

A WORTHY WALK

Ephesians 4:1-6

Introduction:

This morning we are back to the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, after a break of a couple of weeks. The book of Ephesians is really all about the church. It is a study of the church, as the body of Christ.

In the first three chapters, which we have looked at over the past couple of months, Paul has given us a wonderful picture of God's plan and purpose for the church.

- Ch. 1 – Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places
 - He chose us to be holy
 - He predestined us to be his children - adoption
 - He redeemed us to set us free from sin
 - He sealed us to guarantee us an inheritance
- Ch. 2 – A showcase for God's grace
 - Our problem - dead in sin
 - God's grace makes us alive in Christ
 - His purpose – v. 7
 - Unity of the Body – Jew and Gentile brought together into one new body – v. 14-15
- Ch. 3 – The mystery of the gospel and Paul's ministry
 - That Gentiles are fellow heirs and partakers of the promise
 - Through the church God's wisdom would be revealed

Mixed in with all of this theology, Paul included two samples from his prayer life. He prayed in chapter 1 that his readers would have a greater understanding of the hope of our inheritance and the greatness of God's power. In chapter 3 he prayed for inner spiritual strength and a deeper understanding of the love of God. He concluded the first half of his letter with a wonderful doxology – *read 3:20-21*.

What a great reminder of God's power and ability. We cannot even imagine what He can and will do in us. As He works in and through us, He is glorified for all eternity.

Now, we come to chapter 4. At this point Paul turns a corner and changes his direction. Up to now his dissertation has been primarily theological—dealing with doctrinal issues; reminding us of all that God is and all that He has done. But now he turns it back to us and how we ought to respond to all of this.

Verse 1 – “I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord...” (ESV). The NIV says, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Paul's plea is that we would walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We have looked at that calling in weeks past, and just reviewed it briefly. He has called us, adopted us, redeemed us and sealed us. Does that not give us good reason to consider how we live our lives?

The Bible often uses the term walk to describe the way we live our lives. When Moses was bringing the people to the Promised Land and he was giving them his final words he reminded them,

*“If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by **walking in his ways**, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.” (Deut. 30:16)*

In the book of Isaiah, as God assured his people of his presence with them, whatever they faced, he said to them through the prophet,

*“And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘**This is the way, walk in it,**’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.” (Isaiah 30:20-21)*

Now Paul is saying, “...walk in a manner worthy...” or “...live a life worthy of the calling...”

This morning, as we look at this for the next few minutes, I want us to consider the characteristics of a worthy walk, as Paul outlines in verse 2, and then look at the foundation of a worthy walk, which we see in verses 3-6.

The Characteristics of a Worthy Walk

There are four terms Paul uses in verse 2 to describe or characterize a worthy walk. The first is...

- Humility – In the pagan world of Paul’s day, humility was not valued; in fact, it would have been looked down upon. It was a world where respect went to the powerful, and the way to the top was through self-promotion. Humility—putting others ahead of self—was seen as weakness.

Yet, one of the key Christian virtues is humility. How do we define humility? The NKJV uses the word *lowliness*. It is not putting yourself down. We have all seen people who continually degrade or demean themselves. That is a false humility. I think there are a couple of important passages that can help us understand humility.

Romans 12:3 says, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

And in Philippians, Paul tells us, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:3-4) Then he goes on to give us the example of Jesus himself, leaving the glory of heaven, which was rightfully his, to come to earth and offer himself as a sacrifice for us.

So the first characteristic of a worthy walk is humility—not having an inflated view of ourselves, but seeing ourselves as God sees us.

- Gentleness – the word is the same word translated *meekness* in the AV. This is another term often misunderstood. It does not mean *weakness*. It does not mean that we should be doormats. Rather, it suggests a “*mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit.*” It carries the idea of controlled strength, not easily provoked. Meekness is really power under control. And that is the word Paul uses here. It is a characteristic that is demanded of us throughout the NT.

