

With All Humility

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[0 : 0 0] well let's turn back to that passage that we read continuing on and what where we left off some weeks ago some months ago in fact Ephesians chapter 4 and I want us to begin to look the words that you'll find at the opening of the chapter I therefore a prisoner for 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 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 well as I said we're going now to turn to the final chapters of the letter to the Ephesians and in them we're going to be Lucas looking at some very practical material as I said before it's a no holds barred imperative on how to live the Christian lives in Christian life practically in our homes in our places of work and in church and in fact the church is woven all the way through these chapters it never it's never far away from the mind of the apostle he's always concerned about the church as it was in those days as it was growing from its inception on the day of Pentecost and he's wanting more than anything else to see the church growing stronger and stronger as we read in part of that chapter but the church has a bearing on the way we live our lives in ordinary day-to-day lives in our homes in our places of work it has a bearing on our attitudes and Paul is going to be looking at dishonesty he's going to be looking at lies he's going to be looking at theft many of these people who were converted they were converted from a life that was full of corruption and lies and deceit he's going to be looking at anger he's going to be looking at the kind of things we laugh at in chapter 5 let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place he says but instead let there be thanksgiving and so on it doesn't get more practical than that does it and it doesn't sit very comfortably in today's world or in any world but it's essential that we tackle some of these great issues which are practical issues and which we come across as Christians young Christians older Christians continuously and it's essential to put first God's word and how God wants us to live in order that we might be witnesses and living epistles known and read of men he's going to be looking at our attitude to alcohol be not drunk with wine but be filled with the spirit and then there's a thorny subject in chapter 5 later on of husbands and wives and wives and husbands in other words how we live in our homes and then there are children and parents and their relationships slaves and masters and we don't need to think that just because we don't have slaves and masters in today's world that these words have no relevance to us there's the workplace and our relationship to our employers and the relationship

between employers and employees and how we live in that environment the Bible is immensely practical in the kind of guidance it gives us as to how we are to live to bring glory to Jesus Christ that's the all-important thing from the life of a Christian does my life does my manner of living bring glory to Jesus Christ and then lastly there's the armor of God I'm sure that many of us are familiar with the elements that make up the armor of God and how essential it is to live every day wearing it and using it and so on that's there then just a brief resume of chapters 4 5 and 6 I don't know how long it'll take us but I'm sure that it will arouse your interest because we can relate to every single one of these issues from the very beginning to the very end every one of us tonight can relate to every one of these issues there's nothing in what I'm going to be saying over the next few weeks which is irrelevant to our practical lives well now we've taken a look ahead of chapters 4 to 6 but let's recap then because it's been a few months since we looked at this letter and let's see what we've already seen you'll remember that Paul thinks of salvation that's the great theme that filled that dominated the life of the apostle Paul his salvation from the moment that he met Jesus on the road to Damascus his salvation was everything to him and he could never ever lose sight from that moment onwards of what God had done for him in Jesus Christ and he thinks of it in different ways he thinks of it first of all in terms in chapter 1 of his calling or his election he goes all the way back to before the world was created and he describes his salvation in terms of

God's call even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him then he calls our salvation in chapter in verse 7 redemption in which Christ by his death on the cross he has forgiven our sins by his sacrifice and then he calls it something else he calls it our inheritance in chapter 1 and verse 11 and he goes on to tell us that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and then all of that is before that great prayer for the for the Ephesians that they may know the hope of their calling the riches of their inheritance and the greatness of God's power in their lives then in chapter 2 of course he describes two things in their own experience two things and you can summarize the passage from from 1 to 10 in just one sentence he describes the depths from which they were saved as well as the height to which they were saved he tells us you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked Kenny I was mentioning this this morning following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air that's the depths from which they were saved they were slaves they were without hope and without God in the world they were hopeless without any light whatsoever but then in verse 4 comes the the turning point as we all know but God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses he made us alive together with Christ he raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ

Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus now what a contrast there is the depths of despair and darkness and sinfulness from which these people were taken and then there is the enormity of the height heaven itself is where our belonging is if we are in Jesus this evening and so there's he makes that very clear now chapter 2 and chapter 3 describes the grand plan of God did you know that God is carrying out an enormous awesome plan for this world it's greater than any plan or any construction that you'll ever come across in this world and it's going to take longer than any plan or construction in this world he is the great architect you want to think of a great building and today's world has seen the most fantastic buildings being constructed if you want to build a great building you have to have an architect who designs the building but you also have to have an engineer you also have to have a contractor and God is both the architect and the engineer and the contractor of this great enormous the greatest plan and the greatest construction that has ever taken place in the history of this world is going on right now as we speak are you aware of that are you living within that plan because to be a Christian that's what it means to be part of this great project which God in chapters 2 and chapter 3 describe that great project there are great there are places in the world tonight where the most the most awesome buildings are going up I was watching a little bit of a program the other day about a documentary about one of these great towers that are being built in China today and it really is you know you talk about the ancient pyramids and all the rest of it and you think well there were they think that some of the ancient buildings were they had technology that we don't know well that's as may be but some of the buildings that are going up today are absolutely awesome they really are and I say that without a moment of hesitation modern technology has given rise to the most fabulous constructions now you can say what you like about well the pride of man and all the rest of it perhaps that there's well that's in everything but what I see in these constructions is the cleverness of man the ability of man and when I see the ability of man

I think of God I think of his creator because man's ability reflects God's greatness man would never be as great as he was if it wasn't for that there's a God and every time I go to these great cities of the world and see these incredible skyscrapers you wonder how in the world did anyone manage to get these things erected and you think that's the greatness of God the great God has given us this gift this ability this function this cleverness so that we can do that and I'm no hesitation whatsoever in saying that it reflects to me the glory and the greatness of God well anyway I was watching this program about the construction of one of these things built being built in China at the moment this is like nothing the world has ever seen before and it's involved years of painstaking work design first of all and then in engineering because you have to have engineers because there's no use in having a design if it's going to fall down in two years time can have the cleverest design in the world if it can't stand an earthquake then it's going to there's going to be a huge catastrophe and it's going to fall down and then there has to be a contractor who will see that all the components are made the steel and the concrete and there has to be a foundation and it all takes years and years to construct and there are thousands of people involved in its various stages of construction and very often these people can't see what they're doing they don't they don't know they've never seen the design that they're working towards for example you take somebody who's driving a digger down in the foundation the building hasn't even been constructed yet and that person is driving a digger and he's day by day by day he's digging and digging tons of earth away and there are people pouring the concrete they don't know what they're doing they're working they're doing what they're told but they see nothing of the finished product it's as if they're kind of working blind if you like and they believe that the very fact that they're working means that one day the building will be erected but it's going to take years and years and years now you imagine that these people were working with it for no money but for the glory of the person who designed the building because they loved the person who designed the building and they were working out of love that's what we are tonight that's what the church is that's what the apostle Paul is and that's what he sees he's given he's given the ability to be able to perceive the greatness and the glory of what God is doing and he's saying to the people in Ephesus don't ever lose sight of that you can't see it you're like one of these guys who's driving the digger right and he's down in the depths of the earth he's digging out a foundation or say the people who are making the steel they're away miles away in a yard somewhere and they're welding away and testing the welds and endlessly putting these great structures together they haven't seen the finished product and maybe some of them will never see the finished product and that's the same with the church today we believe that one day God will complete this great project in building his kingdom because he has said it

