

## STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS STUDY FOUR: Ephesians 4:7-32

### Study Four, Part One

<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup>This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." <sup>9</sup>(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

**4:7** – Each person has grace according to the amount that Christ chose to give. **What do you think this means in your life?** This statement is made in the context of calling and purpose. Paul was writing about unity but then brings in the topic of diversity of purpose. That can be a source of disunity because each person will tend to view what is happening in the church from the perspective of his or her calling. Don't make your "part" the whole thing. If your purpose is missions, don't try to impose that purpose on everyone, insinuating that it is the most important issue there is. Of course, it is the most important to you, if that is your purpose. Others will have their own burden – counseling, prayer, the poor for example. Influence the body, but don't try to make everyone see things or do things like you do.

**4:8** – The gifts that Paul discussed in the following verses have often been called, "ascension gifts." That is because they were achieved once He was raised to heaven and then sent to Spirit along with the gifts to distribute to those in the Church.

First, Christ had to set men free from sin on the cross; then he freed them to fulfill the purpose that He had for them. When you function in your purpose, you are a gift to mankind! **What is your purpose? What did the Lord create you to be and do? Can you describe it in one simple statement?**

**4:9&10** – Many believe that Christ descended to the "lower regions" of the dead during His three days of death. There were many in that "place" who were righteous but could not be released to their full eternal reward until Christ came to set them free. They had put their faith in the promise of God as pronounced in Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Others believe the "descension" here is simply the reality of the incarnation, when Jesus became flesh and descended to earth to minister here during His earthly years. Whatever this verse is referring to, it simply points to the fact that Christ is everything. He came to earth, could easily have gone to a place to set the captives free who had put their hope in His coming and redemption, and then ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand

of the Father. He is supreme and always to be the focus of our ministry. He fills the whole universe, whether mankind acknowledges that He does or not.

This is the second time in Ephesians that Paul mentioned the ascension. This is the only epistle where he did so. You and I fulfill our purpose in the power of Christ's ascension, which represents God's ability to do heavenly things with and through mankind's flesh (not carnality, but our actual human body). **Are you an ascension Christian?** That would mean you operate as a gift to mankind as a result of Christ's ascension into heaven. It is marvelous to think that One with a body like ours is seated at the right hand of the Father, praying for us and fulfilling His own purpose. You and I are also seated there and we, too, need to fulfill our purpose in the power and reality of Christ's ascension. **Have you ever meditated on the issue and importance of the ascension for your life and work?** If not, why not spend the rest of the day doing just that.

### Study Four, Part Two

<sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

**4:11** – This verse names what are referred to by some as the five-fold ministries of the Church – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. There is much discussion about these offices or roles and whether or not they exist and are relevant for the modern church. I believe they are. Whatever is taught or believed, it is important to realize that these roles are gifts to the Body. It is also a privilege to serve in any of these capacities.

Therefore no one involved in five-fold ministry should have any pride, for they are what they are by the grace of God. They did not earn that ministry by their faithfulness or good deeds. They are simply God's choice by God's grace. To demand or expect any honor or special privileges for holding one of these offices is simply misguided. If anything these offices require even more commitment and service than any others:

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-27).

**4:12** – These five-fold ministries are given for one purpose: to prepare God's people for the works of service. These ministries are *not* to do the works of service but rather to prepare others to do them. It seems that in the modern church the roles have been reversed. Most leaders are comfortable doing the works of service and most of God's people are content to watch them do them. Are you doing the works of ministry or

watching them get done? What's more, are you judging or criticizing those who are doing them, while you sit back and do not much of anything? Someone once said that ministry is like American football, where 70,000, in desperate need of exercise, watch 22 men play who are in desperate need of rest.

It seems that the first priority for doing works of service is to build up the body of Christ. Then there should be an effort to meet the needs of nonbelievers as the opportunities presents themselves.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9-10).

