Ephesians 4 Bible Nerd Bonus Guide

Truthful speech and a people made new in Christ

Primary text: Ephesians 4:15-16 and 4:20-5:2. Read Ephesians 4 as a whole before working through the notes.

The passage within Scripture and Ephesians

The larger biblical story

Ephesians locates Christian conduct within God's work of gathering all things under Christ (1:9-10). The instructions about truthfulness, anger, and forgiveness belong to that larger story. God is forming a people whose shared life displays the reconciliation accomplished through Jesus.

Several biblical threads converge here. Humanity was created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27); the new person in Ephesians 4:24 is created according to God's likeness. Israel's holiness included honest dealings, rejection of slander and vengeance, and love for one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:11-18). Zechariah envisioned a restored Jerusalem marked by truth and peace (Zechariah 8:3, 16-19). Paul takes up that prophetic language when addressing the church in Ephesians 4:25.

The inclusion of Gentiles is essential to the argument. Through Christ's cross, previously alienated peoples receive access to the Father in one Spirit and become God's dwelling together (2:11-22). Their reconciliation gives visible expression to God's purpose. Speech that damages this community contradicts the kind of people God is making.

The argument of the letter

Ephesians identifies its writer as Paul, a prisoner for Christ (1:1; 3:1; 4:1). Some early manuscripts omit the destination words “in Ephesus” in 1:1. A letter intended to circulate among several churches is therefore plausible, although the original distribution cannot be reconstructed with certainty. The readers include Gentile believers (2:11; 3:1). [1]

Chapters 1-3 describe God's gracious action in Christ: redemption, resurrection life, reconciliation, and the formation of one body. The appeal in 4:1 follows from that gift. Believers are to live in a manner appropriate to the calling they have already received. Ephesians 2:8-10 holds the relationship together: salvation is God's gift, and the saved community is created for good works.

The movement through chapter 4 is deliberate:

- **4:1-6:** Preserve the unity given by the Spirit through humility, patience, and love.
- **4:7-16:** Christ equips his body for shared service, doctrinal stability, and maturity.
- **4:17-24:** Life learned in Christ entails a decisive change of identity and conduct.
- **4:25-5:2:** That change takes concrete form in speech, work, anger, forgiveness, and self-giving love.

The chapter break after 4:32 interrupts a continuing argument. The “therefore” in 5:1 connects imitation of God with the forgiveness just described. Christ's love in 5:2 supplies the pattern for the community's walk.

1 Seated walking and standing

Texts: Ephesians 2:6; 4:1; 5:2; 6:10-14.

The three postures provide a useful way to trace the letter. In 2:6, **συνεκάθισεν** (*synekathisen*, “seated together”) describes God's action: believers share in Christ's exalted life because they belong to him. Their position rests on grace.

Περιπατέω (*peripateō*, “walk”) describes a person's manner of life. The contrast begins before chapter 4: believers formerly walked in disobedience (2:2), but God created them to walk in good works (2:10). The later appeals develop the implications: walk worthily, in love, as children of light, and wisely (4:1; 5:2, 8, 15).

In 6:14, **στῆτε** (*stēte*, “stand”) is a plural command. The community resists evil together, depending on the Lord's strength and God's armor (6:10-13).

The sequence expresses a theological relationship: life received in Christ grounds faithful conduct and resistance. It should not become three successive spiritual levels. Paul also kneels in prayer (3:14), and “walking” occurs before the description of being seated. These are overlapping dimensions of Christian existence rather than a rigid outline imposed on every paragraph. [2]

2 Maturity belongs to the whole body

Text: Ephesians 4:11-16.

The singular expression **ἄνδρα τέλειον** (*andra teleion*) in 4:13 depicts a mature adult, in contrast with the unstable children of 4:14. In the surrounding body imagery, the goal is the church's corporate maturity. The language does not assign adult Christian maturity to males alone.

Verse 15 describes growth toward Christ, the head. Verse 16 begins **ἐξ οὗ** (*ex hou*, “from whom”): Christ is also the source of the body's growth. Its members contribute as each part

works. This prevents reducing maturity to either private knowledge or the accomplishments of a few gifted leaders.

The immediate setting of “truth in love” is therefore doctrinal discernment and the building of a united body. Personal conversations matter within that larger purpose. The text first addresses relationships among believers; applying it to public disagreements should preserve that original communal setting. [3]

3 What does speaking the truth mean

Text: Ephesians 4:15.

Ἀληθεύοντες (*alētheuontes*) is a present participle of **ἀληθεύω** (*alētheuō*), a verb associated with speaking truth or being truthful. Its only other New Testament occurrence is Galatians 4:16, where Paul asks whether telling the truth has made him an enemy. “Speaking the truth in love” is a well-supported translation.

