

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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The Three "Cs"

am, Holy Communion

The Text: Ephesians 4:1-6

Unity in the Body of Christ

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **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. **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.

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Today we begin our study of the latter half of Ephesians. This letter is one of the clearest to analyze structurally. Chapters one to three focus on theology and chapters four to six focus ethics. Another way of saying this is to understand chapters one to three are centred doctrine and chapters four to six centred on the practice of the Christian faith as it is shaped by our doctrine.

In chapter two verses 8 – 10 Paul shows us how doctrine and practice are linked together.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Here the doctrinal statement focuses on the theology of grace. It is by grace that we are saved. The practice, or we could say, behavioral statement comes at the end of verse 10. This is where Paul says that because of the grace of God we are created for good works, in which we are to walk. As we turn now to chapters four to six we will understand what these good works are.

So let's turn now to chapter four, where we will focus our attention on verses 1-3 and conclude with a statement about verses 4-6.

Verse 1

Verse 1 reads: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."¹

I want to teach you the significance of this word "worthy" There are two ways in which we need to understand this word. The Greek language lends itself well to word pictures and there are two associated with the word "worthy".

The first image is that of an old fashioned scale. Think of two things which are of the same weight, so that when you put them on opposite sides of the scale there is no tilting to one side or the other, but they balance perfectly. That is the original derivation of the word translated here by 'worthy'. I think Paul is urging us to give equal weight in our lives to doctrine and practice. We must not put all the weight on doctrine and none on practice; nor all the weight on practice and just a little, if any at all, on doctrine. To do so produces imbalance and lopsidedness. We must take great pains to see that the scales are perfectly balanced. Paul implies that to do this will require effort on our part and so he urges us to be eager to keep these balanced.

However packed your head may be with knowledge, if you are failing in your life you will be a hindrance to the spreading of the Kingdom, you will bring the cause of God and His Christ into disrepute. But it is equally true to say that if your understanding of the Christian life is that it means no more than that you live a good life, that you should be moral, and that doctrine is of no importance, again you will be a hindrance to the cause of the kingdom.

¹ I am grateful to Martin Lloyd Jones who has helped me to understand this verse. What I will say to you know is a distillation of his teaching.

The other word picture contained in this word "worthy" is of something that is 'becoming', in the sense of "you look becoming". The idea conveyed is that of a thing that is matching. It is of putting on a piece of clothing that is consistent with another, something that is suited to and matches something else.

Paul means, negatively that we must avoid a clash of colour and appearance. There must never be a clash between our doctrine and our practice. This is something that is recognized in the matter of dress; there must not be a clash of colours that is not becoming. There are certain colours that do not match and do not go together. When you see a person with such clashing, contrasting colours you say that that person is lacking in taste. We can extend the idea and say that the same clothing is not always becoming at every age. There is nothing quite so ridiculous as to see an elderly person dressing as if he or she were young, and vice versa. There are certain things that are not becoming. This is the idea that the Apostle conveys here; there must never be an element of incongruity or of sharp contrasts in our lives between what we believe and how we live.

We can take the idea yet further by noting the word which the Apostle used in writing to Titus where he talks about how in everything we are to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.' (Titus 2:10). The idea is that doctrine is, as it were, the foundation or basic garment and that the life is a kind of adornment which is added on to it. His exhortation is that we must always be careful that our decorations, our adornments, are suited to, and are congruous with, and match, this foundation garment which we have already put on. The doctrine is the foundation; the life is the adorning. The purpose of the adorning is to make the doctrine attractive, to cause people to admire it, to look at it and to desire to have it. The Apostle here, as everywhere else, does much more than issue a general appeal to Christian people to live a good life and to be philanthropic. The appeal is always in terms of the doctrine; the life must always issue from it, must always match it. You and I are to live the kind of life that will adorn the doctrine.