**4:13** – This verse outlines the objectives for service on the part of the five-fold ministries:

- 1) the unity of the faith;
- 2) the knowledge of the Son of God; and
- 3) maturity among believers, which is attaining the whole measure of Christ's fullness.

This is the third mention of Christ's "fullness" in the epistle (see 1:23 and 3:19). Too often we think of the unity of "the" faith as doctrinal correctness. But if you take out "the", it reads "until we all attain faith." Leaders should teach people how to trust the Lord, not only to hold onto a particular doctrinal statement.

Church leaders should teach people about Jesus. I know that sounds basic, but I don't hear see some leaders doing that today. They are teaching the doctrinal positions of their movement, studying end times and pursuing prophecy or at times building their own kingdoms. Then there are those who teach about Jesus, but they aren't preparing people for a living, vibrant relationship with Christ.

Finally, maturity, which is to be one of the objectives for leadership, is helping people to handle and take on as much responsibility as one possibly can, which speaks to each person being like Jesus and then doing greater works than Jesus ever did in the fullness of Christ!

**How are you doing in regards to each of these three objectives above? If you are a leader, are you equipping people with these three objectives in mind?**

### Study Four, Part Three

<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole

body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**4:14** – There are some infants in the body who are susceptible to a lot of “con men” – people peddling God’s word and promising all kinds of fabulous results. All the infants have to do is give their money, time or loyalty and the in return for a gift of money. Then there are leaders who develop personality cults that preach truth, gather a crowd, but keep people in immaturity so that the leader can be front and center.

All this happens due to the cunning and craftiness of scheming men. Some of this doesn’t appear to be premeditated, but it is and it is diabolical. These leaders are usually exceptional talkers, who can paint a lovely picture with their words, but their intent is on deceiving people into following and there is usually a monetary reward for their efforts. There is only one antidote for this kind of person and that is a solid grounding in God’s word, which many don’t have or even want.

It is interesting that this dynamic was present in the Garden of Eden. The serpent had success tempting Eve because she did not have a solid knowledge of God’s word, which was Adam’s fault. One example is that God said they could eat freely of the trees in the Garden; Eve told the serpent that they **may** eat of the fruit, implying perhaps that God was holding something back from them. Also said they could not eat; He did not say they could not touch the one tree.

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16b-17).

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Genesis 3:2-3).

When Eve did not quote the Word of God properly, the serpent moved in and planted a seed of doubt that somehow God was holding something back that was really in Eve’s best interests. **Are you an infant in God’s body or are you growing into maturity? How do you know one way or the other?**

**4:15** – I was once in a church and saw someone came to the pastor, explaining that the Lord wanted her to do something. The pastor then talked this person out of what she felt the Lord had prompted her to do! **Since when is any man or woman in a position to judge what God is telling someone else to do?**

Yes, we each have discernment and we have a duty to share with others what we see and sense in the Lord and from our experience. At the end of the day, however, we don’t know for sure what is in someone’s heart or what the Lord has said to them. So we must speak the truth in love realizing that we don’t see or know it all.

We are to develop followers of Christ and not of any leader. I have found it is easier for me to hear from others than it is to hear from God at times. As a follower, I must not expect that anyone else can live out my relationship with the Lord and I must not be content to live off someone else's faith or knowledge. As a leader, I must not hear God for anyone else, but direct and train them by every means possible to hear God for themselves!

**4:16 – As a child, did you have to work at physically growing up? Or did it just happen?** In most cases, it just happened! You cannot rush your maturity in the Lord; it will happen as you cooperate with the plan God has for you. If you do the good works that God has prepared for you and if leaders would equip followers to follow and grow up into Christ, I think maturity would take care of itself in the power of the Spirit. What's more, the body would grow up and be all that the Lord intends for it to be.

