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Let's Walk Together /

Removing the Grave Clothes

Scripture text: Ephesians 4

The Growth of Unity (Eph. 4:12–16)

Paul was looking at the church on two levels in this section.

He saw the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, growing gradually until it reaches spiritual maturity, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

But he also saw the local body of believers **ministering to each other, growing together, and thereby experiencing spiritual unity.**

A free-lance missionary visited a pastor friend of mine asking for financial support. “What group are you associated with?” my friend asked.

The man replied, **“I belong to the invisible church.”** My friend then asked, “Well, what church are you a member of!”

Again he got the answer, **“I belong to the invisible church!”**

Getting a bit suspicious, my friend asked, “When does this invisible church meet? Who pastors it?”

The missionary then became incensed and said, “Well, your church here isn’t the true church. I belong to the invisible church!”

My friend replied, “Well, here’s some invisible money to help you minister to the invisible church!”

Now, my pastor friend was not denying the existence of the one body. **Rather, he was affirming the fact that the invisible church (*not a biblical term, but I will use it*) ministers through the visible church.**

The gifted leaders are supposed to “**equip the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ**” (literal translation). The saints do not call a pastor and pay him to do the work. They call him and follow his leadership as he, through the Word, equips them to do the job (2 Tim. 3:13–17)

The members of the church **grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other.** The first evidence of spiritual growth is **Christlikeness.** The second evidence is **stability.** The maturing **Christian is not tossed about by every religious novelty that comes along.**

There are religious quacks waiting to kidnap God's children and get them into their false cults, but **the maturing believer recognizes false doctrine and stays clear of it.** The cultists do not try to win lost souls to Christ. They do not establish rescue missions in the slum areas of our cities, because they have no good news for the man on skid row.

Instead, these **false teachers try to capture immature Christians**, and for this reason, most of the membership of the false cults comes from local churches, **particularly churches that do not feed their people the Word of God.**

The third evidence of maturity is **truth joined with love: “Speaking the truth in love”** (Eph. 4:15).

It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy.

Little children do not know how to blend truth and love.

They think that if you love someone, you must shield him from the truth if knowing the truth will hurt him. It is a mark of maturity when we are able to share the truth with our fellow Christians, and do it in love.

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

One more evidence of **maturity is cooperation** (Eph. 4:16). We realize that, as members of the one body and a local body, **we belong to each other, we affect each other, and we need each other.**

Each believer, no matter how insignificant he may appear, **has a ministry to other believers**. The body grows as the individual members grow, and **they grow as they feed on the Word and minister to each other**. Note once again the emphasis on love: **“forbearing one another in love”** (Eph. 4:2); **“speaking the truth in love”** (Eph. 4:15); **“the edifying of itself in love”** (4:16). **Love is the circulatory system of the body**. It has been discovered that isolated, unloved babies do not grow properly and are especially susceptible to disease, while babies who are loved and handled grow normally and are stronger.

So it is with the children of God. **An isolated Christian cannot minister to others**, nor can others minister to him, and it is impossible for the gifts to be ministered either way.

So, then, spiritual unity is not something we manufacture. **It is something we already have in Christ, and we must protect and maintain it.** Truth unites, but lies divide. Love unites, but selfishness divides. Therefore, **“speaking the truth in love,” let us equip one another and edify one another, that all of us may grow up to be more like Christ.**

TAKE OFF THE GRAVECLOTHES!

Ephesians 4:17–32

The Bible was written to be obeyed, and not simply studied, and this is why the words “therefore” and “wherefore” are repeated so often in the second half of Ephesians (4:1, 17, 25; 5:1, 7, 14, 17, 24).

Paul was saying, “**Here is what Christ has done for you. Now, in the light of this, here is what we ought to do for Christ.**”

We are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only (James 1:22).

The fact that we have been called in Christ (Eph. 1:18) **ought to motivate us to walk in unity** (Eph. 4:1–16).

And the fact that **we have been raised from the dead** (Eph. 2:1–10) **should motivate us to walk in purity** (Eph. 4:17–5:17), or, as Paul told the Romans, “**walk in newness of life**” (Rom. 6:4).

We are alive in Christ, not dead in sins; therefore “put off the old man ... and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22, 24). **Take off the graveclothes and put on the grace-clothes!**

The Admonition (Eph. 4:17–19)

There are some negatives in the Christian life, and here is one of them: **“Walk not as other Gentiles walk.”**

The Christian is not to imitate the life of the unsaved people around him. **They are “dead in trespasses and sins”** (Eph. 2:1), while he has been raised from the dead and been given eternal life in Christ. Paul explains the differences between the saved and the unsaved.

