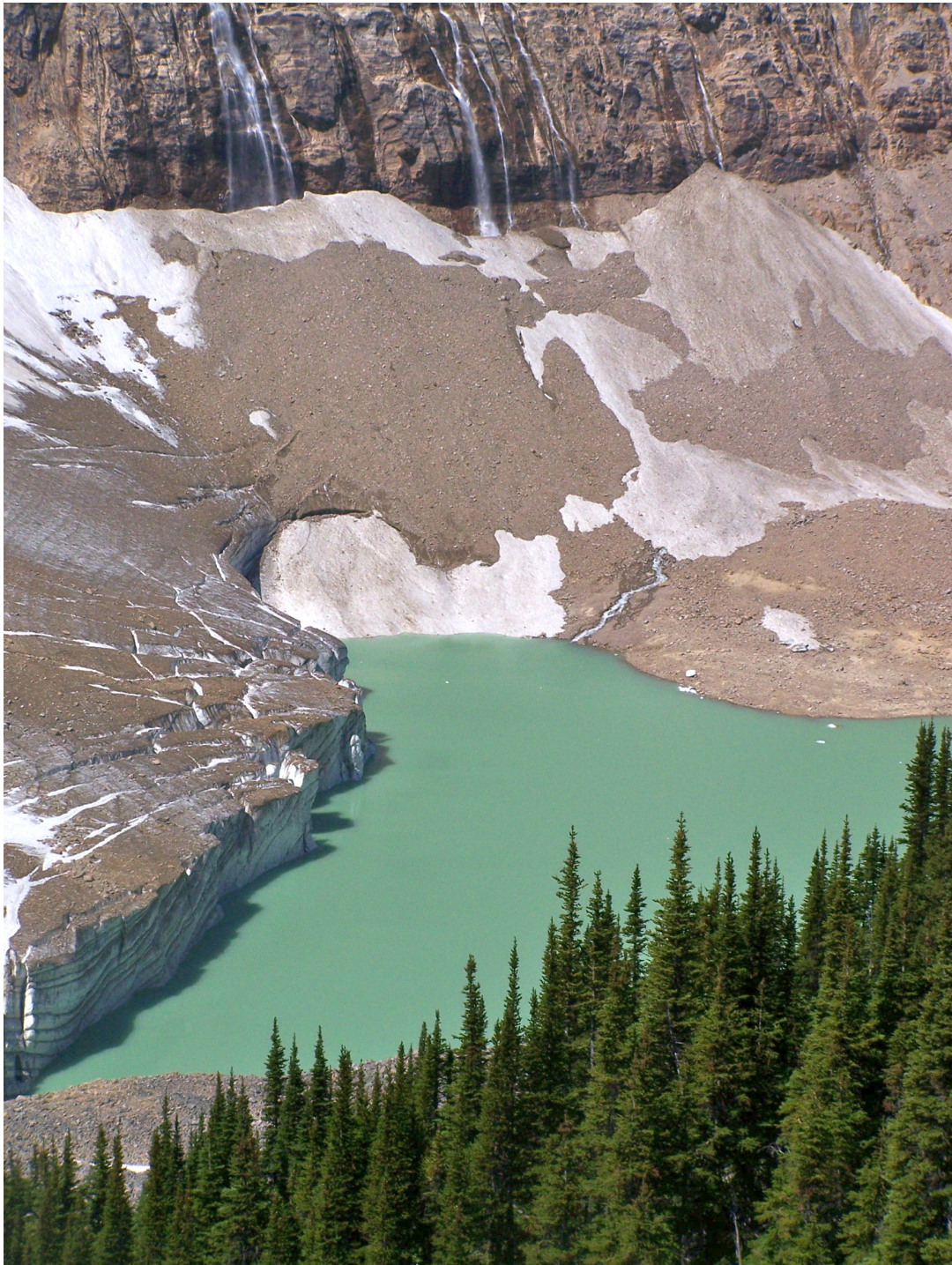

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Above photo: Chilliwack, BC

“God be merciful to me a sinner!” These were the words of the humble tax collector in one of Jesus’ parables. God is a merciful God who hears the cries for mercy from those of us who see our need of His forgiveness. Join with us as we look deeper at this truth. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

Jesus often told stories, or parables, to teach principles of how to live our lives. The following is one of those. Next we are continuing our study Ephesians chapter 4 to explore what it looks like to live in unity with others from a biblical perspective. God Bless you as you read.

