

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 16

Walk Worthy
September 15th 2013
Ephesians 4:1-6
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Ephesians 4:1. We are crossing over into what scholars call the “paraclesis” portion of Paul’s letter. The word “paraclesis” means “exhortation” or “admonition” and it comes from the first word in this second section in the Greek text. Usually in Paul’s letters you can find the hinge where he turns from theology to application by looking for this word. It shows up at the ideological mid-point in Romans 12:1 and at 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and it signals a major change in tone from a focus on who God is and what he has done to secure our redemption toward how we should live as recipients of God’s gracious work of redemption. Let me read to you now from God’s holy, inerrant and inspired word:

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with 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 all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Before we dive into the specific words of this passage I want to spend a few minutes listening to this text at the forest level. There is a sense in Paul’s letters in which you have to be impacted at FOREST level before you can make sense of what he’s saying at TREE level; do you know what

I'm talking about? There is a big picture impact to these words coming as they do at this particular point in the letter that I want to make sure you have heard.

Forest Level Listening

When listening to this text at the forest level we are immediately impacted by:

1. The Place Of Paraclesis

Paraclesis as I mentioned, means moral exhortation. When do you encourage people to begin acting in an appropriately ethical manner? How you answer that question is just about the most important thing in the life of a church. You see, if you introduce morality and law as part of how we become acceptable before God you fall into the pit of legalism and works righteousness. On the other hand if you never introduce the issue of morality and law you fall into the pit of anti-nomianism and both of these pits leave you outside the Kingdom of God, so the stakes on this are pretty high.

Jesus is clear that a concern for morality and law is a part of the Gospel in some way and that the neglect of law reveals a person as outside the covenant community. In Matthew 7:21-23 he says:

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, **you workers of lawlessness.**’ (Matthew 7:21-23. ESV)

That phrase “you workers of lawlessness” actually translates the Greek word from which we get our word antinomian. When you charge someone with the heresy of anti-nomianism all you are doing is charging them with being a Matthew 7 type of Christian. They have a sincere profession but they ignore issues of law and morality. They love Jesus and live however they want. Such a person is not a true believer. Jesus said that. So clearly law and morality cannot be divorced from our understanding of the Gospel.

On the other hand the Bible also says that if we put law and morality too early in the Gospel equation we create a mutation of works righteousness that cannot save us. Paul said that if you try and earn your salvation as a wage you forfeit grace:

⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:4-5. ESV)

The Bible explicitly says that if you try and earn salvation with law and works of morality you are attempting to by-pass grace and it is by grace only and not works of righteousness by which we are saved so that just won't work. So, how do we put this all together? The way the Bible does; Old Testament and New. Look at Exodus 20, look at the context for moral exhortation in the Old Testament:

¹And God spoke all these words, saying,

^{2c}"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

^{3c}"You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:1-3. ESV)

That's the preamble to the 10 Commandments, ground zero for Judeo-Christian morality and if you read it careful you will notice that the law is given to saved people. Moral imperatives follow gracious redemption. Get this wrong either way and its game over for your church. We don't keep the law to EARN our salvation. We keep the law to RESPOND to our salvation. Obedience is how we say thank you and its how we say "I love you"; Old Testament and New. Jesus said:

^{15c}"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15. ESV)

Saved people need to be told how to show gratitude and love toward their redeemer and this is why Paul turns now to ethical exhortation. Saved people are exhorted to obey.

Secondly in terms of the forest level impact of this paragraph we need to consider the:

2. The Paradox Of Peace

If you read this letter straight through you have to be impacted by the transition from remarkably precise theology in chapters 1-3 followed immediately by an exhortation to peaceful Christian

