

2009

# Ephesians: Empowered to Love Harmoniously

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## Recommended Citation

Tse, Luke M., "Ephesians: Empowered to Love Harmoniously" (2009). *Psychology Faculty Publications*. 174.  
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# EPHESIANS

## EMPOWERED TO LOVE HARMONIOUSLY

BY LUKE M. TSE, PH.D.

**Abstract:** *To be holy and blameless before God is to be one with each other and with Him. Only God could take the incompatible—the circumcised and uncircumcised, citizens of the covenant and foreigners—and make them one (Ephesians 2:14-16). This level of reconciliation is applied to the husband-and-wife, parent-and-child, and “employer-and-employee” relationships.*

The opening remarks in Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus (1:4-11) declare God’s original purpose for all who would be adopted into His family through Jesus Christ. “He chose us... to be holy and blameless in his sight” (1:4). This edict is not as much a directive for our efforts as it is a proclamation of God’s desire and intent to make us so. Indeed, Ephesians is about the power of God to produce maturity in all who would receive it.

### IT IS GOD WHO EMPOWERS

Paul said, “I pray... that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ” (1:18-20). For believers, unabridged power is provided to excel in all relationships, but most specifically discussed are the marital, parental, and working relationships.

Paul cautioned that it is not in our nature to do well in any virtuous areas of life. In fact, the opposite is true (2:1-3). We need a power that is beyond our own to do good deeds and do them consistently well. Without such power, we are inclined ultimately to “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (2:3; also

Titus 3:1-7). But God has interceded: in His mercy He has made us alive, by His grace He has saved us from our sinful nature and empowered us to accomplish good instead (2:4-10). Ephesians is Paul’s systematic treatise that “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 3:20-21).

### THE POWER THAT RECONCILES

By the power of God in Christ, those who were once incompatible have been brought near and made one. For the circumcised and uncircumcised, citizens of the covenant and foreigners, the God who is peace intervened and “has made the two one” (2:14) for the very purpose of reconciling both (as one) to Himself (2:15-16; John 17; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20). Unity is possible only by means of a God-initiated effort among those who are different. Not only does God unite, it is He alone who can bring peace into that fusion.

Paul acknowledged his role as a steward and administrator of God’s unveiled mystery (3:2). In that regard, there is little difference between his role then and the roles of pastors and counselors today. The call to stewardship and the administration of God’s grace is extended to all who are called to be helpers. As such, each must endeavor to understand this “insight into the mystery of Christ” that all are “sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (3:4, 6). We must intercede with the same clarification conviction and compassion as Paul (3:14-21) in order to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (4:12).



## LEARN, PRACTICE AND ENTRUST TO THE FAITHFUL THE POWER THAT RECONCILES

Ephesians 4:15 concisely delineates: (a) the modes and skills necessary for every interaction, (b) the reciprocal benefits—signified by the word “we”—to such a careful exercise, and (c) the growth and reach of such a lifestyle. While each has a respective role and function (e.g., 4:11), no one is exempt from the mandate to live out the peaceful union that God desires. Without exception, all must fulfill the destiny “to live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received... [Being] completely humble and gentle; [being] patient, bearing with one another in love; and [Making] every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (4:1-3).

“Speaking the truth in love” (4:15a) entails the following attitudes and actions:

- Put away falsehood—dishonesty, deception, deceit, facade, hypocrisy, pretense, etc. (4:25).
- If you must become angry, do so only for the right reasons. Even then, do not let it prolong and decay (4:26-27).
- Do not steal from others. Instead, be diligent and work so that you “may have something to share with those who are in need” (4:28).
- Have no unwholesome talks, but say “only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (4:29).
- “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (4:31).

Instead:

- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (4:32).

The above involves imitating God (5:1-2). To do otherwise and, worse, engage in immorality, impurity, and greed is to be equated to deeds of idolatry (5:5).

## HARMONY IN DIVERSITY

Perhaps the most referenced passage in Ephesians, insofar as the marriage relationship is concerned, is 5:22-33. Given all that Paul had emphasized about the power of God to reconcile those who are at odds and to unite all into one under Christ (1:9-10), it becomes wrong to engage in a discussion about spousal relationship that places emphasis on verse 22 instead of 21: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Much like the revelation concerning the erased differences between the circumcised and uncircumcised, the egalitarian and complimentary existence in human-to-human relationships and the common orientation by all toward God cannot be negated in this and subsequent narratives. This is consistent with the hierarchy prescribed between the first and second greatest commandments and the balance and equality presented in the second (Matthew 22:34-40). Mutual submission is indispensable to the peaceful union between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Non-submission is tantamount to disobedience and rebellion. As Paul definitively laid out his arguments in the earlier portions of the letter, he made specific applications of the spiritual truths to the relationships between a husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee.

The mandate for those who are in positions of seemingly

greater power and authority to uplift those who seem lesser in roles and values is exactly what God had demonstrated in Christ. In the same way that Christ emptied Himself for the sake of the Church (5:25; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:9-13) and then worked “to present her to himself as a radiant church” (5:27)—as one who is suitable to Himself—so must a husband humble himself to love and esteem his wife to be at one with himself. As Christ has elevated us to Himself and made us His siblings (Romans 8:29) and joint-heirs of the Kingdom (Romans 8:16-17), so husbands are to appreciate (as opposed to depreciate) their wives as valued partners to themselves. The reconciled oneness is as deliberate for the husband-wife, parent-child, and employer-employee (master-slave) relationships as it is for the circumcised and uncircumcised. It is an effort beyond our human abilities, requiring supernatural empowerment.

**“BE KIND AND  
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—EPHESIANS 4:32

## Conclusion

Paul ends the letter as he had begun: that the power to fulfill this godly aspiration to be holy, blameless, and unified comes only from God. Indeed, He has equipped us to fulfill His mission. Of all the pieces of the armor furnished to us in this spiritual pursuit, the only part that we uniquely contribute is prayer. Everything else—armor and weapon—belong to God, and we need to wear them well. To the extent that we grasp, and teach, this unveiled mystery will reconciliation and oneness have their desired godly end.

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