

Ephesians 4:1-6

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[0:00] page 977. We are looking at Ephesians 4, 1 through 6 tonight. And I think this is an appropriate passage for the new year. The new year is a time of looking back and looking forward, sort of a good time to think about the past year, to think about the sorrows and trials that we've endured, the joys and triumphs that we can celebrate, and think about God's faithfulness through it all. And it's also a time to look forward to what is ahead, perhaps to make resolutions to be different in some way or another, or simply to consider who God has called us to be as we look into the future. And this passage comes right at the middle of Ephesians, and it's really looking back on the first half of Ephesians and looking forward to the second half. And the first half of Ephesians, as we'll look at in a minute, is all about what God's done for us in the past, and how he's been faithful to us in the past. And the second half is all about who we're called to be as we walk into the future. So I think this passage is entirely appropriate for that sort of new year's theme. So let's read the passage. We're reading chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. This is Paul writing to the Ephesians, and the Holy Spirit. We'll pray that the Holy Spirit uses this passage to speak to us as well. So Paul writes this,

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.

Let's pray. Holy Spirit, we thank you for inspiring the Apostle Paul to write these words to the Ephesian church so long ago, and we pray that you would speak through these words to us tonight and apply them to our lives for your glory. Amen.

So three things we're going to see in our passage tonight. Number one, we have a calling. Second, we need to walk in a manner worthy of that calling. And third, we'll see where we get the power to do so, where we get the strength and power and the basis of walking worthy of our calling.

So first, we have a calling. Notice how often Paul uses the language of calling here. Verse one, he says, the calling to which you have been called. Verse four, you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. It almost sounds redundant, right? He's using the word twice in each sentence.

[3:16] But the point is, he's emphasizing this theme of a calling. Now, what is the call that he's talking about? Well, he's pointing back to what he's already talked about in chapters one through three.

Okay, so we're going to sort of just do a skim overview of chapters one through three. If you look at chapters one through three, they begin and end with praise and prayer.

So chapter one, three to 14 is just praising God for all the spiritual blessings that we have in Jesus Christ. The rest of chapter one is a prayer that we would come to know God more. Chapter three, verse 14 to 19 is a prayer that I just used as the basis for a prayer earlier in the service, that we would know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the love of Christ deep in our hearts. And then chapter three, 20 to 21 ends with praise. So it's like praise, prayer, middle, prayer, praise.

So it's even symmetrical. So the point is, it begins and ends with praise and prayer. And then in the middle, it tells us what we have to praise God for. And who is this God that we're praying to?

And what he's done for us? Chapter two, which is really the middle section, Paul says, remember what God has done for you. Beginning of chapter two, he says, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

[4:49] In other words, you were in bondage to the world, the flesh and the devil. But he says, now God made you alive with Christ. He saved you by his grace and he's made you a new creation in Christ Jesus so that you can carry out the works that he's called you to do. Second half of chapter two, he begins, he says, remember you were separated from Christ. This is verse 11 and 12, alienated from God's people, having no hope and without God in the world. And he says, but now through Jesus Christ, you've been brought near to God. You've been reconciled to God and to one another, included in God's family. And you're now building blocks in the temple that God is building and dwelling in by his Holy Spirit. And in, uh, and that's, this is the call that Paul is talking about. Chapter one, verse 18, he actually uses that word. He says, he prays that our hearts would be in the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened that we would know the hope to which he has called you. So the call here is the call to belong to Jesus Christ. And, and Paul's speaking about this as an accomplished fact.

God has called us and brought us in to his family and given us all these spiritual blessings. Um, that we've been called out of bondage to sin and death and the devil to belong to Jesus Christ called out of envy and strife and anxiety and restlessness to be at peace with God. He says, Christ is our peace. And we're called out of a self-centered way of life to be in harmony with God's plans for his whole creation. So this is the calling that we have. Paul says, remember this calling. And Paul speaks of this calling as an accomplished fact. He doesn't, it's not like he's saying God has put out a call for job applications. And now you have to prove that you're worthy to be accepted in his kingdom. No, it's more like a father speaking to his child and saying, I have called you. I have chosen you. I have adopted you. I have included you in my family and I will never leave you or forsake you. In fact, he uses that idea of adoption in chapter one to describe what God has done for us through Christ. And so now he's saying, now you need to live like you're part of this new family of God's family where you belong forever and I will never disown you. And so it's both an undeserved privilege, this calling that we have, as well as it's also an ongoing responsibility.

