

Live A Life Worthy Of Your Calling
Ephesians 4:1-32
Key Verse: 4:1

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

In chapter 3, Paul taught us the mystery of God. What is it? It is the very heart of God. In essence, the mystery of the gospel is that God loves all people in the whole world, and that he sent his one and only Son Jesus to die to save the Gentiles as well as the Jews. As we know, Jews and Gentiles are like oil and water. They could never be united. But through the mystery of God, they were brought together through our Lord Jesus Christ (3:6). Paul himself was also personally moved by God's mystery. It is because God chose him, even though he was least of all God's people. To Paul, it was God's marvelous and mysterious grace that he was called to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). Because Paul grasped the mystery of God, he became a most famous person throughout history. Do you want to be famous? Then please discover God's mystery for the world and for yourself.

In chapter 4, Paul teaches Christians the way to conquer the world with the gospel of Jesus. According to our key verse, it is to live a life worthy of the calling we have received (1). It means to personally grow to maturity in the image of Christ. We can say many good things, but if our inner man is very weak, then we can't even get up in the morning, not to mention conquering the world with the gospel. For example, St. Paul was in chains in prison. He was old and tired. On the other hand, the Roman Empire was outwardly prospering and glorious, and its army was well disciplined. But because Paul's inner man was strong in the love of God, he conquered the mighty Roman Empire within 150 years with the gospel. The love of God is that Jesus came to this world to save men from their sins, and that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). One man's life of faith in Jesus is so important. From this passage, let's learn from Paul how to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.

First, live a life worthy of the calling (1).

Read verse 1 again. "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." As we studied, Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while he was in prison. He was arrested in Jerusalem for bringing Greeks to the temple. However, it was God's plan to send Paul to Rome to preach the gospel there to the Gentiles. Acts 23:11b says, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." So Paul entered Rome as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

In verse 1, Paul urges the Ephesians and all Christians to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. God used Paul to establish the Ephesian church during his third missionary journey. The church began to grow and take root. However, many problems arose. Some in the church did not repent of their old bad habits. Some acted like spiritual babies and did not have a mature view of things. They did not forgive, but held grudges and gossiped. Paul was concerned about the health of the church and the church's influence upon non-believers. So Paul admonished them to live a life worthy of the calling they have received.

To receive some kind of high calling is a great privilege. For example, for any athlete to represent their country in the 2008 Olympics is a great honor. This honor though is not without great sacrifice. Many an athlete began their training from childhood, in order to be chosen as an Olympian. But we must know that being called by God is far greater than being chosen for the Olympics. It is an eternal privilege.

What is the calling Paul is speaking of? It is the calling to be part of the body of Christ. It is to be part of God's world salvation plan. When we become a Christian, our Lord gave us rights, privileges and honor. We were once spiritual orphans but we were "adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:5) We were once spiritually poor, but He granted us "the riches of his glorious inheritance." (Eph 1:18) He blessed us in the heavenly realms with "every spiritual blessing in Christ." (1:3) And in ages to come He will pour out "riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (2:7) Based on all that Jesus has done for us, Paul urges us to live a life worthy of such a high calling. The Lord expects us to act like members of His Body--to make His goals and objectives our goals and objectives. He expects us to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.

The root of the Greek word "worthy", is translated as of equalizing or balancing the scales. Thus, a Christian's lifestyle ought to be equalized with his identity. There ought to be perfect harmony between who you are and how

you live. In other words, Christians must "talk the talk," and also "walk the walk." A famous author and theologian (Dr. John Stott) said: First, the church must be incarnational, and second, Christians must live like Christians. Our circumstances shouldn't affect how we live as Christians, no matter how bad they might be. The worthy walk may lead to prison and death, as it did for Paul, but it should never change our commitment to live a life worthy of our Lord. How can we live a life worthy of the calling we have received?

Second, be like humble Jesus (2).

Look at verse 2. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Paul said "Be completely humble." He did not say, "Be partially humble." He said, "Be completely humble." What does it mean to be humble? It doesn't mean to have a bad self image or develop an inferiority complex. Humility is the all-inclusive principle. Humility produces greater virtues. Look at verse 2 again. There's a progression: humility leads to gentleness, which leads to patience, which leads to love, which finally leads to unity.