Ramona Stevens

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Luke 18:9-14

In this great parable, Jesus shows us the ugliness of pride and self-righteousness and the beauty of humility. He shows us also that God forgives the humble ones who call out to Him for mercy. We are first told of two men who go up to the temple to pray. The one is a Pharisee and the other is a tax collector. The Pharisee and the tax collector both pray to God. However, there is a great

difference in their prayers. This difference also shows us a great difference in their hearts as well.

The Pharisee came to pray at the temple because it was a public place where he could be seen by more people than he would be at his home. This man was not an overtly gross sinner who would practice such vices as extortion, or adultery. As well, he was aware of good things that he had done such as give to God of his money and fasting. For this reason, he felt confident of God's acceptance of him. He prayed loudly, thanking God that he was such a good person.

The Pharisee prays to God and the content of his prayer is a praise of himself and a declaration of his own worthiness.

There was praying that day another man, a tax collector who would not even lift his eyes to heaven but in humility cried out, "... God be merciful to me a sinner." (vs 13) This one, Jesus says, was justified rather than the other.

What is self-righteousness? Some might not like this definition but, biblically, self-

righteousness is believing that in yourself you are a good person. It is what it says it is, self-righteousness, that is trusting in yourself to be righteous. The Pharisee was a very religious man. Often self-righteousness is a characteristic of religious people but you don't have to be religious to be self-righteous. You can be as irreligious as an atheist and have the same kind of heart as this Pharisee. To have a self-righteous heart is simply to believe that in yourself you are a good person. The Bible does not say that you and I are good people in ourselves. It says that we are sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Romans 3:23). The tax collector knew this, that is why he prayed the way he did. He confessed to God that he was a sinner and he begged for mercy.

How many today refuse to acknowledge their need of God and yet the evidence for our need of God is staring us in the face. On our own without God, our lives just drift downward and continue in a vicious circle of frustration as we go from loss to loss. The things that never satisfied us before, we go back to time and time again. This is evidence that our souls are in turmoil and we need the

Lord. We were not made to just bump around from one problem to the next. We were made to have fellowship with God and to fulfill a purpose. This is why the tax collector cried "...God be merciful to me a sinner."(vs 13)

The tax collector knew that he was a sinner, but he also knew that God was a God who showed mercy. God is holy. God is truthful. God is also merciful; the Bible teaches "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9). The tax collector cried out to God for mercy. This is faith.

Friend, are you a good person or are you a sinner? In the Bible Jesus told this parable to those " ... which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, ..." (vs9) What are you trusting in? On the day that you stand before the Lord are you going to tell God that you were a good person?

Dear reader, if you have not already done so, call out to God and tell Him that you are a sinner in need of His forgiveness. Say, "be merciful to me." God looks at the hearts of men and women. Your heart could be like the

humble tax collector's heart. Call out to God.

Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, came to earth and died for your sins and mine and for the sins of mankind. He took the penalty; "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20:28). Jesus rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of Father God. Pray and call out to Him. Commit your life to following Him. Call out to God and experience His mercy. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

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Scripture taken from the King James Version.

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS PART 3 , (CHAPTER 4)

TEXT : EPHESIANS 4:1-6

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 long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;

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.

TOPIC : LET'S MAKE CHRISTIAN
UNITY OUR AIM

INTRODUCTION :

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN UNITY?

Christian unity is an attitude which finds its source in the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual bond between individuals who have received, by faith, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Christian unity is not uniformity that is all same human efforts.

OUR TEXT SAYS "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." **4:3**

The Holy Spirit is the source of Christian unity, however, we must yield

ourselves to the Holy Spirit's empowerment to make Christian unity our aim.

1. FOUR VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN UNITY THROUGH THE ENABLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our text suggests four Christian virtues through the enabling of the Holy Spirit that will enable us to focus on Christian unity.

1.1.HUMILITY (See 4:2)

Humility is not personal embarrassment in public. For example, when someone makes us feel very uncomfortable in public we tend to say "they embarrassed us."

Humility is having an honest view of ourselves.

1 Peter 5:6 says "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:"

To face ones self honestly is one of the most difficult things to do.

The Apostle Paul grew in true humility. Notice how he describes himself.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9, he classified himself as the "... **least of the apostles, ...**".

