

The Christian Life
Part One
Eph. 4,5

Last week after the message on Victory, someone spoke to me after the service and basically appealed for help to understand what we as believers should be doing and seeking after. I gave the matter some thought and prayer this week and determined to undertake to give you a short overview of the Christian Life and the instructions of scripture in regard to it.

The nearest that we have to a concise manual on Christian living is found in Ephesians chapters 4 and 5.

In this message we are going to follow a style known as a ‘running commentary.’ We will be going verse by verse through the passage and making short comments on each idea that we find being taught by the apostles Paul. I will be undertaking to be brief but I also want to make sure that I leave you with a solid perspective.

Background on Ephesus and the Ephesian church, Acts 19. The church at Ephesus had a really interesting and powerful beginning. It was a large and thriving trade city, very prosperous, very pagan, very religious, and very immoral. Beginning with 12 new believers, the Lord did a mighty work there through Paul’s preaching and established possibly the best church of the first century. These people loved Paul and took to heart his teachings. One can hear his affection for them throughout the letter that he wrote them to encourage their further development.

We should not think that this passage contains *everything* that we need to know on the subject of the life of the Christian but it certainly contains a great deal of the information that is necessary to us.

Paul’s approach here is to divide the topic into three sections: the nature and design of the church, the purpose of the ministry, and the personal life of the believer.

I. The nature and design of the local church.

Eph 4:1-6

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Paul used an interesting phrase when he said “the vocation wherewith ye are called.” He reminded the Ephesians that the reason that they were involved in this thing of Christianity in the first place is that God had ‘called’ them to it. In the beginning of chapter two he had affirmed that before their conversion they were (Eph 2:3) “...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

However, God, in love, had brought them from death to life and had taken them up into heavenly places in Christ and given them a sure and fixed place there.

Eph 2:4-6

- 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: KJV

Paul referred to this as their ‘calling.’ And, he constantly taught that this ‘calling’ was both specific and for a divine purpose. Those who are called in this way are to recognize that they have the responsibility to conduct themselves in a certain way on the basis of that calling.

Parenthetically (and maybe not useful or interesting) is the phrase that Paul used, “teis kleseos eis ekleithete” - “the calling wherewith ye have been called.” Poetic in the Greek. Both ‘keseos’ and ‘ekleithete’ are derivatives of the verb ‘kaleo’ which is used often in the NT to speak of the work by which God brings a soul to Himself, or as in this case, a group of souls.

Here Paul was instructing the best Christians he knew and desiring that their behavior should be consistent with the design and purpose of the work by which God had ‘called’ them. Another way to phrase this would be ‘live up to the invitation.’

“...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...” NAS

So, he began the discussion by challenging the Ephesians with the concept that to be brought into a special relationship with God, totally by grace and apart from their efforts, was a high and lofty thing which should be seriously considered and to which their lives should be devoted.

Now, human beings typically consider being invited to something really important as something to be proud of, but...

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Paul said that we should be humbled by the ‘calling’ of God and that believers should relate to one another within the church in a particularly pride-less way. The English words “lowliness and meekness” give a pretty good picture of the attitude that Paul said was “worthy of the calling.” Other translations use “humility and gentleness” to express the thought here.

The word “forbearing” means extending patience and tolerance for the perceived faults of others, not being easily offended and not bringing relationships to an end over small insults, disappointments or injuries. It means dealing with one another within the church in the way that a truly humble and gentle person would do.

The first step, therefore, in walking worthy of our calling is to adopt, develop, and practice humble patience with one another.

Jesus told us why when He gave us the Lord’s Prayer.

Matt 6:14-15

- 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. KJV

The person who does not behave in a worthy fashion on this issue reveals that he is not a child of God at all but an imposter.

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The church is to be a place of unity, established and maintained by constant and earnest labor in that regard.

We only need call to mind those who have not followed this admonition to realize that division and infighting within a church is no godly testimony to the world or to prospective members.

Paul rightly couched his instruction here in the terms of hard work because ongoing and faithful unity is no easy thing to maintain. Much personal work of the soul of each member of the church is necessary to maintain and sustain true unity of the group over time.

But it is absolutely necessary and a commitment to such unity is a fundamental element of the Christian commitment to “walk worthy of the calling.”