And so chapters one through three remind us this is an undeserved privilege, this calling that we have. It's never something that we will merit or pay God back for or deserve more. It's an undeserved privilege, completely undeserved, but it's also an ongoing responsibility. Paul says we need to live as representatives of God's family now. So that brings us to our second point. We need to walk in a manner worthy of that calling or appropriate to that calling. Verse one, Paul says, I therefore, now that word therefore means it's important what comes before it, right? It's based on chapters one through three. We've just talked about that. So therefore, on the basis of all that, what God has done for us in Christ, I therefore a prisoner for the Lord. That's a bit like Paul saying, you know, I'm really serious about this. I'm not joking here. I'm in prison because I actually believe this. So I'm not just sort of throwing out an interesting theory and thinking, you know, see what do you think about this?

Right? It's not like just trying to get published in an academic journal, right? Which doesn't necessarily mean you believe any of it. Just means it'll get published. Sorry, it doesn't, no slight against PhD students. I respect PhD students. I've never wanted to do a PhD, but I respect you all. Keep persevering and glorify the Lord through your work. All right. But Paul's saying, I'm a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ. He's saying, I'm serious about this. Okay, listen, listen up. And he says, I urge you.

Notice the earnestness of this language. He says, I urge you with all, verse two, with all humility and gentleness. Verse three, eager, be eager to maintain unity. Do you see the sincerity and, and urgency of these earnestness of these words? It's like Paul is saying, work at this with all your might. Don't be half-hearted. Be all in. Don't sort of step back, wait and see what other people seem to be doing around you, and then sort of follow their lead or don't, you know, try to mostly fit in and not rock the boat. Don't try to live with one foot, trying to be, follow the ways of this world and be approved by this world and one foot seeking to follow God, because that's like having one foot on the up escalator and one foot on the down escalator. And you're just going to get twisted around. Paul says, no, be all in. I urge you, do this with all you have.

[10:47] Now notice Paul doesn't just say, I command you. He could say, I'm an apostle. God's given me authority as apostle. I'm commanding you. Or he could say, probably what many of us would be inclined to say, hey, I'm your buddy. You know, here's an idea. You can take it or leave it. Of course, it's ultimately up to you. You know, you can do, you can, you can do what you want.

I'll love you either way. But Paul, Paul doesn't go either of those ways. He doesn't overemphasize his authority and he doesn't simply emphasize his commonality with them. He says, no, I urge you.

He's saying there's a purpose that God has called us together for. He uses the same phrase in Romans 12 verse one and first Thessalonians four verse one. Therefore, I urge you. And both of those are sort of the transition from praise and prayer and what God has done in the past to practical Christian living now and in the future. So at least three of Paul's letters have this very similar structure as Ephesians, but that's a side point. All right. I urge you walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Now, what does that mean? I think what it means is he's saying you're calling from God is something that is precious. And so live in a way that reflects how precious that is.

You've received an undeserved and costly and eternally significant gift. Don't live as if that costly gift is only sort of important. Live as if that is so important and so valuable and so beautiful. Walk in a manner appropriate to or worthy of your calling.

Live in a way that reflects the supreme worth of Christ. Live in a way that's an appropriate response to what God has done in Christ. Live in a way that's an appropriate accompaniment to praise and prayer. You know, it's interesting that Paul begins chapters one through three. It's not just telling us what God has done for us. It's praising God and it's praying. And it's sort of like Paul is saying, you've come here tonight, right? We just sang all these songs about God's majesty and crown him with many crowns and you are good. And he is the, the, the wondrous mystery that he has become flesh and dwelt among us and died and risen again to save us. It's like Paul is saying, live the rest of your life dancing to that music. Like you've heard the music of the gospel, let it resonate and live in your heart and live in a way that's, that reflects the music of the gospel of grace.

[14:06] Now, before we focus on verse one through six tonight, let me just give you a little preview of where we're going in chapter four through six, the rest of the book, because it's all about what Paul says in verse one, walking in a manner worthy of God's calling. And so Paul begins the first half of chapter four, Paul begins by focusing on our relationships with each other within the church, in the body of Christ.

And tonight we're looking at unity in the body of Christ. Next week we're looking at diversity and maturity in the body of Christ. Now all those three things fit together. Then he goes on to our personal lives and talks about putting off the old and putting on the new.

Then in chapter five, he goes on to our interactions, not just with each other in the church, not just in our personal lives, but our interactions with the outside world, with people who are outside the church, people who are not Christian believers. And so he talks about walking in love, walking in the light, and walking in wisdom.

That's beginning of chapter five, verse one to 21. And then Paul goes on to talk about our living for Christ in our families and workplaces. So he talks about husbands and wives, parents and children, bond servants and bond servants and masters, sort of employee relationships. And then the conclusion, Paul talks about how all of this is spiritual warfare. And so we need to be praying that we're in the middle of a spiritual battle. And all of these areas, our relationships with each other in the church, our personal lives, our relationships with other people outside the church, our family and work lives, they are all places that where we will face spiritual battles and where we need to be praying for one another so that we can walk in a manner worthy of our calling in all these different aspects of our lives. So that's where we're going in the next few months. We're going to do Ephesians, I think until Easter. So it's a, we're going to look at each of these areas. And so before we go there, let me just make this, make this sort of broader point. God wants to work on every part of our lives.

That's what you see in the second half of Ephesians. I mean, there's a lot of parts of our lives that Paul looks at. Church, individually, outside the church, work, family, prayer. That covers pretty, I mean, I don't know, what's, what, what's part of your life that's not covered in one of those areas, right? And the reality is we all need change and growth in all of those areas.

[16:57] But practically speaking, most of us can't change, can't focus on all of those areas all of the time, every single day. And so what we're, what Paul's doing, and I think this is what God often does in our individual lives as well, is he's going one by one. And he's saying, I'm going to work on this.

Let's think about our relationships in the church. Okay, let's think about your personal life. And there's some specific issues there. Anger, lust, dishonesty, right? Different things he deals with there. And then he talks about relating to the outside world, being loving, being pure and holy, being wise. Then he talks about family relationships, right? So one by one, God sort of puts, he's, God sort of shined the spotlight on some area of our life that he wants to work on.

And then sometimes he moves on to another area. And I think this is often how God works in our lives. So let me just encourage you with a couple of things from that bigger picture. Number one, by God's grace, you don't have to fix everything all at once because you can't. Okay. And so, and I think it's interesting that Paul starts with our relationships with each other in the church before he goes on to our personal lives.

Um, I think some of us, maybe you can relate to this. If you have fallen into sinful habits in your personal life, you are tempted to stay away from church and you're tempted to withdraw from other Christian believers because you know that some things in your personal life are not right.

And so you feel shame and you feel not worthy. And so maybe you stop coming to church. Maybe you stop talking with other Christians. But when you do that, you're cutting off one of the main ways that God wants to help you in your personal life and in every other part of your life. You know, the church is like a hospital. It's a place where you come because you're sick and you need to get better. It's not a place where you come because you've got everything all together and you have no issues and you come to show that off. So let me encourage you, um, don't stay away from the church because you haven't cleaned up all your personal habits. You need your brothers and sisters in Christ to help you live worthy of your calling. And God's going to work on your life often one issue at a time or one area at a time. But he's, he's, you know, C.S. Lewis uses this example of, it's like, um, buying a house, buying a rat infested house that's boarded up in a bad neighborhood.

[20:10] That's what Christ did when he died on the cross and purchased us for himself, right? We're a mess infested with all kinds of spiritual nastiness. And God says, I'm going to clean up this house and I'm not going to become a slumlord and rent it out to people. I'm going to come and live in this house. That's what it's the Holy Spirit coming to live within us. But when he does that, he, he's going to renovate every room of the house and he's going to add some things onto the house and he's going to change it. So it's not the same as it was before. And that's really what God is doing in making us new is he's working on one room in our house at a time and saying, I am going to make this a place where I am delight to dwell in you. And I've already bought you. I've already called you. It's an undeserved privilege. I've, I've, I've paid the price. You're mine. You belong to me. I love you with an everlasting love. You can be secure in that, but I'm going to work on changing you a little bit at a time until you become like Christ. So that's a big picture. That's what we're looking at the next few months in Ephesians. Now let's just focus for the last few minutes on what Paul lays out in these verses, verse two and three. Um, Paul talks about three areas of the calling that we have in

Christ. He says, live with all humility and gentleness. That's number one, uh, with patience and for, and loving forbearance. That's number two and third, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. That's sort of the big idea, but that's what I'll call the third one.

