

A Series on Ephesians
“A Life Worthy of the Calling: Our Character” (Ephesians 4:1-6)
May 16, 2010
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

[Mass confession from last week]

We are in the middle of a series on Ephesians.

Let's read Ephesians 4:1-7.

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Then, in verse 7, it says: “**But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it**” and goes on talking about how Jesus gave us spiritual gifts and how we serve God with those spiritual gifts. We'll talk about this next week.

The first three chapters have been talking about the calling we have received—that is that we have been adopted as His children, we are loved, we are heirs, we have hope, we are free, all based on grace—the work of Jesus on the cross, not on our own work. Then, it says, “**therefore, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**” *It tells us who we are first, then it calls us to live life worthy of who we are.* It calls us to know our position first—that we are accepted and loved more than we can ever imagine, then it calls us to live out our lives consistent with that position. That's Christianity. Everything else says try hard to attain to a higher position by works. Christianity says this is your position. It is given to you by God's grace. Now, live your life worthy of the position you have received.

You are a prince or a princess. You don't have to work to become a prince or princess. And now, you are called to live as a prince or princess should live. You see,

that's how Christianity works. This is what distinguishes Christianity from religion or every other way of thinking. You are accepted, loved and adopted, and now we obey. Everything else says: we perform, we earn, we do, we obey, and therefore, we are accepted. The order is extremely important.

II. How do we live a life worthy of the calling?

There is a twofold answer.

One is our character, and the other is our exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit—in other words, our acts of service. One is about what kind of person we are called to be and the other is about what kind of things we are called to do. We often jump to what God wants me to do, but we have to also think deeply about what kind of person God calls me to be. Verses 1-6 talk about what kind of person we are called to be and the verses 7 on talk about how Jesus gave us the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how we are called to exercise that gift. We are going to talk about the character issue today and about exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit next Sunday.

It is so important to understand that character formation and the exercise of the gift of Holy Spirit must be done together. Otherwise, we will use the gift to destroy, not to build up the body.

Examples:

- A person who is gifted at teaching. He might be conceited. He will ultimately fall. He'll be tempted to manipulate his teachings.
- A person who is good at playing an instrument or singing. Looking down at others.
- A person who has the gift of prophecy: using it to manipulate others.
- A person who has the gift of pastoring: use it to control others.
- A person who has the gift of healing: use it to manipulate others and make money.

Just because a person is gifted by God does not mean that that person has Christ-like character traits. Think about 1 Corinthians 12. Paul talks about all kinds of great spiritual gifts. Gift of teaching, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing. Then, he says in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2:

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Paul is saying that if your spiritual gifts are not aligned with Christ-like character traits, the deepest and the most important of which is agape-love, an unconditional self-sacrificial Christ-like love, it's useless for the kingdom. You are just a clanging cymbal. In fact, you will be a cancer in the body of Christ.

We really have to realize this. Unless we have the character of Christ, our gifts will become our downfall. When we see our gifts, we began to think to ourselves: wow, I'm pretty good. People start saying how good we are. Then, we begin to build our lives on how good we are with respect to the gift. We begin to build our lives on it. We become enslaved by it. We live for it. We start to get our life from it. And it destroys us and the body of Christ.

So, what kind of person are we called to be?

(1) First, verse 2 says, "Be completely humble."

What does it mean to be humble? The word for humble means to be made low. I struggled with this idea. How do you humble yourself? I used to think that to humble yourself means to pretend like you are lower than other people. The problem is that I still thought I was better than them. I still thought I was higher than them. I realized that that's false humility.

The only way to find biblical humility is to come to the realization that we are truly more messed up than we think we are. Our identity does not stand on what we have done, what we have accomplished, or how well we have performed. It is based on God's grace upon our lives.

The only reality that counts is who you are in front of God, and not in front of anyone else. And in front of God, Isaiah 64:6 tells us that **"all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** The Bible is telling you to acts based on your identity in front of God, not based on your identity comparing yourself with other people.

Paul says in Philippians 3, after he lays out all his righteous works, he says his righteous acts are like rubbish—but some people say that it means dung. So, the next illustration I am using is biblical. So, don't get grossed out too much.

It's like all of us have been dunked in a port-a-potty. One of us feels like he is better than another because he has less poof than someone else. God is saying that it doesn't matter whether your whole body is in the poof or only a half of your body is in the poof. It is in the poof. If we look down on anyone because we think he or she is a sinner, we failed to see that we are also a sinner. Isn't that what Jesus said when he thought us not to judge, he didn't tell us not to judge because it is just bad to judge, he told us not to judge because we've got a log in our eyes. We are also messed up. Don't look down upon anyone because you think they are lower than you. The reality is that all of us are messed up. If we don't see this, our humility is inauthentic. You might say to yourself that you should humble yourself, but if someone actually treats you in a way that undermines your goodness, you will get mad and sometimes feel uncontrollable anger.

Let the Spirit of God speak to you. Our righteousness, our self approval, our performance is like a filthy rag to God. It is only by the grace of God that we stand and do what we do.

