

Day 164, Ephesians 4

by David Servant

David Servant explains the importance of holiness, walking worthy of the calling, and preserving unity in the church, emphasizing the role of genuine ministers of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 7:15, Luke 23:43, Ephesians 4:1-19

Topics: "Church Unity", "Personal Sanctification"

Description

David Servant preaches on the importance of holiness, emphasizing God's call for repentance and belief as a preparation to stand before King Jesus. He highlights the need for unity among believers, despite the diversity of spiritual gifts bestowed by Jesus. Genuine ministers are identified by their fruit, equipping the saints for service and promoting spiritual maturity and unity within the church. Paul's exhortation focuses on putting off sins like sexual impurity, greed, lying, anger, and unforgiveness, stressing personal responsibility in sanctification. The sermon concludes with reflections on Jesus' descent to the lower parts of the earth and ascension, emphasizing the certainty of salvation and the hope of believers.

Transcript

Generally speaking, this entire chapter is about holiness. God's call to the world to repent and believe is obviously a call to holiness. It is a call to make oneself ready to stand before King Jesus to give an account. It is a call to be prepared for future life in the heavenly kingdom by living in God's earthly kingdom with others who have also responded to the same call. Love is the preeminent goal.

Paul thus implores his Ephesian readers (and us) to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love" (4:1-2). Most important is that we preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3), remembering that there is "one body and one Spirit...one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" and "one God and Father of all" (4:4-6). Reading such facts, one can't help but wonder why so many little human kingdoms have been carved out of God's kingdom.

Although all of us who believe in Christ have so much in common that should keep us from division, there are special gifts that Jesus has bestowed within His body that differ greatly, and we must guard against allowing those different gifts to divide us. Specifically, Jesus has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for service (4:11).

This particular passage has been milked by many who pose as apostles, prophets, and so on, in order to prop up the legitimacy of their "ministries." The primary way to discern between those who are genuine and those who are false is to look at their fruit, just as Jesus said (Matt. 7:15-23). Are they "equipping the saints for the work of service"? (4:12). That is, as a result of their "ministries," are their disciples doing good deeds and serving others? Sadly, many modern "ministers" are exposed as being undeniably illegitimate in light of this test.

Genuine ministers of Christ are helping the church understand truth, so it is not misled by false doctrine, and so it becomes spiritually mature, unified, and Christ-like (4:12-14). They do this through teaching by precept and example, just as Paul exhorted his readers to strive for holiness in every aspect of their lives in this very letter (4:20-32) and also lived a life that was above reproach. We need more like Paul today!

Take note of what Paul focused on within his exhortation. They were not things like church attendance, Bible reading, women's apparel (as important as those things may or may not be). Rather, Paul mentions sexual impurity and greed first (4:19), two damning sins according to other scriptures, and then moves on to mention lying, anger, theft, and neglect of the poor (4:25-28), four more damning sins according to other scriptures. Then he mentions sins of the tongue, "unwholesome words" (4:29), as well as bitterness, revenge, slander, malice, and unforgiveness (4:29-32). Putting off these sins is our responsibility, not God's.

Finally, Paul parenthetically tells us that Jesus descended into the "lower parts of the earth" (4:9) and also that He "ascended on high" (4:8), quoting Psalm 68. Some say that the "lower parts of the earth" are a reference to Jesus' body being placed in a tomb. However, a tomb hardly seems like the "lower parts of the earth" to me.

We know that when Jesus died, His spirit did not immediately ascend to heaven, just as He told Mary (John 20:17). Yet Jesus told the repentant thief on the cross beside him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). For these reasons, it is thought by many that Jesus' spirit descended to what is referred to in Luke 16:22 as "Abraham's bosom." That was a paradise in the heart of the earth where the righteous dead dwelt awaiting release to heaven after Jesus' resurrection. It was separated by a "great chasm" (Luke 16:26) from Hades, which was a place of torment for the unrighteous dead. Yet with scant scripture references, it is hard to be dogmatic about these things. Let us rejoice in what is certain!

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