

Lesson 10 | November 7, 2021

Christ's Model for the Church

Study Text: Ephesians 4:1–16

Central Truth: Believers should minister to one another and experience spiritual growth together.

Key Verse: Ephesians 4:14–15

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine . . . but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (KJV).

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. . . . Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to communicate the purpose of leadership in the local church.
- Students will accept the role that God has assigned to them with joy.
- Students will work in harmony with fellow Christians to follow God's purposes.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: This lesson marks a transition of this unit from the theology of the Church to a more practical look at the way the people of the Church live their lives. **Our daily lives as believers give evidence to unbelievers as to what the Church is really about, and for this reason, we ought to live in a way that provides good evidence.**

Opening Activity—The Church

Ask your students to draw a picture of what the word “church” means to you. Provide blank sheets of paper, colored pencils, or colored markers. (After a few minutes, have the students share their pictures. Some of the students will have drawn physical structures. It is likely that at least one student will have drawn a picture of people. Explain that a church in biblical terms is not a building. The Church is made up of the people who are being built up through the power of the Holy Spirit.) Ask: How would you describe your church to someone who is new to your community?

Say: As the body of Christ, we as Christians are responsible to represent the Church to the world. Let's consider what others will think of our church if we are the only people they meet who represent it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The doxology at the end of Ephesians 3 signals the reader that Paul is changing focus. **During the first half of his letter, he laid the theological foundation for the Church and its mission. The rest of the letter is a description of what God expects of believers in order to demonstrate His glory through the Church.** In this lesson students will come to understand that if they are “in Christ” they will show their love of God through their love for one another.

Part 1—Maintain Unity

A Worthy Life

Ephesians 4:1–2

[Eph 4:1-2 KJV] 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Say: In Ephesians 4, Paul began by reminding his readers that he lived victoriously as a prisoner—he continued to live for Christ despite the circumstances. Thus, they could likewise live victoriously in freedom. He used forceful terminology to emphasize the importance of living a life that is reflective of the One they profess to serve. **Our spirituality means nothing if it produces no change in our lives.** Paul indicated that our behavior must line up with the doctrines and beliefs that we embrace. **If Christ lives within us, His presence ought to be demonstrated through our lives.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul did not leave it up to the reader’s imagination concerning what a Christian’s walk ought to look like. First, he summarized the quality of that walk by saying that the believer must walk “worthy” of Christ (Ephesians 4:1, KJV). That terminology (from the Greek word *axios*), does not mean perfection, for we, unlike Christ, will struggle at times. Rather, to walk worthy of Christ refers to a walk, or lifestyle, that is appropriate of one who professes Christ. Literally, we are to walk in a manner that is worthy of the relationship we have with Him—a relationship that those around us will use to associate us with Him.

From that basis, Paul went on to describe the features of such a life. **Verse 2 begins by stating that a Christian’s walk ought to demonstrate humility. Demonstrating humility was not seen as a virtue in Greco-Roman culture. The Greek word translated “humble” (NLT) or “lowliness” (NIV) was a derogatory term in Greek culture, suggesting low-mindedness and groveling. As a result, this was no doubt a striking term for the original hearers. But as Christians, they were—just as we are—reminded that Jesus provided a positive view of the concept of humility when He lowered himself for the benefit of others. Christians must demonstrate a servant’s attitude—a willingness to lower oneself—if they are to truly represent Jesus through their lifestyles.**

The second word Paul used to describe the Christian walk is gentleness or meekness. This quality refers to much more than being mild mannered. The Greek word used here speaks to controlling one's attitude, in this case toward other people. **Meek people are so focused on walking with Christ and living in a manner worthy of Him that they will not be dissuaded or upset by those who speak against them.**

The third word Paul used to define the Christian walk is "patience" (NLT), or "longsuffering" (KJV). **Commentators note that the word used here describes a person who is slow to avenge wrong or retaliate by word or deed when hurt or offended by someone.**

The final descriptor is forbearance. Those with this quality are not put off by the weaknesses of others and are willing to help individuals grow up in the faith. This quality allows individuals with different personalities and opinions to live together in harmony. **A person with forbearance does not always have to be right.**

Discuss

? How can the faithfulness of Christians who are being persecuted for their faith encourage Christians who live in freedom?

