

Ephesians 4:1
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Ephesians 4:1-4
Unity of the Spirit

We're going to continue today with our study of the book of Ephesians. We finished chapter 3 last week and will try to say a few things about the beginning of chapter four this morning. Lets read it.

***Eph 4:1** Then I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you to walk worthily of the calling in which you were called, **2** with all humility and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, **3** being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

I'd like to get as far as verse three today and talk about the unity of the Spirit, and spend most of our time there. But there are some things in the first two verses here that deserve some attention because, even though they appear straightforward, I believe they are easily misunderstood.

Paul begins by exhorting the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. This is not the only place he says this. But what does it mean to walk worthily of your calling? Maybe even a better place to start – what is your calling?

In approaching a Scripture like this, the natural mind would probably first define our calling as something God expects us to do, or how he expects us to behave. And then, from there, we would assume to walk worthy of that calling would be act accordingly. Kindof like "shape up guys, God has forgiven your sins and is calling you to serve Him. Now act like it!".

Its probably obvious, but that's not what I understand this verse to be saying. To understand how to walk worthily, or according to, your calling, you must first have some idea what your calling is. This is one of those words that we individualize and therefore misunderstand. We bump into this word "calling" and want to make it about our personal calling, our personal mission, our unique assignment from God. Only twice in the entire new testament is this word used this way...when Paul says that he was called by God as an apostle. But in every other instance, and I believe the way it is used here, Paul is not talking about what we are called to do, or how we are called to function in his body, but really what we are called out of and called into.

Our calling is perhaps best understood when we see it as the fulfillment of the way that God called Abraham. Abraham's calling wasn't unto a behavioral change. Abraham wasn't called to a quest for the Holy Grail. Abraham's calling was much more significant than that. **It was out of his former country, kindred, and father's house, and unto an inheritance that God would show Him.** That is how God called Abraham. That is how God calls you. He calls you out of one

kind, one creation, one family...and into another kind, creation, family – an inheritance that can only be shown to you.

Elsewhere Paul calls this the “high calling of God in Christ”, or the “heavenly calling”. It is a calling out from death, out from the earth, out from the first man, and into the heavens, into Christ. It is a calling to leave one realm by Jacob’s ladder, and abide in another that will be progressively shown to you. The calling of God involves walking the length, the breadth, and the width of this land called Christ. It involves an altar that cuts you off from all that you formerly knew and identified with. It involves a journey of faith, coming to an experience of the mind of the Lord. All of this was Abraham’s journey in type and shadow, and it is ours in spirit and truth. Ours is the spiritual reality of which his only testified.

We could take quite a bit of time and review all of the pertinent verses, but that would take all of our time, and if memory serves, I’ve done something of that once before with respect to “calling”. Suffice to say right now, your calling has less to do with how you function, and more to do with where you are, what you are, and what is left behind. If this heavenly calling is not first real to our soul, you will never function properly in the Lord’s body. And, truth be told, if this heavenly calling **does** become real to your soul, you won’t even care how it is that you do function...only that you’re found in Him.

So you are called of God to follow Christ through death, burial, and resurrection into the universe of Christ, who must be revealed to your soul. Jesus invited people to follow Him. He would often say “come, follow Me.” Where did he lead them? Through the villages of Judea. No. **Into His death, into a door out of one country, kindred, and father’s house, and onto heavenly ground.** A whole new Land that must be revealed. The Spirit will walk you through this Land, and teach you the things that have been freely given. And you will learn, through seeing this inheritance, what is of necessity left behind.

But that being the case, to walk worthily of (or better translated, becomingly...or according to) your calling is to walk according to where you are, where you are not, what is real, and what has ceased to be. You have left something behind, now let it fall from your heart. You have been baptized into His death, now come to reckon yourself dead. You have been raised up with Him, now fix your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. You have been given the fullness of Christ, now put Him on through the renewing of the mind. Or as Paul says in Galatians 5:25 “Since you live by the Spirit, so too walk by the Spirit”. Walk where you are. Live by His Life.

And then when Paul mentions humility, meekness, longsuffering, and love, you can understand that these aren’t the obligatory deeds of the flesh that correspond to your personal assignment. These are the fruits of His Spirit that must grow from the Seed He has given you. These are the things that grow in the land you are in. The produce of the land, so to speak.

Don’t forget what Paul has just told us. At the end of chapter 3 he has just finished talking about being empowered by His Spirit in the inner man, then Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, then being filled up to all the fullness of God, and then the one that does exceedingly abundantly more than we could ask or think through His power working within us. Paul ends chapter three like that, and then starts chapter

four with the word "therefore". He's not making a huge jump from the power of the Spirit back to the works of the flesh. He's carrying on with what he was saying.

Of course you know that there were no chapter divisions or verses in the original letter to the Ephesians. It's just one letter. I would summarize this section like this. Ephesians, I am praying for you. I am praying that you would be empowered by God's Spirit in your soul, so that Christ might actually operate, define, and move your heart by faith. And that you would be rooted and grounded in the love of God, which is the Son that He has given you, so that in every way you would be filled up to the fullness of God. And He will do it. He will do exceedingly abundantly more than you ask or think through the power that works within you. Therefore, since THIS is your calling, since this is what you are called into, walk in it. Walk in it and bear the fruit of it. Deal with one another according to the reality it.

