

Ephesians 4:14-16

Introduction: How Paul wrote his letters

I. Experiencing God's Grace!

- *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 1:4-5*

So What?

- *...created in Christ Jesus to do good works Ephesians 2:10*
- *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13*
- *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Ephesians 2:19*

II. God's grace lived out in practical application

A. Paul's appeal for unity

- *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3*

B. How "speaking the truth in love" leads to unity

- *"Instead, by speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. Under His control, all the different parts of the whole body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love." Ephesians 4:15*
- Deposits and Withdrawals in the Emotional Bank Account

III. When criticizing breaks bonds of unity and cause others to **H-U-R-T****H – Heaping or Helping?****U – Understanding or Unloading?****R – Redeeming or Ridiculing?**

1. Is my criticism specific or is it just general?
2. Does this really matter?
3. Am I getting any pleasure out of criticizing?

T – Tender or Tackle?

- Offering a "praise sandwich."
 1. *"When am I leveling this criticism?"* Publicly or Privately
 2. *"How am I giving this criticism?"* To Instruct or Insult?
 3. *"Why am I offering this criticizing?"* To Build Up or Beat Down?

IV. God calls us to be love-finders, not fault-finders. (Stephen Covey)

One of the Bible's most beautiful books, Paul's "Letter to the Ephesians" is central to the 'Pauline Epistles' in laying out not only the church's earliest theology, but its practical application for living our daily lives. Study it with prayer and you will be blessed!

Monday – We learned yesterday in church about the structure of the Pauline Epistles. We've learned also that Paul presents a theological issue (like Grace in Ephesians) and then makes an ethical application (like unity) to be lived out in our daily lives. We can see from *Ephesians 1:15* that Paul probably did not know many of his readers personally...but his letter was instruction for a wide audience. Paul also had heard about some of the conflicts that were happening; conflicts he wanted to address by appealing to God's grace and prayer (*verses 1:15-2:10*)

Tuesday – Look closely at one of the hot-button issues of Paul's day -- 'circumcision' in *Ephesians 2:11-13*; Paul said it was a practice that separated people...but Christ's grace unifies us all. What religious practices separate believers today? Are they necessary? Do you think that our own modern-day practices hurt God's cause of unity? Paul goes on in *verses 14-18* to explain that Christ's unity is to override all types of divisions...and that is the ultimate peace. The reason for unity in our churches is that a unified body of Christ is where God's spirit will actually live! (*verses 19-22*) Is it possible that perhaps we have made God homeless by our quarrelling and bickering in the church world today?

Wednesday – We move to Chapter 3 today and see Paul begin to speak of 'mystery' in Christ. (*3:1-10*) The mystery is that through our unity we spread the gospel because Gentiles are equal to Jews in God's kingdom. Further in (*verses 7-21*) we see Paul's high understanding of the church and our place in it! Are you just a 'member of an organization' or are you being mobilized for God's work? To better learn how, sign up for class 301 today!

Thursday – Paul turned to prayer to conclude this section and reveal the goal of redemption (*3:14-21*). His prayer was that Christ may dwell in the believers who will be rooted in love and can grasp the marvelous greatness of that love. One of the things that hurts our ability to be people in love together and therefore to grasp Christ's great love is our tongue and how we use it to criticize. *Proverbs 11:12; James 1:26*. This series on criticism is to help us look at how our words can hurt others and disrupt Christian unity...do you owe an apology to someone today for things you've said and how you've said them?

Friday – Notice how often Paul refers to himself as "a prisoner for the Lord," (*4:1*) His readers know he is a prisoner of Rome, but Paul wants to assure them that he is not just captured by Rome, he is captivated by Christ's cause on earth! He goes on beginning in *verses 2-5-14* to really begin the practical application of God's grace, which we will study fully next week. How about you, is your life worthy of the calling you have received from God?