



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, November 17, 2024

Ephesians 4:1-6

Last week as we rounded the bend on Chapter 3, we closed it off with the famous verse:

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

And if you remember, I made the comment that these two verses are so definitive that it almost feels like Paul could have ended the book of Ephesians right then and there. However, 3 more chapters to go :)

And it is interesting to note, however, that the beginning of Chapter 4 starts with one of Paul's favourite words - 'Therefore.' As we learned a few weeks ago, the word 'therefore' is used to bridge the gap between information and instruction. And although Paul has used the word, 'therefore' on numerous occasions, historians and theologians tend to agree that the definitive 'therefore' that starts Chapter 4 allows us to view the book of Ephesians in two parts. Part 1 being the first three chapters and Part 2 being the last three. Part 1 focuses on who we are in Christ, and then Part 2 emphasizes how we are to live out that identity.

So, as we step into Part 2 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians today I'd like to take just a few moments to recap what we learned in Part 1. If I were to sum up Chapters 1 to 3 into just a few statements, I would say that Paul is reminding us that as Christians, God views us as family. He is the One that pulled us from slavery to sonship and now calls us joint heirs with Jesus Christ. That we have been redeemed from the curse and united as one church - no longer separated as Jews and Gentiles, slaves or free, male nor female but sealed by Christ as one. Empowered by His Spirit, we are now invited to let the love of Jesus Christ into our hearts to lead and guide us in all of His ways. And when that happens, everything changes! This is all part of who we are in Christ, and now, as we move into

Chapters 4 to 6, Paul will show us how we are to live out that identity in a world that is so hostile towards Kingdom culture.

Ephesians 4:1-6

'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'

And the first thing Paul calls us to is to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. He's saying that the calling with which you were called is so great that there is a right way to walk in it and a wrong way to walk in it so be sure that you walk worthy of that calling. This statement needs to be worked through though to gain a deeper understanding.

This first thing we see is that Paul uses the term 'walk' here which is an interesting choice of words as one might expect Paul to say something along the lines of 'to live worthy of the calling' instead. Now, although these two terms may be similar, Paul chooses the word 'walk' here intentionally and there are a number of reasons why I think this is the case:

First, Paul uses the term 'to walk' because it is in direct contrast to his current position as a 'prisoner' where he is confined and restricted in his ability to serve God. Paul would love nothing more than to walk into a synagogue to preach to the Jews or stroll the streets and proclaim the Gospel to anyone who would listen. While Paul can still live out the Gospel in his current situation, he longs for the freedom and ability to physically walk worthy of the calling, just as he is now urging the Ephesians to do.

Second, the term 'to walk' implies specific direction and movement. As we just learned, it is active, but it is also a word that implies purpose, and intentionality, requiring effort to proceed.

I actually think that by using the term 'walk,' Paul has the great commission at the forefront of his mind here. In Matthew 28:19, we see the same implication of direction and movement as Luke teaches that we are to:

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...'

The Great commission appears twice in the New Testament - once in Matthew and the other in Mark 16. And in both passages, we see that they start with the word, 'Go.' This is the root word 'po-reuō' in the Greek which speaks clearly to the idea of purposeful movement and direction - just like what Paul is referencing to the Ephesians when he tells them to walk. You see, 'Go' - like 'walk' - is an action word, one that calls for intentionality and purpose rather than hesitation or apathy.

A great way to explain this is through the contrast between Active Christianity and Passive Christianity. Active Christianity actively seeks opportunities to share the Gospel and serve others, stepping into those opportunities with purpose and intentionality. Passive Christianity on the other hand, is a stagnant belief that hesitates to act or engage even when the opportunity might present itself. I like how the Message paraphrase describes this concept:

Ephesians 4:1-3

'While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.'

So this is why Paul uses the term 'to walk' here - because he wants to remind the Ephesians - and us - that our faith is not passive but very much active, intentional and alive.

So we are to walk (act, behave, operate intentionally and purposeful) worthy of the calling which we have been given. And what is that calling? Well some would say that if you fast forward to verse 11 we get the answer as Paul specifically says that some are called to be prophets, evangelist, pastors.... etc. And while this is true, at this juncture, Paul is still speaking to the broader calling: the calling of unity in salvation. This is the same calling Paul has been addressing since chapter 1 - the fact that we are all united under the banner of family as Christ calls us sons and daughters. No longer Jew nor Gentile, no longer male nor female, no longer slave nor free - but all are one in Christ Jesus.

And we are meant to walk in that calling accordingly. To walk as sons and daughters. To walk as family. Or as Paul now says - to walk worthy.

Again, this is a really specific word for Paul to use because it's not the only time he links the words 'walk' and 'worthy' together. In Philippians, he speaks to the same idea:

Philippians 1:27a

‘...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...’

(to walk worthy)

And to the church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote:

1 Thessalonians 2:12a

‘...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom...’

Colossians 1:10

‘...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him...’

This is a recurring theme for Paul in many of his letters and again, he is suggesting that there is a correct way and an incorrect way to walk as sons and daughters of the Lord.