This also means, by the way, that no one leaves the church except for the most profound of reasons.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The unity of our faith is the binding agent for the members of God’s church. There is one God, one Lord, one faith and one body. We have all been called with one “calling” (the same word as translated “vocation” in v.1).

The single hope, single call, single gospel, and single body all prohibit division within the church and casual separation from the church. Paul rebuked the internal divisions at Corinth and instructed Titus to have nothing to do with divisive people.

It is to be the attitude and commitment of God’s people that what we have in common is far larger than that which tends to pull us apart. Again, it is a part of our “calling.” We are not just called to salvation by God so that we can be this independent and autonomous soul wandering the world. We are called to a calling and that calling is to unity in an ‘ekklesia,’ which, by the way, is another form of the word ‘to call.’

We are called to salvation along with other sinners so that we can live out our faith in a called out assembly in which each one is humbly and meekly committed to be patient and forbearing with each other in a united and unified group of people who share the same faith, the same gospel and the same God.

I. The Purpose of the Ministry

Within this committed and united group of believers, God has a design and a plan. Each one is called to special service and is gifted with the spiritual ability to do what God has called him/her to do.

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

I have taught you before that ‘grace’ is almost always to be understood as ‘enabling.’ This statement is consistent with his teaching in 1 Cor. 12. Every believer is enabled to serve God in some particular and unique way and the differing gifts within the church can be compared to the different functions of the parts of the human body. They do different things but they all work together as one harmonious organism.

All of the gifts that God gives flow to us out of the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ, which Paul here describes in poetic terms.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

The leading “captivity captive” is His deliverance of His people from the bondage of sin. But just as certainly as He delivered them from the kingdom of darkness, He gave them, every one, spiritual gifts to be used in the Kingdom of God.

Paul does not here go into any of the gifts except for those of the public ministry because he is developing the doctrine of the purpose of the church, but he taught in 1 Cor. 12 that there are gifts both large and small but each of them is necessary to the complete function of the Christian church.

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

The apostles were, of course, those whom Jesus Christ personally chose and called in that first century. The office does not continue and all those who take the title are shameless pretenders. In order for one to be a biblical apostle, he must possess all of the spiritual gifts described in the list in 1 Cor. 12.

The office of apostle expired with the death of the original 12 (including Paul). The office of prophet also seems to have expired. They were special ministers in the first century who served a purpose in the establishment of Christianity. They were directly connected with the apostles and did not seem to be able to pass the gift along to others.

Evangelists are probably missionaries, men specially burdened and gifted to carry the gospel to new regions and open new territories to God's truth. One need only know or read of one true missionary to know that they have a special and unique burden as well as a special set of spiritual gifts.

It is debated as to whether the last two ministry positions mentioned are to be thought of as a single gift, pastor/teacher, or two separate gifts. In my experience it does seem that there are people with a gift to teach who do not necessarily show that they are called to the ministry. I believe that one of the problems of the modern church is that it has not distinguished those gifts well.

The pastor must be able to teach, for sure, and he must be qualified to lead the people of God on a number of levels as Paul taught both Timothy and Titus.

But here is the thing. All of these public offices of ministry in the church have one function and one purpose. Paul is very clear and very plain on this issue.

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

They are to bring the saints, as individuals and as a group, to spiritual maturity in which each one is doing ministry work as he or she is gifted by God so that the body of Christ may be 'built up.' They are to function together in unity of the faith with a common understanding of Jesus and His Work, and they are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, phrased here as "the fulness of Christ."

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The 'that' in v.14 is 'to the purpose that' and refers back to the giving of the gifts of ministry to the church. Here we literally see what was the purpose of God in gifting men with the offices of missionary and pastor/teacher.

They are to bring people from spiritual childhood in which they are vulnerable to the deceptions of crafty false preachers who make their living by deceiving people with interest in spiritual things. The duty of the pastor is to make spiritual adults out of these spiritual children so that (1) they do not get caught in these deceptions, and (2) so that they can proclaim the truth themselves as they live out their own callings.

When the spiritual children become spiritual adults the result is a sound, harmonious, strong, thriving and growing church.

