

EPHESIANS Part XII; 4:17-32

A More Perfect Union

Please turn to Ephesians chapter four.

We are now in the second half of chapter four, of the book of Ephesians. We are also in the second half of the book as a whole. The first half of the book explained the theology and reasoning behind the plan of God, which was from the beginning to bring this unity about between the Jews and Gentiles. The plan has now come full circle, as it were, with something of a reboot that now resembles what was to be done in the beginning, in Eden. Just as Adam and Eve were to populate the world, and spread Eden all over the planet, the church, the family of God which consists of both Jew and Gentile believers, with the Gentiles being grafted into the family, not replacing the believing Jews, but joining them. This one family is the church but is also referred to by Paul in other places as the new Israel. What was once one extended family with an ethnic identity as one nation, is now ONE family, but it includes many ethnic identities which are subservient to their real identity which is in Christ.

In the first half of chapter four, Paul told us that we are walk in a manner worthy of the calling which we have been called. Actually, he told this to his hearers, but it obviously also applies to us. He cited the fruit of the Spirit saying that we are to bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. If we listen carefully to his wording, and I don't believe Paul was one who used his words flippantly, we should be able to see and hear that he knows this maintaining unity and bearing with one another won't be easy. After all, Even Paul has had his scrapes with other believers. He will give some practical direction to this very thing shortly as he focuses things into a tighter circle from relationships within the church to what is referred to as codes within the home.

Paul then went on to speak of the gifts God has given his church in order that we may all mature into people who are better able to forebear each other and eventually arrive on the same page with each other as we proceed forward in the one mission we are to be united in carrying out – expanding the kingdom of Heaven through imaging God and His character. This is why prayer, studying and fellowship are so important.

Paul leaned into the metaphor of the body in order to show this unity. We talked about that last week. That imagery is important. It is something of an object lesson. Last week we ended with Paul saying that when each part of the body works as it should, together with the other parts of the body, it then builds itself up in love. This is what the gifts Paul listed earlier are to accomplish in all of us.

Now we have arrived at verse 17 of chapter four.

As we read this, I want you to see if you notice a different use of terms or grouping of people – a new usage of a term.

Eph. 4:17 Now this I say and ^dtestify in the Lord, ^ethat you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, ^fin the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They ^gare darkened in their understanding, ^halienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to ⁱtheir hardness of heart.

Remember we aren't to read our bibles "flatly." In fact, I recommend you read aloud with emotion as if you were reciting some Shakespearian play. This forces us to pay more attention not only to what is said, but how it is being said.

Now, of what was I speaking when I asked that we see if we see anything new terms or grouping – any new usage of a term? We have already passed it. To whom is Paul writing, for the most part? Gentiles. And we have seen that those who believe are now part of the family of God and are no longer referred to that way, at least by Paul.

Eph. 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called ^kthe circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember ^lthat you were at that time separated from Christ, ^malienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to ⁿthe covenants of promise, ^ohaving no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were ^pfar off have been brought near ^qby the blood of Christ.

¹⁸ For ^athrough him we both have ^baccess in ^cone Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer ^dstrangers and aliens,⁴ but you are ^efellow citizens with the saints and ^fmembers of the household of God,

We see what Paul has to say regarding Gentiles no longer being strangers and aliens, but members of the same family. With that being said, look at what Paul says in verse 17.

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He says that you/ y'all, his "Gentile" hearers, who are no longer the uncircumcised, are to no longer walk as the Gentiles do. That wording is important, and we are not to read past it. The "Gentiles" are now being referred to as someone other than Paul's audience who were formally outsiders. They are no longer considered Gentiles. Why? Because they are now children of promise – no longer strangers and aliens, no longer far away from God. They are a new group/ family of people, the church, those who have been grafted into the covenant family, Israel, that consisted of believing Jews. Remember, the Gospel was to the Jew first. That happened at Pentecost, in Jerusalem during a Jewish feast. The church began there. The first believers were

Jews. And it is from this point and context that Paul is making his point. Those to whom he is writing in Ephesus, et al., who technically are Gentiles are no longer considered to be so. Can we see just how much there is in one sentence of Paul's writing? He now goes on to say why the Gentiles, (pagans) act and think the way they do.

