



Discussion Questions

- 1) Ephesians 4:1 sets up the second half of the letter. Why do you think Paul might mention here that he is a prisoner? (See also 6:20).
- 2) What is the “calling [Christians] have received” according to Ephesians so far? (See e.g. 1:4, 2:14-16, esp 1:10). How does this make sense of 4:1-6 (esp. the key repeated word in 4-6)?
- 3) In this context, why are the instructions of v2-3 especially important? Thinking practically, what would this involve for us & how might it be counter-cultural?
- 4) How does v7 encourage humility, equality as well as diversity in the body of Christ? Is this how we really think about each other? (We’ll think more about what this ‘grace’ is given for in following verses.)
- 5) V8-10 is a remarkable description picking up on language in Psa 68 of the divine warrior Lord who defeated his enemies and ascends in triumph to the throne. What does v11 say this ascended Lord has now done?
- 6) Looking at v12-13 what is the purpose and intended result of Christ giving these various kinds of Christian ministers to his church? How should this shape our expectations about attitude to church life?
- 7) In v14-17 verses how does God expect his people to grow into maturity? Who’s involved? Do you find this picture attractive and achievable?
- 8) What would it look like for us as a group to live this out in the details of our life? How practically will we seek to be
 - a) Completely humble & gentle?
 - b) Patient and bearing with one another?
 - c) Speaking the truth in love?
- 9) What specific things might make this hard (practical, spiritual, personal, cultural?) What confidence can we draw from the person and activity of the risen Christ in this passage?

NOTES

Eph 4:1-16 Live a life worthy of your calling – in unity and growing maturity!

- A call to **maintain UNITY** (1-6)
 - The urgency & means of unity (1-3)
 - The basis of unity (4-6)
- The context for **growing in MATURITY** (7-16)
 - Christ gives grace to every member (7-10)
 - Gifted word ministers equip the saints for ministry (11-12)
 - The goal is unity and maturity (13-16)

4:1 shifts us into the second half of Ephesians. (Ch1-3) You are one in Christ, (Ch4-6) So live as one in Christ. Since unity of all things under Christ is the great goal of the universe (1:10) and since the church is that newly united and reconciled community (2:14-16), then it is no wonder that the second half this letter has a keen focus on what it looks like to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

(1-6) The key theme in this section is **Christian unity** in the body (seen in the repeated ‘one’ in 4-6). It’s striking that 4:1 is a call to be who you truly are. Identity drives ethics. Indicatives shape imperatives. The ethical instructions of 2-3 are what’s needed to maintain unity in a real-world community of saved sinners still ‘in progress’ becoming more like Jesus. **NB we are called to ‘keep’ not create the unity**. The crucified Christ through his death HAS already created this one new humanity (2:15).

(7-10) The united body is also a diverse body, but one in which ‘each one’ has been given ‘grace’. By whom? None other than the ascended Christ! The ref to Psalm 68:18 has a slight change to the final clause (from our standard OT version, though it’s possible that Paul may have been quoting another version/tradition that existed). The “descent” spoken of here is the incarnation (from heaven to earth) rather than descent into hell as some take it. The main things to see are 1) The ascended Lord is Christ! 2) The ascended Lord has given gifts to his body (“the fulness of him who fills everything” 1:23).

(11-16). The ‘gifts’ are people – word ministers of various kinds all dealing with God’s revelation – whether ‘special revealers’ (foundational apostles & prophets), ‘gifted spreaders’ (evangelists) or ‘regular teachers’ (pastors & teachers – probably one group who shepherd the church by teaching). Their purpose is to equip every member to do the work of ministry & build each other up to maturity. The church grows as we speak the truth in love and so build ourselves up. Unity and maturity is the goal; word ministry is the means to that goal. NB it’s not just the pastors doing the work of ministry, but their job is to equip all of us to serve.

FOR US: Do you see the **centrality of UNITY** in the body of Christ – will we do what it takes to maintain it? Do you appreciate the **purpose of word ministry** to equip God’s people for works of service – will we play our part? Do you notice **the goal of MATURITY** – will we keep building one another up?

TEACHING TIPS:

- (1) **Remember that identity shapes ethics** 4:1 makes this clear (as does 5:1, 5:8). All the ethical instruction flows from our Christian identity. Be who you are! Be true to your self (in Christ). So we maintain the unity that Christ by the Spirit has achieved, we grow in maturity as part of the body we already are...
- (2) **See how the practical teaching is so fitting.** Being humble, patient etc (2-3) isn’t simply quite nice and randomly included – it is the real, gritty, active need if we will ever maintain unity. Similarly speaking the truth in love (15) isn’t just a nice slogan, it’s the way that the body builds itself up. What a privilege to be able to do this as a group; everyone has a gift and part to play (7, 16)!
- (3) **Inspire one another with the vision of v13.** Given who Christ is (seated above every name and power, who fills everything in every way etc), what a stunning thing that Christian believers are called and destined to become mature – attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This is not small! What more could you want for yourself or each other than this? Don’t sell ourselves short of our privileges in Christ. This should motivate us to join in with 15-16.

