

# The Body Built Up in Love – Part 2

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – Paul defines what it means for the body of Christ to be built up in love
2. aim – to cause us to understand who we really are before God and to choose to live as such
3. passage – Ephesians 4:17-24

### b. outline

1. Love as Thinking Right (Ephesians 4:17-19)
2. Love as Putting Off the Old Self (Ephesians 4:20-22)
3. Love as Putting On the New Self (Ephesians 4:23-24)

### c. opening

1. a discussion of the difficulty of **defining** certain biblical concepts
  - a. in a world of easy access to information, we have a tendency to seek the simplest answers
  - b. in the church (then) in an attempt to “simplify” the explanations of our beliefs, we have a tendency to *embrace* those simplistic explanations as our own
  - c. however, the Bible never allows for “simplistic” understandings of doctrine – concepts which seem “simple” often have far deeper implications than surface-level questions allow (e.g. the Trinity)
  - d. so, when approaching topics like “love”, the Bible cannot be used to synthesize a simple one-size-fits-all definition (e.g. **1 Corinthians 13** within chaps. 12-14)
  - e. thus, Paul’s definition of “love” (**from 4:16**) will take the rest of the letter to define
2. a reminder of the **place** of this section of the letter
  - a. **Ephesians 4-6** is the **imperative** section of the letter
    1. **#1**: the church (the body) is to be *unified* – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (**4:4-6**) – in our calling and our doctrine in Christ as Lord
    2. in this unity under Christ, the body “*builds itself up in love*” (**4:4, 12, 16**)
    3. **question**: what does this “love” look like in the church – or, what does it mean for believers to *love* one another – or, what is love when it comes to the *mission* of the church?
      - a. **is genuine Christian love a sense of sentimentalism, or does it have a different core?**
    4. **Paul will use the rest of this letter to define the concept of Christian love, what it means to truly love one another (and [by ext.] the world) – what it means to be “built up in love”**
      - a. **hints**: see **3:17, 19; 4:2, 15; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23, 24 – 5:2** = “walk in love, as Christ ...”
3. the **worldly level** of the idea of what it means to love (**vv. 17-19**)
  - a. we are not to adopt our definition of “love” (or unity) through the lens of how pagans think – we are not to define *Christian* love on the basis of what the world thinks about “love”
    1. because (**for them**) love is all about *the self*: “*sensuality*”, “*greed*”, “*impurity*” = selfish acts
      - a. feeding the senses, making *ourselves* feel good, getting something for ourselves
    2. Christian love is *utterly different* from how the world thinks – particularly as pagans consider love to be a selfish sentimental sense of “what’s in it for me?”
4. the **biblical level** of the idea of what it means to love (**vv. 20-24**)
  - a. first, he will complete the thought of **vv. 17-19** in **vv. 20-21** (i.e. the turn away from the world)
  - b. then, he will bring three (3) specific *realities* into his idea of genuine Christian love in **vv. 22-24**
  - c. these will pave the way for a long list of how we are to “give flesh” to genuine Christian love

## II. Love as Putting Off the Old Self (Ephesians 4:20-22)

### Content

#### a. to “learn Christ” (vv. 20-21)

1. “*learned Christ*” = came to understand who Jesus is and what he has done
  - a. the gospel of Jesus Christ assumes a starting place in facts (objectively) *contrary* to our natural way of thinking in this fallen world – contrary to our own skewed “view” of reality
    1. to learn that we are not naturally “good,” but rebels and sinners in opposition to our Creator
    2. to learn that we possess no natural ability to drag ourselves *religiously* towards our Creator
    3. to learn that we are never going to create a *utopia* on this planet through our own intelligence
  - b. the gospel of Jesus Christ always *begins* through “*learning*” – and it continues with it

