

Ephesians

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[0 : 00] Lord, a thousand years with a thousand tongues are not enough to praise your name.

! And yet you came and gave gifts to us. Lord, we can't take that in. Lord, you are better than everything that we chase. You're better than everything this world promises us. Lord, your promises are far better. Lord, I pray that today as we look to the obedience that you've commanded us, we would see it rightly as a promise. That you are active in our lives.

That you care about our hearts. That you are working to make us look like Christ, our elder brother. Lord, we love you and we praise you. Amen. We're all pretty familiar with loaded statements.

They're pretty prevalent in the political arena, so I'll just use a quick example there. When you add the word pro to the word life, it suddenly becomes charged with a lot of meaning. When you add the word pro to the word choice, it suddenly becomes loaded with a lot of meaning. And it's not just the I like to live or I like to have options that goes into that. There's a lot of background to it. And they're also sort of calls to action, aren't they? They're calls to support a particular cause. They're calls to change your thinking or vote a particular way. This isn't a sermon about those particular issues. This is just to introduce us to the idea that Paul is starting this, this passage with a really loaded statement.

He says, therefore. And just like those loaded statements, this loaded statement both has background and a call to action. Here's the background. And Paul says, therefore. He's making a transition between what God has done in chapters one to three to what we do in chapters four to six. The word therefore is loaded with the weight of all that we have covered up to this point. And it breaks down to essentially three truths and a three part mission. The three truths we encountered in chapter one.

What is the hope of our calling in Christ? What are the riches of our inheritance in Christ? And what is the power of Christ at work in us? Chapter two showed us how that last truth, God's power at work in us has worked itself out in us individually and as in the whole world, bringing together people from every walk of life into the church. And then in chapter three, we move from background to the call, to the call to action. Because our God is with us, we have a three part mission along with Paul to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, to bring to light the beauty of God's plan, and to make God's wisdom and glory known through the church. And so every instruction Paul gives us the rest of the book falls into one of those three missions and it's fanned into flame. We accomplish them with the power of hearts set on fire by the three truths, by the love of Christ, by the fact that God is with us. Paul says, I therefore, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

[4 : 29] Verse one there, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called is sort of the topic sentence, the thesis, if you will, for the rest of the book. Everything we're about to learn about what obedience we're called to, it's us walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called. And it's interesting here that he says walk. That should remind us of the beginning of chapter two. It stands in direct contrast to that passage where he said, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Following the course of this world, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But since then, God has changed our nature. We are no longer by nature children of wrath, but children of God. We are his temple. We are raised and seated with Christ. As one writer put it, we are trophies of grace, raised from the dead to form God's living temple. So let's act like it. This is our new walk. The first way we're going to do that, as this passage is focused on, is unity. How do we do unity? We just say, let's get unified.

Do we huddle up and bunker down? No. Humility starts, or excuse me, unity starts with humility, gentleness, and patience, and patience, Paul says. And they kind of naturally go together, don't they?

Humility is considering others more important than ourselves. Gentleness is basically acting that way, and patience is doing it for a long time. Paul uses a word here that we might be quick to pass over. He says, with all humility and gentleness. Not patience up to a point. Not humility until we're fed up. Not gentleness until someone no longer deserves it. Patience, humility, gentleness, all the way. Just like Jesus was humble all the way to the cross. This really convicted me as I was preparing this passage. When I saw the word all here, I immediately knew I wasn't living in a manner worthy of my call. I saw all humility and gentleness and knew I was only giving specifically in my life my wife some humility and gentleness. I've been putting her first, being kindly to her, up to a point.

And after that point, if I was frustrated, I'd start turning down the humility. I'd start turning down the gentleness. Start turning down the patience. And I can't say, well, my personality's just not very gentle. It's not an option that I have here. I'm called to obedience. But I think we often have this idea that our personalities are completely set in stone. And therefore, our actions are, I am who I am. I was born this way. Or my parents didn't do X, Y, or Z. Or maybe they did X, Y, or Z. Or maybe that I say, I can't help it. I'm insert nationality here. We say all these things as if whether or not I'm gentle is set in stone, as if I can't be changed.

[8 : 28] In fact, when I talked to Erin about this and told her that I was convicted, that I was only treating her with some gentleness, she said, well, you don't really have a gentle personality.

Now, it's really nice that she wanted to, you know, get me off the hook a bit. But I can't let her graciousness and her forgiveness excuse me from obedience.

If, chapter 119, God is powerfully at work in me, and if with that power, in chapter 2, verse 4, he raised me from the dead with Christ, and if with that power, in chapter 3, verse 16, he is strengthening me in my inner man because he's with me, I can't believe that he's powerful enough to conquer death in Christ and in me, and think that he's somehow unable to use that same power to grow gentleness in my heart. That doesn't compute. If God is working his incomparable power in my heart, then I have the strength to walk forward in faith and actually be humble and gentle and patient with my family, in the church, and everywhere I go. And so do you. Now, you may be so bogged down by a particular sin that you believe you're truly beyond help or hope. Or you might feel that your personality is so not patient or not gentle or not whatever, and think that you are beyond help and hope. But here's the thing. You were beyond help and hope. When, chapter 2, you were dead in your trespasses and sins. But God made you alive together with Christ. Hopeless and helpless situations should not scare us. Heart change is a lot of hard work. I'm not saying that it's not. But God stands with us to work in our hearts and to give us strength. If God raised me from the dead, seated me with Christ, gave me a mission, gave me the gift of the church, I don't get a pass on this because it's not part of my personality. My wife doesn't have to settle for a husband like me because we have a king like Jesus.

