

Handout Ephesians Lesson 3

In an exhortation on the right kind of daily conduct for the baptized Christian who is a “new creation” in Christ Jesus, St. Paul stresses that the right conduct of the individual member contributes to the unity of the Church as a whole in Ephesians 4:25-6:20. Paul’s exhortation can be divided into seven parts:

1. The rules for living a new life of love in imitation Christ (4:25-5:5).
2. The duty to live in the light of Christ as baptized Christians (5:6-20).
3. Advice to wives and husbands on the unity of a Christian marriage (5:21-32).
4. Advice to children and parents (6:1-4).
5. Advice to slaves and their masers (6:5-9).
6. Advice on how to conduct the battle against evil (6:10-17).
7. The need for constant prayer (6:18-20).

5:1 So be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.

The “fragrant aroma” in 5:2 recalls how the Old Testament represents sacrifices in the liturgy of worship as “food” or a “pleasing aroma” for Yahweh (i.e., Gen 8:21; Ex 29:18; Lev 1:9; Num 28:2). However, it was understood by the faithful of the old covenants that an omniscient God was not in need of earthly nourishment or the pleasing smell of sacrifices (Ps 50:12-14; Sir 35:6-7/5-9). It was the “spiritual food” of the self-surrender of the individual and the covenant people as a whole that pleased God, as David wrote in Psalm 51 and as Samuel admonished the people in 1 Samuel 15:22-23:

- *For you do not desire sacrifice; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart (Ps 51:18-19).*
- *But Samuel said, “Does the LORD so delight in holocausts and sacrifices as in obedience to the command of the LORD? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission than the fat of rams. For sin is like divination is rebellion, and presumption is the crime of idolatry” (1 Sam 15:22-23).**

*Presumption is the sin of idolatry because to presume that one knows better than God what is right or wrong behavior, or that Sacred Scripture doesn’t really reflect the commands of the Almighty God, is to put oneself above God, making oneself a god by believing one has the power over one’s own destiny.

In 5:21 Paul begins with an exhortation to all members of the Christian community which sets the tone for the entire section. Then he continues with an exhortation to wives and husbands in 5:22-33:

1. An exhortation to all members of the faith community (verse 21)
2. An exhortation to wives (verses 22-24)
3. An exhortation to husbands in three parts (verses 25-32)
4. A concluding exhortation to husbands and their wives (verse 33)

The Greek term *kephale* (head) in 5:23 is used in the New Testament and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the physical head of a man, an animal, or a statue (Mt 5:36; Gen 3:15; Dan 2:32), as a synonym for “ruler” as in the case of King David who is called → over

“the head” over nations” (Ps 18:44) and Jesus Christ who Paul calls the “head over all things to the Church” (Eph 1:22). The word can also mean what is the “source” or “origin.” In 5:31 Paul uses imagery from the Creation narrative of Genesis where the first man, Adam, was both the “head” and “source” of his wife, Eve, born from his side (Gen 2:21-23). In the same way, Jesus Christ is the “head” and the “source” of the Body of Christ that is His Bride, the Church.

In Ephesians 6:10-17 Paul urges all Christians to be armed for battle against evil. Our offensive weapon is the “sword of the Spirit”—trusting in the Holy Spirit dwelling within the Christian to lead us to the truth. Our defensive weapons are the armour of:

1. being girded (wrapped) in truth and clothed with the breastplate of righteousness in our daily lives
2. being shod in readiness to go out to proclaim the Gospel of peace
3. being in possession of the shield of faith to defeat the false claims of Satan’s children
4. being helmeted with the confidence of our salvation

Tychicus, a missionary companion of St. Paul who is a Christian from Asia Minor, is mentioned five times in the New Testament. Paul gives him a three-fold mission:

1. to deliver the letter
2. to give a personal account of Paul’s condition and his ministry
3. to encourage the community to continue to be steadfast in faith during what were troubled times

St. Paul identifies four characteristics of the Church in Ephesians 2:19, 20; 4:5 and 5:27 that are the “Four Marks of the Church” that we declare in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed: “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” The “Four Marks of the Church” are four specific adjectives indicating four major distinguishing characteristics of the Catholic Church founded by Jesus Christ which no other church can claim:

1. The Church is “one” because the Church has only one origin and was founded on only one source—the Most Holy Trinity—the Church is “one” because her members are united as “one” Body in Christ Jesus.
2. The Church is “holy” because Jesus Christ has delivered her from sin and consecrated her to the Father. She is the sinless Bride of Christ.
3. The Church is “catholic,” a word meaning “universal,” because Christ has called all men, women, and nations to be united in His “universal” Church and because of this the church bears within herself the fullness of grace as she embraces all nations of the earth.
4. The Church is apostolic because she is founded upon the Apostles of Jesus Christ. She continues and preserves their apostolic doctrine given to them by Jesus Christ Himself, and she perpetuates a direct line of apostolic succession that stretches back to the Peter and the Apostles who were ordained by Jesus. Jesus laid His hands upon them in the rite of ordination and that physical touch of spiritual authority has been passed down through the generations and centuries of the Church. Only “Catholics” can claim that direct physical link to Christ and His Apostles.