The gospel always brings us to humility doesn't it? That's why Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:8-9, right after he says:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, SO THAT NO ONE CAN BOAST.”

The more you understand the gospel, the more you become humble. It is not a fake kind of humility. It is a real kind of humility. You can't boast. God takes away your hierarchical view of the world. You have no reason to boast. When you see this, you will be humble. If you don't see this, it is impossible to be genuinely humble.

I know some of you are bothered by this idea of humility.

- This world says, believe in yourself., but humility says, believe in the cross of Jesus.
- This world says you have to assert yourself, but humility says, you have to lower yourself.

- The world says you have to self-advertize and lift yourself up, but humility says advertize others and lift them up.
- The world says believe that you are good, humility says believe that you are sinful more than you know.
- The world says you can do it, humility says you can't do it unless God empowers you.

The idea of humility is utterly opposite of what this world teaches. When we are founded on the gospel, we actually have the foundation to live out this upside down kingdom values.

Only God's grace in our lives can bring us humility because humility is a grace-based ethics, and not a justice based ethics.

(2) Second, verse 2 goes on and says, be gentle.

Sometimes, this word is translated as "meekness." Gentleness is not weakness. It is giving consideration to others and being willing to waive your rights. Often, the enemy of love is fairness, our rights. I have the right to be treated in a certain way. You know what agape love is? It is the willingness to waive our rights. It is the readiness to suffer wrong, if needs be, and commit everything to the Lord. It is the willingness to allow ourselves to turn the other cheek. Do you think meekness is a chicken thing to do? No. To turn the other cheek as a response is the strongest thing you can do. It's easy to hunker down. It's easy to fight back. It is the most difficult to turn the other cheek.

Only God's grace in our lives can bring us meekness because meekness is a grace-based ethics, and not a justice based ethics.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-29:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

It is when we are humble and gentle that we are able to give rest to people around us. People will not grow tired around you.

(3) Third, verse 2 says: “be patient, bearing with one another in agape-love.”

The word for patient literally means long suffering (that’s how KJV translates the word) and allowing for other’s shortcomings instead of flying into rage or thinking about vengeance. It is impossible to be patient if our lives are about avoiding suffering. The NASB translates the word “bearing” as “tolerant.” There it is. The Bible calls for tolerance among the people in the church. Why are we called to bear with one another, be tolerant with one another? Because that’s what agape love is. Agape is about willing to suffer for one another. Willing to bear with one another’s shortcomings. Willing to tolerate one another’s mistakes or sins. When you love someone and are more interested in that person’s welfare, you won’t be as concerned to show that you are right. You don’t always have to insist on your own way. It’s about yielding. It is about letting God deal with the situation. It is about surrendering things to God. [explain situation of abuse]

Only God’s grace in our lives can bring us long suffering, tolerance, and agape love because it is a grace-based ethics, and not a justice based ethics.

(4) Fourth, verse 3 says, “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”

Then, he goes on to show that that there is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God.

In the original Greek, it is one sentence, and the word “make” is more accurately translated as “making every effort.” It is further explaining what he has been talking about. So, he is saying, make every effort to be humble, to be gentle, to be long suffering. Why? To keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. To keep unity in the body of Christ. To demonstrate unity of people who are diverse coming together. Make every effort to do that.

The only way our community is going to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace and demonstrate to the world a vision of God’s humanity is for us to make every effort to be humble, gentle, long suffering. It is for us to forsake our rights against one another and cloth ourselves with love instead.

What the Apostle is really saying is that, as we manifest these characteristics, we are preserving the unity. This is so because we are people who are peace-loving, easy to live with; we are peacemakers. This unity of the Spirit is kept together, is bound together, by peace, 'by the bond of peace'. And as we are peace-making we preserve peace and we preserve the unity.

In all this the Apostle Paul has been repeating the Beatitudes that our Lord Jesus Christ uttered at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. This is what He said about the people He had come into the world to produce: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', 'blessed are they that mourn', 'blessed are the meek', 'blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness', 'blessed are the peacemakers'. These are the characteristics of the Christian. This is the calling to which we have been called. If we fail here, success anywhere else is useless. If my way of asserting that which is right means that I break the peace, I am not right, I have failed to keep the balance of truth, or there is something lacking in my character. The end of all doctrine is to preserve this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The end of all conduct is to be the same. This is the teaching of the Beatitudes. It is also 'the fruit of the Spirit', which is 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control(Galatians 5:22–23).

Now, *what if* we heeded God's call in our lives, and *what if* we actually made every effort to NOT to seek our own comfort, NOT to seek out own rights, NOT to seek our own goodness, BUT to be humble, gentle and long suffering, and seek out for the benefit of one another. What if we loved one another. What if we were willing to suffer for one another? What if we thought of each other better than ourselves? What if we turned the other cheek? I think we will be an amazing community that becomes the alternate city, a city within a city, that would be a beacon of light.