

Ephesians 4:1-6

Introduction

The book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. The first three chapters describe what *God* has done. The last three chapters describe what *we* must do in light of what God has done. Some might say that the first three chapters are *theology and doctrine*, while the last three chapters are *application and exhortation*. This morning we come to the second half—the last three chapters—of Paul’s letter to the Christians who were living in Ephesus.

But we have to be very, very careful here. First of all, we should all ask ourselves, “Which section are we more excited about?” The first three chapters describing what God has done (the theology and doctrine), or the last three chapters describing what we must do (application and exhortation)? Paul begins the second half of Ephesians with these words:

I. “I urge you therefore”

After eleven chapters of very deep theology, describing God’s awesome, amazing salvation, Paul began the section of application and exhortation in the book of Romans with these exact same words in the Greek: “I urge you therefore...” (Rom. 12:1) All true application and exhortation flows out of good theology and doctrine. There are some who get *more* excited about the theology and doctrine in the first half. But that’s hypocrisy. There’s no true excitement for theology and doctrine (for the deep things of what God has done) without an *equal* zeal and excitement for living practically, day to day, in light of that theology and doctrine. On the other hand, some people get *more* excited about the last three chapters of Ephesians – about the applications and exhortations. But that’s legalism and moralism. There’s no true love for “application” and exhortation without an *equal* love and excitement for true theology and doctrine (for the first three chapters of Ephesians). The two halves of Ephesians are intimately, inseparably connected – “I urge you *therefore*...” They’re not only inseparably connected, but they’re also intertwined together (cf. O’Brien). There’s a whole lot of the second half already in the first half.* And as we’re about to see already this morning, there’s a whole lot of the first half that shows up again in the second half. So even though it’s *helpful*, it can also be *misleading* to speak of two separate halves in the book of Ephesians.

Paul begins the second half of Ephesians with these words, “I urge you *therefore*...” “I exhort you, I appeal to you, I beseech you, I urge you...” Why is Paul so urgent? Because he’s come to *understand* the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Why is Paul so earnest and passionate? Because he’s come to understand the things that God has done – and is still doing. We know that he has, because he began and

* Paul has already talked about being holy and blameless before God in love (1:4). Paul has spoken of how we exist for the praise of the glory of God’s grace (1:5-6, 12, 14). There is no room in the Christian life for boasting, because we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (2:9-10). We have free and confident access to God’s presence through Christ (2:18; 3:12). Paul encourages his readers not to lose heart in light of his sufferings, because now they should see that his sufferings are their glory (3:13). Paul has prayed for spiritual strength and enlightenment to comprehend and grasp all that he has written about so that his readers may be filled up to all the fullness of God (1:15-19; 3:14-19). And the whole first section was written in a devotional spirit of worship and adoration and praise.

ended the first half of Ephesians with doxology – with praise and worship and blessing of God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... Now to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages, Amen.” (1:3; 3:20-21).

“I urge you *therefore*...” We will always lack power and strength, and zeal and joy in our Christian walk until we can fully embrace Paul’s “therefore” – until we can fully love and delight in what God has done, and is doing, and will do. “I urge you *therefore*—”

II. “I, the prisoner in the Lord”

Paul is suffering in prison for the very things that he writes now to the Ephesians. This helps us to feel the emotion, and the longing in his voice. And in Paul’s voice and words, we can even hear God’s own heart. Paul wrote in another place:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 5:20 — Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ...

You see, Paul had the authority to command us as an Apostle of Christ Jesus, but instead he appeals to us as a prisoner in the Lord. He says to Philemon:

- ✓ Philemon 8–10 — Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you [urge you]—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— I appeal to you [urge you] for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

In the same way, even though all of God’s words carry the full weight of a command, yet in His love and mercy, and compassion, He also appeals to us, and urges us, and even entreats us to live according to His life-giving word. God commands us as our Creator and as a consuming fire. But then He also appeals to us as one who was made like us, and who died for us. So Paul’s words are a reflection of God’s own heart toward us, His children, “I urge you *therefore*—I, the prisoner in the Lord—”

III. “to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”

Isn’t this what it’s all about? Aren’t all of our words and professions worthless apart from a life lived for our Creator and Savior? May we never be a church that grows fat on hearing, but then fails to do, and to live, and to be in true obedience and faithfulness. In Ephesians 2:2 Paul says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once *walked*. But then in verse 10 he says that now “we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them.” True Christianity is about a daily walk. True Christianity is about how we live, because of who we live for. There is absolutely no part of our life that should not be a part of our Christian walk. There is not a spiritual zone and a neutral zone. There is only our “walk” – our living, and breathing, and moving as those who have been “called” by God’s grace.