Amen? If we say that's just my personality and never expect heart change, we think far too much of how strong our hearts are and far too little of how powerful Christ is. So here's the question. How do I take advantage of God's power at work in me to grow in gentleness? I don't just grin and bear it when I'm frustrated. I don't bite my tongue when I'm feeling impatient. I don't just leave the room when I'm not feeling humble. That doesn't come from the heart. And humility, gentleness, patience, they're all about the heart. They're attitudes and expressions of a loving heart. So if that doesn't do it, how do I break the pattern? How do I obey? What did Paul pray for last week? Chapter 3, verse 18. Paul prayed that we would have strength. But he didn't ask that we would have strength over Satan, over the powers of the world, even over our own personalities, even over our own sin. What did he ask for? It wasn't for power over anything. He prayed that we might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That's the power of God at work in us. So how does that help me in gentleness? Well, here's how those glorious truths of God's incomparable love, of the incredible truths of chapter 1 and how they've worked out in chapter 2, here's how they come into play. First, it's hard to read chapters 1 and 2 and think that it's all about us. And come away thinking anything other than, well, I guess I'm not the most important person after all. Chapter 1 shows us a God who is all-powerful and

sovereign, who works everything according to the purpose of his will in Christ.

[13:36] Not some things or most things, but all things. Then in chapter 2, we learn that we are dead in sins and doomed. Christ alone can save us by his grace. Look at the contrast Paul set up.

An all-powerful God works everything according to his purposes. You and I lived in our own deadness, in our own utter need for life-saving help. It's impossible to read these two chapters and come away with saying anything but, God, you're in charge. Christ is my only hope. I have to humble myself before him. So just contemplating what God has done for us in his love humbles us. That's the first step towards a heart that acts out in humility. Second, since I have been raised with Christ, because Jesus put me first, I have no need to put myself first. Since I have a glorious inheritance waiting for me, I don't have to be cautious with what I sacrifice for my family, for my church, for my neighbor. And that's not selfishness. It's not saying, wait, who's looking out for me? Oh, Christ is? Okay, now I can be humble and gentle and patient with people. It's not saying that. It's about what the hymn we're about to sing at the end of the service.

We're going to say, how can it be that thou, my God, has died for me? And with the gladness that that plants in our hearts, we can start joyfully putting others first.

[15:33] You see how the rich truths of the first three chapters actually produce gentleness, humility, patience in us?

What he, what God has already done in chapters one to three actually equips me for obedience.

Not humility until I'm fed up. Not gentleness until they no longer deserve it.

Not patience within reason. Humility all the way. Just like Jesus was humble all the way to the cross for me.

Just like Jesus is humble enough to call me, me, his brother. And stand beside me, giving me strength to be humble and gentle and patient too.

So in that moment, when you are tempted away from humility, away from gentleness, away from patience, you know three things. You know Jesus made you his own so that just as he has risen from the grave, he has made you alive.

[16:41] It reminds you that he is ultimate. You are not. And it humbles you. You know the very same power is at work in your heart today to do good works as he has prepared for you to do in this moment.

If you trust him to save you, you can trust him to change your heart. You know that you are his temple.

You are not alone. Your God is with you. In the very moment of temptation to strengthen you. Step out into obedience with faith that he will strengthen you to honor him.

And each one of us is responsible for obeying this passage. So which characteristic here do you need most work on?

Humility? Gentleness? Patience? Unity? Go back to the first three chapters. Just like I showed you with gentleness. Trace out how these truths free you.

[17:53] Encourage you. And strengthen you. To walk in a manner worthy of your great calling. Now, we've spent a considerable amount of time on the first three verses.

That's because when we get humility, gentleness, and patience right, we automatically get unity right. And that's what the rest of the passage is focusing on.

We'll get that right too. So Paul continues saying, verse 4, There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul hasn't shifted gears here. The church unity depends on everything that we just said about gentleness, humility, and patience.

Without those virtues, the church won't be unified. But why is unity so important? Why is Paul starting our obedience? Chapter 4 begins a whole host of things for obedience in us.

[19:07] Why does he start with unity? You remember how back in chapter 3, verse 10, Paul says, God's glory is made known to the whole universe through the church?

That's why unity is so important. If we act against the unity of the church, it undermines the witness of God and his greatness that the church gives to the world.

Even more, Paul said back in chapter 2, that the power that God used to unify Jews and Gentiles, people from every walk of life, into the church is the same power that he used to raise you and me from the dead.

And so if we mar, if we disregard the unity God is working in us, what does it say about the life that he is working in us if they come from the same place?

So unity is a matter of God's glory. It actually points back to our risen life with Christ. Paul grounds the unity here around the word one.

