

GOD WITH US
Part 10: EARLY LETTERS
Message 23 – Ephesians
Walking Worthy of our Calling
Ephesians 4-6

Introduction

Paul spent the first 3 chapters focusing on what God has done for us, in the Person of Christ. Now, as in most of his letters, he transitions to write about how we respond to God's love by offering our lives to Him as living sacrifices and seeking to live in obedience to Him. Notice how he makes the transition with the opening words of ch.4. *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called . . . (4:1).* Chapters 1-3 were about our high and privileged calling in Christ. Chapters 4-6 are about walking worthy of this calling. Paul will describe various aspects of the believer's life to show what this "worthy walk" looks like.

Walk in UNITY: 4:1-6

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is 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" (4:1-6).

Unity is the first order of business. How are we to preserve the unity of the body of Christ? *Humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love.* In any group – a home, a workplace, a classroom, a team – these 5 attributes, when they are pursued by every member of the group, will help to protect and promote the unity of that group. If the opposite attributes are present – pride, harshness, impatience, anger and selfishness – the group will disintegrate into as many pieces as there are individual agendas. Paul's point is clear: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3).*

The body of Christ IS ONE, although just as in a human body there are many different parts with many different functions. Paul emphasizes the ONE aspect with many entities: ONE- body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father of all...yet we are individual parts of the body. 'In Christ' we must make 'every effort' to diligently preserve and promote UNITY through our disposition even with our differences.

There are many times when a local body of believers will have differences of opinion on various issues. Yet, we are all called to always protect and promote the unity of the body. What can you do to protect the unity of the body of Christ in its current situation? Are there ways that you have, either knowingly or unknowingly, sowed seeds of discord and division through negative attitudes? Can you work to resolve these issues in a God-honoring way, and pursue a spirit of unity where it might be lacking? What can you do to "walk worthy" of this high calling, growing in unity?

Walk in MATURITY: 4:7-16

Paul next turns to the growth of the body, pointing to the roles that each individual plays in the growth process.

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his 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. 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (4:11-16).

God gives leaders to the church to equip and build up the whole body so that each individual can do his/her part effectively. Thus, in a healthy church, leaders will not be *doing all the work*; but they will be *teaching, mentoring, coaching and overseeing the involvement of everyone* in the body. Then, everyone will be growing in maturity and taking opportunities to work together so that all the work that God has for the church will be accomplished. It is a matter of "team-work."

Walk in PURITY: 4:17-32

Christians in Paul's day had to learn how to walk with God in a world that tempted them to sin (just as we do today). Paul here speaks to leaving aside the old ways that these believers used walk in. We cannot grow in Christ if we continue the same habits and patterns from our former way of life before we met Jesus.

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (4:17-19).

As new believers IN CHRIST, we have been recreated with God's new nature, but it is up to us to let HIS SPIRIT practically transform us in partnership with our willingness and diligence to grow. Paul uses the analogy of taking off old clothes and putting on a new set of clothes to describe the Christian's new way of living.

“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, and be renewed in the spirit of your MIND, and PUT ON the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (4:20-24).

What follows is a list of vices and virtues (old and new clothes):

Old Clothes

Lying
Anger
Stealing
Rotten talk
Bitterness, rage, anger,
slander, malice

New Clothes

Speak truth
Resolve issues
Hard work, sharing
Words that build up
Kindness, tender-hearted,
forgiving one another

A *RENEWED MIND* is key to making this change in new motivations and new behaviors. Paul emphasized the role of the mind here (4:23) and in many parallel passages. Here are two key parallels on the role of the mind:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your MIND” (Romans 12:2).

“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your MIND on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1,2).

I was recently speaking with an expert that creates advanced algorithms that direct super computers how to operate. Once the algorithm has been created and loaded, the computer operates strictly and effectively within the guidelines it is given. Our human minds are the most advanced computers in the world. But our minds are capable of operating in healthy ways and/or unhealthy ways, depending on how we “program” them. The mind will operate in God-honoring ways if you fill your mind with God’s algorithms: His thoughts, truths, values and agendas. It will operate in God-dishonoring ways if you fill it with the world’s instructions. What are you putting into your mind these days? In days past, computer programmers stated the issue this way: Garbage in – garbage out. Read Philippians 4:8!