While we're on the subject, I'd like to say a few things about verses like these in the New Testament. It is almost always the case that when somebody starts to realize the reality of the New Covenant, they trip over verses like these. What I mean is this. When you begin to understand the cross, you necessarily see that in the flesh dwells no good thing. You see that God is not trying to get you to behave better, God has crucified you with His Son. And salvation, therefore, isn't a second chance. It is the end of one man and the increase of Another. All of this begins to become more and more clear to you. You know now what Jesus meant when he said "apart from me you can do nothing", and what Paul meant when he said "there is no one who does good, not even one", and what Isaiah meant when he said "all of our righteousness is filthy rags.". All of this begins to become very clear in your heart because of the division that is worked there through seeing the cross.

And you are amazed and shocked at the reality of it and you suddenly start seeing this reality everywhere you look in Scripture. But, inevitably, at some point you come across a portion of Scripture where it seems like Paul or John or Peter is forgetting what they've already said about the cross, and is now giving you a list of things to do and not to do. You come upon verses that say things like "put on humility and gentleness,.". Or "submit to your rulers". Or "put off evil desire, envy, lust, etc".

And you stop in confusion and think "Paul, you just told me that I could do nothing. You just said that I don't live, but Christ lives in me. You just said "not I, but the one that mightily works in me". Are you now telling me what to do to please God? I don't get it.

In my opinion, verses of this kind fall into two categories. Let me summarize them first, and then I'll explain more fully. Most often, Paul is simply encouraging believers to learn to walk in the Spirit, and bear the fruit of the Spirit, since they live by the Spirit. In other words, he tells them to put on what they have been given; and to put off what God has already put away. And then sometimes, in the other category, Paul is dealing with people according to what I call "stewardship of a natural vessel". Let me try to explain.

In the first case, Paul is aware that believers have the Person of Christ residing in the soul, and so often the problem is not in what they have been given by God, but is knowing and abiding in what they have been given. In this instance, Paul tells the church to "put on" what they've been given. And to put off what is dead, and both of these through the renewing of the mind. It's like a person that has a warm coat, but

goes out in the cold with it in over their arm. Its not a matter of lack, it's a matter of knowing and living in to the good of what they have. And so Paul says "for Pete's sake, put that coat on! You have it right there on your arm.". Putting on Christ is not as easy as putting on a coat, however, because in order for us to appropriate the life we've been given, we must begin to see by the Light of His Life. We put on what we have, not when we receive it, but when we begin to see clearly what we've been given. We put on what we have only when it is revealed to us.

This is the sense in which we will see Paul talking to Ephesus later on in this chapter. In chapter 4 verse 22 – 24 Paul is going to tell the church that they need to lay aside the old man which is corrupted according to deceiving lusts, and put on the new man which has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. How? Vs. 23 – by the renewing of the Spirit of the mind.

This isn't a work of the flesh, it is an effect of the Spirit. If you do not have firmly in mind the foundational reality of the cross, you could read this verse and think that putting off the old man was on God's to-do list for you. But anyone who has seen the cross comes to the reality that you can only put him off because God has put him away. And you can only put on Christ, because Christ lives in you. Knowing the Truth is the key. And so, from here, if Ephesians goes on to say things like "let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor be put away from you, etc"...Paul is not describing self-discipline and Adam-improvement. He is describing the renewing of the spirit of your mind whereby what God has cut away from Himself begins to be put away from your heart as you know the truth.

It is exactly the same in Colossians chapters two and three. Paul ends chapter 2 by telling us that self-made religion, severe discipline, and harsh treatment of the body have the appearance of wisdom, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. It begs the question – what does have value against fleshly indulgence? And so he starts chapter three with his answer – "if then you have been raised with Christ, mind the things above. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God and whenever Christ is revealed then you will be revealed.". What else? Verse 9 – you have laid aside the old man with its evil practices and have put on the new man who is *being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*". Here, again, is the renewing of the mind. And then, and only in this way, "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience". These are the fruit of the New Man. And put off "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech". These are the fruit of the old being put away.

So any "good work" in the New Covenant is not a work of the law or a work of the flesh, but rather a work of faith. It is the fruit that grows out from the Seed that God planted in your soul. It works in you by faith. This is the first category of what some people call "do's and don'ts" in the New Testament. We are told to walk in the Spirit since we are born of the Spirit. To put on what we are, and put off what we no longer are, both through the renewing of the mind.

The other category is what I said I called "stewardship of our natural vessel" type Scriptures. These are the verses where you read of things like "submit to governing authorities, don't get drunk with wine, don't bring lawsuits against believers, live at peace with those around you, etc.

To understand where these types of Scriptures are coming from, you have to realize that Christ being formed in you transforms your nature, your mind, your character, everything internal. But it will not make you a better tennis player. The renewing of the mind will not control how far down your foot goes on the gas pedal or force you to pay your taxes. Spiritual growth will never make you a good cook or make it so you don't have to brush your teeth. There are some things that are just purely natural, and because of that, practical wisdom, practical stewardship of your natural body comes into play.