? How would you describe a Christian to someone who had never met one?

Resource Packet Item 1: Title

Distribute.

A Unified Body

Ephesians 4:3–6

[Eph 4: 3-6 KJV] 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 [There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all.

Say: Those who walk in a manner worthy of their calling as children of God ought to desire to maintain the unity made possible by the Holy Spirit and embrace the peace that God intends to manifest in the Church. The theme of unity is a huge part of Paul's teachings throughout his Epistles. **Unity ought to be the norm throughout the Church around the world as well as in the local church. God calls us to be people of peace.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Since the beginning of the human race in the early chapters of Genesis, Satan has been active to create chaos and disunity. **The account of Satan's rebellion in heaven,**

the disruption of humanity's relationship with God in the Garden of Eden, and Cain and Abel's conflict all illustrate Satan's plan to destroy unity at all costs. He has not stopped attempting to disrupt God's plans through conflict. A person who is a true follower of Jesus ought to act in a way that creates unity within the church (Ephesians 4:3).

Unity in the church is built upon the fact that all Christians are a part of a single body, directed by the One True Lord, and all believers have a single goal in the pursuit of God as we move toward the great hope of everlasting life (verse 4). The Church has only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father who is in charge of all things (verses 5–6). The items listed in these verses speak to the unity found through the very state of being part of the body of Christ. And so, to cause disruption to this Body or to attempt to take the Body somewhere other than where the Holy Spirit desires will lead oneself—and perhaps others—in a direction far different than those who live in unity. **Unity is not an option, then, in the body of Christ. If the church is truly functioning as an expression of Jesus, there will be unity. Anything else displays an organization that models the disunity found in a life without Christ.**

Resource Packet Item 1: Hallmarks of a Worthy Life

Distribute the work sheet, and divide your class into small groups. Give them a few minutes to read the Scriptures and write their notes, then have the groups report on their findings.

Discuss

? Why do you think some Christians are prone to contribute to disunity within the church?

? Why do you think unity is important, especially considering the broken world we live in today?

Part 2—Minister to the Body

The Giver of Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–10

[Eph 4:7-10 KJV] 7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Say: God commands His people to live in unity, but this does not mean uniformity. God made each person unique, and His gifts are given in different manners and through different measures. There is nothing a Christian can do to earn any gift from God—indeed, then it would not be a gift. Nor can we take credit for any gift we possess, whether it is a spiritual gift or a natural ability. Rather, it is our responsibility to embrace the gift God has given, and use it for the betterment of the body of Christ. The variety of gifts ensures that individual Christians have a purpose, and that they must rely on others within the church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 4:8, after asserting that Christ has given gifts to His people (verse 7), Paul cited Psalm 68:18 in explaining the authority Jesus has to give gifts. Paul utilized the psalm to emphasize that Jesus gives gifts to men and women who had once been captive, but now are free. This verse was prophetically associated with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus just prior to Pentecost. **Paul saw these two events as the means of salvation and the institution of Christ’s ability to give gifts to individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis is on Christ’s authority as opposed to the natural giftings and talents of individuals. No person has a right to boast about the spiritual gifts (or even the natural gifts) they possess.**

There is much debate regarding the meaning of Paul’s parenthetical statement in verses 9–10. The clearest understanding of these verses can be found in the contrast between the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. When Jesus came to earth, He was coming down to the “lowest of lows,” our lowly world, compared to the immeasurably marvelous heights of the heavens in which He previously dwelt. Paul was making the point that Jesus indeed did live, die, and rise from the grave while on earth. **These acts establish His authority to ascend, and the authority to give gifts to the Church and direct its functions. Paul also helped us see that Jesus has authority over everything in heaven and on earth as He fills “the entire universe with himself” (verse 10, NLT).**

Discuss

? What gifts do you believe God has placed in your life, and how are you utilizing those gifts?

