

is no clearer description than in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 1-3 lays the foundation as it assures us of our vertical relationship and who we are in Christ. Eph. 4:1 is transitional, “Therefore,” because of who we are in Christ and because of our union with Him, we are told to have a walk worthy of that calling and relationship. Our vertical relationship with God should make a difference in how we get along with our horizontal “family” relationships. The attitude toward those horizontal relationships is expressed in Eph. 4:2 (humble, gentle, patient, loving) and in Eph. 4:3, we find the admonition to endeavor (as much as lies within you – Rom. 12:18) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Rule # 1 – Be Honest (Ephesians 4:25)

Blurt out anything in the name of truth? No! It’s tempered by 4:15, speaking the truth in love. So I must be honest in all my human relationships motivated by love, asking myself if I am saying what I say because I love the person and want what is best for him. Venting to make myself feel better in the name of harsh truth is extremely selfish. Some people pride themselves in “speaking their minds” and “truth that hurts.” God is truth, but His truth frees us! So should mine!

There may be times I have to confront another’s sin, and that is always difficult. My responsibility is to be honest and motivated by love for the individual. God is responsible to produce the results. In other words, I can’t neglect my responsibility for honesty just because I believe he may not respond as I hope he will. His response is between him and God and I must leave that in God’s hands. My responsibility is to speak the truth in love.

Another way I may fail to be honest is by denying that I even have a problem. What’s wrong? “Nothing! Leave me alone!” “Me a ...problem? Or course not!” Denial equals dishonesty.

Rule # 2 – Keep Current (Ephesians 4:26-27)

When I am angry, I must not sin by having a sinful response to that anger. Specifically, I should not hold anger in and stuff it. The sun must not go down on my unresolved anger. To do so gives the devil a foothold, an inroad into my life. Unresolved anger opens the door to all kinds of temptations and sin. Bad news! Check out James 4:1-12 for one example of a sinful response to anger. It destroys people when anger gives way to bitterness (Heb. 12:15) and bitterness gives way to hatred and vengeance (Rom. 12:19-21).

Rule # 3 – Attack Problems, Not People (Ephesians 4:29,30)

Labeling others with words like “stupid” or “slob” or saying things like “I wish I didn’t have to be around you” or even things like “you always...or you never...” are attacks on the person or their character (as well as lies!) This does nothing to help solve the problems, but rather makes more problems, as those with whom God has called us to walk in unity become our “enemies” that we attack.

We are teammates, and must treat each other as such, teaming up to attack any problem that would divide us and destroy unity. I must be committed to my teammates and see them as valuable to God – just as much as I am.

God loves all His children, none more than the others. So I should never attack any other creation of God's, either by corrupt (rotten) words or by lack of words. Silence is often interpreted as saying "You aren't worth the energy it takes to communicate to resolution." To say even one corrupt word actually grieves the Holy Spirit! He allows for none!

Instead, we must work toward solutions to anything that divided us – stuff that makes us angry, like what one or the other said or did. I don't know what to do to fix "slob" attack, but I do know what to do to fix "you did not clean your room today." I can clean my room and restore the unity. I can't fix "stupid" but I can attack the problem of "leaving the lights on all night." When I define the word or deed that made me angry, I can tell you what I want you to fix, and then you can respond and fix it! Unity happens when we as teammates attack problems! Disunity happens when we attack each other, and God is grieved!

Rule # 4 Act! Don't React (Ephesians 4:31,32)

When I react, I "bounce off" your words or actions. I let myself be controlled by what you say or do, giving myself over to anger, being jerked around by what another person says or does. By whom does God's Word instruct me to be controlled (Gal. 5:16-26)? The Holy Spirit! Reactions make problems worse, not better. Actions, when they are modeled after the character of Jesus Christ and are controlled by the Spirit, solve problems and increase unity. I can act like Jesus regardless of what you say or do! So can you. We choose to act like Jesus, being kind, compassionate, forgiving. Relationships are then reconciled, just as Christ forgives us so that we can be reconciled to God.

Rule #5 Listen Attentively (Jas1:19, Proverbs 18:2, 13, 15)

We are told in James to be quick to hear and slow to speak. Throughout Proverbs the idea of listening is seen through statements like "Pay attention," or "Give me your ear," or "Intone your ear to my voice." These are clear admonitions to listen attentively. Some people don't listen. They are busy stating their opinions or preparing their response, but not listening carefully. Failing to listen fosters mistakes and incites anger. Listening is paramount to knowing how to respond properly and to contribute words of value. What if all of God's children communicated using these five rules? What a difference we could make in our world! "All will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn13:34,35). We would be like the early church that turned the world upside down. Our churches would function in a unified manner, and our homes would be safe havens for all who come in. We would indeed walk in unity in all our relationships!