Um, and really all of these three areas are reflections of the character of Christ. Paul saying, I want you to display the character of Christ that he has displayed toward you.

I want you to display that character toward each other. So humility and gentleness. Jesus said, Matthew 11, learn from me. I am gentle and humble in heart. Philippians two says, Jesus humbled himself to death on the cross. And so Paul says, remember the humility and gentleness that Christ has displayed toward you and display that toward one another. What does that look like?

Humility. Humility. Humility is the opposite of pride or arrogance or overconfidence or thinking too highly of yourself, but it's also not humility is not self-hatred or self-condemnation.

[23:02] Christ saves us from those things too. Um, but it's seeing ourselves rightly before God. Someone said, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but it is thinking of yourself less.

So you can actually love your neighbors around you because you're not totally absorbed in yourself. And Christ gives us the freedom to do that more and more.

That's humility. Gentleness, uh, is the opposite of rudeness or roughness or harshness. Instead, gentleness would be a consideration for others, a willingness to give up one's own rights. It's not a manifestation of weakness, but actually of inner strength. So Paul calls us to humility and gentleness toward one another. That's the first thing as Christ displayed humility and gentleness toward us. Second, uh, patience, bearing with one another in love. What does that mean? Forbearance. Forbearance means dealing with people as they are.

Not as you want them to be. And think about it. God does that every single day with every single one of us. He deals with you as you are right now. And he loves you in Christ.

Even as he has a plan for what he wants you to be. And there's all these areas that he wants to change. But he is forbearing toward us. That means he, um, and so forbearance for us means dealing with people as they are, including their faults, weaknesses, and failures, even as we seek to help each other become who God wants us to be. It would be the opposite of being short-tempered and easily angered or writing people off saying, I'm never going to deal with them again, enduring wrong rather than flying into a rage or seeking vengeance. So Paul says in other places, consider the patience and forbearance of God. As the old Testament says, he's slow to anger and abounding in love. Consider the patience and forbearance of Christ with his disciples. Now think about when Jesus looked at his disciples and you had James and John who said, we want to sit at your right and at your left in your glory. And Jesus says, you do not know what in the world you were talking about and what in the world you were asking for. And of course the other disciples were annoyed and jealous.

[25:37] And then there's Peter, right? Peter's like, I'll die for you, Jesus. And then later that night, he denies that he even knows him. And then there's Thomas, right? Doubting. Jesus is, Jesus sees all their weaknesses and yet he deals with them. He loves them. He doesn't write them off.

He forbears and perseveres and persists with them. He sticks with us. And so Paul says, as Christ has forbear with you, forbear with one another.

Now, note, forbearance is not the same thing as enabling. Enabling is promoting someone's continued sin or self-destructive behavior and not resisting that. That's not forbearance. It's not the same thing. Forbearance is not enabling. Sometimes we need to confront one another.

Sometimes we need to set appropriate boundaries in relationships so that they can be healthy in the long term. Forbearance doesn't always mean saying yes to other people's demands of us. It does mean seeking to bear with them and ultimately to do them good because we love them through Christ.

Sometimes we need to pray for wisdom. Sometimes we need to seek wise counsel about how to do that. That's the second area. Humility first, humility and gentleness. Second, patient forbearance. Third, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. Notice that word maintain.

[27:31] We don't create the unity of the spirit. There's already the unity that Christ has created in us and for us and among us. Christ is our peace. Chapter two, verse 14. He died to make us one. He sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit. He's building us together in his house. It's sort of like God has planted the seeds of unity and peace in our garden and we're responsible to cultivate them and to take out the weeds that want to, and those vines that want to wrap themselves around that unity and peace and suck the life out of them. So sometimes we need to resist those weeds that want to poison the unity and peace of God's church and God's and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ. And again, Christ was eager to maintain the unity of the spirit. Christ prayed on the night before he died. Christ prayed that we would be one as he and the father are one. So in all these ways, these are the characteristics that Christ has displayed toward us. Humility and gentleness, patient forbearance, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit, promoting that in all the ways that we can. And finally, verse four to six, briefly, we see where we get the power to walk worthy of the calling. So I've talked about how this is what Christ has done for us. But in these verses, it actually points that it's not just Christ, it's also the father and the Holy Spirit.

