

Paul's NT letters ~ fall into 2 groups ...

The **Pastoral** ones: such as Timothy, Titus, & Philemon,
& the **General** ones: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians,
Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, & Thessalonians.
The early chapters: explain important Christian **principles**,
While the following chapters teach:

The practical outworking of those principles !

Let's read Ephesians 4. Vs.1-3. NLT

In the years ~ since Paul changed from being an ...
Opponent of Christ ~ to being an ~ **Apostle of Christ**,
He's seen many different levels of 'response & commitment'
from the people ~ who listened to his preaching !

Because ... Paul lived out his Christian life with integrity,
Worthy of his Lord, and refused to compromise his belief:
that Jesus is ~ '**the Messiah**' ~ he ended up in prison !
Paul's 'wish list' for the Ephesians,
was that they demonstrate, that same sense of commitment !

When **we** acknowledge, that the **Son of God**, came to earth,
to suffer at the hands of sinful men ~ and die for **us**.
It should motivate **us** ~ **to live out our faith**, every day.

Notice ... He doesn't say:

'Don't do what I did ... Look where it got me !'
Instead ~ He encourages the Ephesians to hold to their ...

Christian commitment, regardless of the circumstances.
He commences this section of his letter with strong words:

I, a prisoner for serving the Lord,
beg you to lead a life **worthy of your calling**
for you have been called ... **by God**.

The Lord has called them ...
Into a new relationship with Himself.
Something these Gentiles, had never known before !

This new relationship ~ is built on a new **understanding**:
of what God **approves** ~ and **disapproves** !
It required ~ significant changes in their **behaviour**,
brought about ~ by changes in their **attitudes**.

Not just a short term, 'lip service'
(Or ~ to change the example)
Not like a temporary alteration ~ to part of a building,
As we might build on a stage, to create the **scenery for a play**

BUT instead ~ the permanent re-furbishing,
& a '**complete makeover**' of a house,
to serve the purposes of ~ **the new owner** !

The initial changes following their conversion,
can be taken for granted ~ He's now focusing on ...
The need for **ongoing refinements** !

I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling,

In our own lifetime ~ we've seen some men and women:
Stand for Parliament, and get in. They talked **very** confidently.
They impressed the voters, that **they** could make a difference.
They also impressed their party leaders, and were made:
“A Minister of the Crown”

They thought they'd '**arrived**'... They liked the importance,
They liked the limousine ~ And they liked the salary !
In fact ~ they'd never had so much money !

They had '**the gift of the gab**'
BUT, not the **background and training needed** ...
So they had little idea, of how to fulfil their new responsibilities
But the problems really began ~ when they made little effort:
to learn how ... to fulfil their new role !

After some serious mistakes, including an arrogant attitude of:
'But, I'm the Minister ~ how dare you question me?'
There was a 'leadership reshuffle' They were stood down,
& the task was given to someone else.

Paul recognised ... that the Ephesian Christians,
were a pretty mixed bunch !

They hadn't had the **background and training**,
That he'd received: (from his father ... & from Gamaliel)

So they needed some serious encouragement ...

In how to: **learn and grow ~ and keep on learning !**

Paul had already spent 3 years living in Ephesus,
teaching them ~ on a daily basis.

Now he hopes ~ their Christian commitment,
Is sufficiently '**grounded**' to help them deal with:
Life's 'ups and downs'!

In another letter ~ Paul uses the illustration of **an athlete**,
Who's not content ~ with what he's already achieved,
He continues to train ~ to do **even better** ...

1 Cor. 9. (vs24-26)

Remember, that in a race everyone runs,
but only **one person**, gets the prize ?
You also, must run in such a way, that you will win.
All athletes practice strict self-control.
They do it, to win a prize that will fade away,
but we do it, for an eternal prize.
So I run straight to the goal, with purpose in every step.

The winner of a race, in those original Olympics,
was crowned with a **wreath of Laurel leaves**.

The genuine 'athlete' ~ competed in certain events ...
And then continued to prepare, for the next opportunity.
A few however ~ were content to win one race,
and then not bother any further.

We still use a phrase with just that imagery:
We say someone is ~ **'resting on their laurels'**
They think: because they've been successful once,
they can bask in that glory ~ forever !

Paul urges his friends ~ to apply the principles,
He's taught them ~ and to recognise ...
that **God** called them ~ into a new 'way of life'
that's on-going ~ it's not just a 'temporary spurt'
And not just a 'Sunday activity' !