Walk in LOVE: 5:1,2

“Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (5:1,2).

Why walk in love? Because we are God’s “beloved children” and if we “imitate God” then we will mimic Him by “walking in love” as God the Father and God the Son loves us. God never asks us to do something for Him that He hasn’t first done for us. All of the relational aspects of Paul’s instructions in this letter can be summarized by one command > Love one another, and by one example > Christ’s love for us.

Walk with CAUTION: 5:3-7

“But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no obscenity and foolish talk, or vulgar wit, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (5:3,4).

There is great caution here about avoiding past ways of immoral and impure living. When we hear the words “immorality” or “impurity” we tend to think of sexual issues – and this certainly is in view. However, Paul’s emphasis falls on the morality and purity of our heart and *our*

words (note also above 4:29-32). Jesus said that *“the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart”* (Matt.12:34). James also emphasized the importance of *“the tongue”* as evidence of what is going on in our hearts. Thus, it is a good exercise to regularly ask yourself: *What kinds of words are coming out of my mouth?* The answer to that question will give you an accurate diagnosis of your overall spiritual condition at that moment.

Walk in the LIGHT: 5:8-14

“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (5:8-14).

“Light” and “darkness” are metaphors for the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. As “children of light” (children of God’s kingdom), it is imperative that we walk as children of light, continually and progressively learning *“what is pleasing to the Lord.”* It is a lifelong process (called “sanctification”) to learn what is pleasing to the Lord and how to walk in those ways, instead of our old ways.

Are there any ‘past ways of darkness’ that you continue to talk like, or walk in? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to this question, and listen for His promptings as you continue on your journey. God’s Word is full of truth that the Spirit uses to make us aware of our old habits that we need to ‘put off’. When He shows you something, confess it (agree with God) as sin, and ask for wisdom and power to move away from those past practices and to form new practices that are ‘ways of light.’

Walk in POWER: 5:15-20

“Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to

the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (5:15-20).

When we are “*filled with the Spirit,*” (5:18) we will exhibit a disposition and behavior that is produced by the Spirit (the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22,23). Our heart will be focused toward the Lord with thankfulness and praise. Our words towards one another will be filled with Scripture and truths turned into songs. Jesus gave us this picture to help us understand His controlling influence in our lives:

“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4,5).

“Remaining connected to the vine” and “walking in the power of the Spirit” are two ways to describe the same idea: connection to the life-giving power of God. How do we surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit? By faith, we ask Him to fill us and to empower us, and we do this in an ongoing way (the Greek command “be filled” can be read: “*continually* be filled”). You invite Jesus to be your Savior just once, and He comes in and stays. In contrast, you must regularly ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, moment by moment throughout the day.

Begin each new day with a simple act of surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. Invite Him to take charge. And then, throughout the day, walk in the Spirit. Listen for His promptings and follow Him. If He brings something to your attention, pause and ask Him what He wants to reveal to you. Invite Him to empower you through difficult situations. Allow Him to guide you in making decisions. When you pray, ask Him to help you. When you read God’s Word, invite Him to illumine your mind and heart. “Keep in step with the Spirit” (as Paul puts it in Galatians 5:25). Being “filled” (controlled by) with the Spirit is the moment-by-moment experience of every believer. It is the only way we can live a life that is truly pleasing to God.

Walk in SUBMISSION: 5:21 – 6:9

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21).

Paul moves to specific kinds of relationships: husbands & wives, parents & children, masters & servants. This entire section is governed by the opening command in 5:21 – “*Submit to one another . . .*”. This spirit of mutual submission uniquely defines Christian relationships in every area of life. Whatever role one occupies in these relationships, our conduct is to reflect our commitment *to Christ*, not just to the other person in the relationship. In short, relationships are one way we show our love for Christ.

- Husbands and Wives

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless . . . This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (5:25-33).

In the Roman culture of Paul’s day, husbands exercised total authority in the family. In contrast, Paul exhorts husbands to “die” (as Christ died for His bride, the church) for their wives, while urging wives to voluntarily respect the leadership of their husbands. The new idea for women is that by honoring their husbands they are actually honoring Jesus by reflecting the way the body of Christ (the bride of Christ) honors Him. The woman is playing her role in displaying to the world the divine mystery of the love between Christ and the church. At the same time, the new idea for the husband is that they are playing the role of the “dying Savior” who gives his life for the sake of the bride. By loving their wives in this sacrificial manner, husbands honor Jesus by showing to the world a picture of the love that Christ has for His bride, the church.

- Parents and Children

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ – which is the first commandment with a

promise – ‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’ (6:1-3).

Children are called to submit to the leadership of their parents, and in so doing, to expect a blessing from God the Father. Yet, contrary to Roman culture, Paul does not place all the burden on the children. Parents also have a responsibility to be Christlike in the way they treat their children. (Remember, “mutual submission” governs all the relationship Paul discusses.)

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

In Paul’s day, fathers were the ones most likely to dominate and misrule their children. Today, what is said here of “fathers” applies for both fathers and mothers who exercise authority over children in the home. Both fathers and mothers, who lead their children, must do so with kindness, making sure not to exasperate (frustrate due to unreasonable demands) the children.

Parents, are there any ways you might be exasperating your children? Are you placing unrealistic demands on a child? Are you giving unreasonable consequences for failures on the part of the child? Are you spending time listening to the heart of your child, or are you merely focusing on controlling the behavior of the child? Ask God (and your spouse, if you are married) if there are ways you are frustrating your child, and thus damaging their view of God their Heavenly Father, and also your relationship with them.

- Masters and Servants

“Servants, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like servants of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is serving or free. And masters, treat your servants in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him” (6:5-9).

Servant-master (or slave-master) relationships were part of the Roman way of life. Masters or mistresses were expected to mistreat their servants or slaves without remorse. (By giving instructions on

how these relationships should be conducted, Paul is not thereby endorsing slavery. In 1 Corinthians 7:21 Paul says that if a servant or slave is able to become free, that is the best option). The same principles of mutual submission apply here as in other relationships. Attitudes such as humility, love and a servant's heart should flow in *both* directions, from master to servant, and servant to master. Notice the first line to masters: "*Treat your servants in the same way*" (i.e., in the same way that servants or slaves are exhorted to act in v. 5. "*with respect, and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ*"). Again, Paul's instructions would have been seen as entirely counter-culture in the Roman context.

The repeated idea in this relationship section is that all service or treatment of another is to be done as if it is being done for/to Christ. Look beyond the 'master', the employer, the one in authority. Obey 1st from the heart, as if you are serving the Lord. The motive is to whole-heartedly serve Christ and receive HIS reward. A "master" or one in authority must treat the one below him/her, as if they are treating Christ with respect and serving Him as well. MUTUAL SUBMISSION is required as unto Christ, just as He submitted to His Father as our example. How do you treat others above or below you?

Walk with ARMOR ON: 6:10-20

Spiritual power was a big issue in Ephesus. You can see this in the historical account of Paul's ministry in that area (Acts 19,20). Paul begins to close his letter by emphasizing the believer's need to recognize the reality of hostile powers and the dangers they pose. The way to prevail is to walk with Christ and "keep the armor on."

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (6:10-13).

Notice that we are strong "in the Lord" (in His name), and "in His mighty power" (not in our own strength). When Peter, Jesus' key disciple faced the powerful forces of darkness on the night Jesus was

betrayed, Jesus had told Peter, James and John to ‘keep watch and pray’ so as ‘not to fall into temptation’. However, they slept. Peter was determined to stand by Jesus ‘to death’, believing he could. But later when asked if he knew Jesus, Peter couldn’t stand up against the devil’s power and he cursed and denied that he even knew Jesus 3 times (Luke 22:31-34, 39-46,54-62). He learned that he was no match for the evil one.

We have an unseen spiritual enemy that we cannot resist in our own strength. The devil is scheming against us. The word for “schemes” (v.11) means “strategies or sinister plots.” The evil one carefully plots ways to thwart God’s work in our lives; to cause us to doubt, to fall to temptation, to stop walking in the power of the Spirit. As Paul wrote in ch.2, Satan is “*the prince of the power of the air that is working in the sons of disobedience.*” Every day, he spreads his vast net of deception, trying to pull people away from allegiance to God. This is why “spiritual armor” is so important. Scholars have suggested that Paul may have been looking at the Roman soldier standing guard outside his cell when he described the 7 pieces of “armor” that a believer must wear every day, and stand firm.

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (6:14-18).