There's sort of seven pillars of unity, but really there are sort of three clusters, one body and one spirit. He reminds us we're one body in Christ and we're filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives in us and the Holy Spirit is working through us and the Holy Spirit empowers us. And so we have power from the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. And then he goes on to talk about one Lord, one faith, one baptism. He's sort of reminding us, this is where you start. Where do you start the Christian life? You start the Christian life by believing in Jesus Christ and being baptized as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ. So he reminds us that's where we all started.

And then he talks about where Christ leads us to the one God and father of all who is over all and through all and in all. Christ leads us into the presence of the father. And so we can know the one whose rule and presence fills all things. So it's really, um, this, this call to, to promote unity in the church is, is really, uh, a reminder that God in, in Christ, we've been brought into the unity of the father and son and Holy Spirit, which has existed from all eternity.

[30:26] Um, meditate on the Trinity. Sometimes it's, it's mind boggling, like father, the son, the Holy Spirit, how they all work together. Notice how they all work together. Ephesians has a lot of it. Um, just feel free to feel free to do that in one of your quiet times this week, but, um, that can be a worthwhile thing to ponder and praise God for. Um, so ultimately I think Paul's saying, think about all that you have in common with fellow believers, right? And let, think about what the father has done for you and how he sent your, his son, Jesus Christ. Now he's filled you with his spirit. And so make every effort to pursue the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

Um, so last question I'll end with is who in the church do you need to be treat with all humility and gentleness with patient forbearance and be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and peace?

Is there someone that comes to mind when you think about those things? And maybe there's someone that you struggle to do that towards. Maybe there's someone that you're like, I don't, I just don't know if I can deal with that other Christian anymore. And I just don't want to deal with them.

And so maybe we need, and so maybe that's an encouragement is we need to pray, pray for that person. Even if you don't do anything else for them, just pray for them because that's a start and that will allow the Holy spirit to work in you and in them. Um, so, so start there. Um, I think that's a very practical application is let's treat each other in these ways and we can have the power to do that because of what God has done for us, the father, son, and Holy spirit. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. And God, we thank you for this book of Ephesians. We thank you for the greatness of what you've done for us of the calling that we have received through Christ. Uh, we pray Lord that we would just grasp more of how wide and long and high and deep is your love for us. And we pray that you would fill us with your spirit so that we can love one another. Well, Lord, it's not easy to be humble and gentle and patient and forbearing. Sometimes we are difficult to deal with. Sometimes we don't even realize that we're difficult to deal with and that's even worse for the people around us, but we thank you for your humility and gentleness and patience and forbearance with us. Lord, we pray that we would meditate on just how you have been all these things toward us and Lord, that you would empower us, uh, to pursue these things, to pursue, um, these kinds of relationships with each other in the body of Christ, the unity that you died on the cross that we might know and experience and live in. Uh, we thank you Lord. I, I want to thank you for this church and the ways that you have worked in it, uh, to promote unity and, and just the sweet unity that we do have.

[33:42] Uh, Lord, um, Paul's encouraging us to pursue this, but we also just want to thank you for the ways that you have, have preserved, uh, this church, uh, from, from many, um, you have preserved us and you have kept us and you've, you've kept us united, um, in, and in so many ways. And we just thank you for the ways that we can just enjoy and experience that together, um, already. And we pray that we'd experience that more and more in Christ's name. Amen.

The closing song is a song called the church is one foundation. It's an old hymn of the church. Um, and the words are really great. So if you're familiar with it, sing it out. If you're not familiar with it, uh, just meditate on the words as we sing them. Uh, and it's all about the unity that we have with one another and with all other believers, um, throughout time and space, uh, who are those who are alive now and those who have gone on to glory, uh, to be with Jesus. And it's a reminder of the unity that we have in Christ and by his spirit. So let's stand and sing.

One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three.