

## Ephesians 4:1-6

### Introduction

As many of you may know, the book of Ephesians has two main parts. We could say in general that the first three chapters describe what *God* has done, while the last three chapters describe what we must do *because* of what God has done. Some might say that the first three chapters are theology and doctrine, while the last three chapters are application and exhortation. As we'll see in a moment, this is a bit artificial, but it can still be helpful. This morning, we're going to look at the opening verses of that second part of Ephesians – of the last three chapters. Paul begins with these words:

### I. "I urge you therefore"

In the book of Romans, after eleven chapters of theology, of describing the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God revealed in our salvation (cf. Rom. 11:36), Paul begins the section of "application and exhortation" in chapter twelve with these *same* words: "I *urge* you *therefore*..." (Rom. 12:1) All true and healthy Christian living is always flowing out of good theology and Gospel doctrine. There are some who may get *more* excited about the theology and the doctrine. But isn't that hypocrisy? How can we have any true love for theology and doctrine (for the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God revealed in our salvation) without a corresponding devotion to living practically, day by day, in the light of that theology and doctrine. On the other hand, some may get *more* excited about the applications and exhortations. But isn't that legalism and moralism? How can we have any *true* love for practical Christian living without a corresponding love for theology and doctrine (for the first three chapters of Ephesians and the first twelve chapters of Romans)?

The two halves of Ephesians are intimately, inseparably connected – "I *urge* you *therefore*..." They're not just inseparably connected, they're also intertwined together (cf. O'Brien). There's a whole lot of the second half already in the first half. And as we're about to see already this morning, there's a whole lot of the first half that shows up again in the second half.

Paul begins the second half of Ephesians with these words, "I *urge* you *therefore*..." "I exhort you, I appeal to you, I beseech you, I urge you..." Why is Paul so urgent? Because he's come to understand the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (3:18-19). Because he's come to understand the things that God has done – and is still doing—in and for His church. We know this because he begins and ends the first half of Ephesians with doxology – with praise and worship and blessing of God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" at the beginning of chapter one (1:3), and then in the verses immediately before chapter four opens: "Now to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations, forever and ever, Amen." (3:20-21).

"I *urge* you *therefore*..." We will always lack power and strength, and zeal and joy in our Christian walk until we can fully embrace Paul's "therefore" – until we are able to love and rejoice in what *God* has already done, and *is* doing, and *will* do in our salvation. "I *urge* you *therefore*—"

## II. “I, the prisoner in the Lord”

Paul is suffering in prison for the very things that he now writes to the Ephesians. This should help us to hear the emotion and the longing in his voice. And in Paul’s voice and words, we can even see something of God’s own heart. Paul wrote in another place:

- 2 Corinthians 5:20 — Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ...

Paul had the authority to *command* us as an *Apostle* of Christ Jesus, but instead he *appeals* to us as a *prisoner* in the Lord. Paul writes to Philemon:

- Philemon 8–10 — Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you [urge you]—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— I appeal to you [urge you] for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

In the same way, even though all of God’s words always carry the full weight of a command, yet in His love and mercy, and compassion, He also appeals to us, and urges us, and even entreats us to live according to His life-giving word. God commands us as our Creator and as a consuming fire – and also as our Father. But then He also appeals to us as one who was made like us. So Paul’s words, here, are a reflection of God’s own heart toward us, His children, “I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—”

## III. “to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”

Isn’t this what it’s really about? Aren’t all of our words and professions worthless apart from a life lived for our Creator and Savior? In Ephesians 2:2 Paul says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once *walked*. But then in verse 10 he says that now “we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them.” True Christianity is about a daily walk. There’s no part of our life that should not be a part of our Christian walk. There’s not a spiritual zone and then a neutral zone. There is only our “walk” as people who have been “*called*” by God (“walk worthy of the *calling* with which you were *called*”).

Our “calling” is something that happened in the past. God is the one who powerfully and effectually called us through the Gospel, and it’s this powerful call that has produced in us faith and repentance; it’s this powerful call that has resulted in our justification – so that we are declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. Therefore, it’s also this *past* calling that has brought to us a wonderful *hope* of things still to come – of one day being perfected in God’s love, as those remade in His image and likeness. In other words, it’s God’s powerful call that has accomplished not only our justification, but even our future glorification (cf. Rom. 8:28-30). So in chapter one, Paul spoke of “the *hope* of His calling” (1:18). And in just three verses, Paul will speak again of the “*hope* of your calling” (4:4). Our calling is in the past. The hope to which we have been called is yet future. And so it’s in this in between time that we are called to walk worthy – worthy of God’s past, gracious call, and worthy also of that future

hope to which we have been called (cf. Thielman). Both our past and our future are always an exhortation to walk “worthy” *today*.

“I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” So how do we do this? What will this look like? Brothers and sisters, it’s really so very “simple.”

#### IV. **“with all humility and gentleness”**

When we’ve come to genuinely love and rejoice in the sovereign, saving grace of God to lost sinners such as ourselves, how can we not be humble in our relationships with one another? How can it not come naturally to us to think of others as more important than ourselves? Who *am I*, after all, and what was it that I deserved as a child of wrath by nature (Eph. 2:1-3)? When we’re thinking like that, it will never once cross our minds to ask, “who is he, and what is it that he deserves.” But because of the sin that remains in us, we do still struggle, don’t we? And it’s to this struggle that Paul is urging us and calling us.

If we’re going to walk worthy of the calling with which we were called – if we’re going to live today in light of the past and the future – then we must walk with *all* humility and gentleness. The “*all*” shows us how important this really is. Humility is a mindset and a whole way of thinking. Humility should be in some very real sense the beginning and the ending of everything that we do and say as Christians. But how completely impossible this is apart from God’s power mightily working within us (Eph. 1:19-20; 3:20)! If we’re honest—if *I’m* honest—how many of our actions and words are motivated even in subtle ways by pride and self-centeredness?

If humility is the heart and the mindset, then we could think of gentleness as one of the first outward marks or evidences. Gentleness is the manner in which we will always speak and act toward others when we’re not impressed with our own self-importance (O’Brien; BDAG). In this respect, we can see how our Lord Jesus Himself was the epitome of this gentleness (2 Cor. 10:1).

- Isaiah 42:3 — A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.
- Zechariah 9:9 — Behold, your king is coming to you... humble [gentle] and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Certainly Jesus could also speak with a blazing, righteous anger, but we should never forget that immediately after the “woes” in Matthew 23, Jesus *lamented* with these words:

- Matthew 23:37 — O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

The point here isn’t whether others deserve to be treated with gentleness, but whether we have any grounds in light of who we are to act or to speak in any other way – with pride, or arrogance, or harshness. *If* we are humble, and *if* we’re not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and *if* we’re not deceived by ideas of our own self-importance, then in all of our

dealings with one another, how can we not be *characterized* by a humble spirit and an attitude of gentleness? I think of Paul's words in Galatians:

- **Galatians 6:1** — Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of *gentleness*.

If Jesus, our Lord, was humble and gentle, how much more should *we* be humble and gentle with one another, who know that we are sinners saved by *grace* (Eph. 2:5, 8)?

We said that the point isn't whether others deserve to be treated with gentleness, but whether we have any grounds in light of who we are to act or speak in any other way. Well, now Paul makes it very clear that we never do. "I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness..."

#### **V. "with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love"**

Most English versions have the word "patience," here, instead of longsuffering. But when we think of patience, we usually just think of enduring a wait when we'd rather have something now. Paul's point is not so much the enduring of a wait, but the patient "enduring" of *one another* – because the fact is that not only are *we* sinners, but we're still surrounded by other fallen sinners. Paul's point—believe it or not!—is that we are willing rather to suffer hurt and injustice from one another than to retaliate or insist on any "rights" of our own. And so I translate with the New King James, "with *longsuffering*, bearing with one another in love." None of this is to say that we can't go to a brother or a sister who has hurt us or who has sinned against us out of a genuine desire for their welfare or to restore a broken relationship. In fact, this should be, in itself, one major outworking of a true spirit of longsuffering and of bearing with one another in love!

Just to *bear with* the real sins and failings of others can be difficult enough – especially when those sins and failings affect me. But how can we bear with someone—how can we patiently endure the faults of another—*in love*? This really *is* impossible for all who have not truly been born again. But we are a new creation. We are God's own workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for precisely *this* "good work," which God Himself prepared beforehand, that we should walk in it (cf. Eph. 2:10). And what *is* the point of a "new creation" if we're still living in light of the limitations and possibilities of our "old man" (cf. Eph. 4:22-24)? It's because we are a new creation that we *can*, and we *must* not just be longsuffering and bear with one another, but be longsuffering and bear with one another *in love*.

*Why, though?* What is the purpose of this humility and gentleness, and longsuffering, and bearing with one another in love? "I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love..."

## VI. “being fervent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

Even as Paul continues to exhort and apply, he points us back to the first three chapters of Ephesians. In Ephesians chapter two, this unity and peace is something that God has already fully accomplished in Christ.