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They walk/ live, and therefore act as they do because they do so in the futility of their minds. Their understanding of things is darkened, and this is why they are alienated from the life of God. They are ignorant, (define). And why is all of this true? It is because of their hardness of heart.

Notice how Paul places these unbelievers in the same category as the believers one belonged, (aliens/ strangers) to the things of God. And what we see here is that they are willfully so. That doesn't mean they are to be treated badly. And it doesn't mean that we shouldn't help or take pity on them. But we must remember that, "but for the grace of God. Go I." We were once where they are. And we don't want to fall into the same trap as Israel did, that being to adopt the we/ they, it's us against them mentality. Yes, they are often against us. But if we de-humanize them to the point that we just see them as damned, then we have fallen into a trap that only exacerbates the problem. They need the Gospel. And how can they hear about it or see it lived out apart from us?

- Hardness of heart – Pharaoh and the exodus. Who hardened whom?
- We see the result of this hardening in verse 19.

¹⁹ They ^jhave become callous and ^khave given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

The result of this hardening of heart is to take the path of least resistance. It is easier to go with the flow of the world and our sin nature – which is usually alluring because it appeals to our most basic desires. Paul says that now that they, the 'once Gentile' believers are to no longer live/ walk that way. There is to be a difference between God's people and those of the world. We are to emulate who we worship. Our God is holy and just, making Him different. Therefore, we are to be different. And Paul is clarifying this by defining things. Cultures and actions based in sensuality outside of a marriage of one man and one woman are not of God. And the love of these things makes them callous to the truth of what love is and the one who invented, and therefore gets to define love – the God who is love.

²⁰ But that is not the way you ^llearned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that ^myou have heard about him and ⁿwere taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to ^oput off ^pyour old self, ⁶ which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through ^qdeceitful desires, ²³ and ^rto be renewed in

the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on ^sthe new self, ^tcreated after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- “But” – verbal cue; dichotomy, comparison.
- But you have been taught differently than the unbeliever has. You should know better.
- Assuming you have heard... There are most likely some unbelievers in the audience and they are hearing these things for the first time. Paul is acknowledging them.
- The truth is in Jesus.

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- “Put off your old self...” Imagery of changing clothes, related to the old life, (as Gentiles).
- Volition – something we have to do and work at doing.
- Comparison of lives – we have to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. When we are saved, there is to be a change. But no one is just zapped with a laser. There is a spark, but we have to choose and want to “change our clothes.” That is why sanctification is a process. Salvation is instantaneous, sanctification is a learning/ growing process. Go back and read what Paul has already said about maturing in Christ.
- We are then to “put on the new self”, which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Edenic/ creation language.
- Aren’t all people created in the image of God? Yes, but what Paul is getting at is that they/ we are now a new creation in that we have been born again and are to emulate God as Adam and Eve were prior to the fall. That is the point.

Eph. 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you “speak the truth with his neighbor, for ^vwe are members one of another.

Pagan culture was not known for honesty. Everyone was always trying to get over on each other and get a leg up on someone else. That is not how we are to be. We are to speak the truth, (in love) with our neighbors. Notice that Paul says that we are members of one another. This means he isn’t referring here to just any relationship, i.e. those with unbelievers, (though we are to speak truth to them also). This shows that this is an in-house thing – something within the family. A body cannot function properly if one part of the body is lying to the other. The legs and feet cannot tell the rest of the body that it is walking on dry land when in fact it is treading water. We must walk/ live in truth with the body. It also means that we aren’t to just ignore issues and sweep things under the rug. Once again, Paul knows this unity won’t be easy, but we have to speak the truth in love while fore-bearing and deferring to each other. He then goes on to give some practical advice.

²⁶ ^wBe angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and ^xgive no opportunity to the devil.

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather ^ylet him labor, ^zdoing honest work with his own hands, so ^athat he may have something to share with anyone in need.

²⁹ ^bLet no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give ^cgrace to those who hear.

³⁰ And ^ddo not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, ^eby whom you were sealed for the day of ^fredemption.

³¹ ^gLet all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² ^hBe kind to one another, tenderhearted, ⁱforgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.