Our calling is something that happened in the past. And yet what our calling has brought us is a wonderful hope of things still to come – of one day being perfected in God’s love, as His image bearer. So in chapter one, Paul spoke of “the *hope* of His calling” (1:18). And in just three verses, Paul will mention the “*hope* of your calling” (4:4). Our calling is in the past. The hope to which we have been called is yet future. And so it’s in this in between time that we are called to walk worthy – worthy of God’s past, gracious call, and worthy of the future hope to which we have been called (cf. Thielman). Both our past and our future are always an exhortation to live today, and to walk worthy today.

“I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” So how do we do this? What will this look like? Brothers and sisters, it’s really so very simple.

IV. “with all humility and gentleness”

When we’ve come to love and rejoice in the sovereign, saving grace of God to lost sinners such as ourselves, how can we *not* be humble in our relationships with each other? How can it not come naturally to us to think of others as more important than ourselves? Who *am* I, after all, and what was it that I deserved as a child of wrath by nature? When we’re thinking like that, it will never once cross our minds to ask, “who is he, and what is it that he (or she) deserves.” But because of the sin that remains, we struggle. And it’s to this struggle that Paul is urging us and calling us.

If we’re going to walk worthy of the calling with which we were called – if we’re going to live *today* in light of the past and the future – then we must walk with *all* humility and gentleness. The *all* shows us how exceedingly important this really is. Humility is a mindset and a whole way of thinking. Humility should be the beginning and the ending of everything that we do and everything that we say. But how completely impossible this is without God’s power mightily working within us! How many of our actions and words are motivated even subtly by pride and self-centeredness?

If humility is the heart and the mindset, then gentleness is one of the first outward evidences. Gentleness is the manner in which we will always speak and act toward others when we’re not impressed with our own self-importance (O’Brien; BDAG). Jesus was the epitome of this gentleness (2 Cor. 10:1).

- ✓ Isaiah 42:3 — A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.
- ✓ Zechariah 9:9 — Behold, your king is coming to you... humble [gentle] and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The point here isn’t whether others deserve to be treated with gentleness, but whether we have any grounds in light of who we are to act or speak in any other way. If we are humble, and not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and not deceived by ideas of our own self-importance, then the *only* way we can ever speak or act toward each other is with gentleness.

- ✓ Titus 3:2 (NASB) — Malign no one, [but] be peaceable, gentle, showing every *consideration* for all men.
- ✓ Galatians 6:1 — Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of *gentleness*.

In *all* of your dealings with each other, are you characterized *completely* and *always* by a humble spirit and an attitude of gentleness? Jesus was humble and gentle. How much more then should we be humble and gentle, who know that we are sinners saved by grace?

We said that the point isn't whether others deserve to be treated with gentleness, but whether we have any grounds in light of who we are to act or speak in any other way. Well, now Paul makes it very clear that we never, ever do. "I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness..."

V. "with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love"

O that God would always do this work in our midst – that we would all be more, and more, and more characterized by long-suffering and bearing with one another in love! This is what the Church needs. This is what *this* church will *always* need – as long as we are living between the time of our calling and the ultimate hope to which we have been called. Most English versions have the word "patience" here. But when we think of patience, we usually just think of enduring a wait when we'd rather have something now. Paul's point is not so much the enduring of a wait, but the "enduring" of *each other*. Paul's point is that we are willing rather to *suffer* hurt and injustice than to retaliate or insist on any "rights" of our own. And so I translate with the New King James, "with *longsuffering*, bearing with one another in love."

If you have to *bear with* someone, then this assumes that you have been treated wrongly. That's difficult, though perhaps even an unsaved person could muster up enough will power. But how do you bear with someone—how do you patiently endure and "put up" with someone—*in love*? The very idea seems not only emotionally impossible, but logically impossible. And it *is* completely impossible for all who have not truly been born again. But we are a new creation. We are God's own workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for precisely *this* "good work," which God Himself prepared beforehand, that we should walk in it. What's the point of a "new creation" if we're still living in light of the limitations and possibilities of our "old man"? It's because we are a new creation that we *can*, and we *must* not just be longsuffering and bear with one another, but be longsuffering and bear with one another *in love*. I wonder if our questions about *how* to do this are often motivated by a hidden desire to justify and excuse our disobedience. In principle, it's not at all complicated. It's just our sin that pretends it is.

Why, though? What is the purpose of this humility and gentleness, and longsuffering, and bearing with one another in love? "I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love..."