[13 : 43] I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it yet we haven't seen it ourselves and none of us will ever see it unless the Lord comes of course and that depends on whether you believe in that whether you believe that that's going to happen immediately depends on your interpretation of certain parts of the Bible but the chances are that in this world we will not see the finished product until the resurrection and only then will we see what God was working at for all these thousands of years but we know what's going on right now as we speak and every one of us has an involvement in that work and every one of us goes about that involvement because of our love for the designer and the contractor and the engineer who's all one God hasn't subcontracted any of this to any other person or any other company but he has involved us all some people in the foundational generation the generation way back in the apostles the day of the apostle Paul and then as it built up as the first site of the building appeared and each stage having its own responsibilities and each stage having its own difficulties that's the way Paul pictures the church and what he's saying in chapter 4 is this that there's a sense in which you're already there you already belong to this kingdom and it's essential that you behave and that you live in a particular way and here's the way he puts it now listen to this because this is the nub of everything that he says in these few verses in verse 1 in other words he's starting with you when he comes to give instructions about how to live the Christian life you have to start with yourself but in a moment you're going to see that in the next breath he's talking about how we relate to one another within that kingdom of God which is the church and this is going to be our subject as we start off these chapters in other words what we're talking about is this if I can put it in this way me and my church that's the subject in this chapter me and my church you can't talk about the church without talking about me because I'm part of the church and don't ever think about the church as being someone else don't ever think of the church please as being the minister well that's his job that's his world it's not it's your world it's your church it's your family it's your involvement and that's where many of us go wrong when we begin to think about the church we kind of extract ourselves and we look at it from the sidelines but that's wrong that's not the way the apostle Paul saw things at all he talked about our involvement in the church because he saw that without you there is no church it's as simple as that the church is comprised of each person who follows Jesus and look at what he says he says first of all

I therefore a prisoner for the Lord now he said that before he said it in chapter 3 for this reason I Paul a prisoner for Jesus Christ on behalf of you Gentiles now why is he repeating himself because he is aware of the hardships and the frustrations and the stresses that many of those Christians are going to have to face just as you and I have to face the difficulties of living the Christian life and many of these we'll see as we go along now here is his way of saying I am not asking you to do anything or to face any kind of hardship that I am not prepared to face myself this is leadership from the front and look at what he's saying also that he's not saying my being a prisoner is a temporary blip in God's plan and as soon as I get out of prison then God's plan can continue he's not saying that at all he's saying the opposite he's saying

God's plan his project his church involves me and requires me to be in this prison now imagine that you would think it would be the opposite wouldn't you especially somebody like the apostle Paul who was such a linchpin in the church in the first century there was nobody with so much influence as the apostle Paul and yet he's saying it's all it's all my influence is going to come to it's going to come to nothing because I am a well I shouldn't have said it come to nothing it didn't come to nothing but you know what I'm saying that it's all going to come to an end my life is going to come to an end because this is how I'm going to die as a prisoner for the Lord and this is where I am content to be because this is where the Lord has placed me and I want you to think tonight about where

God has placed you as the first step of the future without wishing you were somewhere else without saying oh I wish my circumstances were different but I want you to think tonight God has placed me where I am in the place I am with the family I live in the community I live in with circumstances now what does he want me to do within these circumstances I therefore he says a prisoner for the Lord I'm not coming at you he says from a position of strength I'm coming at you from a position of weakness and if God can use me here in this prison cell where it's miserable utterly miserable and where I run the risk of all kinds of diseases and sicknesses and cold and all kinds of horrible things if God can use me here if this is where God wants me to be then you can do the same and that's what the Lord Jesus of course meant when he said that if anyone would follow me he must take up he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me the Christian life is not a life of grandeur it's a life of suffering and humility and service it's service to others now what does he say he says this to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called and that's it because if you and I this evening have been taken from being dead in trespasses and sins and if God has saved us if one day we were following the course of the world following the prince of the power of the air without God or without hope in the world and if God has raised us look at what he's done he's raised us together with Christ on Wednesday night we were thinking about our union with Jesus Christ as being the the key to understanding what God has done in us and if then

God has taken us and he has raised us together with Jesus and he has ascended us seated us with him in the heavenly places in Jesus chapter 2 verse 6 look at that again he's raised us and he has seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus how can that not mean a difference to the way in which I live in this world it can't possibly be that if I have been seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that I can live the same kind of life using the same kind of language using the same kind of under the same principles of selfishness and deceit and lies and all the rest of it that I see in the world around me I've got to be different and I've got to live in a manner worthy of the calling which you have been called and the first thing that people look at when they find out that you're a Christian is they look at the way in which you live your life they don't look at how many communions you go to they're not interested in that they're interested in your attitude to them your care for them your your response when things get tough in ordinary day-to-day life they're concerned and that's the way in which

