



**MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
(BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND).



**Pulpit Ministry of Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church**

Lord's Day Morning 27<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

Series - God's Covenant Heritage

*No. 16 "The Marriage of Doctrine To Godliness."*

Scripture Reading Eph Ch4

By. Rev. Paul Thompson.

The Ephesian Church to whom Paul wrote this epistle was a Church that was renowned for its spiritual zeal towards the Gospel. This intense desire for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Ephesian converts can be seen particularly in Acts Ch20. There Paul declares v26, v31 that night and day he preached the whole counsel of God. While Paul encourages them in their love for the gospel he takes pains to warn them of the danger of cooling off, of becoming displaced in their faith as the result of false teachers coming in unawares. It is clear that when Paul comes to write his epistle to this Church that a declension has taken place within this church, he writes *to the Faithful* in Christ suggesting that there were those among the Church who were not faithful. The way in which Paul dealt with the Ephesian Church in relation to putting things right was to first present a doctrinal foundation (*a series of doctrinal truths*) upon which would rest all his practical exhortation and admonitions. In almost all of Paul's epistles you will find this division, the first part of the epistle being highly charged with doctrine and the latter being intensely practical. Notice how Paul begins, he does not commence by chiding them and saying you have got to put things etc. No he begins by reminding them of the Whole counsel of God, the doctrine that he had not failed to consistently declare unto them (Acts Ch20). He speaks of their *election and predestination* in Ch1:4-5, of adoption, in (v7) of their *redemption and forgiveness through the blood of Christ*, that doctrinal emphasis continues right to the end of Ch3. Now look at Ch4:1, see how Paul begins the latter section of the book, with a exhortation, "*I...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*" He then follows a series of practical truths which they are to absorb into their experience. Given the nature of the content of Ch4-6, Paul is evidently concerned about the spiritual walk of these believers, he knows that there are those things that must be dealt with. But as he begins observe carefully the Pauline '*therefore*' in Ch4v1, a word of connection, a word that points us back to the doctrine just set forth. Paul's reason for this is to show the Ephesian Church that there is a union or a marriage between vital doctrine and practical godliness. And if there is going to be a putting right of those things that are wrong it will only be done through the application of that doctrine.

Doctrine and practical living go hand in hand, there is a cry today that goes from the pew to the pulpit, that we need more practical preaching, but we cannot have practical preaching except we first have a doctrinal foundation upon which we can lay it. Doctrine governs the way in which people live, doctrine provides the line of demarcation between the world and the Church. That this is so is to be seen in the reverse where there is a setting to the side of doctrine the results will first be seen in the lives of the Lord's people. I want us to consider Paul's opening exhortation in the light of what I have said is the marriage between vital doctrine and Practical Godliness.

#### 1) The Calling of The Believer. "*Ye are called*"

Two truths that are key to understanding what Paul means by '*calling*': are (1) Regeneration, and (2) Adoption. *Firstly* - Regeneration is the giving of a new nature to the Sinner, he is renewed by the Spirit of God, given a new heart a new mind and new affections after holiness and righteousness (*read Ch1:17-18*). He is called out of the world by the Spirit of God. *Secondly* - Adoption is the act of God in bringing those renewed by the spirit into the family of God, whereby they having received a new nature they now receive a new name. The result of the call of the Spirit to salvation is adoption into the family of God [there is one call of the Spirit, but different aspects]. The N.T word for Church is '*Ekklesia*' (*out from-call*) *the called out ones*. It is a call into a new relationship or position, a r/ship with God, Paul reminds the Corinthians in 1 Cor Ch1:9, "*ye were called unto the fellowship of His son Jesus Christ...*" Indeed in Ch1-3 there is a strong emphasis upon the believers new position as opposed to his former, Ch1:5, Ch2:1-2, 19, Ch3:14-15.

This new relationship brings with it certain requirements, being a member of the Church of Christ imposes certain responsibilities. This new relationship which the Ephesian believers had been brought into by regeneration and adoption imposed upon them certain responsibilities. There were certain expectations that were required of them because of their familial position. So you can see the connection between the doctrines of election, adoption and practical godliness. Obviously this was something that the Ephesian Church had grown to forget, among the Ephesians the doctrine of adoption and its practical outworking had become separated Paul therefore seeks to move them to exercise practical godliness by reminding them of the familial state in which they stood.

*"The Fear of God is the soul of Godliness."  
...Dr. John Murray...*

a) The Manner of this calling. The calling of the believer being familial in nature, is a call to walk as a member of the family of God! The word 'worthy' means 'suitable' or 'becoming.' The manner or fashion of our walk is to be suitable to or becoming to our profession. Being part of the family of God the manner or way in which the believer lives must and ought to reflect the family of which he/she is a part. Because the believers calling unto salvation is positional and therefore his conduct is not optional.

To illustrate this for you, as we send our children to attend a Sunday School or a birthday party etc, as parents particularly fathers admonish the child with words like, 'you behave yourself', 'you know what I expect of you' why is that? It is because that child is a representative of the family name, - very often it is the father who is in view when a child misbehaves. The cry 'we don't need doctrine', is the same as saying to a child, "You don't need instruction!" Why do we instruct our children from their earliest days in the rudiments of courtesy, 'Thank you'; 'please' etc? For one reason, we instruct our children in order to preserve the family name, Doctrine is teaching, teaching is instruction, our children need instruction, with the Church doctrine is there to ensure our father's name does not become the object of scorn. God is concerned about his Glory, therefore we as His children ought to be concerned about doctrine. This call is a call to walk in holiness, *1 Thess Ch4v7*, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness." or *2Tim Ch1:8-9*, "God who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling..." From this we note that it is a high calling indeed.

