

## Commentary

1 According to 1:4, God chose us to 'be holy'. What are these holy, 'good works' (2:10) that God has prepared for Christians to walk in? What kind of life is 'worthy of the calling' we've received? It's not general godly living that Paul has in mind, but what is appropriate for the 'calling' we've received, the calling of being brought together under Christ as head. 4:3 summarises this appropriate worthy life: we should not re-erect dividing walls of hostility between us (cf 2:14), but adopt the behaviour of 4:2.

'Walk' is Paul's behaviour word in Ephesians (cf 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15): it's a word which captures the everyday progress of our lives, and how we go about things as we travel on life's journey. (It may even function structurally in the four references from 4:17 onwards, in each case a new section is introduced with a new illustration: changing clothes, family likeness, light/dark, and influence [like the influence of alcohol].)

4-6 is where Paul explains what this 'unity of the Spirit' is. God is into oneness in a big way (which is why his 1:10 plan is all about oneness!). You can easily see this by looking at:

- who God is (= each person of the Trinity is described as 'one')
- what God has done (= united Jew and Gentile into 'one' body, through the same entry point/'baptism', to have the same 'hope' because of the same 'faith').

7 is a contrast to this oneness: Jesus has made us different! As we saw in 3:3, 7-8, 'grace' is the privilege of a special role in God's service. But remarkably, it is when we each work in our different God-given role, building up the body of Christ in our own unique way (and in the godly way which 4:2 describes) then the oneness will be preserved (13). So ...

- Jesus brings together different people (eg Jew/Gentile) under him;
- our different-ness is his gift to his church so that the oneness is preserved.

Maybe the image of a symphony orchestra makes the point: each instrument plays its different part, but the result is a rich harmony.

8 Paul claims that this pattern fulfils what the OT prophesies in Psalm 68:18.

Psalm 68 celebrates the victory of God. It may have been written to celebrate the return of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem (cf 2 Sam 6). God marches victoriously from Egypt to Jerusalem (7-18) where he reigns over all (19-31). Although Ps 68:18 says that God 'received gifts from men' (ie the opposite way round to Eph 4:8), 68:19f shows him sharing with his people the booty from his conquest (as Eph 4:8 says). This history and prophecy of salvation is what Eph 4:7-16 understands as fulfilled in Jesus' ascension - he leads captivity captive and shares out the spoils of his victory. In fact, his gifts now given to his church are his former foes: God leads Christians 'in triumphal procession in Christ' (2 Cor 2:14), and Paul (the erstwhile persecutor) is Jesus' gift to his church (cf 3:7-8), as are we who were also once his enemies (cf 2:1-3).

11 The gifts here are not 'teaching', 'prophecy' etc (as in Rom 12:6f or 1 Cor 12). What Jesus gives to his church are people - 'apostles, prophets,

evangelists, etc'. It is an extraordinary thought that I am Jesus' gift to you, and you are Jesus' gift to me!

The Greek makes it clear that 'pastors-and-teachers' are one gift here. Our contemporary separation into 'he's a good teacher, but a useless pastor' (or vice-versa) is an unbiblical separation. The complaint against the 'shepherds' (= the same word as 'pastors') who should have been the spiritual leaders of Israel is that they failed to feed the flock (cf Ezekiel 34:8 etc): feeding is the way that the flock is pastored. The pastoral ministry is a ministry of the word.

11-13 Note the 'some ... all' distinction here. All of Christ's church is to work (12) so that 'we all reach unity ... and become mature' (13). But the path to that vibrant, mobilised church is the ministry of those listed in 11. The church is built on the 'apostles and prophets' (cf 2:20), those in the first-century to whom God first revealed his 'mystery' (3:5-6). This gospel spread to others by 'evangelists' like Paul (3:5-8), and by those contemporary evangelists (whether a friend, a family member, or a famous speaker!) who proclaimed the gospel to us here in Britain centuries later. And now Christ's church continues to be 'equipped' to be workers by some pastor-teachers. This chain of people from the first century to now is Jesus' gift to us today. Note that the result is a workforce: church is not supposed to be a place where a collection of sponges can go to soak it all up, but a gathering of workers!

13 Why did Jesus give gifts to his church (which results in us being set to work)? The ultimate aim is 'unity', of course (because we know from 1:10-11 that this 'purpose' is what God always and everywhere is working towards). But this is spelt out as:

- unity of the faith / knowledge of Jesus
- (which is) 'mature manhood'
- (which is) the church fully become the intended people of God (cf 3:19b which uses the same idea of 'fullness').

So, through Jesus, God has given to the church all that we need to be what he intends (cf 1:3's 'every spiritual blessing').

14-16 begins with a 'so that ...'. If the church has reached the maturity and unity of 4:13, then verses 14-16 are an Identikit picture of what this fully mature church will look like. It will be characterised by ...