Some interpreters understand the expression more broadly as practicing truth or living truthfully. The NET Bible adopts that broader reading. It fits a paragraph in which sound teaching and the body's life belong together, but it remains an interpretive choice. Translating the verb informally as “truthing” does not resolve the lexical question. [4]

The participle describes the manner of the growth expressed by the main verb: the community grows toward Christ as it holds to and expresses truth in love. The phrase reaches beyond the modern scenario of confronting someone with an unwelcome opinion. In context, truthful allegiance to Christ resists deceptive teaching and serves the body's growth.

“In love” describes how this truthfulness operates. Neither grammar nor context allows truth and love to become competing commitments. The truth spoken should also be recognizable in the community's life. [3-4]

4 Learning a person

Text: Ephesians 4:20-21.

Paul's wording is striking: **ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν** (*emathete ton Christon*), “you learned Christ.” Christ himself is the grammatical object of learning. Verse 21 continues with hearing him and being taught in him; English translations sometimes supply “about” to clarify how later believers heard him through Christian proclamation.

The wording joins instruction with allegiance to a person. It does not diminish doctrine: verse 14 has just warned against deceptive teaching. It places doctrine within a life shaped by the actual Jesus. The reference to truth “in Jesus” in 4:21 also stands against the deception associated

with the old life in 4:22. The following instructions describe the conduct appropriate to the Christ they have come to know. [5]

5 The new self and the new humanity

Text: Ephesians 4:22-24; compare 2:15 and Colossians 3:9-11.

The noun **ἄνθρωπος** (*anthrōpos*) can mean a human being or person. “Old self” and “new self” communicate the personal dimension of the passage. Yet Ephesians has already used “one new person” language for the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (2:15). The individual and corporate dimensions belong together: changed people participate in a newly reconciled humanity.

The new person is created **κατὰ θεόν** (*kata theon*), literally “according to God.” Translating this as “in the likeness of God” recognizes a likely creation connection. Ephesians does not use the noun “image” here, so the Genesis link is an interpretation of the wording and context rather than a direct quotation. Colossians 3:10 makes the connection explicit by describing renewal according to the Creator's image. [6]

The clothing imagery describes a changed identity with ethical consequences. The new humanity bears righteousness and holiness characterized by truth (4:24). This also sharpens the contrast with the deceit that corrupts the old life (4:22). The text concerns renewal in Christ; it gives no basis for treating people outside the church as lacking their God-given human dignity.

6 What the Greek grammar can and cannot establish

Text: Ephesians 4:22-24.

The expressions often translated “put off,” “be renewed,” and “put on” are three **infinitives**, not three independent imperative verbs. They explain the content of the teaching mentioned in 4:21.

- **ἀποθέσθαι** (*apothesthai*, put off): aorist middle infinitive.
- **ἀνανεοῦσθαι** (*ananeousthai*, be renewed): present middle/passive form, normally understood here as passive.
- **ἐνδύσασθαι** (*endysasthai*, put on): aorist middle infinitive.

Two readings deserve consideration. The infinitives can express what the readers were taught **to do**, or describe the change they were taught **had occurred** in their conversion. The NET notes acknowledge both possibilities; S. M. Baugh argues for the second. English translations necessarily make decisions about how to express this relationship. [1, 7]

The aorist presents an action as a whole; it does not, by itself, prove that an action happens only once or has no continuing implications. The present form of “be renewed” fits renewal

viewed as an ongoing process. The larger argument combines a decisive change in belonging with continuing transformation and concrete obedience.

In 4:23, “the spirit of your mind” most naturally concerns the inward disposition of the readers' thinking. The word “spirit” is not automatically a direct designation of the Holy Spirit in every occurrence. That distinction does not exclude God's agency in renewal; it identifies what is being renewed. [8]

7 Zechariah and a community whose words can be trusted

Text: Ephesians 4:25 and Zechariah 8:16-17.

Ephesians 4:25 directly takes up Zechariah's command for each person to speak truth to a neighbor. The shared Greek wording includes **λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν ἕκαστος** (*laleite alētheian hekastos*), “speak truth, each one.” There is a small prepositional difference: Zechariah's Greek has “to the neighbor,” while Ephesians has “with the neighbor.” The close verbal correspondence establishes the connection; the changed preposition should not carry an elaborate theological argument. [9]

Zechariah 8 announces God's return to dwell among his people. Jerusalem will be characterized by truth (8:3). Truthful speech appears alongside judgments that make for peace, rejection of harmful plotting, and rejection of false oaths (8:16-17). The chapter ends with nations seeking the Lord (8:20-23). Honesty belongs to the public life of God's restored people.

Paul supplies a reason particularly suited to Ephesians: believers are members of one another. Falsehood injures a body to which the speaker also belongs. In the setting of 2:11-22, the prophetic language fittingly addresses a community in which Gentiles now share Israel's promised blessings through Christ. This connection does not require treating every detail of Zechariah as a coded prediction of the church.