To begin with, **Christians think differently** from unsaved people.

Note the emphasis here on thinking: **mind** (Eph. 4:17, 23), **understanding** (Eph. 4:18), **ignorance** (Eph. 4:18), **“learned Christ”** (Eph. 4:20).

Salvation begins with repentance, which is a change of mind. The whole outlook of a person changes when **he trusts Christ, including his values, goals, and interpretation of life.**

What is wrong with the mind of the unsaved person?

For one thing, his thinking is “vain” (futile). It leads to no substantial purpose. Since he does not know God, he cannot truly understand the world around him, nor can he understand himself.

The sad story is told in Romans 1:21–25. **Our world today possesses a great deal of knowledge, but very little wisdom.** Thoreau put it beautifully when he said that we have **“improved means to unimproved ends.”** **The unsaved man’s thinking is futile because it is darkened.** He thinks he is enlightened because he rejects the Bible and believes the latest philosophies, **when in reality he is in the dark.**

“Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools” (Rom. 1:22). But they think they are wise. **Satan has blinded the minds of the unsaved** (2 Cor. 4:3–6) because he does not want them to see the truth in Jesus Christ. It is not simply that their eyes are blinded so they cannot see, but **that their minds are darkened so that they cannot think straight about spiritual matters.**

Of course, **the unsaved man is dead because of this spiritual ignorance.**

The truth and the life go together.

If you believe God's truth, then you receive God's life. But you would think that the unbeliever would do his utmost to get out of his terrible spiritual plight.

Alas, **the hardness of his heart enslaves him.** He is **“past feeling”** because he has so given himself over to sin that sin controls him. Read Romans 1:18–32 for a vivid expansion of these three brief verses.

The Christian cannot pattern himself after the unsaved person, **because the Christian has experienced a miracle of being raised from the dead.**

His life is not futile, but purposeful.

His mind is filled with the light of God's Word, and his heart with the fullness of God's life. He gives his body to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13), and not to sin for the satisfaction of his own selfish lusts. **In every way, the believer is different from the unbeliever, and therefore the admonition: "Walk not."**

Romans 6:13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.**

The Argument (Eph. 4:20–24)

Paul reinforced his admonition with **an argument from the spiritual experience of his readers**. Again the emphasis is on the mind, or the outlook, of the believer. **“But ye have not so learned Christ”** (Eph. 4:20). He did not say “learned about Christ,” because **it is possible to learn about Christ and never be saved**.

To “learn Christ” means to have a personal relationship to Christ so that you get to know Him better each day.

I can learn about Sir Winston Churchill because I own many of his books and can secure books about his life. But I can never learn him because he is dead. **Jesus Christ is alive! Therefore, I can “learn Christ” through a personal fellowship with Him.**

This fellowship is based on the **Word of God**. I can be taught “**the truth**” as it is in Jesus Christ.

The better I understand the Word of God, the better I know the Son of God, for the whole Bible is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, **he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures** the things concerning himself.

John 5:37-40 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,** yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

The unsaved man is spiritually ignorant, while the Christian is intelligent in the things of the Word. And the unsaved man does not know Christ, while the **believer grows in his personal knowledge of Christ day by day.**

We have believed the truth; we have received the life; therefore, **we will walk “in the way”** and not walk after the example of the unsaved world.

But this experience of salvation goes much deeper than this, **for it has resulted in a whole new position before God.**

The old man (the former life) has been put away, and we can now walk in newness of life through Christ.

Ephesians 4:22–24 is a summary of Romans 5–8, where Paul explained **the believer's identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection**. He also dealt with this in Ephesians 2:4–6, as well as in Colossians 3. **As Christians, we have not simply changed our minds. We have totally changed our citizenship.**

We belong to God's "**new creation**" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and therefore, the **ideas and desires of the old creation no longer should control our lives.**

The simplest illustration of this great truth is given in John 11, **the resurrection of Lazarus**. Our Lord's friend, Lazarus, had been in the grave four days when Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, and even Martha admitted that, by now, the decaying body would smell (John 11:39). But Jesus spoke the word and Lazarus came forth alive, an illustration of John 5:24. Notice our Lord's next words, "**Loose him, and let him go**" (John 11:44). **Take off the graveclothes!**

Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death, for **he was now alive**. Why go about wearing graveclothes? Take off the old and put on the new!