- v 14 stability (rather than chasing after every latest Christian fad);
- 15 growth (which is 'into Christ' [15] and 'in love' [16] cf 3:14-19)
- 16 work (which is explained in v.12b, and cf 4:29 for an example).

We should ask how our church measures up alongside such qualities!

15 'Speaking the truth in love' is often understood as 'gently pointing out one another's faults!' It could mean this. But more likely, 'truth' here means 'the truth', what the pastor-teachers speak (and an alternative to the false teaching in 14 that will knock us off course). The result of 'pastor-teachers' doing their thing (12-13) is the same as the result of all of us 'speaking the same truth in love' to one another: ie growing up. To put it simply, we need teaching/truth-spoken-in-love if we are to grow up, so let's make sure that there's lots of that going on in our church.

## Group Study Outline

### Ephesians 4:1-16 Theme Sentence

Christians should work to preserve the oneness God has achieved in his church.

#### *Launching Question:*

Would you say that 'the church' (and take this as broadly or narrowly as you like!) is united or divided? What would most people answer to this question?

#### **READ Ephesians 4:1-6**

What is the calling we've received? (cf 2:11-22)

Does verse 3 tell Christians to work hard to be united?

Why might it be important to be clear that it's God not us who creates unity?

What do these verses tell us about how we maintain unity?

When is it hard to be humble and gentle and patient?

What might be involved in 'bearing with one another in love'?

Why is it so important to maintain this unity (according to verses 4-6)?

#### *Thinking it through*

If 2:11-22 is true, why is it our experience that church is full of dividing walls?

What should be our reaction when church feels disunited?

Why should maintaining unity be our priority at Emmanuel?

#### **READ Ephesians 4:7-16**

Why are we different, according to these verses?

What has the ascended Jesus given to his church?

To whom does verse 11 refer? to whom does verse 12 refer?

How do these groups of people relate to one another?

Who is our church's minister?

What is the responsibility of every Christian?

What are 'works of service' (NIV)/'work of ministry' (ESV) (12)?

How will our church grow up?

What does a grown-up church look like? what illustrations does Paul use?

What is the 'the truth' that is to be spoken in love (15)? who is to speak it?

What roles do 'truth' and 'love' have in building maturity? what happens if one of these is missing? (eg imagine a truth-minus-love, or a love-minus-truth church)

What does it mean 'to grow up into him who is the Head'?

#### *Thinking it through*

Verse 3 urges us to 'make every effort' (NIV) to maintain unity: having now

read the second half of this passage, what might some of these 'efforts' be?

Why do our differences tend to divide churches rather than enhance them?

What role is there for denominations?

What role is there for full-time (or if you like, 'ordained') ministers?

What are some practical ways we can do works of service to build our church?

Is this passage encouraging or discouraging for us at Emmanuel at this time?

# Ephesians 4:1-16



## The story so far ...

In 1:10b, Paul explains that God's plan is 'to bring everything together under Christ as head' (NIV). It used to be a 'mystery' how God would ever work this out (3:9), but not any more. By the cross, and through the gospel, God has already brought Jew and Gentile together under Christ as head (2:11-22; 3:6). You only have to look at the church now to see clearly how God is already working towards his 'purpose' (1:11), this plan of 1:10b (cf 3:10).

So Christians have it all (1:3f): God has so far achieved his end point for the whole world in us. What then remains for us to do? 4:3 summarises it as: 'keep that which is already there'. Preserve this 'being brought together under Christ as head'. God has achieved it; don't now destroy it.

OK, we must preserve this oneness (and 4:4-6 gives a theological overview why oneness matters so much to God). But how? The answer is by 'effort' (3 NIV) or 'work' (12, 16):

- (a) the work of the ascended Christ (4:7-10). Everything we want church to be starts with Jesus in heaven giving gifts to his church: it is his church (because he is its head) and he has promised that he is the one to build his church (Matt 16:18).
- (b) the work of 'some' (4:11). 'Some' people's gifting is foundational for ...
- (c) the work of every Christian (4:12). The route to a mature church is through a mobilised church, where every Christian serves every other Christian, and does with the loving qualities of verse 2.

### Ephesians 4:1-16 Theme Sentence

Christians should work to preserve the oneness God has achieved in his church.

## Application

- **Live a life worthy of your calling.** Paul's practical instructions are based on the gospel he loves so much. Given what chapters 1-3 have said that we Gentile Christians have received, and given God's big plan of 1:10b (and how that is currently being worked out in the church), of course the appropriate lifestyle will make 'church' very, very important.
- **Maintain the unity of the Spirit.** God has brought Christians together under Christ as head. So we must not re-erect walls of hostility that exclude other Christians, but instead 'make every effort' to 'work' at unity.
- **Some ... all.** 'Teaching' / 'speaking the truth in love' is essential if our church is to become mature ... some should be set apart for that pastoral ministry if 'all' of us are to be set to work as 'full-time ministers' (!).