This is because the life we are to live is in accordance with the calling with which we have been called. Did you know that the word "Church" is in Greek "Ecclesia"? We get from this the English word echo. To be the church means that we are the "called ones", or the "called out ones". We have been called out of the world where the prince of the ruler or the air is influencing the lives of those who are under his power. We live as those who are called out of darkness into his marvelous light. It is this calling, this marvelous light that has so

captured Paul in the opening three chapters of this letter. And it is because he sees this so clearly that he calls himself a prisoner of Christ. To be a bond slave of Jesus Christ means that we realize our lives are not our own to do with as we like. We have been bought at a price and so with Paul we understand that we are to honour God in our body. Because we know the greatness of our calling we respond by affirming that because of what God has and is doing for us we will live for him. The calling which Paul says we are to live worthily of is enumerated in many ways in chapters 1 – 3. Here are just a few of them by way of reminder.

1. *before the foundation of the world, we were chosen to be holy and blameless before the Father. . (Eph 1:4)*
2. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7).
3. In him we have obtained an inheritance (Ephesians 1:11)
4. even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— **6**and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5)
5. 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)

This our calling, and because this is true we are to live a balanced life and a colour coordinated life where our doctrine and practice to not clash but show a mutual complementarity.

Verse 2:

Because we are the called out ones we are not to live this life by ourselves but in community with each other. Paul begins to show us in these words how our doctrine finds expression in our relationships with each other. It is the kind of life that is to be characterized “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”

There are two stages in this verse that will help us to understand how we are to live worthy of our calling.

1. With humility and gentleness:

The first stage is that of humility and gentleness. The knowledge of our high calling should make us feel very lowly. Christian humility is a disposition to think lowly of ourselves and highly of Christ. Christian gentleness is the demeanor of a person with this disposition. Precisely because he or she has been granted to know God, the Christian is a person of lowliness. He regards his knowledge as small and lowly because he has seen the omniscient God. She regards her strength as small and lowly because she has seen the omnipotent God. He regards his righteousness as small and lowly because he has seen the Holy One of Israel. And since the Christian is oriented on God and not men and women, he or she is not puffed up by any little superiority he may have over other humans.

If an ant measures itself by the Petro Canada Tower, he will not boast over the flea. We can only understand the humility that Paul is speaking of here when we realize that we are to God as the ant to the Peter Canada Tower. And yet we believe as Christians that this big God became so to speak an ant so we could know God.

To live with this kind of humility means that I we will recoil from the contemporary counsel of self-assertiveness and self-esteem and self-confidence. The great delight of the lowly Christian is to enjoy the free, unmerited mercy of God. All his longings are satisfied in God. God is the one he esteems. God is his confidence. God is the one who will assert himself someday to vindicate the poor in spirit and to make the last first. In the meantime, the man or woman of lowliness is the servant of all. This is the first stage that allows us to walk worthy of our calling and it is the work of the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to see the majesty of God's holiness and the minuteness of ourselves.

2. Patience and Forbearance

The second stage results from the first. It is called patience or long-suffering. "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience." Lowliness or humility is the prerequisite of patience. Haughty people are not patient. The more highly you think of yourself the more quickly you will think you should be served. "Who do they think they are to keep me waiting like this!" But if you have a disposition of humility, of lowliness, it won't feel so inappropriate when you are not treated like a dignitary and when the fruits of your labors are slow in coming.

Another way of describing the results of lowliness is with the term forbearance. "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been

called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love." Another word for "forbearing" is "enduring." Just like gentleness is the demeanor of lowliness, endurance is the demeanor of patience.

So do you see how the body of Christ is to work together? As we understand the need for balance between doctrine and practice we are learning to live as men and women who are humble because we know the grace of God and in turn we are patient because we are expressing this grace to others as we manifest the character traits of gentleness and forbearance.

Are you as grateful as I am that Paul said we must endure one another. This frees me from the hypocritical need to think I, or anyone else in the church, am perfect. Perfect people don't need to be endured or forgiven (Colossians 3:13). But we do, often. Paul is not naïve. He knows that there are people at St. Augustine's who are grumpy or critical or unreliable or finicky. He knows the pastor has gaping holes in the fabric of his personality. So his counsel here is not how perfect people can live together in unity, but how real, imperfect Christians can maintain the unity of the Spirit, namely, by enduring each other in love.