In Ephesians 3:8, he describes himself as "... less than **the least of all saints, ...**".

In 1 Timothy 1:15, he describes

himself as **the chief of sinners.**

We too need to face ourselves courageously in God's presence and recognize our total dependency upon Him.

THE SECOND CHRISTIAN VIRTUE WHICH GIVES EXPRESSION TO CHRISTIAN UNITY IS :

1.2 MEEKNESS (SEE VS 2)

Meekness is not weakness or spinelessness. It is opposite to self-assertiveness or self-interests. Meekness is focused on being considerate, kind, and caring toward others. A gentle person respects others' rights and is considerate toward those who differ in opinions with his own. It's giving a soft answer to rough questions or accusations.

A gentle person is truly amazed that God, and others, can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.

Meekness is the opposite of being touchy or oversensitive about oneself.

Meekness is exercising self-control and having an honest view of yourself before God and others.

THE THIRD VIRTUE MENTIONED THAT GIVES EXPRESSION TO

CHRISTIAN UNITY IS :

1.3 LONGSUFFERING OR PATIENCE

Patience is the ability to bear up under trying circumstances. A person who is patient endures insults without retaliation. It is the spirit that never admits or gives in to defeat and which is not defeated by any task.

Patience is like the saying “when the going gets tough the tough keep going.” Patience is self-control under pressures of life. With the enabling of the indwelling Holy Spirit we can learn to be patient in trying situations.

We sometimes wonder how we can learn to be more patient.

James 1:2-4 says “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

THE FOURTH VIRTUE IS CLOSELY RELATED TO PATIENCE :

1.4 FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE (SEE VS 2)

This does not mean we are to close our eyes to the failures and sins of others. But, rather, realize we too have failures and sins and appreciate when fellow Christians are considerate and understanding of our shortcomings.

To bear with one another in love means we do not gossip about their sins or shortcomings but, rather, seek to come alongside them in love and encouragement, helping them overcome

their problems through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. We seek to refrain from forcing on them what we think they deserve as punishment for their wrong doing.

Galatians 6:1,2 tells us how we are to treat those who are caught in sinning:

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

In summary then, practicing these four Christian virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with others in love through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we will be better prepared to practice the sevenfold foundation of Christian unity.

2. THE FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY. (See 4:4-6)

Paul seems to group the sevenfold foundation for Christian unity into two groups of threes. The first centres around the Holy Spirit. The second group of threes centres around the Lord Jesus. The last foundation centres around God the Father.

Let’s remind ourselves that the unity of the Christian Church is not based on a common race, culture, or linguistic background of its members. But, rather, the foundation of Christian unity finds expression in the Godhead and our relationship to that Godhead. Let’s examine the foundation of Christian unity more closely.

2.1 THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (See vs 4)

ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT AND ONE

HOPE

It is through the Holy Spirit that the believers have become new creations in Jesus Christ, namely the Church. Both in Ephesians and Colossians, the “body” concept is used in relation to the believers functioning harmoniously together. That is, for the common good of building each other up in Christ, who is the head of the body. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who creates fellowship and genuine Christian unity. Our part, as fellow members of the body of Christ, is to function in harmony with the Holy Spirit who is the living source of Christian unity. Moreover, we are looking for that “... one hope of your calling;” (Ephesians 4:4) as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live lives that are pleasing to Jesus Christ.

Human organization of the believers tries to bring external agreement and harmony but does not really provide spiritual organic life shared through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

2.2 THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST (See vs 5) ONE LORD, ONE FAITH AND ONE BAPTISM

Christian unity expresses itself through the same faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ. When the lordship of Jesus Christ is not central in our relationship to one another, disunity results. Faith, here, does not mean one creed or one confession of faith as some denominations emphasize. But, rather, this faith expresses trust in the lordship of Jesus Christ through personal

salvation and faith in the finished work of Christ.

Thus, there is one faith in the believers regardless of race, creed, colour, or ethnic background.

Galatians 3:26-27 says “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

We were baptized into Christ at conversion. Thus, all believers have experienced one baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit. Following conversion, many followers of Christ received water baptism symbolizing they being dead to sin and alive to God. Romans 6.11 says: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Christian unity finds its source in the Godhead and it is through the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer that makes it possible for us to practice Christian unity. This unity is not uniformity outwardly speaking, but inward spiritual unity which cuts across all barriers, race, creed, colour, denominations, etc. Therefore, it behoves us to practice Christian unity through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by being humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love.

