

Ephesians 4

For those of you who do not live in the world of computers

- Or do but have not heard of ‘the Wikipedia’, it is an online encyclopaedia
- But what makes it special is that readers can contribute information
- And edit the text of what is written

The old-fashioned idea, ‘if it says so in the encyclopaedia – it must be right’

- Has been replaced by an immense resource where mistakes can be corrected
- Just for your interest my contributions to the Wikipedia are on the following subjects
- ‘Plymouth Argyle’, ‘Charles Wesley’, ‘the Methodist Church’ and ‘Swilly’
- four subjects on which I can now claim to be a world authority

No one seems to speak much of a career these days as being a vocation

- In fact I was so uncertain as to what a vocation really
- That I consulted my new friend ‘the Wikipedia’ to get some information
- A vocation is an occupation either professional or voluntary
- That is carried out more for its benefit for others than for its income
- it can be used to describe any occupation for which a person is specially gifted
- and usually implies that the worker has a form of ‘calling’ for the task
- the word ‘vocation’ coming from the Latin ‘*vocare*’ meaning to call

Ephesians 4 opens with an exhortation ‘live a life worthy of the calling you have received’

- in English we tend not to like the repetition of the same or similar word in a sentence
- but the original text of this really means
- ‘live a life worthy of the calling with which you were called’

This is the same ‘calling’ as Jesus gave to the first disciples

- to live as Christians is simply to respond to the calling of Jesus
- this is not for some elite group – but for every believer
- ‘live a life worthy of the calling with which you were called’
- in other words – every Christian has a vocation
- it’s not just doctors, nurses, teachers, ministers and all the traditional ‘vocations’
- this is a verse for every Christian – live a life worthy of your calling

I LIVE AS A CHRISTIAN

As in most of his letters, about half way through Paul takes off in a new direction

- he normally begins his writing setting out Christian doctrine
- and then moves on to the practical application of his doctrine

One of the lovely things that we encountered in New Mexico was Navajo weaving

- here men and women from the ancient tribes use traditional methods
- to pattern wonderfully coloured blankets – using vertical and horizontal threads
- the warp and weft of loom – it was fascinating to see these blankets being made
- it is only when the threads are woven together that the whole thing is complete
- New Testament teaching is never about Christian doctrine without application
- Neither is about application with Christian doctrine – it is always about both

In short, Paul is saying to the Christians, if this is what we believe, this is how we must live

- In Chapter 4, therefore, Paul's theology is not left behind
- But it is interwoven with moral exhortations
- So that the new Christians may lead the life that matches their calling
- Paul lists four graces that evidence living a life worthy of their calling
- Humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance

Humility is a word that Paul uses to describe a distinctly Christian virtue

- Humility was not regarded as a great virtue in the ancient world
- If we want to discover what humility is then we need to look at Jesus
- For he left the realms of heaven and descended to the lower earthly regions
- This is not the obsequiousness or insincerity of Charles Dickens' character Uriah Heep in his famous novel *David Copperfield*
- Humility is obviously not thinking highly of yourself
- Neither is it thinking lowly of yourself
- Rather it is the attitude that we find in Jesus
- To be humble is to yield our rights and possessions to God
- To entrust ourselves to God – his justice and his mercy
- And to respond appropriately when others mistreat us
- Linked with humility is gentleness or considerateness
- While patience, a characteristic of God himself
- (particularly a reluctance to avenge wrongs)
- is expressed in loving forbearance – all examples of love
- exemplified to perfect in Jesus Christ

Believers are one body in Christ – one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism

- it is clear that what Paul means by 'one body' is not a vague spiritual identity
- but a profound oneness made possible by God's Spirit
- it is the Holy Spirit in the life of the body of believers who gives us hope
- particularly hope in the Lordship of Jesus, his person, his death his resurrection
- in the pagan world there were and are many religious cults to choose from
- but believers are all members of the one body – because of the Spirit of Christ
- there is one Lord in whom we believe and in whose name we are baptised
- in the pagan world there were and are many lords – but our basic creed is this
- Jesus is Lord – nothing more, nothing less
- It is faith in this one Lord, Jesus Christ, that unites all true believers
- But even this has an outward and visible sign – baptism – that marks believers out

