

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
 Psalm 51:1-13
 Ephesians 4:1-16
 John 6:24-35



A LIFE WORTHY OF THE CALLING

Paul's letter to the Ephesians divides naturally into two parts. Chapters 1-3 teach basic Christian theology – God's plan for the redemption of mankind through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The second part, Chapters 4-6, concerns our response to what God has done, in terms of how we ought to behave and get along with each other. Its importance lies in the fact that our fallen world has always taught one kind of behavior towards ourselves and others, and the way of the cross teaches another kind.

Also in part 2 there is a certain change of outlook, from looking back to looking ahead. The verses no longer recall what life was like without Christ (see Eph 2:1-3 and 2:11-12, for example). Instead, Chapters 4-6 look forward to what life can become, and in fact does become after it is surrendered to Christ.

So let us begin with the latter in mind. If Christ is not in control of your life, do all in your power to let him take control. *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,"* he said (Matt 11:30). Learn all you can from him, because it turns out that right living really is better than sin.

Eph 4:1-6. *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.¹*

- *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord ...* (v.1, also 3:1). Paul saw himself in confinement as a *prisoner for* (not of) *the Lord*. He was where God wanted him to be. If you see your life that way today, you are content. Again we have here a passage beginning with "therefore," which refers to all the content of Chapters 1-3. God has given us new life in Christ; *therefore* we are enabled to grow in his grace and righteousness.
- *... beg you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called ...* (v.1). The road you travel is not always easy. Paul's life was not easy, but going back was never an option. *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). Besides, no other life is worth leading anyway. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it"* (Matt 13:45-46). Having Christ is worth infinitely more than anything you previously had, or now have, or ever could have from the world.
- *... with all lowliness and meekness ...* (v.2). Both words imply an attitude of *humility* resulting from seeing yourself as God sees you. Both are opposed to a proud spirit. *"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"* (Jas 4:6). *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Proverbs 16:19). In the Bible, *meekness* is the result of *humility* rather than weakness.

For example, Num 12:3 says, *"The man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth."* Yet, in Ex 2:11-12, Moses saw an Egyptian overseer beating one of the Hebrew slaves. After making sure no one was looking, he killed the overseer. This is not what we usually call "meek."

Jesus said, *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* (Matt 5:5). When the meek inherit the earth, even though the world will be very different from the world we now know, they will need to govern it and care for all living things. Inheriting the earth is going to require strength and initiative, not weakness, on the part of those who inherit it. Our image of a person with wings, sitting on a cloud with a harp, does not fit with Moses, or Jesus, or anyone else whom the Bible describes as being *humble* or *meek*.

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

In the Bible, *Meekness* and *humility* imply an unusual kind of strength, which we can see in Moses and David, for example, as well as in our Lord Jesus Christ. These men were angry and even violent at the right time, not out of selfishness, but for the right reasons. They were never tolerant of cruel or unfair treatment of others, yet never lashed out in defense against insults and unfair treatment of themselves. Their anger, you could say, was *unselfish* – always in defense of God and neighbors.

Of all men, Jesus is our greatest model of *meekness*. On behalf of the people, he lashed out verbally at the Jewish authorities. In defense of the house of his Father, he drove the money changers from the temple. But on his own behalf, he did nothing to defend himself against all the insults and pain which the world with all the power of hell threw at him, and he died on the cross asking the Father to forgive those who were against him. Knowing this, how can we not live as v.2 describes, “*with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love ...*”? Jesus lived this way – I must learn to.

Humility implies the absence of *pride*, and pride is the cornerstone of sin. It was *pride* that caused a once-beautiful angel to fall and become the devil (Isa 14:12-14), and it was *pride* in Adam and Eve that the devil used to tempt and cause them to fall (Gen 3:1-7). In every situation, pride always works to cause one to disbelieve God, or forget him altogether and rely instead on one’s own insight and feelings of self-worth.

Humility opposes pride. It draws us into the light so we can see ourselves as God sees us. Humility lets you see the truth. Pride hides the truth from you. *When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom* (Prov 11:2). Pride always, without fail, works to draw men into sin, and humility always, without fail, works to make one aware of one’s real state of affairs and, as a result, turn from sin.

Pride works to draw men away from the presence of God. *Humility* opens the way for God to dwell (come to live) with the one who repents. *For thus says the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite”* (Isa 57:15).

Pride depends on one’s goals in life. There are times of accomplishment, when you are tempted to see yourself as being a cut above the others. We compare ourselves with men in terms of worldly goals.

But when we compare ourselves with Christ in terms of eternal goals, *humility* is the result. “*For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and lose his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?*” (Mark 8:36-37). When your eyes are on Jesus it is easy – almost a relief – to be humble toward God and others. For now you are no longer competing with God for control of your life. And the rewards of humility must be seen first-hand, so to speak, to be appreciated. *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you* (1 Pet 5:6-7).

Finally, *humility* must be always *pursued*. It is never really achieved in this life. If I were to receive a badge for being the most humble person (which is not likely), I suppose I would be tempted to wear it.

- ... *with patience, forbearing one another in love ...* (v.2). *Patience* and *love* are gifts of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). *Patience* waits for something hoped for, but as yet unseen. Christians wait for the return of Jesus Christ in glory. *Patience, faith, hope, and love* are attributes of God. He conveys these attributes into our hearts. We must learn and practice them while we wait to be raised on the Last Day (John 6:39, 40, 44, and 54).

Patience is one of the attributes of love: “*Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful ... love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Patience must be tough at times. It is the virtue that allows us to *forbear one another in love*, knowing all things will pass. *Patience* does not give up in hard times, or when the situation seems hopeless, or the road grows narrow and steep, or darkness lies ahead. It keeps watch through the night, waiting for the dawn.

- ... *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (v.3). This is the goal. God commands discipline in the church, but *unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*, rather than discipline itself, is the objective. We maintain *the unity of the Spirit* when we forsake selfishness and pride and our former ways and begin to live the kind of life described in these great chapters of Ephesians.

You cannot do this alone, however hard you may try. You must let Christ change your life and make you a new creation. You must be, as the image on page one suggests, “Owned and operated by Jesus Christ.” Our prayer is that this may be the story of your life, today and forever.