



## A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

### A Worthy Walk...

### Ephesians 4:1-6

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

Early on when we started this study in Ephesians, I told you that Paul's great epistle was really divided into two parts. The first part is usually called the indicative section because in it Paul went to lengths to try to explain to the Ephesians and us our wonderful new position in Christ. You will remember, I hope, that he emphasized that there was a time when we were alienated from God, separate from the Covenant community of God, dead in our trespasses and sins, alone and without hope or God in the world. But now we have been included. We have been grafted into God's new society, the church. We have been regenerated; we have been given the Spirit of God as a pledge of God's great kindness toward us.

This morning we have finally reached the second part of his letter. Scholars call this section the imperative part of the epistle because, in it, Paul begins to give the Ephesians certain commands regarding their Christian obligation and

behavior. Over the next few weeks we will look at several of the areas on which Paul focused. Now, I am making that point because it is important that we understand that the commands Paul gives are given to us because we have been included into this great new society. That is, we have been included into a new society and the result of that inclusion is that we have been given certain obligations.

That's not too hard to understand, all of us have been included in some relationship or another that also puts certain obligations upon us. We may chafe under those obligations but we know they are there. When we were born into our family we assumed certain obligations. We have to attend certain family functions; we have to participate in certain family rituals and activities. When we get married there is an inherent struggle that goes on as we try to redefine what our responsibilities are now. Will we eat Thanksgiving dinner with your family or my family? Where will we have Christmas this year? Do we have to buy all that side presents? And so on...

But what I want you to see is that Paul thought the same kind of thing happened when we were included into God's new society the church. For Paul, inclusion into Christ's body meant that we also incurred certain obligations and those obligations, in fact, impact some our existing relationships.

Some of the things that are affected are how we now view and treat each other, how we speak to each other, how we endure each other. We are to have a new perspective and it is funny how a new perspective changes everything.

Two golfers stepped up to the first tee on the St. Andrews course at Ardsley, New York, one of America's oldest courses. The elder one was a kindly man who played a thoughtful, deliberate game. The younger man was full of pride and impatience. On the first hole he sliced, lost his ball in the tall grass, shot another one, and had a score of eight instead of four or five. On the second tee he began to lecture the caddie: "Keep your eye peeled. I'm not here to do your job for you!" Thereafter, every bad shot was the caddie's fault! At the end of the first nine holes, the young man was so enraged that he discharged the caddie and carried his own bag. **"That caddie doesn't like me,"** he said to his companion, **"and I'm \*\*\*\* sure I don't like him. He made me nervous. Thank God he's gone!"** After several holes had been played without a word, the older player broke the silence:

"You know several years ago a little kid from Yonkers came up here and was taken on as a caddie. He was a wonderfully sweet-natured boy; quick-witted, willing, and had a nose for golf. Everybody liked him. His name was William; he had a club foot. But that didn't affect his quality as a caddie. It was a pleasure to go out with him. A certain famous doctor, a member of the club, became interested in William and took him South on a long trip. When William returned, he went back to caddying. The doctor, however, had to give up golf shortly after that because of his health. He died a few months later. One morning I was playing a round with William carrying my bag. Spring was running riot all over Westchester County and the fields and hedges were alive with blossoms. William gathered flowers until he had quite a bouquet. **'Who's the girl, William?'** I asked. **'I haven't any girl, sir,'** he said sheepishly. **'They're for my friend, the doctor-- twice a week I take flowers to his grave.'** "You see," the man went on, "the doctor took him down South that winter and operated on his foot. He made the boy whole again. And William never forgot the doctor's act of kindness." **"Now that's a caddie worth having,"** the younger man said. "What ever happened to this William?" **"Well, nothing really. He carried your bag today for the first nine holes."**

It's funny how a change in perspective can change everything. What Paul does in the first few verses of chapter 4 is begin to relate God's expectations for the Ephesians based on their change of perspective. Notice what he says:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 4:1**...As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be

patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Paul starts by entreating the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which they have been called. It seems to me that there is a wonderful connection here between theology and practice. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to “**walk worthy**” which clearly is directed toward Christian behavior. But he makes the admonition to “**walk worthy**” on the basis of the “calling with which we have been called”, which is clearly directed toward theology. He is saying our “**orthopraxy**” should flow from our orthodoxy.

I think that is an important message for all of us assembled here today. It seems to me that there is a tendency to hardly ever get this balance right. There are those among us that are consumed by theology and theological reflection. We want to be right and are willing to read everything, listen to everything, and analyze everything we come into contact with. And we do that from the perspective of theological accuracy. This is an emphasis on the “**why?**” We like the first three chapters of Ephesians.

There are also those among us that are consumed by ethics. We want to live rightly. We want every aspect of our life to be conformed to the image of Christ. We want our actions, our words, our thoughts, our intentions to be pure and holy. And we do so from the perspective of achieving proper ethical behavior. This is an emphasis on “**how?**” We like the last three chapters of Ephesians.