This was Paul's argument—**you no longer belong to the old corruption of sin**; you belong to the new creation in Christ. **Take off the graveclothes!** How do we do this? **“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”** (Eph. 4:23). Conversion is a crisis that leads to a process. Through Christ, once and for all, we have been given a new position in His new creation, but day by day, **we must by faith appropriate what He has given us**. The Word of God renews the mind **as we surrender our all to Him** (Rom. 12:1–2).

“Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth”
(John 17:17).

As the mind understands the truth of God's Word, it is gradually transformed by the Spirit, and **this renewal leads to a changed life.**

Physically, you are what you eat, **but spiritually, you are what you think.**

“As he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). This is why it is important for us as Christians to spend time daily meditating on the Word, praying, and fellowshiping with Christ.

The Application (Eph. 4:25–32)

Paul was not content to explain a principle and then leave it. **He always applied it to the different areas of life that need to feel its power.**

Paul even dared to name sins. Five different sins are named in this section, and Paul told us to avoid them and he explained why.

Lying (v. 25). A lie is a statement that is contrary to fact, spoken **with the intent to deceive**. If I tell you it is noon, and then discover that my watch is wrong, I did not tell a lie.

But if I gave you the wrong time so you would be late to a meeting and I would benefit from it, **that would be a lie**. Satan is a liar (John 8:44); and **he wants us to believe that God is a liar**. “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1)

Whenever we speak truth, the Spirit of God works, but whenever we tell a lie, Satan goes to work. We like to believe that we help people by lying to them, but **such is not the case**. We may not see the sad consequences immediately, but ultimately they will come. “**Ye know that no lie is of the truth**” (1 John 2:21). Hell is prepared for “*everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*” (Rev. 22:15).

This does not mean that anybody who ever told a lie will go to hell, but rather that **those whose lives are controlled by lies**—they love lies and they make lies—are lost forever. The Christian's life is controlled by truth.

Note the reason Paul gave for telling the truth: **We belong to each other in Christ.** He urged us to build the body in love (Eph. 4:16) and he urged us **to build the body in truth. "Speaking the truth in love"** (Eph. 4:15). As "members one of another" we affect each other, and we cannot build each other apart from truth. **The first sin that was judged in the early church was the sin of lying** (Acts 5:1–11).

Anger (vv. 26–27).

Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (Deut. 9:8, 20; Ps. 2:12).

Several times in the Old Testament the phrase appears, **“the anger of the Lord”** (Num. 25:4; Jer. 4:8; 12:13). **The holy anger of God is a part of His judgment against sin,** as illustrated in our Lord’s anger when He cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12–13). The Bible often speaks of anger **“being kindled”** (Gen. 30:2; Deut. 6:15), **as though anger can be compared to fire.**

Sometimes a man's anger smolders, and **this we would call malice**; but this same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and **this we would call wrath**.

It is difficult for us to practice a truly holy anger or righteous indignation **because our emotions are tainted by sin**, and **we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters**. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. The New Testament principle **seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people**. "You that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10).

It is possible to be angry and not sin, but **if we do sin**, we must settle the matter quickly and not let the sun go down on our wrath.

“Agree with thine adversary quickly” (Matt. 5:25). “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15).

The fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder (Matt. 5:21–26), because anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and Satan is a murderer (John 8:44).

Satan hates God and God's people, and when he finds a believer with the sparks of anger in his heart, **he fans those sparks, adds fuel to the fire**, and does a great deal of damage to God's people and God's church.

Both lying and anger “give peace to the devil” (Eph. 4:27).

When I was living Illinois, in Chicago, one out of every thirty-five deaths was a murder, and most of these murders involved relatives and friends.

They are what the law calls “**crimes of passion.**”

Two friends get into an argument (often while gambling), one of them gets angry, pulls a gun or knife, and kills his friend. Horace was right when he said, “**Anger is momentary insanity.**”

A woman tried to defend her bad temper by saying, “I explode and then it’s all over with.”

“Yes,” replied a friend, “**just like a shotgun**—but look at the damage that’s left behind.”

“Anyone can become angry,” wrote Aristotle. “But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, **for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.**”

Solomon has a good solution: ***Proverb 15:1*** *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

Stealing (v. 28). “Thou shalt not steal” is one of the Ten Commandments, and when God gave that commandment, **He instituted the right of private ownership of property.** A man has the right to turn his strength into gain, and to keep that gain and use it as he sees fit. God gave numerous laws to the Jews for the protection of their property, and these principles have become a part of our law today. **Stealing was particularly a sin of the slaves in Paul’s day.**