Humility is foreign to our world because our world exalts pride, power and money. Our society, as well as those throughout history, has tended to view humility as a weakness. But according to the Bible, humility is the virtue of the righteous, while pride is the mentality of the unrighteous. 1 Peter 5:5a says, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

Our Lord Jesus is the perfect model of humility. Look at verse 9, 10 "(What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)" Before Jesus' ascension, he descended. This is also known as the incarnation of Christ. John 1:14a, reads, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The incarnation is God becoming a man. He did this to be a friend and savior to all sinners. It is like us taking the form a cockroach in order to help cockroaches. Jesus displayed complete humbleness by obeying God's will to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Phil 2:8 says "...he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" Sinful human beings have a hard time giving up anything. In addition, they only want to ascend over others. But Jesus gave up his heavenly glory to be born as a humble baby in a manger. Jesus became flesh to become a friend to sinners.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, he practiced humility. He descended to the level of sinners to reach them with the gospel. Jesus practiced incarnational evangelism, or friendship evangelism. There was a Samaritan woman. She was bitter and sorrowful because of many failed relationships. Maybe she was like the troubled Britney Spears. Jesus was the Messiah, she was a dirty sinner. But Jesus humbled himself in order to be her friend. He said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" In this way, he opened the door to her heart and introduced her to the living water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:7-14). At that time, tax collectors were known as national traitors since they worked for the enemy. They were like modern day drug-dealers. People would throw rocks at them as they passed by. But Jesus was different. As Jesus passed by the tax collector's booth and saw Levi and said to him, "Follow me" (Lk 5:27). Jesus called him to be his disciple. Jesus bore with Levi's great selfishness with great humility. Later, his name was changed from Levi to Matthew. He became the writer of the Sermon on the Mount, the world's best literature in human history. Paul did not just say, "humble yourself." He said, "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." How can we be completely humble? The best way is to think about Jesus who humbled himself before terrible sinners.

Dr. Billy Graham is the most famous Christian of the 20th century. He has preached the gospel to more people than anyone else in history. He is indeed an influential man of God and a truly great man. But whoever has met him, whether president or pauper, is awed not by his towering presence, but by his genuine heart felt humility and self effacement. When Democratic presidential candidate, Hilary Clinton was recently interviewed by ABC News, she said freely, "Billy Graham is the only man who understands both my husband and I." May God bless us to look at Jesus, until God enables us to be completely humble and gentle. May God enable us to practice humility and reach out to many students this new school year.

Third, make every effort to keep the unity (3-6).

Look at verse 3. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." A major tragedy of man is his inability to be truly united with others. For instance, it seems that Democrats and Republicans will never

be united, whether it concerns Iraq, taxes, the budget or even global warming, to name a few issues that they will seemingly never agree upon. There is also generational disunity, for older people think that younger people do not respect or obey their seniors, while younger people think that older people do not really listen to them or understand them. Even families who should love each other can't stay united, as attested to by the tragic 60% divorce rate that has wounded countless millions of children and broken their tender hearts to pieces. Man's lack of unity also creates many problems among believers in the church, including the church in Ephesus. This is the reason Paul says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." Still, we may fail. It is because of our mountain high pride that always insists that "I am right, and you are wrong!" It is nothing but a lack of humility, gentleness and patience.

How is unity possible? It is only through the bond of peace. Our Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the bond or glue that keeps us one in spirit. Unity cannot be achieved by human desire or effort. Peace and unity are only possible when we come to Jesus with a repentant heart and acknowledge Him as our Lord. So, Paul reminds us that only God can unite us, for there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (4-6).

Fourth, discover others' gifts, not their weaknesses (7-11).

To be truly united in Christ, we must make every effort to deeply respect one another from our heart. But fallen man's bad habit is that he loves to point out the weaknesses of others and then highlight them with a bright yellow marker. It is because fallen man spontaneously sees others' weaknesses without even trying. Then he spreads destructive rumors with great sadistic joy and exaggeration. This is a universal problem, which unfortunately also happens in church, as it likely did in the church at Ephesus, and also in the church at Corinth. This invariably causes divisions within the church. Therefore, in this part, Paul encourages the Ephesian Christians to use the same intensity to see the God-given gifts and virtues of others, and not their faults and mistakes.

Look at verses 7,8. "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'" By Jesus' death and resurrection he set free those who had been captives of the devil. He ascended to his throne on high. He gave spiritual gifts to the captives he set free. What are some of these gifts?

Look at verse 11. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." When Jesus ascended into heaven, he poured out his Spirit upon the church. He poured blessing upon each person. Some have the gift of being an apostle. They have missionary zeal to reach the lost. Some have the gift to be prophets. They have keen spiritual insight and foresight. Some became pastors. They have the gift of shepherding others. Some became excellent Bible teachers. No matter who he may be each person has a gift. Some even have hidden gifts. Recently, one chapter director thanked me for my wife. He said he has never seen his wife laugh until she was in tears. I realize my wife has the gift of laughter and joy. So instead of focusing on the weaknesses of others, we must try to discover their God-given gifts and virtues, and pray for them and help them to develop their gift for the glory of God. Once, the disciple Simon Peter was known as a man of sand. He was proud, boastful and highly emotional. But Jesus saw his gift. John 1:42b says, "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)." Jesus called him Cephas, which means the "Rock." Jesus saw his gift as a great teacher and leader for the early church. Once Missionary Maria Peace was sorrowful because she thought she had no gifts. One day Dr. Lee said to her, "You are leadership material." When Maria discovered her gift, she became a new person. She became a powerful and fruitful Bible teacher here in Chicago and now in Kiev, Ukraine.

Fifth, the children of God must grow in Jesus (12-16).

What is the purpose of these gifts? They are to build up the whole body of Christ. We are to use our collective gifts to serve the work of God. Look at verse 12, 13. "...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Paul says that we must grow until we become mature. Unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God are marks of maturity. Divisions among God's people are a mark of childishness. The goal of our growth is unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus the Son of God, until we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Look at verse 14. “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” Infants are immature and gullible. They are full of curiosity, especially about toys and cartoons. An infant in Christ is moved by every convincing speaker; he sometimes becomes confused by the deceitful scheming of crafty men who try to destroy the work of God. Christians should not remain in spiritual diapers. Peter said that new Christians crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it they may grow up (1 Pe 2:2). The milk is God’s word. We must study the Bible diligently and obey its teachings. This is how we can grow to maturity in Christ. When we grow up we can speak the truth in love; we can support and build up the body of Christ.

Sixth, put off the old self, put on the new self (17-32).

In these final verses, Paul mainly encourages Christians to put off the old self and put on the new self in Christ. In verses 17-19, Paul insists that Christians must no longer live like unbelievers or Gentiles, especially in the way we think. Our thought world or what we think about is very important. These days we are bombarded by all kinds of dark images in all kinds of media channels, especially the internet. Satan tickles us to just enjoy sinful thoughts and desires just once. But sin has a terrible wage. When we allow our thought world to be captured by sensuality and impurity, our hearts become hard. Then we are darkened in our understanding. Soon we harden our hearts towards God and become ignorant and numb to sin. Sinful desire grows until it becomes an unquenchable and destructive urge. These days we grieve over the lack of moral standard and spiritual order in our nation. How can we restore the moral standard and spiritual order of this nation?

Let’s read 22-24. “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” These days, people spend lots of money for makeovers. They use expensive Botox injections and plastic surgery. Though they may look a little better, their inner person may still be quite ugly. But the Bible has the least expensive beauty secret. What is it? We must put on the new self in Christ Jesus (Ro 13:14). When we know Christ, God’s truth is planted in our hearts. Christ rules our thought world, and gives us a new attitude towards others, ourselves and the world. We can put on the new self through daily repentance, prayer and deep Bible study. We can put on the new self when we live a life of mission by helping others to know Christ. When we do, we become new and more beautiful and younger every day.

In verses 25-32, Paul teaches us additional advice how we can be a good influence to others. First, we must not lie, but speak the truth in love. Second, we should not get angry or else the devil can get a foothold in our hearts. We must resolve grudges before sun down. Thirdly, we should not steal. We should work hard with our hands, not to take, but to give to others in need.

Paul said in verses 29-30, we should discipline our mouths and say things that are only helpful in building others up. We are all guilty of unwholesome talk. We may curse loved ones, our irritating bosses and even our dog. But what we say is very important. As James said the tongue can be used to praise or curse (James 3:9,10). Our words should be limited to words that build up others. When bitterness, anger, slander or a grudge against someone is in our heart, the words that come from our mouths grieve the Holy Spirit and hurt others. We can build up others by our speech when we remember Christ who forgave us. Read verse 32. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

In this passage, Paul urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received by giving us much practical advice. In brief, we must grow more and more to be like Jesus, especially in his humility. Then we will also be gentle, patient and united in the love of God. May God bless each of us to put off the old self and put on the new self in Christ.