8 Anger through the lens of Psalm 4

Text: Ephesians 4:26-27 and Psalm 4:4-5.

The wording **ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε** (*orgizesthe kai mē hamartanete*), “be angry and do not sin,” directly follows the Greek translation of Psalm 4:4. In editions that count the psalm's heading as a verse, the reference is 4:5. [10]

Why do some English versions of the psalm say “tremble”? The Hebrew **רִגְזוּ** (*rigzū*, from *rāgaz*) can describe trembling or agitation. The ancient Greek translation renders it with the language of anger, and Ephesians follows that Greek wording. The difference arises from the Hebrew expression's range, rather than from Paul inventing a different psalm. [10]

Psalm 4 moves toward quiet reflection, trust in God, and peaceful rest. That setting is a useful restraint on using Ephesians 4:26 as permission for hostility. Interpreters debate whether the first command positively calls for appropriate anger or has a concessive force, “when you are angry.” Either way, Paul expressly forbids sin, warns against letting anger persist, and calls for the removal of destructive anger in 4:31. [1]

The sunset language presses urgency. It should not become a rule requiring every complicated disagreement to be fully resolved before bedtime. The immediate concern is refusing to nourish anger and give evil room to work.

9 Ordinary relationships and spiritual opposition

Texts: Ephesians 4:14, 27 and 6:11-14.

In 4:27, **τόπος** (*topos*, “place”) has the sense of room or opportunity given to the devil. The context concerns anger within the community. The verse is not presented as a technical explanation of demonic possession.

An unusual word connects this paragraph with the armor passage. **Μεθοδεία** (*methodeia*, scheming or cunning) occurs only twice in the New Testament: in 4:14, concerning deceptive teaching, and in 6:11, concerning the devil's schemes. This verbal link supports reading doctrinal deception and damaged relationships within the letter's larger account of spiritual conflict. It does not establish that every mistaken idea or difficult conversation is a particular demonic attack. [11]

Ephesians 6:12 identifies the ultimate struggle as extending beyond human opponents. Human deceivers remain accountable in 4:14, while the church is summoned to resist evil through truth, righteousness, faith, and prayer. Treating people as contemptible enemies would sit uneasily with that armor.

10 From rotten speech to words that give

Text: Ephesians 4:28-29.

The movement in 4:28 helps explain 4:29. A person who stole is to work so that there is something to share. The change reaches beyond stopping harm to becoming a giver. Speech follows a similar pattern: harmful words give way to words that meet a need and benefit their hearers.

Σαπρός (*sapros*) can describe something rotten, poor in quality, or unfit for use. It describes bad fruit and unsuitable fish elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 7:17; 13:48). In Ephesians 4:29 the concern includes speech that damages rather than nourishes communal life. A vocabulary free of profanity could still be full of humiliation, insinuation, or calculated misrepresentation. [12]

The noun **οἰκοδομή** (*oikodomē*, building up) recurs in 4:12, 16, and 29. The same letter describes believers as a temple being built together (2:20-22). This repeated imagery links ordinary speech with the formation of God's dwelling community.

The aim is to give **χάρις** (*charis*), grace or benefit, to those hearing. The criterion includes their actual need. A truthful warning or correction can serve that need; words need not be flattering to build someone up. Their content, timing, and manner should contribute to the person's good. [13]

11 Grieving the Spirit and Isaiah 63

Text: Ephesians 4:30; compare Isaiah 63:7-14.

The command not to grieve the Holy Spirit probably echoes Isaiah 63:10, where Israel's rebellion grieves God's Holy Spirit. Isaiah recalls the Lord's covenant kindness and his deliverance of Israel, then recounts the people's unfaithfulness. The Spirit's presence belongs to the story of God's redeemed community. [14]

This is a likely scriptural echo rather than a direct Greek quotation. Ephesians uses **λυπέω** (*lypeō*, grieve); the Greek Isaiah uses a different verb for provoking the Spirit. The correspondence lies in the distinctive combination of the Holy Spirit, God's redeemed people, and conduct that betrays their relationship with him. The echo is plausible without assuming Paul reproduces Isaiah's entire setting. [14]

In Ephesians, God's people are already being built into a dwelling by the Spirit (2:22). Conduct that tears apart their life together therefore has a theological dimension. It concerns their relationship with the Spirit who inhabits the community.

The warning stands beside assurance: this is the Spirit in whom believers were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 1:13-14 has already associated that seal with the promised inheritance. Future redemption gives weight to present conduct. The verse neither trivializes destructive behavior nor says that every careless word cancels God's seal.

12 Slander contempt and forgiveness

Text: Ephesians 4:31-32.

