1-6-19

Ephesians 4:1-3

At this point in Paul’s letter, there is a significant shift in what he is talking about. Up to this time, he has been explaining theology to the Christians at Ephesus, and to us. We have covered some very deep subjects. God knew us before the foundations of the earth; in the council God had with Himself in eternity past, He knew us and loved us and made plans for us. God made a plan to deal with the sin He knew would come; with the division He knew would come. Mankind would be divided from God and from each other.

God didn’t let His plan be known in the beginning, but over time, what had been a mystery has been revealed. God has chosen to bring all things back together through Jesus Christ; God the Son. All of God’s plan works through Jesus. We who belong to Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This seal is an earnest, a promise, that we belong to God and no one can change that.

Paul has explained that we didn’t stand a chance of surviving judgement. God is far to holy and just and we are far to evil. But in His love and mercy, God planned a way to satisfy His justice through Jesus Christ that we may be forgiven.

Our spirits are reborn through Jesus; our spirits were dead in sin but have now been given new life by the Holy Spirit, and that makes us children of God; Actual children. We now have an eternal inheritance along with Jesus. We are now truly alive. And somehow, we are actually seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We have access to God by prayer.

By the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus actually reside within us; and we reside in Christ. We are in Christ. That is so important: in Him we live and move and have our being. Additionally, we are part of the church and we are being built into a temple of God.

When we accept Christ as Saviour, we become one people, a whole new creation. We are no longer Jew or Gentile, we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Our nationality is Christian.

All of these are wonderous things and hard to comprehend; but then, we who are human-beings can’t hope to comprehend God. If we could understand God completely, then He would not be above us; He would not be God.

This brings us to about the mid-point of the letter. Paul has been discussing theology, now he turns more to application; he explains what we need to do as people of God, as a church, what we need to do with all the theology he has just gone through. Remember that Paul prayed for the Christians to be more filled with the Holy Spirit so to have a better understanding of all that God has for us. That is a prayer we can pray for ourselves.

Paul starts off by describing himself as a “*prisoner of the Lord*”. This actually has two meanings. This is one of a group of Paul’s letters know as the “prison epistles”. Paul wrote this letter while he was actually in prison, most probably in Rome. And he was imprisoned on account of his witness to Jesus. But he also means that he is attached to Jesus with love and a deep desire to serve Him. Because of his attachment to Christ in this way, he can easily deal with the physical imprisonment. Pray for this kind of attachment to Christ; that you are willing to witness about Him, regardless of the cost. When we consider what Christ has done for us, this is not an unreasonable prayer.

Paul says “(I) implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”. First, what have we been called to? We have been called to be disciples of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. We have been called to be children of almighty God Himself. We are called to be a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be built into a temple of God. We are called to make disciples of all the nations to help build God’s Kingdom.

That is some heavy stuff; but this, and more, is all wrapped up in being a Christian. We are associated with the eternal God: We need to act like it. We cannot simply claim Christianity and then live as the rest of the world does; people should be able to tell a difference. There has to be a difference because accepting Christ is a life-changing experience. We become something new; a new creation.

In this chapter and part of chapter 5, Paul focuses of two aspects of how we should walk; that is, how we should live our lives. First, he speaks of unity, then he talks about purity. The purity is for the individual Christian; the way he behaves and how he interacts with others. But verses 1-16 focus on unity, and so, is for the church. Of course, the church has lots of individuals, and each one must live in a manor worthy of a disciple of Jesus.

Paul continues in verses 2 and 3 giving the characteristics of a life worthy of this calling. We are called to humility or lowliness. This is the opposite of pride, but it does not mean being a doormat. Humility means recognizing that every human-being is made in the image of God and therefore is valuable. No one is intrinsically more valuable than someone else. Because we recognize that we are not better than others, we treat others with respect; even considering them more important than ourselves. It helps to remember that all we have and all we are comes from God.

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The “poor in spirit” are the humble. This is a characteristic that is important to Jesus and necessary in His followers. This is reason enough to be humble, but being so even brings blessing; the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Philippians 2:8

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

To be a Christian is to be like our Saviour. Jesus is our perfect example of humility. Consider what He left behind to become one of us, what He went through to save us; think of Him washing feet, even of the one who betrayed Him. This is how we are to walk.