? What should be a Christian’s attitude be toward their gifts?

God’s Gifts to the Church

Ephesians 4:11–12

[Eph 4:11-12 KJV] 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Say: It is critical—and natural—that believers mature spiritually within the church. God gave the Church leaders as a gift. While leaders have key roles within the work of the Church, they are to help others develop spiritually so that they can use their gifts as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 4:11–12, Paul moved from the general gift of grace, which is given to each person in the Church, to instruct on specific gifts of ministry leadership that are given to aid in the discipling believers, the leadership of the church, and the enhancement of the various gifts within the lives of believers in the church. Paul identified four specific types of leadership gifts given to those who have the task of equipping others to do the spiritual work of the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/ teachers. (Note that scholars differ on whether pastors/teachers should be seen as one gift or two. The structure of the sentence in Greek seems to indicate one office that is invested with the responsibility to nurture believers as they walk with God. The concept of shepherd is seen here.)

It is good to keep in mind that the leadership gifts of the church are designed to multiply ministry rather than consolidate it. It is not Paul's intent to say that leaders do all of the ministry tasks of the church. Rather, leaders train and equip believers to do various tasks of hands-on ministry.

Resource Packet Item 2: God's Gifts to the Church

Distribute the information sheet and highlight each gift briefly. Discuss how the church might be more effective if every believer used their gifts to free the church leadership to do the work of training and equipping.

Discuss

? How, and to what degree, has the role of the church leader changed today from Bible times? Why do you think the change took place?

? How would the church today be more effective if we followed Paul's instructions more closely?

Part 3—Mature in Christ Together

A Mature Church

Ephesians 4:13

[Eph 4:13 KJV] 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Say: A mature church is comprised of mature Christians. For a church to function in the role of discipleship, and to be the proper witness God desires it to be in a community, it ought to display characteristics that properly reflect the mission and values of God. In

Ephesians 4, Paul provided a clear description of the steps necessary to reach maturity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul contrasted maturity with immaturity in the spiritual realm by stating that a mature church will, first and foremost, be unified in their faith and in their acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul's repeated emphasis on unity demonstrates its importance (echoing, as well the difficulty it is to maintain). Church leaders must not allow internal strife to weaken and corrupt a church, thereby inhibiting its effectiveness in honoring the call of God.

The second characteristic of a mature church is that members will grow in an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ. The word "knowledge" in the Bible involves more than learning facts about Jesus. Intimate knowledge of God may start with information, but it leads to the experience of getting to know Him personally, in a way that changes one's life. This knowledge will, then, lead a person to understand the desires of Jesus and have a willingness to live in accordance with His wishes.

The third characteristic is to reach maturity. The word could also be translated as "adulthood." One key difference between a child and an adult is responsibility. Children have little responsibility. Their parents instruct on how to live, pay their bills, take care of their housing, and provide food. **Mature Christians take responsibility for their spiritual lives, even as they are willing to help nurture those who are new in the faith. Sometimes this means that they have to say no to themselves in order to say yes to others. Paul used the phrase "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (KJV) to mean that the person is grown up. They are walking with the Lord in faith and trusting Him with their lives.** This is not to say that a person ever stops growing. Spiritual growth continues throughout life. A Christian should continue to move forward in the faith as time passes.

Discuss

? What does it mean for the Christian to transition from mainly knowing about Jesus to experiencing growth in actually knowing Him?

? What are some signs of spiritual growth in your life and the lives of people you know?

Benefits of Maturity

Ephesians 4:14–16

[Eph 4:14-16 KJV] 14 That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint

supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Say: Young children are unable to tell the difference between the real and the make-believe. They quickly believe people who seem knowledgeable, and often willingly follow them. This blind faith can result in spiritual disaster. The way to ensure the safety of Christians is to nurture them while they are young in the faith, helping them become strong spiritual adults so they can recognize false teaching and reject it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christian leaders must not engage in any type of manipulation or false teaching. They are to speak in a straightforward manner, always telling the truth about Scripture. Sometimes the truth is difficult because it will require discipline for individuals who have sinned. Like parents who love their children so much that they help them from becoming engaged in destructive behavior, Christian leaders must be willing to challenge those they lead to grow up spiritually. Ideally, all Christians will accurately reflect Jesus and function in accordance with His leading.

In Ephesians 4:14–16, Paul brought his discussion to a close by returning to the concept of unity. When each Christian recognizes his or her role and learns to work together with others in the body of Christ, the entire body of Christ will grow as God desires. When Christians love one another, they will not be jealous of one another. They will celebrate each other's success. Their greatest desire will be to enhance the lives of fellow Christians and please the Lord who provided their salvation.

Discuss

? How has your growth in Jesus impacted the way you understand faith? How has your growth impacted the way you live out your own faith?

? How does love help make unity possible?

Resource Packet Item 3: Indicators of Spiritual Maturity

Allow students time in class to complete this work sheet or encourage them to take it home as a means of reflecting on this lesson.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As we examine the Scriptures, we find that Christians are to have a purpose outside of themselves. Once they have become followers of Christ, they can no longer live only for themselves and their own welfare. God has given us gifts to be used for the welfare of others. We should seek to discover our gifts and then practice them. Once we do, we can use our gifts in cooperation with other Christians to bring about the purposes of God. The goal of every Christian must be to mature and take responsibility for seeking out growth in the faith, including relationships with others. There is no room for conflict or jealousy in the Church because life is not about the desires of the individual. Life is about care and cooperation for one another, thus emulating the love and compassion of Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Approach your pastor this week and ask him or her to help you better understand and practice your gifts.
- If you already know how God has gifted you, ask the pastor how you can use that gift in a more effective manner to accomplish the mission of the church.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been a source of conflict in the church. Ask for forgiveness, and look for ways to make things right..

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Working Together Brings Victory.
Exodus 17:8–13

[Exo 17:8-13 KJV] 8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. 10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands [were] heavy; and they took a stone, and put [it] under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Tuesday:

Love the Lord in Unity.
Deuteronomy 6:10–19

[Deu 6:10-19 KJV] 10 And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, 11 And houses full of all good [things], which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; 12 [Then] beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. 14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which [are] round about you; 15 (For the LORD thy God [is] a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. 16 Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted [him] in Massah. 17 Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. 18 And thou shalt do [that which is] right and good in the sight

of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, 19 To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.

Wednesday:

The Good of Unity.
Psalm 133:1–3

[Psa 133:1-3 KJV] 1 [[A Song of degrees of David.]] Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is] for brethren to dwell together in unity! **2** [It is] like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, [even] Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; **3** As the dew of Hermon, [and as the dew] that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, [even] life for evermore.

Thursday:

Live in Peace Together.
Romans 14:13–19

[Rom 14:13-19 KJV] 13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in [his] brother's way. **14** I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that [there is] nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him [it is] unclean. **15** But if thy brother be grieved with [thy] meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. **16** Let not then your good be evil spoken of: **17** For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. **18** For he that in these things serveth Christ [is] acceptable to God, and approved of men. **19** Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Friday:

Warning Against Division.
Romans 16:17–19

[Rom 16:17-19 KJV] 17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. **18** For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. **19** For your obedience is come abroad unto all [men]. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

Saturday:

United in Purpose.
1 Corinthians 1:10–13

[1Co 1:10-13 KJV] 10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them [which are of the house] of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?