Βλασφημία (*blasphēmia*) is often associated with blasphemy against God, but it can also mean slander or abusive speech against another person. That human-directed sense fits this list of destructive relational behavior. A familiar English derivative should not determine the Greek word's meaning in every setting. [15]

“Contempt” is not the translation of a particular word in this paragraph. It is a useful description of an attitude that may express itself through bitterness, clamor, slander, and malice. The list

addresses both inward hostility and its outward expression. Paul answers it with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

The verb **χαρίζομαι** (*charizomai*) describes both God's forgiveness and believers' forgiveness in 4:32. The comparison is explicit: God's action in Christ supplies the basis and pattern for their action toward one another. The verb can mean graciously grant or give in other contexts; here it concerns forgiving an offense. Its meaning comes from this sentence, rather than from combining every possible dictionary sense. [16]

The order matters. Forgiveness received in Christ grounds the command to forgive. The paragraph does not present gracious behavior as a way to purchase God's forgiveness.

13 Beloved children and the fragrance of sacrifice

Text: Ephesians 5:1-2.

The command to imitate God follows the account of his forgiveness in 4:32. The readers are addressed as beloved children: family belonging precedes the summons to resemble their Father. The comparison word **καθώς** (*kathōs*, “as” or “just as”) links God's forgiveness with theirs in 4:32 and Christ's love with their walk in 5:2. [17]

Christ's love takes the form of giving himself for others as an offering and sacrifice to God. The phrase **ὀσμὴ εὐωδίας** (*osmē euōdias*, fragrant aroma) uses familiar sacrificial language from the Greek Old Testament, including Leviticus 1:9, 13, and 17. It evokes an offering acceptable to God. This is shared biblical sacrificial wording; identifying one exclusive source verse would go beyond the evidence. [18]

Christ's offering is both directed toward God and given for others. His death is more than an illustration of generosity: Ephesians has already described redemption through his blood and reconciliation through his cross (1:7; 2:13-16). Here that saving act also becomes the pattern for the community's love. The call to walk in love grows from Christ's completed gift and takes shape in costly concern for another's good.

Scripture connections at a glance

Passage in Ephesians	Related text	Kind of connection
4:24	Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 3:10	Likely creation allusion, clarified by an explicit parallel in Colossians
4:25	Zechariah 8:16-17	Direct quotation of the command to speak truth

4:26	Psalm 4:4, numbered 4:5 in some editions	Direct quotation following the Greek psalm
4:30	Isaiah 63:7-14, especially verse 10	Likely echo of grieving God's Holy Spirit
5:2	Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17	Shared sacrificial formula concerning a pleasing aroma

Sources and further study

The Septuagint is the ancient Greek translation of Israel's Scriptures. Greek wording is especially useful for recognizing the quotations in Ephesians 4:25-26.

[1] **NET Bible translation notes.** Ephesians 1 on the destination; Ephesians 4 on grammar, translation alternatives, and quotations.

[2] **Greek text and parsing.** Ephesians 2:6 and 6:14.

[3] **Greek text and parsing.** Ephesians 4:13, 4:15, and 4:16.

[4] **Lexical and translation comparison.** J. H. Thayer, ἀληθεύω, and the NET notes at 4:15. The named Thayer entry is distinct from the additional unsigned material on the hosting page.

[5] **Greek text.** Ephesians 4:20.

[6] **Creation language.** Eric Montgomery, The Image of God in the Resurrected State in Pauline Thought, a 2005 ETS regional paper. Consult its discussion of Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10.

[7] **An interpretation to compare.** S. M. Baugh, Ephesians, comments on 4:17-24. Compare his conversion-focused reading with the alternatives in the NET notes.

[8] **Renewal and the mind.** S. D. F. Salmond, Ephesians 4, in The Expositor's Greek Testament, comments on 4:23.

[9] **Quotation comparison.** Zechariah 8 in Swete's Greek Old Testament and Ephesians 4:25.

[10] **Psalm wording.** Psalm 4 in Swete's Greek Old Testament; Brown-Driver-Briggs, רגז. The Greek hosting page adapts verse numbers to modern English usage.

[11] **Lexical connection.** Thayer, μεθοδεία; compare Ephesians 4:14 and 6:11.

[12] **Speech imagery.** Thayer, σαπρός.

[13] **Greek text.** Ephesians 4:29.

[14] **Spirit and Isaiah.** Joshua M. Greever, “What Does It Mean to Grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)?” Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry 16.1 (2019), 27-40. Full journal PDF. See especially the treatment of Isaiah 63. Compare Isaiah 63 in Brenton's Septuagint translation.

[15] **Slander.** Thayer, βλασφημία.

[16] **Forgiveness.** Thayer, χαρίζομαι, and Ephesians 4:32.

[17] **Greek text.** Ephesians 5:2.

[18] **Sacrificial language.** Leviticus 1 in Swete's Greek Old Testament.