[20 : 31] One body, one spirit, one hope that belongs to our call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. What does that all point to? What is it focused on?

Christ. And that actually helps us figure out how to achieve unity. We don't get unified and then do ministry.

First we look to God that gets us unity. Then we can do ministry. Even though some of us are sitting on that side of the room, some of us are sitting on the opposite side of the room, if we all stood up and started walking towards San Francisco, we would be very, very much unified.

Even though we're on opposite sides of the room, we would be moving in exactly the same direction. You wouldn't be able to determine on a compass the difference. So if we all move towards one God, one Lord, one spirit, we're going to be walking in the same direction.

That's unity. We don't huddle up together first. We run to Christ first and in that there is unity. We don't start with unity. We start with Jesus.

[21 : 51] And our focus on him is what will give us unity. So let that be our focus today and every day. Paul continues in verse 7, saying, But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. Do you remember how we read Psalm 68 earlier?

That's what Paul's quoting from here. But strangely, he doesn't quote it right. In fact, he quotes it opposite to what Psalm 68 says.

Here's Psalm 68, 18. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men. And here's Paul in Ephesians 4, 8.

When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. Did you notice the change? Paul has changed received gifts to give gifts.

[22 : 59] Did he misread the Psalm? Did he copy it down wrong? Is he just messing with us? No.

Psalm 68 is a psalm of victory. It's a picture of God marching triumphantly into the city with a ticker tape parade after vanquishing his enemies.

And he rightly receives gifts from men. But Paul is showing us that Jesus turned everything upside down. And the one to whom all gifts are due gave us gifts.

Wow. Wow. I hope Christ's humility, giving us gifts when we should be giving him gifts, prompts humility in your heart.

I hope it prompts single-hearted devotion to God. I hope it sets your heart aflame with affection for Christ. He led captivity captive.

[24 : 06] What does that mean? Paul's using captivity as a shorthand for all of God's enemies. Those enemies have held God's people captive.

Our own sin, death, the devil, they all have in some way oppressed us. We've already seen in Ephesians what God has done with sin and death.

He's taken them captive. And we'll see the devil's end before we finish the book of Ephesians.

There are two kinds of leaders.

Those that lead from the front, those that lead from the back. We find that those leaders who lead from the front, blazing a trail for their friends, are unifying leaders.

They're rallying leaders. They're inspirational leaders. In these verses, Paul's reminding us that Jesus leads us from the front. He didn't capture captivity and win the battle by staying in heaven and pushing a button.

[25 : 16] Though he could have. No, he led from the front. He descended. Paul means here either to the earth or maybe to the grave. And from here, from our position, he conquered death.

He conquered sin. He conquered Satan. And only then did he pave a road to heaven so that he could take us there. That's leading from the front. So the God who should receive all gifts came and gave gifts to his church.

But those gifts aren't jewels or cars or vacation homes. What are they? Verse 11. He gave them, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

And until we attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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 cunningness, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

What did he give? What gifts did he give? He gave tools for growing character that looks like him. They aren't power tools.

[26 : 39] They aren't something you find in a workshop. They're not books. They're not tomes. They're people. They're the people in the church.

So, I'm God's gift to the church. Hardly. What do you notice about this list? The apostles and the prophets are extraordinary.

But evangelists, missionaries, shepherds, elders, teachers, teachers, are very ordinary.

The church is full of them. God builds up his people in extraordinary ways with very ordinary things. You and me and his church. Evangelism, the ministry of the word and the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The things that theologians call the ordinary means of grace.

[27 : 44] A life rhythm centered around God. the preaching of his word. Fellowship and discipleship of his church. And the sacraments. Paul isn't hoping here that we have blinding visions or ecstatic experiences.

His focus isn't on spiritual mountaintops. It's on everyday life. He expects that we'll grow into maturity as Christians, standing in unity, growing in our understanding of the scriptures and love for God, and standing firm in the gospel through lives that have a rhythm of scripture, sacrament, discipleship.

It's not flashy, but just like fitness or investing or marriage, it's about consistency, not flash. I want to point out verses 11 and 12.

The apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers have a job to do. Equip the saints for the work of ministry. My job is not first to do ministry.

My job is first to equip the church to minister. My job, along with the other elders, is to feed and serve and lead this church to be ministers of the gospel, all of us.

[29 : 07] What does that look like? Well, it starts with humility, gentleness, and patience. That's why we spent so much time in the first three verses today.

And there's more to come. We're to equip the church for all the works of ministry. And that's the rest of the letter of Ephesians. But before we conclude, pause, one last reminder.

Verse 15. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.

one last time, Paul focuses our attention on Jesus. We're growing up to look like Jesus, our elder brother. We hold together as the church through Jesus, the bridegroom.

We work together with the strength Jesus provides. We praise him with our lips and with our lives. Jesus, will you pray with me?

[30 : 26] Lord, Lord, I pray that our focus would be on your beloved son, Jesus.

And that is that as we pursue him, as we seek him out, as we submit more of our lives to him, that you would grow in us his character.

That we would be humble, gentle, patient people who seek to make your majesty known through the unity of the church. I pray these things in Christ's name and for his sake.

Amen. Amen.