fellowship. That sounds like a contradiction doesn't it? And yet, Paul says, the two actually go hand in hand. That's what a paradox is, a paradox is something that sounds like a contradiction but on closer inspection is not. So is the relationship between orthodoxy and peace. We tend to think in church life that you have to choose between orthodoxy and fellowship; that you have to be either a TRUTH church OR a LOVE church. We tend to think that if we are too precise in our theological statements we will necessarily sacrifice some measure of loving fellowship. I know this to be true because some of you have expressed that to me over the last few months as we have been updating our statement of faith. I know in fact that this fear has had influence in our church over the course of its history. Our original Statement of Faith was the 1689 Baptist Confession – I've recently been able to double verify that – that statement of faith was over 14,000 words; it was remarkably precise. Now somehow over the course of multiple revisions our Statement of Faith gradually shrank and became far less precise and detailed. Our current version is 393 words – by way of comparison that is about how many words are on the label of a bottle of salad dressing. The guiding thought in this church has been that less theological precision should result in greater opportunities for fellowship. As we've contemplated a new version that would bump back up to 2000 words several people have expressed concerns that more clarity will result in less unity. The Bible does not share the concern that truth and peace are contradictory. On the contrary, as we will see this morning, the Apostle Paul believes that truth is the precondition and motivation for real Christian unity. We are tipped off to that intention by the placement of this text within the flow of the letter and also from the internal grammar of the paragraph. Verse 1 and verse 3 are connected. Verse 1 contains the main verb "to walk" and verse 3 contains the desired result: "such that we will maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". Verse 2 tells us what virtues to cultivate to facilitate that desired result and then verses 4-6 remind us of the theology that makes all of this possible and desirable.

With that we move from forest level observations to tree level. Let's look first at the 4 virtues that are commended to us as ways we can express our eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Tree Level Listening

Virtues To Cultivate:

The first virtue that Paul commends is translated in the ESV as:

1. Humility

It comes from a compound word made up of the Greek words for “humility” and “mind” or “thinking”. Paul is commending humility of thought. He is telling us to cultivate an attitude whereby we understand our thoughts and opinions cannot be authoritative inside the house of God. This is the opposite of the mindset that is characteristic of sin and rebelliousness in the Bible. Think about it, what was the original sin? Adam and Eve took from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil so that they could be like God deciding right and wrong for themselves. The first sin like ALL SIN begins with believing that we are capable of deciding right and wrong for ourselves. Christian community begins with the conviction that we are NOT ABLE to decide right and wrong for ourselves and therefore our opinions, thoughts and inclinations will not be considered authoritative in God’s House. What will be authoritative in this house is the Word of God. The converted mind is described in precisely this way throughout all of Holy Scripture:

But this is the one to whom I will look,
to the humble and contrite in spirit,
who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2. NRSV)

Peace in the House of God is maintained by rigorously marginalizing human opinions and thoughts and by faithfully elevating the Word of God above all things. We will require of one another what we read in the Word, we will not require of each other more than we can read or prove in the Word of God. That’s why there isn’t anything in our Statement of Faith about drinking alcohol or not, sending your kids to Public School or not, having cable TV in your home or not. It is right and good and appropriate to have convictions about those things in the church but it is not right to elevate them to the level of doctrine – THAT’S what divides! Human opinions treated as doctrine divides the church, submitting to the Word of God as the rule of faith and practice is what unites the church. Be humble and lowly in mind – tremble before the Word of God and put very little stock in your own thoughts and opinions and you will show yourself eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2. Gentleness (Or Meekness)

The second virtue is translated by the ESV as “gentleness” though it is the same Greek word often translated as “meekness”. It is the word used by Jesus in the Beatitudes when he says:

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5. ESV)

Meekness is a word and a concept that most of us have no frame of reference for whatsoever but in Bible times that was not the case. People hearing Jesus or Paul use this word would have perceived that Jesus was quoting Psalm 37 and Paul is quoting Jesus so for us, 20 centuries later and fairly Biblically illiterate, reading Psalm 37 would probably be very helpful. We won't read all of it but let's at least notice the climax of the Psalm in verse 11:

¹¹ But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:11. NKJV)

The meek shall inherit the earth – that's what Jesus was talking about and the meek shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace – that's what Paul is talking about. Obviously Psalm 37 is important if we want to understand what the Bible means by meekness. When you read Psalm 37 it becomes clear that the Psalmist is contrasting “the meek man” with “the evildoer”. The evildoer is envious of others, he lives for the moment without considering future consequences, he schemes and plots to advance himself at the expense of others, he is willing to make use of violence and fraud to accumulate wealth and power, he borrows money but walks away from his debts, he is wealthy and increasingly powerful but it is all doomed to fail. Eventually and ultimately his empire of lies and blood collapses and he meets his maker and is forced to account for his sins. The end of that man is ruin and darkness. His ways are the opposite of meekness.