#### Study Four, Part Four

<sup>17</sup>So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup>They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. <sup>20</sup>You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. <sup>21</sup>Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

**4:17 – Paul insisted that the Ephesians no longer live in futile thinking.** I have lived in the futility of my thoughts, and I know many others who have as well. **What is futile thinking?** It is a worldview or thought pattern that does not conform to God's reality, oftentimes with man at the center of things instead of God. Paul goes on to describe futile thinking in terms of Gentiles who are separated from God. Of course, those Gentiles would not have the Word of God to help shape their thinking in the power of the Spirit. Yet Paul was concerned that those saved Ephesians to whom he was writing would also operate in that same erroneous thought process. Paul explained the way out of futile thinking in his letter to the Romans:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:1-5).

**How is your thinking? Is it in line with God’s word? Or does it represent more of the worldly thought pattern as opposed to a biblical one? What examples can you give to back up your answer?**

**4:18** – Why would Paul insist that the Ephesian believers *not* engage in this kind of futility unless it was possible for them to do so? The results from futile thinking described in this verse can be part of a believer’s life if anyone engages in wrong thinking. Gentiles or non-believers have not “cornered the market” on futile thinking. Believers can be cut off from the life of God, too, when they allow their thoughts to control their behavior.

**4:19** – There is an order of progression outlined here: hardness of heart leads to ignorance, which leads to loss of sensitivity, which leads to sensual indulgence in impurity, which leads to lust for more sensuality. I think that describes anyone’s descent into an addiction of any kind, which separates them to some degree from the life of God.

**4:20** – It seems that the Ephesians were struggling to break free from a lifestyle that was more closely associated with that of the Gentiles. The Gentile world of Paul’s day was similar to this 21<sup>st</sup> century world that we know. People were idolaters and addicted to sensuality and lust. Furthermore we know that they were benefited from the presence of Diana’s temple and the industry such as travel, prostitution and the manufacture of idols associated with that temple. That sounds just like the world we live in today.

**4:21** – It seems that Paul was reminding the church of the teaching that he and others had done while they were in Ephesus. His readers must have needed the reminder. Note the gentle nature of Paul’s teaching. He did not rebuke them severely like he did the Corinthians when they struggled with their problems. Paul was almost indirectly reminding them of the conduct he expected. The pressure that they were under in this pagan culture must have been quite difficult and Paul, the shepherd, is gently leading them back to the truth.

#### **Study Four, Part Five**

<sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. <sup>25</sup>Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

**4:22-24** – Paul outlined the “three-steps out” process for anyone looking to live a godly life. First, you put off the old self. That is a decision and something that anyone can do by God’s grace. If you see the need to put off the old self, then you are more than halfway home. For then you will know the truth and seek God’s remedy:

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

**Have you decided to put off your old self? What components made your old self so problematic? What does your new self look like?** Next you must have a new attitude in your mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your **attitude** should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:3-8).

Finally, you need to put on the new self, which is like God Himself. This is not a one-time event, but rather a way of life. You will always be putting off, changing and putting on the new. You may need to follow this process right now in your own life. Do you need to strip away something old, get a new mindset and then put on something new?

“Be **perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Jesus answered, "If you want to be **perfect**, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

Obviously, perfection is not attainable in this lifetime, but we can be perfectly blameless by confessing what we are not, seeking God’s help and cooperating with His grace that He gives in response to our cry.

**4:25** – We are not to lie, but we cannot stop there. We must go on to tell the truth. And to whom must we tell this truth? We must tell it to your neighbor! **And who is our neighbor?** Our neighbor is your brother and sister in the body of Christ. So are you being truthful with those around you? Do you tell them when something upsets you or when you are concerned for their well-being based on something they are doing or some attitude they have? That is one of the most difficult things to do – speak honestly without cruelty and with grace.

I had a meeting the other day with a couple wanting to get married and it was my recommendation that they wait. They refused and are proceeding, which of course is their right. I felt like I fulfilled this verse by speaking the truth but not bludgeoning them with it. In that sense, you can say I have put off the old self, who would have been less than gracious, and put on the new self, which I trust is more Christlike.