He answers the question of **'How to do this ?'**
in the verses that follow.

In looking at any text and asking:
'What does it say ~ and how should that apply to us ?'
It sometimes helps, to ask: 'What would the **opposite** be ?'

v2. says: **Be Humble & Gentle ~ Be Patient with each other,**

So, the opposite is: 'Be ... Arrogant & proud !
Aggressive & strident !
Impatient & unreasonable !'

Continuing...vs 2b &3:

**Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.
Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit,
And bind yourselves together with peace.**

In the Message: You're called to travel on the same road,
and in the same direction,
so stay together.

These 3 words: **Humble ~ Gentle ~ & Patient.**
Are not popular in our modern world, & are often viewed as:
Signs of **weakness** ... But, that's **not** how God views them !

Growing up in Jerusalem, and joining the Pharisees ...
Paul had met many men,
who were committed to walking with God.
But, **they** thought ~ **they** could decide ~ how they'd do that.

They were arrogant ~ self-assured ~ domineering ...
And impatient with anyone ~ who didn't see things their way !
Paul had even copied some of these attitudes, as he went about
Arresting Christians ~ in the name of the High Priest.
and throwing them into prison !

But after his 'Damascus Road' experience ...
As he studied the Gospel accounts.
& the OT prophecies about 'The Messiah'
He saw in Jesus: **A completely different style of leadership.**

So that in Romans 12.v2 he wrote:

**Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world,
But let God transform you into a new person,
By changing the way you think.**

Then ~ you will know what God wants you to do,
And you will know how **good** and **pleasing** and **perfect**
his will really is.

**“Humility ~ Gentleness ~ Patience ~
and bearing with one another, in love”**

They're all to do with ~ **how we relate to other people !**
All these traits ... **require strength in our personality,**
to support the other person ~ and not expect them to run,
when they're still just learning ~ to walk !

**v3. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit,
And bind yourselves together with peace.**

Notice he doesn't say: “Make every effort to **find**
the unity of the Spirit ~ as though it was lost,

But: **always ~ KEEP ~ yourselves united in the Holy Spirit.**

The unity, we are given through the Holy Spirit,
Is **spiritual** and **unique**.

It's **not** simply ‘organisational unity’
any sports club ... can have that !

Neither should it be a ~ ‘**superficial unity**’
where we “**smile**” on the outside,
while discrediting people ~ in our heads !

Some of you may remember, the **Rev. David Watson**.
An English **cricketer**, who became a Vicar, in the UK.
He was part of the 'Low Church' meaning:

He was part of the Anglican Church, that is 'Evangelical'.
Not the theologically 'Liberal' part.

After some years of service, he was appointed Bishop of York
(which is the 2nd ranking after the Archbishop of Canterbury)
He visited NZ about 1980 ~ and I went to hear him speak.
David preached brilliantly,

After he'd spoken, the meeting was opened up for questions.
There were plenty of questions, they were particularly about
the running of his Church in York. Because he wasn't
following the usual Anglican way, of Hierarchal control
(from the top down) ~ but he'd appointed Elders,
More like the Presbyterian system !

When he was asked:

"Do you seek 'unanimity' in your Elders meetings ?"

He answered: "Most certainly not"

(He continued:)

***"If... we're all of one mind, & unanimous ~ that's great !
But the Elders must feel free:
to express a differing opinion, without embarrassment.
If we can't come to an agreement on how to move forward,***

*Then we'll adjourn the meeting ~ for a week.
with a strong injunction ~ to **pray** about the issues involved !*

*When we meet again, there's opportunity for further discussion
before we take another vote !*

We seek ~ HARMONY ~ rather than: absolute unity.

*Sometimes an Elder may say: 'I'm not totally sure, that **this,**
is the best way forward ~ but I'm happy to go along with it'
Then we have harmony, and can proceed.*

*So far, we've always succeeded in reaching **Harmony**.*

However ~ in the unlikely event ...

*That all the Elders, (**except one**) wanted to proceed,
Then, I don't believe God's work should be:
Stalled indefinitely ~ because of one unbending opinion''*

Coming back to **Ephesians** ...

Harmony is exactly what Paul desires !

He doesn't say: '**Unity** is the only thing that matters' !

And he doesn't say: '**Peace** at any price'. He says:

**v3. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit,
And bind yourselves together with peace**

Let's read: verses **4,5,6,&7**.

- v7.** Tells us, that **God's grace** ~ is a **gift** to each one of us !
and since Grace is undeserved ~ We cannot earn it,
nor do we receive it ~ **in proportion to our virtue !**
So it has to be apportioned ~ by the Lord himself.

Verses ~ **vs 8,9,10** ... seem a bit difficult !

So let's to look at them carefully, as well:

- v8.** **That is why the Scriptures say,**
When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives
And gave gifts to his people.

This is a quotation from **Psalm 68 v.18**.

It pictures a King returning home from battle, and ascending
the steps of his throne, to take his rightful place once more.

The king doesn't come home empty handed,
That would look like ~ he'd been defeated,
and barely escaped with his life !

No ! The king brings back his main opponents, in chains.
To **prove** ... that he gained the victory over them !

And from the material spoils he's brought home,
he gives gifts, to his soldiers ~ & to his faithful subjects.
Paul thinks of this verse from David's Psalm:
As a poetic description ... **of Jesus returning to heaven !**

- He resumes His rightful place in heaven once more,
- Having conquered Sin and Death.
- He gives ‘gifts’ to His faithful followers.

Vs.9,10: Notice that it says ~ ‘He ascended’ ~ this means that Christ first came down to the lowly world in which we live. The same one who came down is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that his rule might fill the entire universe.

Paul makes it clear: That Jesus was **not** just an **ordinary man**, Elevated to a **special place** by God !
He always was & still is ~ **the Son of God**, come down to earth to accomplish God’s purposes ~ and then return to heaven.

After His ascension, the Holy Spirit was given to each believer With specific gifts provided for ministry as well !
Some Christians, teach that ‘**Spiritual gifts**’ have no connection whatsoever, to what we’d call our ‘**natural gifts**’

Personally ... I think that God enhances:
The latent natural abilities we have.
Though sometimes, those abilities have gone unrecognised.

This means: The Holy Spirit ~ can see the potential in us,
Better than we can see it, for ourselves !
He helps us overcome ~ any ‘**fear of failure**’
And blesses our efforts to grow and mature, in our ministry.

When we realise that God has personally chosen us !
We should gain a new motivation !

And make the effort to study, discuss, and learn more,
then we'll progressively become:
more effective, & more useful, to God

Read v11. (1stly) ~ Apostles.

Around the time, Paul wrote this letter,
the Church leaders had trouble with some men,
calling themselves: '**Apostles**' in order to gain importance,
and get a willing audience.

After considerable discussion they agreed:
That the only ones entitled to be called Apostles,
Were those who had walked with Jesus, and learned from Him.

Even Paul says:

For I am the **least** of all the Apostles,
and I am not worthy to be called an Apostle,
after the way I persecuted the Church of God.
But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out
his special favour on me ... 1Cor.15-9,10. NLT

(2ndly) ~ **Prophets**. A prophet is defined as:

One who tells forth God's Word

This was very important, when so many people' were illiterate.
Also ~ there were very few copies of the Biblical scrolls,
so most people ~ didn't have access to them ...
even if they could read !

As well as telling forth ~ what God's Word said,
& explaining its application ~ in a given situation,
The prophet, **sometimes** received a message
directly from God ~ to be given to His people !

This task, carried a big responsibility, to pass on the message
accurately ~ and in the time and manner, instructed.

Also ... God gave a very serious warning:
about **false prophets** who claimed **God's authority**,
for something ... they'd just made up, themselves !

Paul is making it very clear ~ that these 5 different roles,
are to be carried out because of the Lord's direction & gifting.

Therefore ... such leaders, **should not be**:
'Self Appointed' ~ Nor 'Self Important' !

So why did the church need:

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers.

v.12 says: Their responsibility is...
to equip God's people to do his work,
And build up the Church.

The task ~ of these various leaders was twofold:
To **teach** ~ & then **explain** the application ~ of what God said.

A significant part of Christ's message was:
That they should be 'concerned for others'
and not just 'self centred'

That ... was very different from the behaviour they knew,
And the cultures ~ they'd grown up in.

v13: **Until we come to such unity in our faith,
And knowledge of God's Son,
that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord
Measuring up to the full stature of Christ.**

Paul says ... **maturity and a harmonious unity,**
should be **the desired goal:**
of the whole Church fellowship.
Not just the leaders !

(our chapter continues for another 17 verses,
but that's for another time.)