2. Paul is *probably* drawing on the kinds of teaching that he (and others) had provided in Ephesus
    - a. his presentation of the gospel was never an appeal to an *emotional response*, but to the *mind*:
      1. “heard about him” = heard (intellectually) the facts about this Jesus (*i.e.* life, death, resurrection)
      2. “taught in him” = taught (intellectually) how these facts apply to their existence (*i.e.* faith)
      3. “the truth is in Jesus” = genuine **reality of existence** grounded in the appearance of Jesus
    - b. **question**: does this mean that emotions are *never* a part of the gospel? – **answer**: no, although naked emotionalism is never the core of Christianity, a balanced set of *redeemed* emotions will accompany our salvation (*i.e.* a genuine sense of joy, satisfaction, hope – *balance*)
      1. **e.g.** this makes the prosperity guys so dangerous – they are actually peddling emotionalism
  3. the “to” at the beginning of **v. 22** (then) strongly suggests what Paul had *actually* taught them
    - a. *i.e.* that the core of being a Christian (and being united in a genuine love) involves three realities:
- b. to “put off the old self” (v. 22)**
1. “self” (see also **v. 24**) = lit. man (see ESV footnote); our ontological reality; what we are at our most *base level* – our humanness as it is affected by the environment in which we reside
  2. “old self” = the nature of humanity as affected by the environment of the Fall; our nature whereby we are “soaked” in sin and its effects (**Romans 6:6-7**)
 

“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

    - a. it is our “former manner” = what *used to be* true in us and about us
    - b. it is “corrupt” = a *totality* of sin permeating our existence
    - c. it is from “deceitful desires” = from a base sense of longing that flows from the heart of sin
  3. “put off” = take off; lay aside; stop; lit. cast off – to voluntarily (and obediently) choose to cast off the former manners and ways of life – to *repent* of our former ways of thinking, acting, and speaking
    - a. Paul will give a brief list of the “former” behaviors that we must now do away with in **vv. 25-32**
    - b. **problem**: some of the teaching (now) in the church is that it is possible to come to Christ *without* having to “give up” your former beliefs and lifestyle choices
      1. *i.e.* because God “made you this way” he does not demand abandonment of who we are
      2. but, Paul argues *throughout his writings* that those who come to genuine faith **are not** what they *used* to be (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**)
 

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
4. **teaching #1: to repent of and abandon the old life, with all of its attendant patterns and habits**

### III. Love as Putting On the New Self (Ephesians 4:23-24)

#### Content

- a. to “be renewed in mind” (v. 23)
  1. “renewed” = made new; renovated; to be **reformed** – to embrace a new way of *thinking*; to be transformed by a new pattern of thought (*i.e.* the “spirit” = the very core of the object)
    - a. **principle: patterns of behavior are simply the outward actions of inward patterns of thought**
      1. or, how we act or speak flows from how we think (**Matthew 15:11; 18-20**)
 

“... it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person ... But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.”
    - b. the essential uniqueness of apostolic Christianity is that it demands a transformation of the mind **first**, which *then* leads to a transformation of the **will** (**Romans 12:2**)
 

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God ...”

      1. and this statement after 11 chapters of deep theological teaching!!
      2. *i.e.* changed minds → changed hearts → changed lives
  2. **teaching #2: to replace the worldly thinking patterns with the deep things of Christ**
- b. to “put on the new self” (v. 24)
  1. “new self” = the nature of humanity as affected by the environment of biblical teaching; our nature whereby we are “soaked” in the things of Christ and conformed to his image (**Romans 8:29**)
 

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

    - a. it is created after “the likeness of God” = flowing from the very nature of God himself
    - b. it is “true righteousness” = a *totality* of Christ’s nature permeating our existence
    - c. it is “holiness” = from a base sense of longing that flows from the heart of God himself (**Lev. 11:44**)
  2. “put on” = clothe; dress oneself; lit. to invest oneself with – to voluntarily (and obediently) choose to put on a new way of life – to pursue a life that is pleasing to Christ in every way (Phil. 3:10-12)
 

“—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”
  3. **teaching #3: to press forward towards the image of Christ’s holiness in every aspect of life**

**c. the characteristic of Christian love**

1. we are not to adopt a definition of “love” (or unity) through the lens of how pagans think (selfish)
2. we are to adopt a definition of “love” (or unity) through the lens of how *Christ thinks*
  - a. Christian love flows from a genuine change of nature that is wrought by the Spirit in us, thus
  - b. Christian love flows from an absolute *Christ-centeredness* that is rooted in our entire existence
3. **we are to love others by loving the truth (first), loving holiness and godliness (first), and then acting to the benefit of others primarily by helping them to love the truth, as well**
  - a. **i.e.** to love your neighbor is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength **(Luke 10:27)**