The meek man lives his life in constant anticipation of the final reckoning. He knows that life on this earth is brief and that afterwards there is a Judgment. He knows it is better to be poor for a lifetime and rich in eternity. He knows that the Lord sees all and knows all and he lives contentedly within the circle of permission afforded him by the law. His life plan is to please the Lord now and to be blessed of the Lord later. He is not angry when his plans do not succeed because he knows the Lord's plan always prospers. He feels no frustration when his earthly ambitions are thwarted because he knows that ultimately the meek shall inherit the earth. So he does not panic or compromise in times of economic difficulty. He trusts in the Lord to provide.

He does not change his giving patterns when things are tough because the cattle on a thousand hills are God's. He is not reed shaken by the wind, nor one disturbed by rumours or changes in the chambers of power and earthly influence. He knows not what the future may hold, but he knows the one who holds the future and he is at rest. This is the way of meekness.

Meekness in a church seeking to maintain peace is that quality whereby you learn to live with unresolved hurt and unrealized ambition. It is not needing closure. It is not forcing your way into positions of influence. It is not needing to get even. It is knowing when you don't really know and it is therefore being willing to wait a little longer before making a decision or forming an opinion. It is knowing the difference between conviction and doctrine and therefore knowing what to fight over and what not to. It is knowing that God will sort everything out in the end. It is resting in His Sovereignty. That's meekness and you can't do church without it.

Thirdly Paul commends what is translated in some of our Bibles as patience and in others as longsuffering.

3. Patience

The Greek word here is *macrothumia* where macro means long and thumia means suffering. When this word is used in the Bible it usually refers to God's longsuffering towards his covenant children as for example in Exodus 34:6:

⁶And the LORD passed by before his face and proclaimed, "The LORD God, pitiful, and merciful, **longsuffering** and very compassionate, and true (Exodus 34:6. LXX)

Some more modern translations render that as "slow to anger". The idea is illustrated for us in the story of the wicked servant in Matthew 18. The servant fell into tremendous debt to his master and was about to be thrown into prison along with his wife and children:

²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have **patience** with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. (Matthew 18:26-27. ESV)

Same Greek word exactly. To be patient or longsuffering with one another is to forgive each other our faults and failings rather than flying into a rage and demanding immediate satisfaction.

It is to remember God's patience with you and to be similarly patient with others under the operation of his grace and kindness.

It is related to the fourth virtue Paul commends to our cultivation, translated in the ESV by the phrase "bearing with one another"; it is what the older generation called "forbearance".

4. Forbearance

The Greek word in question is *anéchomai* which means "to put up with". It appears as a participle here which suggests that it may not be an entirely new virtue, it may be a further description of what it means to be patient and long suffering. So whether this is really virtue 3b or virtue 4 the point is that we need to be patient and kind with people OVER THE LONG HAUL. We need to take the long view on people in process under the operation of the grace of God in Christ. People in this church are changing by one degree of glory to the next which implies that you are going to have to wait an awful long time for most of the people in this church to look anything like Jesus. We have to take the long view.

Now, this doesn't mean that we stop caring about sin. Paul didn't stop caring about sin. If a brother persists in known sin you kick him out – that's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5; a member of the church there was having sexual relations with his step mother, his father's new wife, and the church was being patient with him and Paul rebuked them saying:

Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.... Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. (1 Corinthians 5:2-7. ESV)

Here Paul is saying pretty clearly, if a man or a woman persists in sin, kick them out of the church. Hand them over to Satan with the hope that they will repent and return in purity. How does that square with the call to maintain unity by means of patience and forbearance?

The answer according to both sides of your Bible appears to lie in the issue of attitude and will. Hebrews 10:26 says this:

²⁶For if we **wilfully persist** in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (NRSV)

The ESV translates “wilfully persist” as “deliberately” but however you translate it, it sounds an awful lot like what the Old Testament called “sinning with the high hand”.

