

# The Christian Arsenal

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## EPHESIANS 4:1-16

So far, in the book of *Ephesians* we have seen Paul inform the believers at Ephesus of the blessings that are theirs because of who they are in Christ Jesus.

Paul has told them and us...

...that we have been **chosen by God,**

...that we have been **redeemed and forgiven,**

...that God has **lavished His grace upon us,**

...that **we've been seated with Christ in heavenly places,**

...that **we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.**

Paul has shared with us the mystery **that the body of Christ is made up of both Jew and Gentile.**

**He has told us all this and much more...**

Last week we saw how Paul bowed on his knees before God and asked Him to enable us to live in the light of what he had taught us. Paul has taught doctrine, now he will begin to teach duty!

Dr. John Phillips divides the book of *Ephesians* like this:

- I. **The Christian and His Blessings (chapters 1-3)**
- II. **The Christian and His Behavior (chapters 4-5)**
- III. **The Christian and His Battles (chapter 6)**

We've seen the blessings of the Christian and today we'll begin to look at the Christian's behavior. *Ephesians 4* takes us from **principle to practice.**

**There's a real danger that we will know truth and not live it! There is a real danger that we will have sound principles but not put them into practice every day.**

It really does make a difference whether your doctrine is on target. But, if we walk around with a head full of sound doctrine and never ever live out that doctrine, it really hasn't done us any good to learn it, has it?

So, Paul spends the next three chapters exhorting us to live out what we have taken in! The main idea of the verses before us today is **the unity of believers.**

And this is simply the practical application of the truth Paul taught us last week...that God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**This oneness, this unity of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality, but it's our responsibility to live it out...to protect it and preserve it...and the way we do that is by practicing it!**

So, let's look at **4 important facts** that we must understand if we're going to live in the light of what we've already seen so far in this book.

### 1) **The Grace of Our Unity**

#### **Verses 1-3...**

The "therefore" we see in **verse 1** emphasizes to us that Paul is saying, "Okay, folks, in view of all that is yours because you belong to Jesus, let me tell you some things..."

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Paul begs, he beseeches us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We're going to be like Christ for all eternity, so we need to begin to be like Him now!

**When the Bible uses the word “walk” in this context it means our “daily conduct”...our “day by day living.”**

How we live day by day, moment by moment will determine whether or not our walk is worthy of our calling.

In other words, do we just talk the talk or do we walk the walk, as well? The more we depend on the Lord to walk the walk the stronger we'll be convicted when we don't!

**God has called *some* folks into the ministry...but He has called *all* of us to a worthy walk! Every Christian is to be a full-time Christian! We're all to be in full-time Christian service!**

Paul goes on to tell us what characterizes a walk that is worthy of our calling...

**“humility” or “lowliness”** - This is the opposite of pride. God hates pride!

The world exalts pride, doesn't it? And our flesh loves pride.

I mean, we're proud folks. We're proud of our children, our grandchildren, our home, our car, our job, our education, our achievements. We're just proud of ourselves! We're proud to be an American!

And sometimes we can even be proud of our humility! I read this past week: *“Humility is something to be strived for but never claimed!”* And human nature tells us if we strive for something, we need to tell somebody!

On December 6 of last year, in recognition of his Christian service, Billy Graham received an honorary knighthood from the British Empire.

When he was given this award, he said, *“I accept it with humility and unworthiness.”* He went on to say that **he looked forward to laying his honorary knighthood, along with any other recognition he has ever received, at the feet of Jesus Christ, who deserves all the honor and praise.**

The Apostle James said, ***“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”***

Another characteristic Paul lists here is:

**“gentleness” or “meekness”** – this word doesn't mean weakness. It means power under control. Jesus said, ***“...I am gentle and humble in heart...”***

If the Lord of glory walked in meekness and humility, how much more should His imperfect followers walk in meekness and humility.

**“patience” or “longsuffering”**

In 1871 H. M. Stanley was sent to Africa by the New York Herald. Mr. Stanley was a reporter and he was sent to Africa to report on the missionary work of Dr. David Livingstone. He spent several

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months traveling with Dr. Livingstone....being with him on a daily basis...and Stanley observed Livingstone's love and patience toward those he sought to evangelize.

**Stanley wrote in his journal that when he saw the patience of Livingstone toward the folks in Africa, he became a Christian, "though," Stanley said, "he never spoke a word to me."**

My strong suit isn't patience. I want it and I want it now! But God knows how to use circumstances in my life to teach me patience. Please pray that I will learn it so I can get out of this school He seems to have me in.

## **"forbearing love"**

Peter tells us that "love covers a multitude of sins..."

Forbearing love is agape love...unconditional love.

**Then, Paul says we should be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit of peace. We can't create unity...but the Holy Spirit can. I believe this tells us we have the responsibility to do all we can to maintain and preserve the unity the Holy Spirit has created!**

Well, we've looked at the Grace of our Unity...let's look at

## **2) The Grounds for our Unity**

What really unites us? Upon what do we base this unity?

Well, Paul names **7 basic realities** that unite true Christian:

### **- one body**

This is the body of Christ. He is our Head. This doesn't refer to a denomination...it refers to the church...and it includes all believers!

### **- one Spirit**

The same Holy Spirit lives in a believer in Africa or China or Afghanistan as lives in you and me! And because of the bond of the Holy Spirit we have a bond with other believers all over the world. Those of you who have been on mission trips can testify to this, can't you?

### **- one hope of your calling**

The hope of our calling is Jesus... "Christ in you the hope of glory..."

### **- one Lord**

There is only one Lord. The bottom line of Christian belief is Christ. Christ as God the Son, eternal, uncreated, self-existing, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy and true.

He is the One who was rejected, betrayed, falsely accused, crucified and buried. He is the One who died to purge our sins. He is the One who rose from the dead and ascended on high. He is the One who sat down at God's right hand, sent the Holy Spirit, heads the church and is coming again!

**It's difficult to believe that two believers can claim to love and obey the same Lord and yet not be able to walk together in unity.**

### **- one faith**

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Paul isn't referring here to the act of faith by which a person is saved...Paul is referring to the body of doctrine revealed in the Word of God. **Jude said this faith was once for all delivered to the saints.** Our one faith is the content of the revealed Word of God.

**And the revealed Word of God points us to the Lord Jesus.**

- **one baptism**

Does this baptism refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit or water baptism? I don't know. I read eight opinions this week and they were split just about evenly.

There is only one baptism of the Holy Spirit...and it happens the moment we're saved. And we also believe there is only one baptism and it's by water. Both separate the believer from the world.

Water baptism is a confession of faith. It announces to all who witness it that the believer has died with Christ, has been buried with Christ, and is now raised with Christ to walk in newness of life.

And, in many parts of the world, believers who are publicly baptized pay a high price.

Finally, Paul says there is

- **one God and Father of all and He is over all, through all and in all!**

**We are God created, God loved, God saved, God sustained, God filled, and God blessed.**

**And God is sovereign – over all; God is omnipotent – through all; and God is omnipresent – in all.**

We've seen the Grace of our Unity and the Grounds for our Unity, let's look at

### 3) The Gifts of our Unity

God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift. Now, these are not natural abilities or talents...although these are God's gifts to us as well.

When you were born into this world God gave you certain abilities...perhaps in art or music or athletics or creativity in design or sewing or cooking.

And in this regard all men and women are **not** created equal...**because some are smarter or stronger or more talented than others.**

**But in the spiritual realm, each believer has at least one spiritual gift no matter what natural abilities he may or may not possess. You received this gift at the time of salvation. This gift may be undiscovered for a long time but God's Word says you have at least one spiritual gift!**

Christ is the Giver of these gifts through the Holy Spirit. By the way, you don't have to know what your gift is in order to serve the Lord, **but when you do discover it, your service will be much more effective!**

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Before we get to the specific gifts mentioned here, let's look at this very interesting passage of Scripture.

## **Verses 7-11...**

We know that Jesus descended from Heaven when He was born in a stable in Bethlehem.

But, at His death Jesus also descended into Hades. Peter tells us in **1 Peter 3:18-20** that He went and preached to **"the spirits in prison."**

Some theologians believe this meant the spirits of those who had died in previous ages.

At that time, Hades seems to have been divided into two realms. each of these sections were separated from the other by a great gulf...remember the rich man and Lazarus?

In one section of Hades were the spirits of the wicked dead and in the other section were the spirits of the righteous dead. Jesus called this second section **"paradise"** when He was speaking to the dying thief, and He called it **"Abraham's bosom"** when He told the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

From this passage in **Ephesians** and the passage in **1 Peter**, we see that Jesus went to the captives in Hades with a proclamation. He announced His everlasting triumph over sin, Satan, death and the grave.

To those in the dark realm of Hades, this was a message of *eternal despair*.

During their lifetime they had rejected the light God had given them and now they were without God, without Christ, and without hope.

To those in paradise, the Lord's message was full of *joy and glory!*

Think how the prophets, many of whom were martyred, must have rejoiced at the fulfillment of their often misunderstood and rejected prophecies.

After Jesus proclaimed triumph He arose and brought the souls of the righteous dead with Him. It is believed that many of them were united with their bodies and shared in His resurrection...

## **Matthew 27:52**

**"...and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."**

**Paradise was emptied. Jesus took captivity captive. Death and the grave had held these saints captive and Jesus freed them! Now, when a believer dies, he doesn't go to paradise...he goes directly to be with Jesus immediately!**

Let me tell you not everyone agrees with this interpretation. Some believe the descent mentioned is the fact that Jesus became flesh and dwelled among men. But I have given you what I believe when I compare Scripture with Scripture.

But, what about these gifts? Let me say first of all this list is not exhaustive. There are actually three lists given in the New Testament...one in **1 Corinthians 12** and one in **Romans 12** and this one.

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Let's look at the list we have before us...

## **Verse 11...**

The offices of apostle and prophet are believed by most theologians to have ended with the end of the first century and the completion of the New Testament canon of Scriptures.

An apostle was primarily a man who had **seen** the risen Lord Jesus and had been **sent out** by the Lord Jesus. Paul could call himself a apostle because Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road and it was the Lord Jesus Himself who commissioned Paul to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel.

New Testament **prophets "forthtold"** more than they **"foretold"** although we know that the apostle John **"foretold"** in the book of **Revelation**. But basically it was the job of the New Testament prophet to expound on truth already revealed by the Holy Spirit but not yet generally known by all believers.

We have to remember that believers in the New Testament didn't have Bibles. The New Testament had not been completed. So, the Holy Spirit shared God's truth through those to whom God had given the gift of prophecy.

Then, Paul mentions **evangelists**.

All believers can be sharers of the gospel, but not all believers have the gift of evangelism. You may be the one who plants the seed, or waters the seed, but someone else may come along and actually reap the harvest for God's kingdom.

Folks with the gift of evangelism usually see many people saved.

Think about Billy Graham again...

Billy Graham is not a "deep" preacher or teacher. But, God has gifted him with the ability to present the gospel plainly and concisely and in a way that anyone can understand. And consequently, he has seen thousands and thousands come to Christ through his crusades.

I remember hearing Dr. John Phillips say that he really didn't see many folks get saved in his meetings. He said he really longed to see the aisles filled with people coming for salvation...but the gift of evangelism simply was not his gift. His gift is teaching.

When Bro. Benny Jackson preaches and when Bro. Ronnie Tullos preaches folks are going to be saved...because they have been gifted by God to do what they do!

Lastly, Paul speaks of pastors and teachers. Now, some say this is one office and others say it is two. I don't know. Some pastors are not great teachers, are they? Ours is...Bro. Bob is a wonderful pastor. He tends God's flock. But, he is also a wonderful teacher. He teaches God's flock.

So, those are the gifts mentioned in this epistle. As I've said, there are more gifts than these, so if you don't see your gift here...study the lists in **1 Corinthians** and **Romans**.

But let me tell you how Dr. Phillips summarizes these gifts in **Ephesians**:

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Dr. Phillips said

- 1) God had gifted some men to deal with *situations*:  
The **apostles** were those gifted to guide the infant church in ways it ought to go...  
The **prophets** were those gifted to guard the infant church in what it ought to know...
- 2) God had gifted some men to deal with *sinners* – **evangelists**
- 3) God had gifted some men to deal with *saints*  
The **pastors** were gifted to tend the flock  
The **teachers** were gifted to teach the flock

But, what is the purpose of these gifts?

#### 4) The Growth of our Unity

**Verses 12-16...**

The church is a living organism...it's not brick and mortar and glass. It's a living body. And living bodies are supposed to grow aren't they?

If the gifts God has given to His children are used properly God's people will be equipped and the church will be built up.

If these gifts are used properly God's people will attain to the unity of the faith.

If these gifts are used properly God's people will grow to maturity...to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ.

**And if these gifts are used properly we will no longer be children. God doesn't want us to stay babies. The word translated "children" is derived from a word that literally means "one not old enough to speak"... In other words...an infant.**

**Verse 15** tells us that we are to speak the truth in love. We can go to two extremes. We speak the truth but not in love, in which case we are being **ungracious**. Truth spoken in that spirit often offends and does little good because it alienates the people we are seeking to win. Or, we can speak in love and suppress the truth, in which case we are being **unfaithful**.

People who don't want to hurt someone's feelings may say nothing and allow a sinful situation to continue. True love, however, will always speak at the **right time**, with the **right words**, in the **right spirit**, and using the **right approach**.

**Verse 16** is a picture of the church as it should be!

God wants us to grow up! God wants us to have strong convictions based on the Word of God! And if we don't know God's Word we **will** be swept to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Paul says we should operate as one body.  
Paul says when each part...each individual is working,

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with every joint fitted and held together properly,  
then the body will grow and be built up in love.

Our time is about up, but let me just close by saying this...

**I pray that we will take the words of this lesson and apply it to our very lives. Paul has begged us to walk in a manner that is worthy of the calling with which we were called. And he has begun in today's lesson to tell us how we can do that. Paul has begun by stressing how unity works for good in the church.**

I read this week that the giant sequoias of California have roots just barely below the surface of the ground. That seems impossible, doesn't it? I mean, if the roots don't grow deep into the earth, it seems that they would blow over in a strong wind. But they don't. And the reason is that they grow only in groves...and their roots intertwine under the earth's surface. **So, when the strong winds come, they hold one another up.**

There's a lesson there for us...as a class and as a church body. People are like sequoias. We need to grow in groves. Standing alone, the winds of life would blow us over. We need to intertwine our roots, don't we?

**Unity doesn't mean uniformity.** I praise God for our different personalities and different talents and different abilities and different gifts. I praise God that some of us are outgoing and some of us are reserved. I praise Him that where some are weak in an area, another comes along and takes up the slack.

**May God help our roots to be so intertwined that when the strong winds of life blow we will hold each other up!**