

In Ephesians 4 Paul quotes from Psalm 68,
about the Lord ascending on high and giving gifts to men.

Psalm 68 is all about the procession of God to the temple.
And Ephesians is all about the establishment of a new temple.

In Psalm 68 we sang of how God went before his people through the wilderness,
and how he accomplished his purpose in restoring his inheritance.
Psalm 68 speaks of how the Almighty scatters kings,
how the LORD will dwell forever in Zion –
how GOD the Lord delivers his people from death.

Psalm 68 also speaks of how it is “because of your temple at Jerusalem”
that “kings shall bear gifts to you.” (68:29)
And so Psalm 68 calls upon the kingdoms of the earth to
“sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens.” (68:33)
“Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—
he is the one who gives power and strength to his people.” (68:35)

But this big picture Psalm
that focuses so much on the redemptive historical significance of this salvation,
also speaks to the “little people”
*Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.
God settles the solitary in a home;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.* (Ps 68:5-6)

In the same way, Ephesians speaks of the cosmic redemptive historical significance
of the coming of Christ,
and yet also looks at the nuts and bolts of the Christian life.

Three weeks ago, we how saw Ephesians 1 speaks of
redemption predestined (in Christ) by the Father
redemption accomplished (in Christ) by the Son
and redemption applied (in Christ) by the Spirit.

Two weeks ago we turned to Paul’s discussion of who you are in Christ.
You were dead, but God has made you alive with Christ.
You were strangers, but Christ has brought you near.

Last week we saw that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews,
partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus though the gospel.
And we saw the stunning and marvelous truth
that Jesus has united his church to himself,

so that we share in the fullness of God which dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ.
It is not just that God has “saved” you.
He has given to you the mind-blowing privilege of sharing in the life of his Son.

And so tonight we turn to Paul’s exhortation,
“walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

First we need to make sure that we understand what Paul means by the “call.”
He has already told us in 1:18
that he prays that you might have the eyes of your hearts enlightened,
“that you may know what is the hope to which he has *called* you.”

God’s call pierces through the hardness of our hearts.
God’s call raises us from the dead,
wakens us from our mortal slumber,
and unites us to Christ.
Or to use the language of Ephesians 2:5,
“even when we were dead in our trespasses,
[he] made us alive together with Christ.”

So when Paul says that you are to walk in a manner worthy
of the calling to which you have been called,
he is saying (in effect) be who you are *in Christ*.

1. The Character of the Christian Walk (4:1-3)

4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord,

Paul identifies himself here as a prisoner for the Lord.
This is designed to serve as a challenge to the Ephesians.
If I, Paul, am in prison for my service to Christ,
then what excuse do you have?
Paul holds himself up as an example to them.

[I] urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

It is worth pointing out that Paul refers to this as a walk.
It is a way of life – an engrained pattern – a habitual trajectory.

The Christian life is not something that you can do occasionally.
There are those who try to be “Sunday morning Christians” –
but it does not work.
Because a Sunday morning Christian is not *walking* in this manner.

What manner?
What characterizes the Christian “walk”?

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling:

2 with all humility and gentleness,

with patience, bearing with one another in love,

3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Humility, gentleness, patience...

What do you think of when you think of humility, gentleness and patience?

I think too often we hear these words and think "passive."

But there is nothing passive about humility.

Cowardice.

Cowardice is passive!

Wimpiness.

Wimpiness is passive!

Doormat.

A doormat is passive.

But Paul does not call us to be cowards, wimps and doormats.

He calls us to humility gentleness and patience.

If you have been called into union with Christ,

then you should think of the humility, gentleness and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ
as your model.

Your imitation of Christ is rooted in your participation in Christ.

Even the grammar here helps you see this.

You are called to *walk with humility and gentleness.*

These two ideas are knit together.

Your conduct, your behavior, is to be characterized by humility.

In other words – you are not proud and self-serving –

but you humble yourself to serve others;

and you do this with gentleness –

if you want to see a picture of gentleness,

look at how a big, burly tough guy

holds his little baby for the first time.

There is strength there – but all that strength

is used to make that little baby feel safe and secure.

There is *nothing* passive about it.

You must walk with humility – you must actively humble yourself –

even as Christ humbled himself and laid down his life for you.

And you are called to walk *with patience, bearing with one another in love.*

You may think that you know the best way to go.

But others may not be ready to go there.

Will you be patient?

Think of God's patience with you!

How often have you been a blithering idiot?

How often have you refused to go the best way?

And yet our Lord Jesus Christ still laid down his life for you!

Again, patience does not mean "passive."

It does not mean silently enduring with an inner snarl.

Patience, bearing with one another *in love*, means walking the right direction,
calling others to walk in the right direction,
and then patiently bearing with them when they don't!

Gregory the Great (ca. 600) once said

that pastors should sometimes overlook faults in the church –

but that when they do, they should always make it clear

that they are overlooking the fault!

Otherwise, if you just "let it slide" then you are "winking" at sin.

When asked what were the three main precepts of the Christian religion,

Augustine once answered, that the first was "humility,"

the second was "humility."

And the third was "humility."

The character of the Christian walk, a walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
is first and last, humility.

And the reason for this (which we see in verses 4-6)

is because of the ecclesiastical context of the Christian walk.

2. The Ecclesiastical Context of the Christian Walk (4:4-6)

4 There is one body and one Spirit—

just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

I call this the ecclesiastical context,

but I could have just as easily called it the Trinitarian context.

Paul starts with the unity of the body in the one Spirit,

but then speaks of the one Lord (Jesus Christ)

and the one God and Father of all.

All three persons of the godhead point us to the unity of the church.

The reason for our humility and patience is threefold:

First, it is because there is one body and one Spirit.

Indeed, it is the one Spirit who unites us in one body!

Here you have a clear reminder of what Paul had said back in ch 1
when he spoke of the Spirit as the seal – the deposit –
the guarantee of our inheritance.

Because the one Spirit has been given to the one body,
therefore we are one body with all other Christians.

But our second reason for humility and patience
is that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

We should not be surprised that faith and baptism
are associated here with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is the one in whom we believe and are baptized.

By faith in him and through baptism into his death
we are made partakers of his resurrection life.

We humble ourselves – we bear with one another –
because we have been united with the one who humbled himself
and died for us.

This also reminds us of Ephesians 1,
with its emphasis on the accomplishment of redemption
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And our third reason for humility and patience is that there is
one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

You really cannot be proud and arrogant
when you remember one basic truth:

He is God. I am not.

If you have that one straight, then humility and patience necessarily follow.
As Paul said back in Ephesians 1,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

The Father who predestined you to adoption as sons *in Christ*
is the same Father who has given the rule of all things to his Son,

as Paul said in Ephesians 1:22,

*“And he put all things under his feet
and gave him as head over all things to the church,
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*

God put all things under Jesus’ feet,
and then God gave Jesus to the church, which is his body.

And so we see that Christ is Lord of the Christian walk:

3. Christ is Lord of the Christian Walk (4:7-16)

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

This is crucial.

Because this strikes a blow at the heart of our pride.

Paul does not say that grace was given to us according to our abilities,
but according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The Messiah is Lord of the church.

And Christ has given you grace to do and to be what he has called you to do and to be.

That doesn't mean that he has enabled you to do what *you* want to do.

It means that he has enabled you do what *he* wants you to do!

And how has Christ given these gifts?

This is where the quote from Psalm 68 comes in:

8 Therefore it says,

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”*

*9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean
but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?*

*10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens,
that he might fill all things.)*

In Psalm 68 the idea was that God as the conquering king ascended to his throne
and *received* gifts from men.

But as Paul talks about humility and patience in the Christian life,
he turns this around and points out that when Jesus ascended on high,
he led a host of captives and he *gave* gifts to men.

And when Paul talks about the “descent” of Christ
he is speaking of his incarnation, as he humbled himself and took our form
(as he says in Philippians 2).

But the one who descended is now the one who has ascended far above the heavens
so that he might fill all things.

The ascension of Christ is his glorious triumph over the powers.

In his ascension he has been proclaimed victor – king of kings and lord of lords.

And because he has triumphed,
he now has given gifts to men.

Paul had said earlier that Christ has been given to the church,
but now we hear of the gifts that Christ himself has given to his church:

*11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,
12 to equip the saints,
for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ,
13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
to mature manhood,
to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
14 so that we may no longer be children,
tossed to and fro by the waves
and carried about by every wind of doctrine,
by human cunning,
by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
15 Rather, speaking the truth in love,
we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
16 from whom the whole body,
joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,
when each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

We'll come back to the details next week.

Tonight I want to focus on what this is saying
about what it means to “walk worthy of your calling.”

The ascension gifts of Christ to his church are first and foremost people:
the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.

So if someone came up to me and said,
“what do you think you are? God’s gift to the church?”
I would have to say, ‘yes!’
Not that there is anything special about me,
but Christ has given me to the church.

And he has given me three particular duties:

- 1) for equipping the saints
- 2) for the work of ministry
- 3) for building up the body of Christ

Some translators and commentators say that only the first one is for the pastors and teachers:
“equipping the saints” –
they say that the pastors and teachers equip the saints
and that the saints then do the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ.

But verse 16 makes it clear that the whole body is supposed to be building itself up.
In verse 12 it seems clear that this is not the body building itself up,

but these gifts – the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – who build up the body.

And so these teachers – these men who are also gifts – have three particular duties:

- 1) Equipping the saints: preparing you and teaching you how to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.
My task is to give you the tools to do your work.
And this equipping happens through the proclamation of the word of God.
That is why Paul lists these “speaking gifts.”
- 2) The work of ministry: this word “ministry” (diakonia) refers to the exercise of office. Paul said in 3:7 that he was made a minister (diakonos) of the gospel, and now he says that those who *are* ministers (diakonoi) are charged with doing the work of ministry (diakonia).
- 3) Building up the body of Christ: even as Christ preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so also now preachers of the gospel continue to bring this message of peace.
And through the preaching of the Word,
the whole church becomes “speakers”
so that the whole church grows up into Christ, the head,
as each of us recognize our gifts and callings in communion with one another.

But notice that from start to finish,

Paul’s whole exhortation about walking in a manner worthy of your calling focuses on the body.

My task as a shepherd and teacher is to lead you and teach you in this way, but it only works if the whole body works together.

It only works if each part does its part – if each part demonstrates that humility and patience, bearing with one another.