HINTS FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Ephesians 4:1 sets up the second half of the letter. Why do you think Paul might mention here that he is a prisoner? (See also 6:20).* It demonstrates his commitment and highlights the urgency of what's at stake. Paul's got "skin in the game" so to speak!
2. *What is the "calling [Christians] have received" according to Ephesians so far? (See e.g. 1:4, 2:14-16, esp 1:10). How does this make sense of 4:1-6 (esp. the key repeated word in 4-6)?* Christians are called to be holy & blameless (1:4) and have been made one (united, reconciled to God and one another through Christ & his death on the cross). Indeed the church is a preview of the ultimate goal of the universe of ALL THINGS being united under Christ. In that case, it's no surprise that the unity of the Church is the central burden of the teaching and instruction of Ch 4-6 in different ways. You ARE one (hence repeated 'one in 4-6) – so LIVE AS one! Calling the church to unity is calling us to be who we already are. But this will take 'every effort'
3. *In this context, why are the instructions of v2-3 especially important? Thinking practically, what would this involve for us & how might it be counter-cultural?* Given that we're all still 'in the middle of the story' (not yet perfected or glorified to be fully like Christ) then we will NEEDED to be humble, gentle, patient etc. It pre-supposes relational struggle and strife within the community. But understanding the depth, power and extent of our unity is a great motivator to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace'. Unity and peace sound like nice cuddly words, but in reality they're blood-bought at the cross and will cost us a lot of sweat and tears to keep. In what moments are we tempted to be proud, harsh, impatient with one another? Our culture often prizes 'getting your own way', 'not taking any nonsense from anyone', 'being proud and sure of yourself' which make 2-3 profoundly distinctive and 'un-natural' in many ways.
4. *How does v7 encourage humility, equality as well as diversity in the body of Christ? Is this how we really think about each other? (We'll think more about what this 'grace' is given for in following verses.)* Humility because all grace/gifts come from Christ, equality because has has given 'to each one of us', diversity because it's 'as Christ apportioned it' (i.e. not identical/uniform). Every single Christian is a gift from the ascended Christ to his body on earth. No 'unimportant' or 'ungifted' ones.
5. *V8-10 is a remarkable description picking up on language in Psa 68 of the divine warrior Lord who defeated his enemies and ascends in triumph to the throne. What does v11 say this ascended Lord has now done?* Don't get bogged down in the details of the quote. The slight change (Christ giving gifts rather than receiving as in OT text) may be Paul drawing on a different manuscript tradition to make a different (legitimate) point in context. The 'descent' is likely speaking of the Incarnation (to earth, rather than down to hell) but the main point is show us the ascended Lord who gives gifts is Christ and to prepare us to see what those gifts are (namely, people!, who are word ministers of different kinds- see note above)
6. *Looking at v12-13 what is the purpose and intended result of Christ giving these various kinds of Christian ministers to his church? How should this shape our expectations about attitude to church life?* Purpose: equip Christ's peoples for the works of service (every member ministry) Result: full unity and maturity of the body to the full measure of the fulness of Christ. Wow! We should expect word ministers to seek to equip the WHOLE body. We should want to play our part in the words of service for which we are Christ's gift to his people. No by-standers or unimportant Christians. Rather a team game, all heading for a glorious destination.
7. *In v14-16 verses how does God expect his people to grow into maturity? Who's involved? Do you find this picture attractive and achievable?* Again, it's the whole body/church. "as each part does its work". It's a stunning picture of inter-dependence and growth together to become fully mature in Him
8. *What would it look like for us as a group to live this out in the details of our life? How practically will we seek to be : Completely humble & gentle? Patient and bearing with one another? Speaking the truth in love?* This will be challenging– either because of pride, impatience etc. But also because we may never have got close enough to each other to actually need to be patient/ bear with! If that's the case then it's worth reflecting together and being honest/realistic how we can move 'one click' further on. Get specific! No point being vague, general & unrealistic and never actually doing anything!
9. *What specific things might make this hard (practical, spiritual, personal, cultural?) What confidence can we draw from the person and activity of the risen Christ in this passage?* He is ascended Lord (with all the glory of the Psa 68 triumphant passage), generous giver of gifts & head of the body!