

QUEEN OF THE EPISTLES 7 - GROWING INTO CHRIST
PSALM 103; EPHESIANS 4:7:7-25
2026-02-15

The overall theme of Ephesians is twofold: **the unity of all humanity** in Christ **and God's purpose for the world** through the church. Paul emphasized we were chosen by God before the beginning of the world—**that included adopting us as his children** through Jesus. Central in that, Jesus came to wipe out all divisions. All history is a working out of this, working out the will of God.

God works out history by grace. We did nothing. Grace: all God. He lifted us from death to life. Grace—the undeserved, unattainable favour of God. We just accept it.

Paul pictured each of us as a stone built into the church. And, of the whole church, **Jesus is the cornerstone.** Each stone is fitted into Christ. The building is a unity that **comes from Jesus.**

The great secret of God **was revealed to Paul** —the love, mercy and grace of God weren't just for Jews but for all humanity. Paul became the transmitter of grace to the Gentiles.

But the ancient world had its barriers. In any Christ-less society there can be nothing but barriers. But **in Christ these barriers are down.** Though the world's not what it's meant to be—torn by opposing forces, by hatred and strife; nation against nation, person against person and even within each of us a fight rages between evil and good—still it's God's design that all people and nations should be one in Christ. To achieve this Christ is depending on us to tell of His love and mercy.

Paul turned from these great truths to what each Church member must be if he's to take part in the plan. Paul urged us to live a life worthy of the calling we've received, worthy of His adopting you, worthy of the great privilege He's given you.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”
(Verse 2.) Every one of these virtues—humility, meekness, patience and love—depends on the obliteration of self. As long as self is at the centre, oneness can never fully exist. In a society where self predominates, people can only be a collection of individualistic and warring units. But, when self dies and Christ springs to life in our hearts, then comes peace, oneness, unity. Consider our oneness:

There is one body. Christ is the head and we are the body. The oneness of the Church is essential for Christ's work—a oneness founded on a common love of Christ and of every part for the other. Remarkably, Christ doesn't need anything from anyone but chooses to partner with us.

There is one Spirit. Greek for spirit is *pneuma*. It is also the word for breath. The vitalizing breath of the body of the Church is the Spirit of Christ. There is no Church without the Spirit.

There's one hope. All of us are heading towards the same goal. This is the great secret of the unity of Christians. Some of our beliefs may differ but our goal's a world redeemed in Christ.

There is one Lord. The creed of the early Church was "Jesus is Lord". *Kurios* is master in contrast to servant or slave. We are all in the possession of one Master and are all servants to Him.

There is one faith—the complete commitment of Christians to Jesus Christ.

There is one baptism—a public confession of faith. Donot equate baptism with salvation. To lock baptism in with salvation makes it a work of ours and we know salvation is 100% God's gift.

There is one God. Paul describes God as Father of all, enshrined in which is the love of God. Our idea of God begins in love. He's above all, enshrined in which is the control of God—no matter how things may look. He's through all. God didn't create the world to send it on its own, unattended—He's guiding, sustaining, loving always. He's in all, enshrined in which is the presence of God in all life. We live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world.

One! We are one. To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (v. 7), so Paul moves on from the qualities of Christians to their functions. The picture in v. 8 is of a conquering king riding into Jerusalem and receiving gifts (Psalm 68:18). But Jesus isn't receiving gifts at all—He is the giver of gifts—it's a complete reversal of what's expected of a conquering king. What's with the ascending-descending piece here? Well, Jesus descended into our world when He entered it as a man. And, of course He ascended from this world when He returned to His glory. The point is that the one who ascended and the one who descended are one and the same person. It means that the Christ of glory is the same as Jesus the earth-walker: still, He loves all people, still He seeks the sinner, still He heals the sufferer, still He comforts the sorrowing, still He is the friend of the outcast. The ascended Christ is still the lover of our souls.

He ascended, not to vacate, but to fill the world with His presence, something He could not do when restricted by a human body, where He could only be in one place at one time. So, the ascension means not a Christ-deserted world but a Christ-filled world.

Verse 11-13 should be given a context about Church leaders. Some had authority throughout the whole church and others were stationary with one ministry.

The apostles had authority through the whole Church. They were not just the 12. Barnabas was an apostle (Acts 14:4, 14); so too were James, Jesus' brother (1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 1:19), Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 2:6), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7). [Junia - indicates a woman but in the 12th century the leaders said this can't be so added the 's' (Junias) making this a man]. So too was Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1). There were two qualifications to be an apostle: first he/she must have seen Jesus. Second, he/she must have been a witness of the Resurrection and of the Risen Lord. So, in one sense the apostles would all die out. But, in another sense the qualification remains: Whoever teaches Christ must know Christ. And whoever brings the power of Christ to others must have experienced Christ's risen power.