- Ephesians 2:14-18 — For he himself is our **peace**, who *has made* both things **ONE**, and *has broken down* the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—*having* abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees, that he might create in himself **ONE new man** in place of the two, so making **peace**, and might reconcile them both in **ONE body** to God through the cross, thereby **killing the hostility**. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access **in ONE Spirit** to the Father.

One of Paul’s favorite words in Ephesians is that Greek preposition *syn* – *together with*. We have been made alive *together with* Christ, raised up *together with* Christ, and seated *together with* Christ, with the result that we are now citizens *together with* all the saints, fitted *together with* each other, built *together with* each other, heirs *together with* each other, members of the body *together with* each other, and partakers of the promise *together with* each other (2:5-6, 19-22; 3:5-6). These are things that *God has accomplished* in Christ as the key to His plan for uniting all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him (1:10). These are the things that *God accomplished* in Christ Jesus for the praise and the glory of His name – so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:10).

And yet these spiritual realities that have been fully accomplished in the heavenly places still need working out, and fleshing out here on the earth – here in God’s church that meets in Morris, Illinois. Our astonishing responsibility and privilege is to make visible (or to “keep”) the unity that God has already created. And this can *only* happen if we are faithfully walking with *all humility* and *gentleness*, with *longsuffering, bearing with* one another *in love*. To fail in this area is to insult and, as it were, trample under our feet, the body and blood of Christ by which we have all been made one. It is to hold up the wisdom of God to the mockery of the world. Shouldn’t each one of us tremble to think that we’ve all been guilty of these very things? When we think about the beauty of God’s manifold wisdom which He has displayed in the Church as His new creation, how can we not, *as that church*, repent of our sin, and turn to walk with all humility and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, being fervent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

One commentator says that “the [word] Paul [‘being fervent’] uses has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis to it” (O’Brien). It means to “do something with intense effort and motivation” (LN). We must act with a zealous fervency and eagerness to maintain and to keep and to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is no place or time for half-hearted efforts. This will never happen automatically or by chance. To use Paul’s words in another place, we must be toiling and struggling to this end with *all of God’s energy* that He *powerfully works* within us (Col. 1:29). Why? For the sake of His name, and for the sake of the

body and blood of Jesus Christ which has made us all fellow members with each other in the household of God.

We *must* toil and struggle to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But don't we also *want* to and even *long* to because *we* are the ones who have been called to be the display throughout all eternity of the manifold wisdom of God? Maybe we can understand now why in the next three verses Paul returns to the theology and the doctrine! He just can't seem to stay away.

**VII.** “*one* body and *one* Spirit, just as also you were called in *one* hope of your calling, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Our English translations smooth things out by adding the words “there is” at the beginning, and making verse four the beginning of a new sentence – “There is one body and one Spirit...” But in the Greek, verses 1-6 are all a single sentence of seventy-one words, and verse four begins suddenly just like this – “one body and one Spirit...” This has the effect of bolding, and underlining and italicizing the word “one,” because “one” is the very *first* word. But this abrupt transition also helps us to feel how amazed Paul was at God's wisdom, and how passionate he was about our calling to be the display of that wisdom by fervently working to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul has already spoken in chapter two of how Christ reconciled both Jew and Gentile “in **ONE BODY** to God through the cross” (2:16), and how through Christ we both have access “in **ONE SPIRIT** to the Father” (2:18). So here he starts out, “*one body and one Spirit.*” Paul has just mentioned the calling with which we were called, so here he goes on to say, “just as also you were called in *one hope of your calling.*” “Lord,” “faith,” and “baptism” were probably chosen at least partly because “Lord” is masculine, “faith” is feminine, and “baptism” is neuter, and so this gives us a masculine “one” (*heis*), a feminine “one” (*mia*), and a neuter “one” (*hen*). That's what you'd see if you were reading the inspired Greek words, and it would cause that word “one” to jump off the page even more than ever – “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” And finally, the last “one” is the sum of the previous six, the sum of the first three chapters of Ephesians, and so very appropriately it's the *seventh* – “*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*”

That simple word “one” sums up the manifold wisdom of God whose purpose in the church is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.

**“I URGE YOU THEREFORE**—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, *with* all humility and gentleness, *with* long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, *being fervent* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace—*one(!)* body and *one(!)* Spirit, just as also you were called in *one(!)* hope of your calling, *one(!)* Lord, *one(!)* faith, *one(!)* baptism, *one(!!!)* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”