But Paul doesn't know anything of this artificial bifurcation. His interest is having a right theology that produces right behavior. I think there is a message

for all of us here. To those that are interested only in theology, let me ask, **“Is it driving you toward holiness?”** To those of you who are only interested in ethical behavior, let me ask **“What is it that pushes you along?”** You see how the two are connected.

Now you know what’s funny about the way Paul phrases his admonition is that I am almost immediately led to respond, **“But Paul you don’t know the complexity of my situation. I want to understand the hope of my calling. I want to walk in a worthy manner. But I am beset by circumstances that keep me from it.”**

It makes me wonder if that is why Paul put into the passage the same phrase that he used back in chapter three. You know the phrase I mean, **“prisoner of the Lord”**. Think about the underlying point his using the term gets across. Paul was faced with the theology of **“why?”** Surely, he must have entertained thoughts about why God wanted him to suffer as he did. Surely, he must have wondered about what was going to happen to him. But he was also faced with the question of **“how?”** There he was chained to a Roman guard under house arrest in the heart of the pagan world. He was beset by Jewish opposition and he was filled with concern about the fledgling church at Ephesus. Yet, he is concerned to admonish them to live rightly. He is concerned that they think rightly. You can see how his circumstances might have caused the Ephesians to weigh his words carefully.

Paul next moves into an explanation of exactly what he means to **“walk worthy”**. Notice what he says in verse 2.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 4:2**...Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

He wants the Ephesians to be diligent to preserve the unity of the church. You can see why that would be so important to Paul after all the energy he exerted in chapter 3 to show how the walls of division had been broken down.

But he doesn't stop at the command to "**preserve unity**", he tells them the kind of behavior that will help to preserve it. He admonishes the Ephesians to walk with "**humility and gentleness**". Let's look for a moment at that first word, "**humility**".

Humility is the opposite of pride or self-assertion. It seems like it would be a natural thing for the Ephesians to live in humility. They had been rescued from pagan worship. They had been regenerated, made new, and they had been given the Spirit of God. How could they ever be prideful? It is an interesting question and it is particularly interesting for us as reformed people. There is something in us, whether you view it as the remnant of the old nature or just the habits left behind from our old nature. There is something there that exalts our own self-value far higher than it deserves. It is terribly egocentric.

We know it is there. We know it's there because we profess to hold to the notion of "**total depravity**" and yet we still get angry when someone impugns our character or questions our motives. We get angry when someone attributes a lack of godliness to us. That is not the way it ought to be, however. If we understood something of the blessing we have received "**in Christ**" we would not be so

prone to strive for our due respect. We ought instead to have the attitude of one of my favorite heroes, Booker T. Washington.

Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, was an outstanding example of this truth. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady. The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. **"It's perfectly all right, Madam,"** he replied. **"Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend."** She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

Now think of what Mr. Washington could have said, **"Madam, you do not know to whom you are speaking. I am a highly educated, world-renown educator and humanitarian. You do me a disservice, Madam."**

But that is not what he did. He had nothing to prove, nothing to protect. He knew where he had come from. He knew the wonderful opportunity God had given him and he knew where he would have been had it not been for the grace of God.

But not only are we to exercise humility, we are to exercise gentleness and we are to exercise patience. That means that we are to give soft responses and that we

are to give them slowly. How often we say things like, "I just could not let it go." Or we say, **"I tried to hold my peace but I just could not keep my mouth shut about such and such"**. But Paul says we are to be slow to speak and when we do speak we are to do so in such a way that wrath is turned aside by the gentleness of our response.

I once heard two of my friends arguing about theology. One was ripping into the other about some minor point of doctrine. His face was red and he was trying with all of his heart and soul to convert the other man to his position. He finally became so angry that he just blurted out, **"Is that what they teach you over at that seminary? Is that the kind of ridiculous point of view that they teach you there? Is that really the heart of what they teach?"**

The other man, who had listened kindly to his tirade and with the softest answer he could muster said, **"Well, no. First and foremost they teach us to be gentlemen and to show a measure of kindness and respect to our brothers with whom we disagree."**

The fire just went out of the first man and his shoulders just sagged under the weight of conviction. But from that moment on they became inseparable friends who were able to talk and agree or disagree without any bitterness or enmity at all.

That's what Paul has in mind here when he caps off his list with the word **"forbearance."** Forbearance has at its heart the idea of suffering wrong and not letting it get in the way of the relationship. We can be patient with someone's lack of growth or insensitivity but we must forbear their wrong behavior when it



is directed toward us. Another word to describe this attitude is that we are to be **“long-suffering.”** That means we must be willing to suffer a long time. We must be willing to put things behind us. There can not be any baggage that comes up or gets in the way of the unity we are commanded to have in Christ. We must be able to forgive and to forgive without reservation.

But why? Paul’s answer is straightforward.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 4:3**...Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

It is order that we may preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Now obviously, we fail at almost every turn to display the kind of humility we ought. We are proud even conceited. We want our due acknowledgment; we want what we deserve. We struggle with gentleness and with patience. We particularly do not want to be the target of bad treatment. We just won’t tolerate it. But think of the Lord Jesus. Think of how humble He was; think of how gentle; think of how patient. Think of much He endured and He did so in order that He might establish not just peace for us with God but peace between Jews and Gentiles as well. He demonstrated all these traits on our behalf in order to accomplish our eternal salvation.

And goes on in verse 4, to explain why this unity is so vital. It is because:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 4:4**...There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--

You see Paul is returning to his great theme of one great, new society. There is only one church. How can we divide it by sinful pride and arrogance? How can re-erect the very same kind of walls that Christ in His great atoning work has broken down?

There is only one Spirit and He is the One who has called us into this glorious new family. Shall we deflect His work by sinful pride or assertiveness?

There is only one Lord. That is, there is only one redeemer. You were not saved by another Christ. If we are redeemed, we are redeemed by the one Christ. We may not agree on every single facet of that redemption but if we are saved we have a common Savior.

In the same way there is only one faith. It is the faith that leans on Christ and his atoning work. It is total dependence on what He has accomplished. If we are both saved, it is a common faith that saves us....a common faith that rests in a common Savior.

There is one baptism.

Oh, to be sure we as Presbyterians have one view of baptism, Baptists have another. But it is the same baptism in that it identifies us with Christ. We may have different understandings of all of baptism's implications but we are not baptized into different saviors. It is one baptism.

And all of that is true because there is only one Father in heaven and since He has ordained the work of the Spirit, and granted the faith that saves and given us

a common Redeemer to justify us before Him, and given a common baptism, we must strive, diligently strive, to preserve the unity of the body into which we have been called.

But it's not always easy.

Sometimes our pride gets in the way. Sometimes it is our ignorance. Sometimes we speak with authority on issues about which we are totally ignorant and truth matters. So even as we strive to give truth its place we are still under the same familial obligation to exercise humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance.

A year or two before I started seminary, I worked for a reformed Christian bookstore and we were a strident bunch of guys. We spent almost as much energy talking people out of buying the wrong books as we did trying to get people to buy the right ones.

If someone came in and asked for a commentary by William Barclay, instead of saying **"No, we don't have it"** we would get out a copy of Barclay's Spiritual Autobiography and go through highlighted quotes where Barclay denied the virgin birth, the literal resurrection of Christ and so on... We would just beat the fire out of the customer until we got them to see the utter foolishness of even thinking about reading Barclay's books. And there is a place for that kind of instruction. Our words were right but our actions were prideful and arrogant.

One day one of our ex-employees came into the store. We we're talking about various books and he asked me if I had ever read the Cost of Discipleship by

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I told him no that we did not carry Bonhoeffer because he was neo-orthodox. His faced flushed and he told me this story.

A few years before, he had stood behind the same counter I was standing behind when a very elderly, white-haired man with a gently wrinkled brow came in and ask him the if he had a copy of Bonhoeffer's book.

My friend, Cliff, said no, in fact, we did not carry the Cost of Discipleship because Bonhoeffer was neo-orthodox. He had a terrible view of inspiration and was almost certainly not a Christian.

The old man just stood there like someone had slapped him on the face. He began to tremble. He looked down at the counter and then up at Cliff. He could not speak. He kept swallowing. His piercing blue eyes were filled with tears.

Finally, when he had stood there for what Cliff said seemed like five minutes he turned and with fallen shoulders began to amble toward the door.

But after a few steps, he stopped.

Whatever anger had been there had turned to something else. His eyes were still filled with tears but he spoke very softly, just above a whisper.

**"Young man," he said, "if I could have just a moment of your time. I would like to say a word concerning Dietrich Bonhoeffer. You know, of course, that he died at Buchenwald by the direct order of Heinrich Himmler."**

Cliff nodded.

**“You know also that he was safe in the West and that he went home to Germany knowing full well that he would be arrested and probably martyred.”**

**“Well, no I didn’t know that.”** Cliff mumbled.

**“Well, you may not know”** said the old man looking very tired, **“that he used lead Bible studies when he was at Buchenwald. He used to lead other men there in studies on the gospel and the hope of eternal life and the peace of God that we can enjoy in Christ.”**

**“Well, of course, I didn’t know that.”** Cliff quietly answered.

**“It’s all perfectly true. He even took some men under his charge and spent hours counseling and praying for them, encouraging them to place their hope in Christ. There were many who will never forget his kindness and his courage. There are still some today that remember his faithfulness. He was executed by the Gestapo just a few days before Buchenwald was liberated and the war ended. It was April 9, 1945.”**

**“Well, it’s obvious you know a lot about Bonhoeffer, sir. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to offend you. You clearly have spent a lot of time studying his life.”**

**“Studying his life?”** the man asked. **“Oh no, you misunderstand. I was there. I was one of the men that he led to the Lord. I watched them take him from his**

**cell and lead him out to be executed...I just think if you are going to be so precise in your assessment of his theology you might ought to actually know what his theology was."**

I remember that story like it happened yesterday. It is a perfect model of what Paul is describing. We are to understand the truth, speak to each other in love but in doing so we are to demonstrate certain attributes that show we understand the nature of the truth. That is as important today as it was when Paul wrote:

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Let's pray.