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all

- In the pagan world there were and are many gods – but 'we believe in one God'
- Paul describes him as the 'Father of all'
- But this needs explaining for in this context it is not so much his creative fatherhood
- As his redemptive fatherhood – we are all God's creation
- But not God's children until we have been born anew and adopted in his family
- Paul has already made the contrast between the children of wrath and the sons of God
- We have been saved by grace through faith – and because of that we have a vocation
- Life a life worthy of your calling 'live as a Christian'

II SPEAK AS A CHRISTIAN

You will know my advice as to what to do if a fellow Christian tells you

- That they are going to tell you the truth in love
- Get out of there as quickly as possible before they stick the knife in
- I guess that relates to my many experiences of being told the truth in love
- The first time I encountered ‘speaking the truth in love’
- Was when I had been a minister for about six weeks
- A person in my congregation wrote to me
- He told me that I need to preach the truth in love
- Proceeded to tell me the truth in love – some things which might have been true
- And many things that were hurtful and in my opinion untrue
- I cannot say that I was disappointed not to be able to share further fellowship
- But the absence of an address or legible signature prevented that

The biblical injunction to speak the truth in love – is not permission to say what you like

- Rather it is an exhortation for church leaders to encourage the body of Christ
- To Christian maturity
- The role of the Christian leader is to encourage works of service (v. 12)
- To build up the body of Christ (v. 13) so that we may reach unity in the faith (v. 14)
- And knowledge of the Son of God and become mature (v. 14)

To this work were appointed Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers (v. 11)

- The first thing to say is that this refers to four types of leaders and not five
- Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers (the last being one role)
- The second thing that the titles listed here might not mean the same today
- I would not use the term ‘apostle’ to describe any Christian today
- Partly because I do not think it would help their humility
- Partly because after the first century ‘apostle’ fell into disuse
- Probably because one definition is someone who has seen the resurrected Lord
- Though that is not to say that some people do not have an ‘apostolic ministry’
- A ministry of church planting or a ministry of preserving Christian doctrine
- I would not use the term ‘prophet’ to describe any Christian today
- Partly because I do not think it would help their humility
- Partly because after the first century ‘prophet’ fell into disuse
- Probably because the time of inspiration that brought the scriptures into being ended
- Though that is not to say that some people do not have a ‘prophetic ministry’
- Which has less to do with predicting future events
- And more to do with explaining the relevance of the gospel and the will of God today
- ‘evangelists’ seems to have meant something different from many of our ideas
- Timothy was urged to stay in Ephesus to build up the church (1 Tim. 1:3)
- Philip had a house in Caesarea –their main sphere of work was with unbelievers
- But it seems that they were men who proclaimed the gospel and its relevance
- To believers and unbelievers alike – I think we have a great need for these today
- Teaching-pastors or teaching-shepherds is the role that I think we call ‘minister’
- Some people have wrongly separated the two dimensions but I think they are one

All four New Testament ministries were ministries of the Word

- The main role of the minister is a ministry of the Word
- I am not saying this by way of a moan, as I think I am treated well by my people
- But I say by way of observation that some churches have made ministry
- An impossible burden by expecting so many wrong things from their ministers

When I arrived in one of my previous circuits one of the church leaders asked me

- If I intended to do DIY and decorating in the house
- To which I replied, ‘only if I am both better and cheaper than a painter and decorator
- And the painter and decorator is a better minister than me’
- In my first circuit, through naïve enthusiasm, I got drawn into a lot of things
- That were working for the church – and I think people were impressed
- But they were not the work of a teacher-pastor

We have all kinds of false distinctions and all kinds of false confusions in language

- The terms ‘ministers’ and ‘ministry’ can be easily confused
- The main role of the teacher-pastor is not to do the work of the church
- But to prepare and enable the whole body of the church to do the work
- That means that instead of one person seeking to be the body of Christ
- The responsibility is share with the whole church community

When we look at the ministry of Jesus, from which all ministry takes its shape

- We see that his was the ministry of a teacher-pastor
- But we do not need to separate the two dimensions of the role
- It is the teaching of the word that enables the minister to be a pastor
- It is the pastoral ministry that earths the teaching of the word in the community
- One of the great tragedies of mainline churches in the twentieth century
- Is that people wanted to be pastoral care but not teaching
- Pastoral care simply became friendship and kindness

In one of my circuits I went to see a retired couple, they made me welcome

- After some conversation and maybe even tea and very nice biscuits
- I read the Bible and led in prayer – their observations was
- ‘we have been Methodists for 35 years and no minister has ever done that’
- in another circuit I went to see a man from a small village community
- who was really rather poorly in hospital – his wife at the bedside
- after some conversation, I read the Bible and led in prayer – the wife observed
- ‘you are the ninth minister to call on him – but the only one to read and pray’
- It just left me wondering what the others had been up to
- We all like friendship and kindness but let’s not mistake them for pastoral care

My teaching is part of my pastoral care – I hope my pastoral care is part of my teaching

- The New Testament word disciple means follower or learner/apprentice or student
- The trouble with so much of the church today is that we think teaching is an option
- Mark Noll assesses the problem like this
- ‘the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind’
- we know where a weekly 15 minutes of topical talks and blessed thoughts leads
- ‘to prepare for service’ (v. 12) means to speak as Christians, teaching and witnessing

III THINK AS A CHRISTIAN

Paul renders this as 'being made new in the attitude of your minds' (v. 23)

- the current expression is the battle for hearts and minds
- the Christian is part of this battle for hearts and minds
- again, it is a matter of what they have been taught
- they were taught with regard to the former way of life to put off the old self
- an old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires
- the phrase is reminiscent of baptism – but it refers to the daily living of a new life
- conversion is a restructuring of the whole person – and then teaching the new life

Some years ago I was living within a certain number of yards of a criminal incident

- it was the policy of the police to interview everyone in the area
- to ascertain where they were, what they were doing and what they were wearing
- the policeman asked me where I was during this time and what I was wearing
- he knew that he was going to be in for a bad time when I replied as follows:
- for the first hour I was wearing a blue jumper and denim jeans
- for the second hour I was wearing a predominantly white sports kit of shirt and shorts
- for the third hour I wore a charcoal grey suit, black shirt-front and clerical collar
- on each occasion I took off one change of clothes in order to wear an outfit
- appropriate to what I would need to be doing
- but what I was wearing started with what I was thinking and then doing
- and not the other way around

Unless there is something that I don't know, every morning you get up and get dressed

- you probably choose something different if you are going to a wedding
- than if you are going to do the garden or wash the car
- the Christian is commanded put off the old self (v. 22) to put on the new self (v. 24)

The old self is being corrupted by its deceitful desires

- the Christian is commanded put off the old self (v. 22) to put on the new self (v. 24)
- the old self is characterised by futile thinking, darkened understanding
- loss of sensitivity, sensuality, impurity, self-indulgence and a lust for more
- The new self is characterised by truthful speaking
- not storing up anger, working not stealing
- not unwholesome talk but that which is helpful for building up others
- bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice are replaced
- by kindness, compassion, forgiveness – just as in Christ, God forgave us

And there is the key to it all – it is when we get our relationship with God in perspective

- that our relationship with others can be transformed – for this is not self-help
- but an inner transformation that comes from the work of God in our hearts and lives

One easily observable fact about babies is the disproportionate size of head and body

- you can either say the head appears too big or the body appears too small
- the head will never shrink to match the body but the body will grow to match the head
- so with Christ as head, believers need to grow to maturity, acting their age