This leads Paul into this next point which is expressed in verse three. As we put on this kind of love and live a balanced life where doctrine and practice are held together, we are then be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Living a Life Worthy of Our Calling

Verse 2 tells us how to maintain spiritual unity and verse three tells us what it is. What is the kind of unity that will bring honor and credit to our high calling?

Part of the answer is found in verses 11–13. Here Paul says that Christ has given to the church

"some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God."

Here we see a reality to be maintained and a goal to be attained.

One difference between verse 3 and verse 13 is that in verse 3 we are told to maintain unity but in verse 13 we are told to attain unity. In verse 3 it is a reality to be maintained. In verse 13 it is a goal to be attained. The reason for this is not that there are two kinds of Christian unity but that Christian unity has in one sense already been accomplished and in another sense hasn't. Look at Ephesians 2: 13–16:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself a new man in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

This text shows that, in a decisive act of atonement and reconciliation, Christ has already made us one. What he has accomplished at Calvary we should maintain by the Spirit. But in another sense the unity Christ purchased and guaranteed with his blood must now be lived out and brought to full expression in the life of the church. In this sense it is a goal to be attained.

Three Components of Christian Unity or the Three Cs

So if the same basic unity is spoken of in 2: 13–16 and 4: 3 and 4: 13, then we can now define it. Christian unity involves three things that we should have in common. Ephesians 4: 13 speaks of a "unity of . . . the knowledge of the Son of God." That is our common convictions about Christ. That verse also speaks of a "unity of faith." That is our common confidence in Christ. And Ephesians 2: 14 speaks of the end of hostility. When hostility is replaced with love, we have a common care for each other. So I would sum up Christian unity from Ephesians 2–4 as having common convictions about Christ, common confidence in Christ, and common care for each other.

Ephesians 4: 3 calls this the unity of the Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who frees our hearts from irrational, self-defensive prejudices so that we are willing to own up to true convictions about Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 14–16). It's the Holy Spirit who enables us to have faith in Christ and to cry out to God with confidence, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8: 15–16). And it is the Holy Spirit who bears the fruit of love in our lives and gives us a common care for each other (Galatians 5: 22). So our common convictions and confidence and care are all from the Holy Spirit. Therefore Paul calls it the "unity of the Spirit" (v. 3).

Verse four to six of this chapter show us that because there is unity in the Trinity we are to be a united people who hold together doctrine and practice in a perfect balance as we learn to live with each other in a way that exhibits humility expressed in gentleness and patience finding its fruitfulness by bearing with each other in love. As we share a common conviction about Jesus, a common confidence in his grace we will live with a common care that will display that we are a people worthily walking as those who have been called out of the darkness of the world's deception into God's marvelous light.

Amen

Preserving Common Care for Each Other

The focus in verses 2 and 3 is not so much on how to maintain our common convictions or our common confidence. Those are assumed as a basis, and the focus is on how a group of imperfect people can preserve a common care for each other. How can you keep on caring about a person who doesn't like you? Or a person who likes music you don't like? Or a person who opposes you and wants to frustrate your dreams? How do you maintain the unity of the Spirit with them instead of becoming hostile and cold? Paul's answer: be lowly in spirit so that you can patiently endure their differences and their sins. A man of lowliness is keenly aware of the immensity of his debt toward God and how he has dishonored God through unbelief and disobedience. He is also keenly aware of God's amazing grace that saved a wretch like him. Therefore, the man of lowliness cannot easily or quickly retaliate when he is wronged. He knows that before God he doesn't deserve anything better, and he knows that if he returns evil for evil, he would be saying to God, "You were a fool for being patient with me and enduring my sin and returning good for my evil." And that would bring

far more disgrace and discredit upon our high calling than homosexual prostitution brought upon the Hennepin County District Court last week.

Therefore, let's not be puffed up but lowly and meek. And let's not be impatient or resentful, but long-suffering and forgiving. Then the unity that Christ died to create will become real in our church, and we will not bring any disrepute upon the great God who called us into his kingdom and glory.