These first two characteristics are displayed perfectly in the life of Jesus. In Matt. 11, Jesus calls his followers to come and find rest in him. He bases that call on his nature and character. “*Come to me, all*

who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mt 11:28-30 ESV)

Those words, *gentle and lowly*, are the same words Paul uses to describe the characteristics of a worthy walk. If we are to walk worthy of our calling, we must imitate the Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Patience – longsuffering. John Gill, who wrote an extensive commentary on the whole Bible some 300 years ago, gives a profound explanation of the need for patience. He says, “...*bearing much and long with the infirmities of each other; without being easily provoked to anger by any ill usage; and not immediately meditating and seeking revenge for every affront given, or injury done; and so to walk, is to walk worthy of the grace of calling, or agreeable to it, to God that calls by his grace, who is longsuffering both with wicked men, and with his own people.*”
- Forbearance – “...bearing with one another in love.” Again I would like to quote from Gill’s commentary – “...*overlooking the infirmities of one another, forgiving injuries done, sympathizing with, and assisting each other in distressed circumstances...*” It is so easy to focus on the quirks and the things that irritate us in other people. It is so easy to dwell on the hurts and offenses that come from others. But if we are to walk worthy of the calling we have received we must forgive and bear with others, warts and all.

Well, that is a brief look at the characteristics of a worthy walk, as Paul gives them to us. We need to look quickly at the foundation for our walk as believers in Jesus and members of His church.

The Foundation of a Worthy Walk

Verse 3 is a continuation of verse 2, even though some translations state it as a new sentence. *Read vv. 2-3.* This could be another characteristic of a worthy walk, but I like to think of it as more than that. I see it as the very foundation of our life as believers. Unity in the body is the glue that holds the body together.

I don’t want to spend long on this, but there is something important for us to understand about the unity of the body of Christ. Unity in the

church is not something that we need to manufacture. It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who dwells in believers. *Go to John 17...* This is Jesus prayer for his disciples and for believers throughout the church age. This comes immediately after Jesus' discourse explaining how he would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in them. *Read vv. 9-11, 20-23.*

The ecumenical movement of today takes these words from Jesus prayer and says, "We need to ignore our differences and work together in order to fulfil Jesus' prayer for unity." That often means leaving behind important doctrines in order to create the unity that Jesus prayed for. But there is a problem with that approach.

Nowhere does the Bible indicate that unity in the church is something we must produce. True unity was brought about by the ministry of the Holy Spirit when He came at the founding of the church on the Day of Pentecost. On that very day, we are told that 3000 people came to faith in Jesus, and the immediate result was a united body, built on the teaching of the apostles and the sharing of all things.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common." (Acts 2:42-44 ESV)

Our responsibility, according to Paul, is not to create some kind of man-made unity, but to "...maintain (or preserve) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." As believers, we are united in Christ by the Spirit of God. Our calling is to preserve this, to not allow petty differences to tear the body apart. After all, Jesus said in his prayer in John 17, our unity is based on the unity within the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit – see *John 17:21-23*.

Back to Eph. 4 – Paul goes on to talk about the unity which is reflected in every area of our faith. *Mention briefly the seven things Paul mentions in vv. 4-6. Note the mention of the Triune God.*

"...over all and through all and in all." Again we see Paul pointing to the union we have with the Godhead.

Conclusion

So if we are to develop a lifestyle worthy of the calling we have received we need to cultivate the appropriate character qualities – the attitudes displayed by our Lord.

- Humility, lowliness –
- Meekness, gentleness
- Patience, longsuffering
- Bearing with one another in love

And we need to build on the foundation which is the unity of the Spirit.

I would like to conclude with a couple of questions today:

1. Have you responded to God's calling on your life? Have you received Him as your Saviour? Are you sure of your relationship with Him?
2. If you are a believer in Christ, are you cultivating the attitudes necessary to make your life, or walk worthy of that calling which you have received? Are there things you need to deal with, either between you and God, or between you and another person, when it comes to these attitudes of humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance? What about unity? Each one of us needs to ask ourselves this question: Am I making every effort to keep or maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace?