

Worthy of the Calling

Ephesians 4:1–6

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CONTEXT: As we turn to chapter 4, we have reached a turning point in Paul’s letter to the churches in Ephesus. In **chapters 1–3**, Paul has been focused on what God has done in creating a people for His glory. God has chosen us. Predestined us. Adopted us. Sealed our eternity. Made us alive. Broken down every wall that divided us. He took people from every culture and every background and made us one in Christ. This is the work that God has done. All of it.

In **chapters 4–6**, Paul now turns his attention toward the church and the calling that God has placed on our life together. He talks about walking in unity with one another, growing up in our relationship with Jesus, walking in love, walking in the light, walking in wisdom. He talks about how we live out our faith in our marriages, in our families, and in our workplaces. And he ends the letter by talking about how we engage in spiritual warfare. In light of what God has done, this is how should we then live.

READ 4:1–6

This morning, we have entered into this second half of the letter, and Paul begins by referring to his **imprisonment** for the second time in this letter (*see also 3:1*): “***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord***” (4:1). This is one of the letters that Paul wrote during his imprisonment in Rome, which is why it’s often referred to as one of the prison epistles. Paul was no stranger to being an **outlaw** for the sake of the gospel. He spent a significant part of his Christian life being chased out of town, beaten, hunted, and imprisoned because he refused to stop speaking the truth of the gospel of Jesus – even when it was wildly unpopular, even when the authorities tried to cancel him, even when it cost him his freedom, and even when it finally cost him his life¹ – he never stopped speaking the good news of Jesus.

I sometimes hear professing Christians talk about how they wish they could be more vocal about their faith, but it’s against the rules in their school and so they can’t. Or it’s against company policy at their work, and so they can’t. Paul was well aware of these kinds of rules & policies, and he once told a younger Christian to be ready preach the Word “*in season and out of season*” (2 Tim 4:2) – whether it’s popular or not, whether it’s policy or not, whether it’s legal or not, whether it’s against the rules or not. And you need to count the cost ahead of time.² By the grace of God, if anything in this Word becomes illegal in my lifetime, I will continue to preach it as long as God gives me breath and North Center gives me a pulpit. And if this sounds extreme, it’s not. If Christ would endure the cross for you, living your life for God (regardless of the cost) is nothing more than your “*reasonable service*” (Rom 12:1).

4:1 || Then Paul urges them to join him in walking **worthy of the calling** *with which you were called*.

You have a calling on your life. The Creator of the universe, the King of glory, Almighty God has placed a divine calling on your life, and He is calling you to walk in a manner that is worthy of this calling.

This year is **election year** in our country. I remember the day (*almost 30 years ago now*) when the world learned about the affair that President Bill Clinton had with a White House intern. His affair lasted approximately 18 months, and one of the things that made it so **shocking** was that he was the President of the United States, which is the highest executive office in the United States. The President is the head of state, the head of government, and the commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces. This is a high calling, and we rightly expect the man who is elected to this position to live in a manner worthy of such a high calling.

¹ See 2 Cor 11:25–30.

² “*If serving You is against the law of man, if living out my faith in You is banned...then I want to be guilty*” (Newsboys).

A position like this demands a higher level of integrity. The greatness of the office should have compelled Clinton to conduct himself in a manner worthy of the calling. It should have restrained him from acting in such a way that brought dishonor and disrepute upon the office to which he had been called.

Here in this letter to the churches in Ephesus, Paul reminds us that we have a calling that is infinitely and eternally higher and greater than the office of the United States President.

- The president is elected through a popularity contest; you were chosen by God (1:4).
- The president has a salary of c. \$400,000; you are heirs of the kingdom of heaven (1:5).
- The president is focused on the glory of America; you were called to magnify the glory of God (1:12).
- You were brought into the church to display the wisdom of God – not just to other nations, but to the entire cosmos, including angels and demons (3:10).
- The president is in office for no longer than 8 years; your calling is sealed for eternity (1:13).
- You were created in Christ Jesus for good works that will echo throughout eternity (2:10).

So, if we expect those who have an elevated position in our society to live in a manner worthy of their calling, how much more should we expect Christians to walk worthy of their calling. So, now that Paul has spent three chapters talking about their calling, he begins **chapter 4** by saying,

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you (Παρακαλῶ³)
to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...
~ *Ephesians 4:1*

We need to be clear that Paul is **NOT** talking about people being worthy of the calling. **NOBODY** is worthy to be called into the family of God. Paul has already made this crystal clear. We were dead, strangers, foreigners, outsiders, enemies, and hostile sinners who were without hope and without God. We were in **NO WAY** worthy to be called children of God. God did not call us because we were worthy, but because He is worthy to call whoever He chooses. God is not calling us to *BE* worthy; He is calling us to live in such a way that reflects the worth of our calling – to live in a way that reflects the honor & glory of being part of the family of God.

1. What does it *mean* for a Christian to walk worthy of this calling?

In 4:3, Paul says that one of the ways we walk in a manner that reflects the exalted position God has given us as chosen, adopted, children of God is by “endeavoring to keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace”.

What does this mean?

1. First of all, our calling is to **commit to community**.
 - **You** (ὁμᾶς) = plural [you all] (4:1). He’s not talking to individuals but to a covenant community.
 - **Unity** = involves other people (4:3)
 - **Bond of peace** = involves other people (4:3)
 - You cannot walk worthy of the calling that God has placed on your life outside of the local church. God has ordained the Christian life to be lived in covenant community with others. So, if you desire to walk worthy of the calling that God has placed on your life, you can start by covenanting yourself to a Bible-preaching, Christ-treasuring, mission-pursuing local church. Become an active, joyful, committed member of the local church.

³ Come along side; urge strongly; exhort; encourage.

2. Secondly, our calling is to **guard the unity** in the church. Notice that we are not called to *create* unity. Christian unity is not something that originates with us; it originates with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are not called to *create* it; **God** creates it. We are called to “*keep*” it. It already exists. Our Savior purchased our unity on the cross with His blood. Our calling is to guard it (**τηρέω**), to watch over it, to **keep** it. To protect it. To treasure it. To be on the lookout for anything that would threaten it. To invest our time and our prayers and our energy into strengthening it.

If you feel like you’ve been hearing a lot about this theme of unity and community, it’s because this is a major theme for Paul – in almost everything he writes. Paul wants you to know that you were made to live this life as one with other brothers and sisters in Christ (4:4–6).

- One body (*Church*)
- One Spirit (*God*)
- One hope (*Eternal Life*)
- One Lord (*Christ*)
- One faith (*Gospel*)
- One baptism (*One death, burial, resurrection*)
- One God & Father (*Monotheism*)
 - Above all
 - Through all
 - In **you** all.

This oneness is the work of God. And our calling is to live in the oneness that God has given to us – from His own heart, through the work of His Son, by the power of His Spirit who is alive within us.

2. **What does it *look like* for a church to walk in unity with one another?**
It looks like **3 things**: *lowliness (gentleness), longsuffering, & love.*

1. **Lowliness (or *humility*) and gentleness**⁴

- Why lowliness? Why humility? Why gentleness?
 - Because the opposite of lowliness/humility is pride. The opposite of gentleness is arrogance, and I don’t have to tell you how impossible it is for proud, arrogant people to walk in unity with others.
 - Proud people are easily offended. “*Who do you think you are talking to me this way? Don’t you know who I am?*”
 - Arrogant people have a hard time receiving help from others. “*I can do this myself, thank you very much.*”
 - Proud people exalt themselves above those around them. *Their ideas are better. Their needs are more important. Their contribution is more significant.*
 - Arrogant people make excuses for their sin. *They see themselves as above the law of God or the law of the land.*
 - **Examples**: (1) the lady who stepped in front of Liz in the checkout line – (2) or the car that drove on the shoulder of the road through rush hour.
 - Proud hearts feel entitled to special privileges and special treatment – and they see themselves as above those around them.
 - Most importantly, a proud, arrogant heart cannot repent. Only a heart that is broken & humbled can confess sin to God (or to others) and ask for forgiveness.

⁴ ταπεινοφροσύνης and πραύτητος

- The **question** we should be asking is, “*How do we cultivate lowliness & gentleness?*” **Answer:** by fixing our eyes on greatness. Looking at greatness doesn’t make you feel great; it makes you feel small. It doesn’t make you feel lofty; it makes you feel lowly.
 - I doubt I will ever forget the first time I stood at the edge of the **Grand Canyon**. As I gazed out across an endless horizon of breathtaking greatness, I felt profoundly small. It’s the same feeling I get every time I stand on the shore of the **ocean**.
 - **John Piper** is one of the most gift Bible teachers I know, and when I sit under his teaching, I don’t feel smart; I feel like a kindergartener who’s just learning how to read.
 - When you work next to **Garrett Toppe**, you don’t feel strong or skilled; you feel like a toddler who wants to go to the gym and lift weights with the big boys.
- The way to cultivate lowliness and gentleness in your heart is spend less time looking in the mirror and less time comparing yourself to people around you and more time gazing at the glory of God. Look at His power. Look at His authority. Look at how beautiful He is. Look at how loving He is. Look at how wise He is. Look at how patient He is. And look at how you are less than nothing compared to this God.⁵ When your heart is fixed on the glorious bigness of God, it changes the way you interact with people around you. You become less critical, less demanding, less self-absorbed, less offended. There’s a reason Jesus began the sermon on the mount by saying, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit*” and “*blessed are the meek*” (**Matt 5:3–5**).

2. Longsuffering (*patience*)⁶

- This word is a combination of two Greek words meaning “long” and “temper”, literally: “*long-tempered*”. In other words, you don’t react quickly or impulsively when your feelings get hurt or your spirit is stirred to anger. The Bible often speaks of God as being “*slow to anger*”,⁷ and this is what it means to be longsuffering.
 - It’s hard to walk in unity when we have a **short fuse** with one another. If you’ve ever played with **firecrackers**, you know just how dangerous a short fuse can be.
 - **Example:** I recently listened to a seminar of a highly influential speaker who walked away from the church because there was one Sunday when the pastor didn’t say something in his sermon that he felt the pastor should have said. It bothered him so much that (*instead of addressing this issue with the pastor or the elders*) he just left, and now he hosts seminars all over the country in which he is helping people *leave* the local church. All it took was one thing on one Sunday by one person, and he was done.
- Thank God that my Savior isn’t like this guy. I make 10,000 mistakes every single day, and His mercy is new every morning (**Lam 3:22–23**). This is what it takes for a church to walk in unity with one another.

3. Bearing with one another in love (ἀγάπη).

- I love this phrase because it reminds us that nobody in this room is perfect. If the church in Ephesus was filled with perfect people, they wouldn’t need to “*bear with one another*”. You only have to “*bear with one another*” when you and the people around you aren’t perfect. That was true for Ephesus, and that is true for North Center. We have every kind of problem represented in this room this morning: cranky people, critical people, careless people, cantankerous people... and we have a called to put up with one another in love!

⁵ Isa 40:17.

⁶ μακροθυμία

⁷ Exod 34:6; Num 14:18 – 20; Psa 86:15; Rom 2:4; 2 Pet 3:15.

CONCLUSION

We have a glorious high calling: you are a child of God.

Being part of the family of God is worthy of the very best we have to give. How?

- I. By committing to a church community
- II. By looking at the greatness of God so that we don't exalt ourselves over one another.
- III. By being patient with one another just as God is so patient with us.
- IV. By bearing with one another in love just as God has demonstrated His love toward us.

Go Low.

Go Long.

Go Love.