1. The Belt of Truth – This was the wide girdle that held all the other parts of the armor in place. Satan is, first and foremost, “the father of lies.” Thus, a Christian must remain grounded in God’s truth in order to fend off lies that can destroy us. Truth also holds together all other aspects of the believer’s life.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness – The Greek word for “breastplate” is “thorax” – the bullet-proof vest of the ancient warrior. It was composed of metal and it covered all the vital organs in the chest, deflecting arrows, spears and swords. “Righteousness” is the believer’s thorax. Righteous is *truth lived out*. Knowing the

truth of God is the first thing. *Doing the truth of God is the second thing.* We are to be “doers of the Word,” like James says, “not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

Knowing truth and doing truth go hand in hand. Satan will test you to see if you really practice the truth; if you walk the talk; if you are serious about “walking worthy of your high calling” in Christ. There is nothing more frustrating to Satan than a believer who knows God’s truth AND walks in it. In what area of your life is God inviting you to take a step of obedience? What practical step can you take, today, to begin living out what you know to be true?

3. The Footwear of the Good News – The Romans conquered the world because they developed footwear that allowed their armies to move with exceptional speed. Josephus the historian writes that these shoes were thickly studded with sharp nails, giving them firm footing in battle. As Christians we need to be wearing the footwear of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. This means we should be ready to live and speak about our faith in Christ in any situation. The gospel of peace moves quickly with us; in our actions and our speech. And when people test us with questions or objections to the gospel of peace, they shouldn’t be able to push us off our balance. Our feet are strongly rooted in the good news.

4. The Shield of Faith – In ancient times, warriors dipped arrows in tar and lit them as they fired at the enemy. Since shields were typically backed with wood, they could catch fire. Thus, warriors would soak their shields before battle, so that they were flame-proof. Similarly, Satan will shoot flaming arrows at us: temptations, accusations, doubts, lies, discouragements. But we need only one thing to make all those flaming arrows worthless: the shield of faith. That means *our trust (faith) is firmly in God.* We are looking to Him to defend us. Faith is our weapon against everything Satan throws at us. When we trust in ourselves, those fiery darts can take us out; but when we cry out to God with eyes of faith, we can stand firm.

5. The Helmet of Salvation – The helmet obviously covers the head, which is critical. Our head is covered with the knowledge that our salvation is in Christ and it is secure. We are saved from the penalty of sin; we are being saved from the power of sin; and we will be saved from the presence of sin. Our deliverance and victory are certain, because of Christ our King. We go into battle as victors,

not victims, against an enemy who is already mortally wounded and will ultimately be defeated.

6. The Sword of the Spirit (the Word of God)

It is critical to know the Word of God and to be able to use it when Satan comes at you with lies. When Jesus was tempted in the desert, He quoted Scripture right back to the devil (who was trying to misuse Scripture against Him). Jesus wielded the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, in the face of temptation. And that's exactly what we should do.

7. Prayer in the Spirit – The last piece of armor is prayer- *“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”* This is how we fight our battles . . . by calling out to God Who is able to do *“exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us (3:20).”* Prayer is our way of keeping in touch with our Commander who is seated in the war room overseeing the whole battle. As we stay in touch with Him, through prayer, He will guide us to victory over the Evil One and his schemes. Paul concludes by asking for prayer for himself, that he might be granted wisdom and power to continue making Christ known in the prisons and palaces of the Roman empire.

Final Greetings: 6:21-24

Tychicus, a dear brother and servant in the Lord, was one of Paul's faithful companions and likely the one who carried this document from Paul to Ephesus. Paul ends with a brief benediction.

“Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (6:23,24)

Discussion Questions

1. Paul begins the 3 chapters of practical living by urging believers to live a life “worthy of the calling you have received”. Skim through these chapters and pick some key ways to “live worthy” that you want to focus more on. What are a few you chose?
2. What is our motivation for forgiving others according to the last verse of Ch.4 (4:32)? Why do you think “anger” is repeated so much in ch. 4:26-32?

3. Ch. 5:21 begins the relational section by exhorting believers to “Submit to one another...”. What is the 2nd part of v.21, and why is that so important?

4. Ch. 6 focuses on the believer’s armor and prayer. What do each of these pieces of armor and prayer do? Which do you need to focus on most right now?