The prophets didn't so much foretell the future as forth-tell the will of God. In some respects these overlapped because announcing the consequences of disobeying God's will also indicated what would happen in the future. The prophets wandered throughout the Church. Their message wasn't from themselves (if it was from themselves, God called them false prophets) but was the direct result of the Holy Spirit. Typically, they had no homes, no family and no means of support. In time, they vanished from the Church. They were never concealed and so were the first exposed to die for their faith. Today, some speak of preachers as giving a prophetic word.

Evangelists were wanderers. We might call them missionaries today. But everyone understands the labelling of Billy Graham as an evangelist. Yet we have those in this and every congregation who tell the good news. In fact, I keep encouraging everyone of you to do that. We are all to share the good news. Some of us find that much easier than others. That makes sense. We are all called to pray. Some of us have the gift of prayer. The gifting of God. Then, as today, evangelist/missionaries didn't typically have the prestige and authority of the apostles or the influence of the Spirit inspired prophets.

Pastors and teachers had a lot of overlap. They settled in with the work of one congregation. They were literally teachers, given the absence of books. The story of Jesus was mainly transmitted by word. There'd probably be a copy of the Torah (Old Testament) in each synagogue/cum Church, and we know this letter to the Ephesians, like others of Paul, were circulated from church to church. So, teachers were the repositories to know and pass on the story of the life of Jesus and open out the Christian faith to them. They did a good job; the faith remained pure and it wasn't distorted. But the teachers were also pastors—the Latin word for shepherd. The duty of the pastor was to shepherd the flock and keep them safe. The association with shepherding surrounds Jesus who is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Hebrew 13:20), the Shepherd of People's Souls (1 Peter 2:25), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). The other side is also remarkably true. Paul urged the elders of Ephesus to guard the flock whom God had entrusted to their care (Acts 20:28). The pastor is pictured as the one who seeks the sheep when they wander away, and if need be, to die to save them. We are all to be shepherds to our brothers and sisters.

The purpose of this framework is so that each of us can be fully equipped—that we become what we ought to be, that the body of Christ is built up—we are a construction project, not a destruction or demolition project! An even greater aim is that members of the Church arrive at perfect unity—not just living decent and respectable lives, but to be Christ-like.

Verse 14-16: In every Church there are people who must be protected. In every Church there are people who have to be guarded against. There's only one way to keep from being blown about and that is by continual growth into Christ—rooting yourself in Him. A body is only healthy when every part is “running on all cylinders” (did you ever cross wire?). The Church can be like that, but only when Christ is really the Head and when every member is moving under His control.

Verse 17-24: So, we need to leave our old way of life and turn to Christ's way. The unbelieving life is concerned with things that don't matter. You'll understand what I'm saying. The longer a person continues to sin, the more desensitized he/she becomes to it. And that can lead into a descent into the insatiable lust for their desires, even to a point of being incapable of bearing the pain of discipline—a spirit which tramples on others to get its own way.

Paul saw in the world of unbelievers, hearts so petrified that they weren't even aware that they were sinning, people so dominated by sin that shame was lost and decency forgotten. He saw people so much at the mercy of their desires that they didn't care whose life they injured and whose innocence they destroyed so long as their desires were satisfied. Does that sound familiar with our world today? Sins that invade life at every point and stalk our streets relentlessly. No surprise, Paul urges those who have come to Christ to be done with that kind of life. Put off your old way of life, just like you would put off an old suit of clothes; clothe yourself in a new way. Put off your sins and put on the righteousness and holiness which God can and wants to give you.

Fancy words. Just how do you do that? Well, Paul doesn't leave it out there in nether-ville. He brings it right down to the practical to get started. Stop lying. Truth demands deliberate effort, or left unchecked, it can slip right into unconscious habit. We all know people like that. No idea that what they've said wasn't true, and if they are aware of it, it doesn't phase them. We use the term "white lie" as if it's OK. I'll just leave that to sit with you. Try to eliminate that stuff—of course with the help of the Holy Spirit.

There's also the lie of silence—the menace of things unsaid. Silence means consent. If a wrong word or action isn't opposed, it becomes something accepted, acceptable. Back to the Church being one body, we can only function properly when we speak the truth—but do it in love.

It's an awkward place to stop, but focus this week on changing one part of your old nature that you'd like to be rid of. You might even share your progress—or lack of it with someone. The accountability to someone else could be very purging and helpful. We've all got junk in the trunk.