#### Study Four, Part Six

<sup>26</sup>"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup>He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. <sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

**4:26&27** – Anger is not sinful. It is what you *do* with your anger that may lead to sin. Anger is a legitimate, God-given emotion, and comes to spur us on to righteous corrective action that will change or resolve either a situation not to our liking or consistent with God's will.

Many have had negative encounters with anger from family or associates that they have tried to eliminate all anger from their own life because they have seen its potentially harmful impact. They only end up suppressing, burying or ignoring that anger, and that always leads to problems.

**Are you angry? Why deny it? What are you prepared to do with it and about it?** You must face it and allow the energy of your anger to lead you to do something righteous concerning that about which you are angry. If hungry children make you angry, then do something to feed them. If someone is making you angry, use that anger to set up a meeting and begin a dialogue. If you are angry that your rights are being abused or ignored, then take that energy and focus your energies on denying yourself by God's grace.

Proverbs has a lot to say about anger. Here are some of the verses:

A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-**tempered** man displays folly (Proverbs 14:29).

Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away **anger** (Proverbs 29:8).

A fool gives full vent to his **anger**, but a wise man keeps himself under control (Proverbs 29:11).

An **angry** man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins (Proverbs 29:12).

For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up **anger** produces strife” (Proverbs 30:33).

You must always deal with anger quickly. Don’t let it sit in your heart or it will eat you up. Unresolved anger, and not anger itself, will give the devil entrance into your life.

**4:28** – Paul urged that his readers not only stop sinful behavior, but go on to replace that sinful behavior with righteous deeds. Stop lying and speak truth. Now he urged them to steal no longer but to work. It is never enough to stop sinning; you must also do righteous deed to replace the sin. Paul explained this process more fully to the Galatians:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:13-26).

**4:29** – We see the same principle in this verse. Don’t just stop talking if you have been involved in unwholesome talk; instead, speak words that will be of benefit to others.

#### **Study Four, Part Seven**

<sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**4:30** – I don’t often remember that I can grieve the Holy Spirit. It would seem that the Spirit is beyond my grieving Him, but He is not. That means that the Spirit is intimately involved in my life and is acquainted with all my ways. He lives inside me. My actions

can bring God joy or sadness. I want them to bring joy, but I know at times I have brought grief.

The Spirit lives in me as proof that God is in my life and will fulfill all the promises that He has made concerning the forgiveness of my sins and the inheritance of eternal life. The Spirit “seals” me as one belonging to the Lord. When the king’s seal was on something in days of old, that meant that what was inside carried the full authority and sanction of the king himself. The fact that you have the Spirit is proof to all who look that you belong to God and that He has set His seal of approval on you.

That means you are the King’s property. Therefore, you should act like it, otherwise you risk grieving Him.

**4:31&32** – It is interesting that Paul would write Christians and urge them to get rid of malice and brawling. They must have needed this instruction. In counseling others over the years, I have found that many assume that the Spirit’s presence in their lives is automatically going to change some things. Then they eventually come to the realization that they must work in cooperation with the Spirit to see some negative behaviors be reversed and replaced. **Has this been your experience? What is it that you need to get rid of in your life? What is the Spirit showing you must go?**

Notice that the things listed in this verse all have to do with anger. Later Paul gave more instructions where anger was concerned, but for now he simply urged his readers to get rid of all that was associated with a hot temper:

A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly (Proverbs 14:29).

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel (Proverbs 15:18).

A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered (Proverbs 17:27).

A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again (Proverbs 19:19).

**Why would Paul have written to forgive unless the reader was going to need that admonition?** It was needed because it is only a matter of time before someone is going to offend you, perhaps even today. What’s more, forgiveness is needed for those who are closest to you, often for fellow believers. That can be hard to do, for those closest to you have the potential to hurt you the most.

All forgiveness must take place in the context of how Christ forgave you and me. Jesus taught a great deal about forgiveness, as you can see in the following passages:

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:12-15).

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:3-5).

**Is there anyone that you need to forgive at this point in your life?**