[22 : 14] God uses us as his witnesses now then what does he say he goes on to talk about the various elements in such a life within the first word he talks about is the word humility and closely following on his gentleness and patience now we're going to see in a few moments time that that humility and gentleness and patience they own they can only operate within the context of our relationships with other people we'll see that in a few moments time but let's look at the words in in the first place the very first thing is humility humility first humility second humility last and these words are as relevant to me today as they were to the apostle Paul and they're as relevant to the oldest Christian here because you never completely fully learn it do you I don't I wish that I knew what this word really meant in my day-to-day living but when

I discover that I haven't got there that's all the more impetus for me to work on it that's what Paul wants us to do and that's what Christ wants us to do to work on it I urge you he says to walk live a life with all humility now what does humility mean it means lowliness lowliness it means a position of servitude in which we see ourselves as servants slaves if you like if you want to use that term now if you want to if you want if you ever want to find out the meaning of a word of course you go to a dictionary but then once you do that you very often want to find out an example of how the word operates in practice and when you want to find out how this word operates in practice you go to the bible but you don't go to some of the great figures of the bible if you want to if you want an example of patience who do you go to you go to job if you want an example of faith the greatest example of faith in the bible who do you go to you go to abraham if you want an example of bravery or courage who do you go to you can go to several people in the bible you can go to samson or you can go to david or some of the great heroes of the bible so there are all these people you can go to for an example of all of these great qualities but if you want an example of humility you go into heaven itself and the great description in philippians chapter 2 of how jesus being god himself who though he was in the form of god did not count equality with god something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore says paul let this mind be in you that was in christ jesus that's the starting point and if we don't think that's important proceed no further in how to live as a christian that is the very first and foundational element in living a life for jesus humility how can you not be humble when you think of where god has taken you from many of you can remember when you didn't believe you can remember the kind of life that you lived many of us who who came to faith in jesus as young people you know i can't hardly remember my life before i came to faith i came to faith as a young teenager it's hard for me to remember the kind of life i lived and that was before i i did anything reckless or anything like that you hear of other people but you know what gets me when i think about my life i often wonder what kind of person i would be if i wasn't a christian i often wonder where i'd be tonight if i hadn't come to the lord at the age of whenever early teens i often wonder what kind of choices i would have made my life would be totally different completely different i know that because the choices at least the good choices i'm not saying i've lived a perfect life i haven't i've made very many foolish mistakes as we all have

but the choices the big choices have made christ has reigned in these choices like praying over what job that you're going to do and like praying over who you're going to marry and where you're going to live and all of these great choices now you wouldn't be doing these things if you weren't a christian and so i just wonder i often wonder now if that doesn't humble you i don't know what does to think of i am what i am tonight and you are if you're a believer tonight you are what you are because of god and nothing more you can't look down on anybody else you have no right to criticize anybody else because you don't know you you can only thank the lord for the grace in which he has shown you his kindness and his favor and his love in christ jesus is that not correct and that's what we pray for those who aren't christians tonight that they too will come to see that christ is the only way and the truth and the life and that they too will come under his love and come to respond to his invitation to come to know him as their savior and that applies to you tonight if you don't know him come to him and come to him because he asks you to and because he commands you to and because there is simply no other other alternative so that's humility then how can we be anything else and i confess to you tonight that that it doesn't that it doesn't work the way it should do in my life humility neither does gentleness and neither does patience these two words are more of the manner the humility is the is the condition in which which every christian tonight should ask for but gentleness and patience are the manner in which we live every day responding to the stresses and to the frustrations and to the problems than which we come up against sometimes our lives are relatively straightforward and easy and when we're on our own we don't need very much patience and we don't need very much gentleness i reckon i would be the most humble gentle patient person in the world if it wasn't for other people and that's the truth isn't it we would be if i lived on an island by myself there's nobody else in the world then i wouldn't have a problem with humility i wouldn't have a problem with with patience or gentleness it wouldn't be an issue but here's the test and here's the test that paul very quickly brings in because it's within the context of other people that we have to exercise our humility and our gentleness and our patience and it's as we do so that the world watches us and looks at us and they see the reality of the love of god in jesus christ the world outside is a world without hope and without god in the world a world that is trying to get its own way in which each person is trying to get one over the other person where there is resentment and bitterness and hatred where there's jealousy and conceit that's the kind of world that we live in and but the christian has to be different from operating on the entirely the opposite principles they tell me that the word humility was a despised word in the greek world that it was somebody if you called somebody humble well when we say that so and so is humble by that we we are complimenting that person we are describing that person in positive terms but apparently in the roman world if you called somebody humble it was like despising them couldn't stand the person that was humble it was a slave that was humble but paul is