Paul mentions gentleness or meekness. This is not lack of strength or will. Someone who is physically strong or strong willed can be gentle or meek. It simply means that their strength is in check; which paradoxically shows strength. We are called to treat others with gentleness. One who is gentle doesn’t try to hold their strength or authority over others; it will be used for the benefit of others. Gentleness is important to Jesus and to the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the gentle (or meek), for they shall inherit the earth.

Humility and gentleness go together in their blessings, for the Kingdom of Heaven will include the new earth. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus speaks of Himself:

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Again, gentleness is a character trait of our Saviour and we are to try to be like Him.

We are to have our humility and gentleness with patience which is also referred to as longsuffering. Longsuffering is a good word. It’s a description; it explains what we are to do. Notice that suffering is not pleasant. It means we have to put up with someone who aggravates us in some way. Often times, people aggravate us and they don’t mean to; it is simply a personality clash. Sometimes they are just not very far along in their Christian walk.

We are to bear with such people; for a long time. How long? As long as it takes. Think of Peter asking Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother. Jesus let him know that there was no upper limit; we are to forgive as often as we need to. It is the same with patience. We have patience for as long as we need to. It is helpful to remember the longsuffering that God has for us. Think about how often we fail God, how often we aggravate Him, how often we treat Him with disrespect. If we were on the receiving end of our own doings and attitudes, I don’t think any of us would have put up with ourselves as long as God has.

Paul ends verse 2 with having tolerance for each other in love. Tolerance goes hand in hand with patience. It is again putting up with the quirks and short comings of others. Tolerance, here, has nothing to do with allowing error. Any Christian who is falling into some kind of doctrinal error or into a sinful lifestyle needs to be lovingly led back to the straight and narrow. We are not to tolerate wrong teaching or belief. We are to tolerate the typical failings that are a part of the human condition.

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking of the church here, this is how we deal with fellow Christians. We treat the rest of the world like this if possible; but it is vital in the church. If a church is to last and carry out its purpose in Christ, there must be unity. This means unity in the basic orthodox doctrines of the Christian church. It means unity in carrying out the purposes of the church. It does not mean that everyone thinks and acts the same. As we will see later in this chapter, diversity (in its proper form) is absolutely necessary for the church.

Verse 3 calls us to be “*diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*”. Diligent: this is a word that requires action. It requires perseverance and commitment and work. This is something that we as a church must work toward achieving and maintaining. Unity can be broken in so many ways. That is why we need to be humble and gentle, that is why we need patience and tolerance. We must care about these things because we are children of God and the world is watching us.

We get a glimpse of Paul dealing with a unity issue with the church in Philippi.

Philippians 4:2-3

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul knows that there is a problem between these two women. It doesn’t matter what it is. All it takes is two people to divide a church. And these are both Christian women who have directly helped Paul spread the Gospel. But there is division between them and, for the benefit of the body of Christ, it must stop. Notice what Paul does. He avoids taking sides or blaming, but he puts it on the two of them to deal with the issue and move on. He also calls on the rest of the church leadership to be involved to lovingly and patiently work toward a solution. If each person is trying to work within the Holy Spirit, a solution will be reached.

Back in Ephesians 4:3, Paul mentions the unity of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one, there are not many Holy Spirits; so, the Holy Spirit is a unity. If we think of our own bodies, we know that we only have one spirit. And so it is with the church, which is the body of Christ; it has one Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Paul implores us, as Christians, to behave as such. We are ministers of God. We are only useful to our Master in as much as we obey Him in our actions and our attitudes. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we must not grieve Him.

Prayer

LORD God, You have blessed us with an abundance of spiritual blessings. You are kind and gentle to us. You are longsuffering in Your dealings with us. In Your righteousness, You could destroy us in an instant and be justified; yet You tolerate us. We owe You a great debt that it would take eternity to pay, but we are forgiven that debt when we accept Christ.

It is our desire and we owe it to You, to treat our brothers and sisters as You have treated us. We ask the Holy Spirit to keep forefront in our minds what You have done for us and urge us to respond to others in kind. Help us to obey that command to love one another.

This church has seen its share of troubles, but by Your grace, it still stands. We ask You to continue to pour out Your grace upon us that by the Holy Spirit we may continue to worship You and bring You glory. Strengthen what is here with Your spiritual blessings; guide us in Your Holy Spirit; grow us into what You desire for us to be.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen