4-gift/>
- Maintain the Unity of the Spirit—John Piper
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/maintain-the-unity-of-the-spirit>
- Study Guide for Ephesians 4—David Guzik
https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Eph/Eph-4.cfm