reversing that he's saying that's the very thing you need to be and we all need to be the very opposite to the way that the world operates and it's in that difference in that contrast that Jesus promises to make us witnesses for him so me and my church I've touched I've just simply dipped into the me humble gentle patience we're now next week God willing going to ask how does that operate in the church and you'll notice that in verses one to verse six there are two things that first of all there is the unity of the church of God one body verse four one spirit just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call one Lord one faith one baptism and so on so there's the unity of the church of God I'm going to ask the question the thorny question why is it if the Bible describes the church as one church one body one spirit one hope one baptism one faith why is the church so divided that's a question everybody's asked isn't it there's nobody here tonight that hasn't asked that question neither is there anybody here tonight that hasn't asked the question of what is wrong what has gone wrong with the church what kind of church did Paul envisage when he wrote these words and when he expressed his love for the church so much there's no question whatsoever about Paul's commitment to the church he thought church breathed and ate and drank church it was close to his heart all the time he gave all his he gave every moment of his active life to the well-being of the people of God now I want to ask this question how much thought do you give to your church how to what extent does your church take up your thinking and your efforts and your time and your commitment and your prayer and when you match it up with the place that it had in the life of the apostle something wrong isn't there something's gone wrong I'm going to ask what is it what is it what does the apostle mean when he talks about the church because remember we're living two thousand years into the future as far as the apostle was concerned we're living in a different era in the church the church was a very different place altogether from what it is today and yet the principles the function of the church surely has to be the same there is only one church says Paul one church one body one spirit what is that function what's the difference between a good church and a bad church what's the difference between a church that does what it should do and lives as it should do and a church that doesn't and of course all the time we're asking that painful question well what about here what about my church and if you're a visitor your church where you come from these are important questions these are not just the subject of youth fellowship arguments as they are I don't know how many arguments I've ever had in youth fellowship and student groups about what's wrong with the church hundreds of them probably and that's good it's an important question because it's important to the

Lord his people how important is it I will build my church he says and the gates of hell will not prevail against it husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church listen if Christ loves the church tonight what place does it have in my affections and in my heart that's the question I want to ask in the next couple of weeks or so and I want to ask if I don't love the church as I should why and what can I do to make sure to make sure that that is reversed so I'm not going to pretend that we're perfect at all that wasn't perfect in Paul's day it's never been perfect since but what I am going to say is that when we come across imperfection God requires us to act and to do whatever is necessary to build up as we eager as we as we exercise our eagerness to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace so we're going to be asking some practical questions some perhaps painful questions but hopefully questions by which God will glorify his own name amongst us in our own minds in our own hearts and in our town let's pray Father in heaven we ask that your word will speak to us clearly and powerfully we ask Lord for those who by way of not having come to faith in Jesus are not truly in fellowship with you and in fellowship with other believers we pray that even as we go through these passages that you will draw them in and draw them to see that they are missing something vital in their hearts and in their lives we pray that you will speak clearly to each one of us and forgive our sin in Jesus name amen