The law is done away in Christ, and we live by the law of the spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul says, do not let your freedom in Christ be an occasion for the flesh. All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial. You are free from the law because you live by the Spirit, nevertheless, Paul says, I will not eat meat sacrificed to idols if it causes my brother to stumble. I will not rebel against civil authorities of the land because it casts shame upon Christ who I claim as my Lord. I will avoid the appearance of evil so that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ not be a stumbling block to any. And so forth and so on. My soul belongs to Christ and He is conforming it to His image. My body, however, though ultimately Christ's as well, is in Akron Ohio and therefore I will pay my taxes, bring my dog inside when he is barking at the neighbors, and work for a living. I will never really be able to say "the life of Christ within me compels me to pay my taxes, and take semi-regular showers". Some things will only ever be natural. We render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.

There is actually one more category, but we will get to it when we get into Ephesians chapter five. It has to do with maintaining in the earth the things that are a testimony of the things in the heavens. But I'll leave it alone for now.

My whole desire for sharing these categories of "do's and don'ts" is not academic in nature, but so that you will not be tripped up when you are reading the Scripture. I cannot tell you how many times people have come to me and said something like, "Jason, I was reading Romans and I was seeing the truth of the cross so clearly in Romans 5, 6, 7, and 8. But when I got to the end it seemed like Paul was giving me a list of instructions." Or Galatians, or Ephesians, or whatever. So I shared what I did so that you will understand these sorts of Scriptures in the context of the gospel as a whole. You will never understand Ephesians 5, unless you have spiritual understanding of Ephesians 1 through 4. You will never understand Romans 13 in the way it was intended unless you've seen 5 through 8.

With all of that said, we have a little time to say something about the unity of the Spirit. Paul says that we should be eager or zealous (a better translation than "diligent") to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Once again, we shouldn't discuss preserving the unity of the Spirit, until we know what it is.

Unity is a common word in the church. There are a lot of churches and Christian organizations that are doing all they can think of to promote unity. But unfortunately, unity, for many people, has to do with agreement or harmony in the flesh. Peace in the natural realm. We think it is agreement on doctrines. Tolerance with differing worship styles. Putting up with discrepancies in our interpretation of Scripture. Or we just think it means plain old "getting along with each other."

But the unity that Paul speaks of here is first of all a spiritual reality. It is not a natural unity of any kind at all. It is not natural minds agreeing on doctrine. It is

not natural bodies sharing one building. It is not natural personalities finding common ground. It is not natural ambitions seeking common goals. It is not natural. What Paul describes here is oneness of Spirit. It is a spiritual fact that was worked in the resurrection of Christ. It is one body, sharing one Spirit.

And you'll find that in the very next verse. "There is one body with one Spirit". Therefore this isn't anything that man could ever produce with any amount of effort or any number of committees. Why? Because not only is it a spiritual reality, but its already done. We are not trying to create the unity of the Spirit, but to PRESERVE the unity of the Spirit. Keep the unity of the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit of Christ in each of us is already one, now don't go screw that up with the flesh. That's what Paul is saying here.

The one who has joined Himself to the Lord has become one spirit" 1 Cor 6:17. That's a fact. That is finished. But if we remain ignorant of this one life, if we remain ignorant of the truth, then our ideas about truth, life, religion, purpose, doctrine, even our ideas about unity, are bound to put asunder what God has brought together.

What I'm trying to say is that the body of Christ is ONE by definition. "We have all been made to drink of one Spirit". We are members of one body. Unity isn't something that we ever need to create by any means whatsoever. It is something that must be realized, known, and walked in, and thereby preserved. It is something that God has done in Christ and which we experience more and more when we all come to the unity of the faith, the mind of the Lord, the true knowledge of the Son of God. I'm getting way ahead of myself here. I just jumped ahead to verse 13 of this chapter. But it all flows together.

Unity is what Paul has already described in chapters two and three. It is one new man. Flesh left behind, Christ is the resurrection and life of all who live. One temple of God. That is unity. Now Paul tells us to preserve in the church what God has established in Christ. In humility and gentleness, be zealous to keep together what God has brought together in and by Christ.

Somebody might say "how can we separate or divide the body of Christ if God has made it from one Spirit?". Well, we cannot as a matter of fact, but we can as a matter of experience or fellowship. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not talking about trying to get along in the flesh because we're one in the Spirit. I'm not talking about tolerating this or overlooking that. That has its place, but that's not what I'm talking about. It is quite possible to be tolerating a whole lot in the name of unity, and still having no experience of the unity of the Spirit – because the unity of the Spirit is always known in the truth. There is no genuine experience of unity aside from a genuine comprehension of the truth as it is in Christ.

I'm talking about coming to one mind, one judgment, one faith, one expectation because we are one in Spirit. I'm not talking about a false unity in the flesh. A false unity is a lie. I'm talking about experiencing the true unity that is given of God and realized in the revealing of Christ.

We'll stop there for this week. I can't say much more without getting into something I won't be able to finish this week.