VI. “being fervent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

Even as Paul continues to exhort and apply, he points us back to the first three chapters. In Ephesians chapter two, this unity and peace is something that God has already fully accomplished in Christ.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:14-18 — For he himself is our **peace**, who *has made* both things **ONE**, and *has broken down* the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—*having* abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees, that he might create in himself **ONE new man** in place of the two, so making **peace**, and might reconcile them both in **ONE body** to God through the cross, thereby **killing the hostility**. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in **ONE Spirit** to the Father.

One of Paul’s favorite words in Ephesians is that Greek preposition *syn* – *together with*. We have been made alive *together with* Christ, raised up *together with* Christ, and seated *together with* Christ, with the result that we are now citizens *together with* all the saints, fitted *together with* each other, built *together with* each other, heirs *together with* each other, members of the body *together with* each other, and partakers of the promise *together with* each other (2:5-6, 19-22; 3:5-6). These are things that *God has accomplished* in Christ as the key to His plan for uniting all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him (1:10). These are the things that *God accomplished* in Christ Jesus for the praise and the glory of His name – so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:10).

And yet these spiritual realities that have been fully accomplished in the heavenly places still need *working out, and fleshing out* here on the earth – here in God’s church that meets in Morris, Illinois. Our astonishing responsibility and privilege is to make visible (or to “keep”) the unity that God has already created. And this can *only* happen if we are faithfully walking with *all humility* and *gentleness*, with *longsuffering, bearing with* one another *in love*. Can you see now that to fail in this area is an unspeakable travesty? It is to insult and, as it were, trample under our feet, the body and blood of Christ by which we have all been made one. It is to hold up the wisdom of God to the mockery of the world. How can we not tremble to think that we have all been guilty of these very things? When we think about the beauty of God’s manifold wisdom which He has displayed in the Church as His new creation, how can we not, *as that church*, repent of our sin, and turn to walk with all humility and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, *being fervent* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

One commentator says that “the [word] Paul uses has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis to it” (O’Brien). It means to “do something with intense effort and motivation” (LN). We must act with intense fervency and eagerness to maintain and to keep and to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is no place or time for half-hearted efforts. This will never, ever happen automatically, or by chance. To use Paul’s words in another place, we must be toiling and struggling to this end with *all of God’s energy* that He *powerfully works* within us (Col. 1:29). Why? – For the sake of His name, and for the sake of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ which has made us all fellow members with each other in the

household of God. We *must* toil and struggle with fervency and eagerness to maintain and to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We *must*, but don't we also want to and long to because we are the ones who have been called to be the display throughout all eternity of the infinite and manifold wisdom of God? Maybe we can understand now why in the next three verses Paul returns to the theology and the doctrine! He just can't stay away.

VII. *“one* body and *one* Spirit, just as also you were called in *one* hope of your calling, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Our English translations smooth things out by adding the words “there is” at the beginning, and making verse four the beginning of a new sentence – “There is one body and one Spirit...” But in the Greek, verses 1-6 are all a *single* sentence of seventy-one words, and verse four begins very suddenly just like this – *“one* body and *one* Spirit...” This has the effect of bolding, and underlining and italicizing the word “*one*,” because “*one*” is the very *first* word. But this sudden transition also helps us to feel how amazed Paul was at God's wisdom, and how passionate he was about our calling to be the display of that wisdom by fervently working to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul has already spoken in chapter two of how Christ reconciled both Jew and Gentile “in **ONE BODY** to God through the cross” (2:16), and how through Christ we both have access “in **ONE SPIRIT** to the Father” (2:18). So here he starts out, “*one* body and *one* Spirit.” Paul has just mentioned the calling with which we were called, so here he goes on to say, “just as also you were called in *one* hope of your calling.” “Lord,” “faith,” and “baptism” were probably chosen at least partly because “Lord” is masculine, “faith” is feminine, and “baptism” is neuter, and so this gives us a masculine “one” (*heis*), a feminine “one” (*mia*), and a neuter “one” (*hen*). That's what you'd see if you were reading the inspired Greek words, and it would cause that word “one” to jump off the page even more than ever – “*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism.” And finally, the last “one” is the sum of the previous six, the sum of the first three chapters of Ephesians, and so very appropriately it's the *seventh* – “*one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” That simple word “one” sums up the manifold wisdom of God whose purpose in the church is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.

“I URGE YOU THEREFORE—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, *with* all humility and gentleness, *with* long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, *being fervent* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace—*one*(!) body and *one*(!) Spirit, just as also you were called in *one*(!) hope of your calling, *one*(!) Lord, *one*(!) faith, *one*(!) baptism, *one*(!!!) God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”