²⁹You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally... ³⁰But the person who does anything with **a high hand**, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.” (Numbers 15:29-31. ESV)

In the Old Testament as in the New Testament there is a difference between sins of accident or impulse and sins of deliberate, wilful persistence. The former is to be met with correction, patience and forbearance the latter is to be met with excommunication. Let me illustrate this in 21st century terms. If a 20 year old member of this church comes to me and confesses that last weekend he slept with his girlfriend we don't kick him out of the church. We remind him that the ways of the world lead to death and that the ways of God are to be trusted and we exhort him to repent. We then encourage him to evaluate the thoughts and habits that left him so exposed to temptation and we suggest some changes. We then likely supply some form of oversight and accountability. In other words we help him grow up. On the other hand, if a 20 year old member of this church comes to me and tells me that he has moved in with his girlfriend, that's a whole different ballgame. That is a deliberate, intentional, wilful, perpetual decision to act against the teaching of God's Word. That's not a sin of impulse or passion. You don't have one too many beers on a Friday night and trip and fall into a three year real estate lease. That's a sober, wilful and according to the Bible, damning decision. Such a person reveals that they are not saved and their visible status within the church needs to be altered to reflect that. Such a person will be, unless they repent, kicked out of the church.

Patience and forbearance means that we take the long view with people who sincerely want to live in conformity with God's will but who stumble, slip, fall and repent from time to time as they grow and change from one degree of glory to the next. It doesn't mean we pat ourselves on the back because of our never ending tolerance and moral blindness.

Theological Flashback And Conclusion:

These are the virtues, be they three or four, which according to the Apostle Paul will serve us in our efforts to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Notice that it doesn't say that these are the activities that will create unity in the Spirit. Christian unity is a gift of the Spirit that accompanies true conversion. You know this if you have ever travelled internationally and have met truly converted believers from another culture. You feel an immediate bond. You don't have to create it. You can't create it but you can destroy it or you can maintain it by carefully cultivating these certain prescribed Christian virtues.

He concludes this little paragraph with a 7 point creed-like statement found in verses 4-6. In Greek there are 7 uses of the word "1". This mini-creed is not organized thematically, rather it appears to be organized as a reverse chronological summary, meaning it appears to summarize the theology of Ephesians backwards going back through chapter 3 to 2 to 1 to remind them of what he has taught them thus far. Let me read it to you again, emphasizing the 7 "1's" as I do so:

⁴There is **one body** and **one Spirit**—just as you were called to the **one hope** that belongs to your call—⁵**one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6. ESV)

Notice how it ends where Paul's Gospel began with the Sovereignty of God the Father over all things. In the middle it recalls the great plan of redemption which is to bring all things under the Sole Benevolent headship of the One Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that it begins where Paul's theology ended; with a reminder that this redemptive plan will result in ONE new community called the church.

So why do we bother trying to cultivate unity in the church? Because the church is the place where the plan of God lands and is displayed before the watching eyes of all creation. When the spiritual powers of the cosmos look at this church they should see Lordship and they should see Fellowship in increasing measure as the plan of God unfolds in this place. That's why truth and peace can never be severed in the local body. They are book ends; if you give up one or the other the whole thing comes tumbling down. This church, FBC, is built around that fact. We are absolutely committed to finding a way to be simultaneously orthodox and loving. We will not say less than the Bible says in a foolish attempt to make this church bigger or more attractive than

it has any right to be. But neither will we tolerate arrogance or divisiveness in a futile attempt to appear holier than we have any right to be. We're going to be humble in our thoughts, careful with our opinions, meek in our interactions, patient in the process, enduring with one another over the long haul, however long it may be.

I said two weeks ago that I don't know what the secret sauce is for great church. I don't. The recipe is too complex and is hidden somewhere in the Sovereign Mind of God but I do know two of the necessary ingredients and they are these: Truth and Peace. I also know that not only are these things not opposites, I know that they only bring a blessing when they come together. So let us be very eager to maintain and steward them both in this local church, for His Glory and for our good. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.