I think it's easy to get thrown by the English word 'worthy' because it implies value by earning. But the Greek word 'axiōs' simply means 'suitably' or 'appropriately.' It has nothing to do with earning or repaying the sacrifice of Jesus; it's about living in a way that aligns with the calling that we have received.

And in his letter to the Colossians, Paul expands on what this looks like practically by saying that:

Colossians 1:10-12

‘...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.’

So to break this down simply: walking worthy of the calling we've been given simply means living in a way that shows the difference the Gospel has made in our lives. It means pleasing God with our actions, growing closer to Him, relying on His strength, being patient and joyful. And knowing the sacrifice that was made on our behalf, always being thankful and grateful for the incredible gift of being part of His family.

By keeping the cross of Jesus Christ at the forefront of everything we do - it's reminder to continually align ourselves with Jesus the cornerstone - ensuring that we never take His sacrifice for granted, and that we would live each day in a way that seeks to honour Him.

Ultimately it's a call to walk in unity as Paul goes on to describe in verses 4-6 but before doing so he makes it clear that this walk of unity is not for the weak of heart but that it will require great humility and patience and long-suffering and peace, and oh such great love. Because ultimately seeking unity tends to war against the nature of the flesh.

Paul goes on to say that there is one body - the church. Many different expressions, but ultimately one body of believers that Christ is coming back for - and we need to learn to embrace each other even in the midst of our differences we all seek peace through the unity of the cross.

So whether we wear suits on Sundays or shorts Jesus just wants us to come as we are.

Whether we sing hymns or bang on the drums, Jesus says to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Whether we raise our hands in worship or keep them folded in reverence, our hearts are still being lifted to the same God.

Whether we take communion once a month or every week, the purpose is to never forget the price that was paid.

Whether we pray written prayers or pray from the heart it is the same Holy Spirit who inhabits each of those prayers.

Whether our services are 3 hrs long or 1, the point will always be to live out our faith outside of these four walls Monday-Sunday.

Paul says that there is one Spirit - the Holy Spirit - who empowers and sustains this unity. And he goes on to say that there is one hope - the eternal life and salvation we all share through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is one Lord - Jesus, our Savior and King. There is one faith - the core truth of the Gospel that binds us together. There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all. And just before that, Paul says that there is one baptism.

Now, in a section that focuses on unity, patience, and embracing one another regardless of differences, why would Paul include this statement about one baptism, knowing there are two baptisms: water and Spirit?

I don't think Paul is referencing either baptism specifically here. Water baptism, as we've seen today, doesn't save us but serves as a public testimony of what the Holy Spirit has already done - placing us into the family of God upon salvation. And Spirit baptism, as we believe, is the moment (or moments) subsequent to salvation when we are empowered by the Spirit with boldness to do what we normally could not do.

In light of that, I think Paul has both baptisms in mind here but is putting the focus on the nature

of baptism instead of the specific baptism. As one commentator puts it: “The word baptize always means ‘to submerge or immerse.’ So, when baptism is discussed, it involves a person being totally submerged into something else. Baptism implies being ‘all in.’ It also implies that a change has taken place. Baptized people are changed people.”

By using the term one baptism, I believe Paul is pointing back to what he wrote to the Corinthians a number of years prior:

1 Corinthians 12:13

‘For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.’

See the language Paul is using here? He’s not focusing on the distinctions between water baptism and Spirit baptism but rather the foundational truth that through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are all immersed - ‘fully in’ - into the family of God. As I said last week, the Baptists and the Anglicans are brothers and sisters. The Reformed and the Pentecostals are family!

But it doesn’t stop there. It goes broader than denominational lines. It also means that the Leafs fans and the Habs fans are family. The Ticats fan and the Argos fans sit at the same supper table. And yes, even the Conservative and the Liberal. The Democrat and the Republican. All one family, baptized into one body - the family of God - united through the work of the Holy Spirit. And to walk worthy of the calling with which we were called because at the end of the day these are the people you’re going to be spending eternity with so you might as well learn to love them now before God puts your ‘heavenly mansion’ right next to theirs for all of eternity ;)

2 Points to consider as we close:

Paul’s call to ‘walk worthy’ challenges us to move beyond passive belief into active, intentional living. This means making purposeful choices to reflect the Gospel in every area of life - at work, in our families, and in the community. Are you taking steps to live out your calling as a son or daughter of God or are you just waiting by for it to magically happen? Maybe ask yourself this question: How can I embody the love, humility, and patience that Paul describes in this passage? Identify one way this week to “walk” instead of “wait.” Whether it’s reaching out to someone in need, sharing your faith, or reconciling a broken relationship, it’s time for some of us here today to let our actions demonstrate the unity and love of Christ.

Paul’s emphasis on “one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God” is a powerful reminder that, despite our differences, we are united in Christ. This unity requires in-

tentional effort - humility, patience, love, and a willingness to set aside preferences for the sake of the Gospel. Ask yourself this question: Are you contributing to unity, or are you letting differences divide? Maybe think about someone you may struggle to see as part of God's family because of differences in background, preferences, or opinions. Pray for them, and ask the Lord to give you a tangible way to show love and unity this week - be it a conversation, an act of kindness, or simply a step toward reconciliation. Strive for unity.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

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