2) The Characteristics of this calling.

The walk and calling of the believer is distinguished from the walk of others by differing characteristics (v2-3), five in particular, *Lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, a loving forbearance with others, and a striving for unity.* The apostle does not develop these extensively, by showing how they ought to be exemplified in the life of the one who is walking worthy of his calling, but he highlights the need for them by calling attention to their reverse (opposite). Throughout Ch4 Paul begins to reflect the worldly perspective and pattern of behaviour that he saw in the Ephesian Church as one that was not 'becoming' the *Family of God, Household of Faith* but was more befitting the lifestyle and walk of the "Other Gentiles" (v17).

It's here that we see the wisdom of Paul in laying down the position of the believer and a sound doctrinal foundation first before outlining the several sins and difficulties of the Ephesian Church. Because the remedy to the problems of Ch4 is only to be found in an understanding of that which precedes Ch4.

a) Disunity. This was a problem at Ephesus (v3, v25.), discord and disunity among the believers. It manifested itself in a number of ways. Paul exhorts these people to exemplify lowliness and meekness along with the others traits that he mentions in v2-3. The opposite of those traits such as humility and meekness is pride, to not be forbearing and longsuffering is to be arrogant and impatient, those things do not contribute to the harmony of God's family.

How is disunity among the church solved, how does Paul set about presenting the remedy, it is by focusing their minds on the oneness of the body of Christ, Ch1v10, 2v16, v25, "...we are members one of another." Disunity among God's people is the mark of spiritual immaturity. It shows us they haven't even begun to understand 'what faith is' Paul reminds these Ephesians that it is Faith that unites them to Christ, faith brings us into union with Christ, but it is faith that also unites us to other Christians who are in Christ! Discord among the Lord's people militates against Christ. Use example of Criticism of the bride of Christ is highly offensive to Christ. All our differences ought to meet in Christ where true brotherly kindness and love are exemplified. When we understand our adoption all difficulties of disunity and contention will be removed. Only Satan works against the unity of the Church of Christ.

b) Instability and immaturity. (v14-15). Paul speaks of a propensity among the Ephesians to run after the latest religious invention, why was that? If you turn to Ch6:11, Paul speaks of the wiles of the devil, the word is 'methodia' it is the same word that is found in Ch4:14 the methodology of Satan. Why is it that today any religious charlatan can find a ready hearing and support among members of the professing Church no matter how outrageous his methodology? The proclivity or inclination to be carried about with every new innovation that comes along, can only happen when there is an absence of doctrinal preaching. What we are theologically

*"He who attempts to stress Christian living by disparaging Christian doctrine is guilty of a most serious blunder. He neglects the important fact that Christian living is rooted in Christian doctrine." R.B. Kuiper.*

will determine what we are methodologically. Our views of God will determine how he is worshipped etc. in society today there has been a reversal of roles, this is seen particularly in the home...*(in homes where no teaching on these issues takes place)*. The order is for the children to dominate the home, no matter what the Father says. That same worldly psychology/mindset has found its way into the Church, God's children determine how things will be done, the Father's determination is set aside. How is this remedied? By once again focusing upon our position in the family of God, in our call to obedience and submission. How children behave is a reflection of how they are instructed - how the church behaves is also a reflection on how they are instructed.

c) Carnality. (v17-31). This also was a problem at Ephesus, v22 put away the former conversation, v25, Put away lying, be done with stealing, corrupt communication. Sadly Paul is not speaking of the ungodly, but those who professed the name of Christ. v25, "...for we are members one of another." He says to them, *lying, anger, stealing, evil speaking...put these things away*, why, v24, "For ye have put on the new man...created in righteousness and true holiness, wherefore..." 'for this reason' put these things away. Ye are no longer alienated from the life of God, but are members of the household of faith therefore walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind! A reminder of their minds being regenerated by the spirit & now called sons of God.

There is this connection between doctrine and practical living, I trust you have seen this, yet I feel I must leave you this evening with some motivations to pursue your calling as a member of God's family. What is it that drives me or incites my soul to pursue a godly walk.

### 3) Motivations to pursue this Calling.

i) Firstly - Be conscious that as you live according to your adoption and calling as a Child of God, displaying a behaviour that is becoming such, the spiritually fatherless are caused to think on your heavenly Father. Matt Ch5, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father, which is in heaven." As you pursue holiness before men you direct their minds to your father. The spiritually fatherless in this neighbourhood or where you live, those of your family will inevitably be pointed to him.

ii) Secondly - Understanding our position as an adopted child of God into the family of God we will be able to cope with our afflictions in a greater way. If I am continually conscious of my being held by an omnipotent Father, and that when trouble arises to Him I can flee. Paul says in Heb Ch12:11, "Now no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

iii) Thirdly - Thankfulness to Christ. Ch5:2, "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." Jesus Christ was not obliged to set his love upon us...yet He gave Himself for us! Is it not right then that we as His children, purchased by His blood ought to render obedience to His word and His commands? May God move our hearts to do so for His names sake.

Unconverted you must plead your fatherless condition, "Oh God, I am without thee as my father" seek Him for mercy, for He has promised that all who come to him by Christ Jesus, He shall in no wise cast out!

By. Paul Thompson.

*"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."*

Hebrews 10:16