LET US, THEREFORE, MAKE
CHRISTIAN UNITY OUR AIM.

TEXT : EPHESIANS 4:7-16

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.)

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:

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:

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.

TOPIC : DIVERSITY IN GIFTS BUT UNITY IN GOALS

INTRODUCTION :

There are an increasing number of voices telling the Church of Jesus Christ what it should be doing.

Consequently, a goodly number of Churches are wrestling with what is their real purpose. in the final end. Where does the Church get its mandate as to what are its goals?

The Bible compares the Church to a body. Now where does our body get direction from as to its functions?

Ask the foot – Response: The function of the body is to be realist and stay on the ground level in order to get something done.

Ask the nose – Response: Really, it depends on whether or not it smells good and appetizing as to what you want to do.

Ask the eye – Response: What really counts is, is it pleasing to the eye? Does it look good? If so, do it.

Ask the hand – Response: Really the issue is, does it feel good? Can you handle it? That's what counts.

Ask the head – Response: The key issue is, does it make sense and is it profitable to you? That is what counts in the end.

Why so many views? Each member sees it from their perspective. What is then the solution? Ask the governing head. The head governs the whole body and each member does what the head indicates to

get the job done.

Now, the Bible clearly teaches that all believers are members of the body of Christ. Christ is therefore, the head of the body. He is the one who governs the body and encourages each member to function in their respective places in harmony and love.

Our passage specifically deals with the goals of the Church. That is, the goals of the body of Jesus Christ. But it also speaks about the gifts that Christ gives to the Church in order to achieve the goals.

According to our passage, it is clearly stated that the risen Christ gives different gifts to the Church and it is up to us to discern these differing gifts and their function in bringing unity to the Church.

CHRIST GIVES APOSTLES TO THE CHURCH (See vs 11)

CHRIST GIVES PROPHETS TO THE CHURCH (See vs 11)

CHRIST GIVES EVANGELISTS TO THE CHURCH (See vs 11)

All believers are commanded to be Jesus Christ's witnesses. Evangelists, however, are especially gifted in effectively communicating to the unsaved people their need of salvation and seeing many respond.

Peter Wagner, who has done a lot of research in this area, concludes there are about 10% of the believers in any Church who have the gift of evangelism, whether person to person or for large groups.

CHRIST GIVES PASTORS AND TEACHERS TO THE CHURCH (See vs 11)

Pastors are responsible to shepherd the groups of believers in the Church. That is nurturing, leading and training them to become reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

The leadership gifts are given to the Church to accomplish the goals Jesus Christ has assigned to the Church. The Church can refer to both local and universal, for Christ is the head of the whole Church.

In our passage, we have three specific goals for the local Church.

1. The goal is to prepare God's people for works of service. (See 4:12).

These works of service, I believe, refers to seven days a week, both within the local Church and beyond. In the Church there are different kinds of service, both formal and more informal. However, during the week there are many opportunities for service. In our family, on our jobs, small groups, visitation, acts of kindness, etc. Each one of us needs to trust the Lord to enable him to serve where the Lord has placed him or where there is an opportunity for service.

There are four (or five, depending on whether or not you count pastors and teachers as one [Shawn Stevens]). The Church leadership is responsible to equip and train the followers of Christ to

be built up and grow in faith and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ so that they then can become reproducing followers of Jesus Christ in love and unity. Believers also need to learn how to respect each other and learn how to work together in harmony as they obey Jesus Christ in their ministries.

TEXT : EPHESIANS 4:17-32

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away

lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

TOPIC : PRACTICING THE SPIRIT CONTROLLED LIFE

INTRODUCTION :

DO YOU FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIS PASSAGE IN EPHESIANS 4:17-32 IS ADDRESSED TO CHRISTIANS?

LET'S CHECK OUT THE CONTEXT. (See 1:1-8, 13)

1:5 God destined them to be his children.
(See vs 5).

1:6 God bestowed grace on them,
accepting them in the beloved. (See vs 6).

1:7 God secured their redemption and
the forgiveness of sins. (See vs 7).

1:8,9 God imparted wisdom and insight
to them. (See vs 8).

1:14 God sealed them with the Holy
Spirit. (See vs 13).

In 4:17, we read; “This I say therefore,
and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth
walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the
vanity of their mind,”

This is the discovery of many believers.
They rejoice in having received
forgiveness of their sins and Jesus as
their Savior. But soon after their
conversion they are shocked to discover
there is a conflict between their flesh and
the new life in Christ.

1. All believers are to practice the basic Christian principle of putting off and putting on. (See 4:17-24)

When we were young children our
parents tried to teach us this principle
again and again. How?

When you dirty your clothes take them
off, get cleaned up, and put on clean
clothes. Then remember not to get them
dirty again.

AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WHAT ARE WE TO PUT OFF AND LEAVE

OFF?

4:17 “This I say therefore, and testify in
the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as
other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their
mind,”

How do the unsaved Gentiles walk?

– They don't have a spiritual
understanding because they are
separated from the life of God.

– Their hearts are hardened from
ignoring God's ways.

– They have lost all spiritual
sensitivity.

– They have indulged in sensuality
and in every kind of impurity,
continually lusting for more.

– They were enslaved in sinful practices
and could not free themselves from this
imprisonment.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are
taught to leave the old sinful way of living
and, through the enabling of the
indwelling Holy Spirit, live a life that
glorifies our Savior and Lord.

2. THE SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH (See 4:23-32)

2.1 PUT OFF FALSEHOOD AND SPEAK THE TRUTH (See 4:25)

Any tendencies to falsehood, be it by
pretending we are something we are not
or speaking falsehood, need to be
replaced by being integral and speaking
truth which is evidence of the indwelling
Holy Spirit empowering us to become
more Christlike in our lifestyle and our
speech.

2.2 WHEN ANGRY DON'T SIN (See 4:26-27)

How? Be angry at sin but not with the sinner.

Some examples are:

- Jonathan became very angry over Saul who planned to kill David.

(See 1 Samuel 20:33-34).

- Nehemiah became very angry when the innocent children were being harmed.

(See Nehemiah 5:6).

- Jesus became angry over the Jews who had made the temple a den of thieves.

(See Mark 11:15-17).

Remember our anger does most of the damage when it blows out of our mouth. When we get angry and harbour it we are actually giving the devil a foothold in our lives.

2.3 STOP STEALING AND WORK SO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO GIVE TO THE NEEDY (See 4:28)

STEALING AS CHRISTIANS CAN TAKE MANY FORMS.

- We steal someone's reputation.
- We steal someone's time by wasting it.
- We steal someone's possessions by not giving them back.

2.4 REFRAIN FROM UNWHOLESOME TALK AND SPEAK WHAT BUILDS OTHERS UP, THEREBY BENEFITING THE LISTENERS (See 4:29)

When we speak evil we grieve the Holy Spirit and often harm others. Speaking wholesome words, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will set an example for other believers to follow and also will build up our listeners spiritually.

Remember what we think is what we speak and what we speak is an indication of who we really are. What kind of indication do others have about you and me?

When we as followers of Christ indulge in carnal practices such as lying, stealing and unwholesome talk, we grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit and often are a stumbling block to others. (See 4:30-32).

2.5 REFRAIN FROM NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE POSITIVE

ATTITUDES (See 4:31-32)

Negative attitudes:

- **bitterness** - Often is the result of harbouring anger or resentment about something or someone.
- The Scriptures warn us about harbouring a root of bitterness which gives the devil a foothold in our Christian lives.
- **rage** – Cutting remarks, back biting, and losing our temper
- **anger** - Negative and harmful speech, even resorting to cursing someone.
- **brawling and slander** – Abusive words against God and people.

- **every form of malice** - Enjoy inflicting hurt or injury on others.

PRACTICE THE POSITIVE ATTITUDES (See 4:32)

- Be kind and compassionate to one another.
- Speak with love and understanding about each other and show consideration and empathy for one another.

“AND BE YE KIND ONE TO ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST'S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU.” (EPHESIANS 4:32)

God set the example of how to freely forgive us who offended and resisted him. Now we are to extend that same kind of forgiveness to one another.

Someone has said he who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.

Let's continue to grow toward maturity, thereby honouring our Lord, and become meaningfully involved in ministering in compassion and love toward one another.

Jake Balzer

Scripture taken from the King James Version.