



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Ephesians 4:1-16 New International Version December 31, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 31, 2017**, is from **Ephesians 4:1-16**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Ephesians 4:1) As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Paul wrote his letter from prison because he had been arrested for obeying Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior when he taught others about Jesus, as Jesus has commanded His disciples. In chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul began to teach how believers in Jesus should live if they truly believed in Jesus Christ rather than just saying they believed in Him. Jesus calls His followers to live daily in ways that honor Him as truly their Lord by all they say and do. By suffering in prison, Paul was paying the price of honoring Jesus; so, he had credibility when he wrote to the Ephesians and told them to live a life that was worthy of Jesus and consistent with the life Jesus had called them to live. The first three chapters of Ephesians teach the true basis of faith, and the last three chapters teach how to live by faith. God has called us to be children of God through faith in Jesus Christ; therefore, we need to live worthy as children of the Great King of the universe with the Son of God as our moral and spiritual example. Our behavior shows others what we think about God our Father and how much we want to honor God by all we say and do.

(Ephesians 4:2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

In Paul's day, there were no Roman laws (and there are no moral laws) against living the way Paul described in the Bible. In addition to living a pure life in the power of the Holy

Spirit before God and among other people (especially among others in the Church), believers need to consider how much they depend on Jesus Christ for forgiveness, guidance, wisdom, love, and power to live rightly. Therefore, knowing how much they depend on Jesus to do His will, believers should treat others with gentleness, patience, and love when others fail to live a perfect life according to the Scriptures.

(Ephesians 4:3) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Jesus Christ calls all believers to love God and others. True believers try to love and serve others, and the ways and results vary in their relationships with others. If we recognize that all true believers vary in their levels of spiritual maturity, as the Holy Spirit helps them grow in Christ Jesus, we will strive to live in peace with them and nurture their spiritual development. We will follow the Holy Spirit's leading according to the Scriptures in how best to develop relationships with others. We will strive for unity of heart and mind as we follow the express will of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14). In Ephesians, Paul teaches about this gate and how we should walk this road.

(Ephesians 4:4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;

Though many congregations and denominations exist around the world, "the Church with a capital C" is the true Body of Jesus Christ on Earth (in His resurrected human body, Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father waiting to return to Earth when the Heavenly Father decides). The one Holy Spirit indwells every true believer in Jesus Christ and every true congregation, and the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures as a foundation for the unity of believers, with Jesus Christ being the cornerstone (see Ephesians 2:20). Since Jesus is our cornerstone, God calls us to line up our lives with our Savior's commands and purposes, for Jesus also reigns over us as our Lord. The one hope of our calling is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is our only hope for eternal life, forgiveness, lasting love, and salvation. Jesus Christ has called us to live for eternity in a loving relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the holy angels, and with all true believers or followers of Jesus Christ. In the Church, believers in Jesus can experience and show others something of what God's heaven is like for Christians.

(Ephesians 4:5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

True believers or true followers of Jesus Christ live before Jesus Christ as their Lord — they seek His will because they love Jesus Christ and want to obey Him completely out of thankfulness and love for Him. They also have a common commitment to and faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ of the Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament and New Testament — that Jesus explained to His disciples during His ministry and after He rose from the dead). They receive baptism and share in baptism as Jesus commanded in Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

(Ephesians 4:6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The one true God exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the Father of all true believers and the Creator of all that exists. God is everywhere present; therefore, God is above all, through all, and in all that exists. God is greater than all that exists, and God is other than all that exists; yet, God exists in all things while not being what He created. In special and unique ways, God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rules and works above all, through all, in all to accomplish His purposes, and especially in the Church and in all true followers of Jesus Christ. Paul always gave reasons from facts about God when he told believers how to live daily by faith in God.

(Ephesians 4:7) But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Jesus Christ gives gifts to all true believers, and He gives grace in different measures according to the needs of believers, the tasks He has called them to complete, and the gifts He has given. Every true believer maintains his or her unique identity as children of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit enhances their unique identity by helping them use the gifts Jesus gives them. Jesus Christ gives both similar and unique gifts to each believer that leads each believer to love and serve God, the Church, and others in ways best suited to God, others, and themselves according to God’s gifts and purposes.

(Ephesians 4:8) This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He freed His people from captivity and slavery in the devil's domain. He also defeated the devil, though the devil still has some power until Jesus Christ visibly returns to Earth (into the world) for a second time. After He frees His people individually from slavery to Satan and sin, Jesus gives them gifts to help them live in their newfound freedom without falling back into slavery to Satan and sin. The believer's greatest gift is Jesus himself living in their hearts and renewing their minds.

(Ephesians 4:9) (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)

In the Apostles Creed, many early versions state that Jesus Christ descended into hell, from where He led forth those of God's people who had been held in captivity because of their sins. The “lower parts of the earth” has sometimes been interpreted as the grave, the tomb, death, and hell. Consider what Peter wrote, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:16-18; see also, 1 Peter 4:6).

(Ephesians 4:10) He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Because Jesus Christ is fully human, He ascended into heaven in His glorified, resurrected, human body and now sits at the right hand of God. Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is fully God; therefore, Jesus fills all things, and Jesus is everywhere present. Jesus spiritually indwells all true believers in a special way so they can follow Him according to the will of God (unhappily, believers may not always choose to follow Jesus as they ought).

(Ephesians 4:11) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

Jesus Christ gave (and still gives) many gifts to forgiven, freed, former sinners; believers that the Bible now calls saints. His gifts enable His followers to serve Him and the Church according to His will, even though they still fail sometimes. Christ gave different gifts according to the measure He chose to give. Paul listed five types of leaders, officers,

or servants that Christ gave the Church in order to achieve His purposes on Earth as He reigned from heaven. Because these gifts differ, pastors and teachers may not be as effective in evangelism as some evangelists may be, though they may still do evangelism. They can help new Christians learn and grow after the evangelist leads them to Christ, and they can help mature Christians keep on following Jesus. These five gifts help members of His Body (who also have other gifts) build up the Church and one another; therefore, we can look at our Church leaders and teachers as gifts from Christ himself.

(Ephesians 4:12) to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Paul wrote that the Church should use these five gifts to help each member of the Church, the Body of Christ, do the kind of ministry or provide the service that Jesus Christ intended them to give to others. Jesus did not intend for these five gifts to do all of the ministry of His Church; instead, He intended for them to equip and help believers do the work of ministry too. He gave His spiritual gifts to believers in different measures for different purposes so all the members of His Church could do all the work of the Church.

(Ephesians 4:13) 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.

Building up the Body of Christ means far more than adding numbers of people to the congregation's membership rolls. The "building up" includes coming to a unity or oneness of faith through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Bible, the Word of God. "Building up" involves a Holy Spirit led understanding of the truth, and a willingness to teach and live according to the truth. In "building up," the Church increases in the knowledge of Jesus Christ through the gifts of teachers and others. The "building up" involves coming to substantial, if not perfect, completeness of mind, spirit, and life in Jesus Christ; becoming all that Jesus Christ wants us to become in the Church here and throughout eternity.

(Ephesians 4:14) 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 people in their deceitful scheming.

We need to grow up and mature in Jesus Christ by using His gifts to us; including the Bible, the Church, the Holy Spirit, and the privilege of loving and prayerfully obeying Him so we do not remain as children, spiritually and mentally immature. As immature children, we will not discern truth from falsehood and error as we ought; therefore, we will be highly susceptible to false doctrines, trickery, and crafty deceitful people and evil spirits who want to mislead us as they scheme against us.

(Ephesians 4:15) Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

To avoid being misled and in order to recognize false teachings and teachers, the followers of Christ need to commit themselves fully to Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Knowing the truth, we must show forth by our behavior and words the loving truth of Jesus Christ to others, because we love Jesus Christ and we love others; and we must pray that others will see our love for them and Jesus Christ and the Church by what we say and do. We must pray and strive in the Spirit to grow up as Christ intends, so Christ truly will be able to direct us; then, we will love and think more and more as Christ, the Head of the Body, the Head of the Church, loves and thinks.

(Ephesians 4:16) 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.

Doing and speaking the truth in love; doing and speaking the truth of Jesus Christ in His loving way will help each person in the Church fulfill His purposes as they work with others in the Church. When each person in the Body of Christ works as Christ intends, they love God and each other and Christ builds up His Church; furthermore, members of His Body draw closer together in their service of Christ instead of falling away from serving Christ and the Church in the world.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What do you think Paul meant by “the calling to which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1)?
2. What might be some reasons Paul wants believers to lead a life worthy of their calling?

3. Why do you think Jesus gives gifts to those who believe in Him?
4. Which gifts of Jesus do you think the Church and the world need most today?
5. What might happen to the Church and the world if believers do not use the gifts Jesus gives them?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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