This is the place that modern Evangelical Christianity has gotten it wrong and in a huge way. It is not the pastor's job to accomplish v.16 himself or with a team of professional 'ministers' that he might bring in. It is his job to train the believers to become adults so that they can accomplish this work as a natural by-product of them living out their own calling in a spiritually mature way.

One note I might make here, if you read the accounts of the great revivals of the past, the church membership becoming revived and committed, functioning as ambassadors for Christ in the community, was key to most of the movings of God upon His people.

I. The Personal Life of the Believer

These principles being laid out, Paul turned to the details of godly living and gave a fairly exhaustive exhortation concerning how believers ought to conduct themselves as the "walk worthy of the calling."

- 17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,**
18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:
19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

As a general guiding principle, the believer should recognize that the behavior of the child of God is to be significantly different from that of the unconverted world around him.

Their behavior, Paul says, is guided by vanity of mind, darkened understanding, alienation from God and blindness of heart. When he said that they were 'past feeling' he meant that they were calloused toward God, no tenderness of affection and an insensitive conscience that did not register fully the wickedness of their behavior.

By the way, if you haven't noticed, Evangelical Christianity in our day has a sizable population who are of a vain mind, are mostly blind to the call of God to holiness, and are calloused toward sin. This is the reason that there is little difference between the lives of the church going population and the rank unbelievers.

- 20 But ye have not so learned Christ;**

- 21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:**
- 22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;**
- 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;**
- 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.**

We hear so often in our day, “you can’t judge me.” Whether that is true or not, this is, no one has ever learned from Jesus Christ that it is OK to be ungodly. The only thing that He teaches and the thing that everyone hears who truly hears Him is that the old life from which we were “called” is to be totally and completely put away. That life was and is corrupt and completely incompatible with living in a godly fashion.

We have been born “from above” and with that new birth is a new life living in us, a life that God created “in righteousness and true holiness.”

What we learn from Jesus Christ is that our mind is to be “renewed” with a whole new and godly set of desires and goals and that we are to consciously and deliberately “put on” that New Life, that New Man, who, by the way, has no problem at all with what he must give up and no problem with the call of God to be holy.

Here is the thing though. If you have “heard” some other thing, some other format, some other expectation for the believer, you did not hear it from Jesus Christ. I will let you figure out for yourself where and from whom you did hear it.

This is not a thing that can be done once and finished. That ‘old man’ lives with us 24 hours a day and constantly struggles to have his own way. Thus, the ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’ is a daily and sometimes minute by minute exercise and duty of the believer. The believer is, then, being called to a constant and continual battle against corruption in his own soul.

“Righteousness and true holiness” is the target for the believer’s victory. This is not some imaginary and theoretical holiness that we possess in eternity but a real and practical holiness that we live out in this present, day by day and hour by hour.

Having established the principle and set the goal, Paul then moved to a series of very blunt, very practical, instructions that cover, at least in a general way, the entire life of any child of God.

- 25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.**

We are to be honest with each other, not pretending, not hiding, and certainly not living a double life, representing ourselves to the group as a believer while living a wicked and hidden second life.

- 26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:**

Simply put, “do not get angry and sin: do not hold on to anger.” No rocket science here. Anger is not to control us and we are not to live as angry people.

27 Neither give place to the devil.

Every sin, every sinful attitude or disposition, every refusal to obey God and be holy, every act, emotion, decision, or commitment that is contrary to the general principle “walk worthy of the calling of God” is a decision to give the devil a room in your life. And he willingly occupies all territory not consciously committed and given to God in obedience.

But the devil is not content ever with the ‘place’ that he is given. If he so much as gets his foot through the door, he will mercilessly pursue a course of occupying and destroying the entire life. **Listen to me.** If the devil has so much as a ‘toe-hold’ in your life and you are not actively fighting him to take it back, you are on your way to destruction. Your enemy has no compassion for you. In fact, he has active hatred for your soul and will not rest until he has destroyed your life.

Peter gave us good counsel concerning him.

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. KJV

Any commitment to holiness, if it is sincere and made with integrity, will begin to expose areas where change is needed. The purpose and decision to change is an act of war and it is taken as such by the kingdom of darkness. Rarely will advancement be made without a battle. You can rest assured of that.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

This principle was so important in the mind of Paul that he repeated himself in this same lesson.

5:4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Rules for conversation for the believer:

absolutely nothing corrupt, filthy, coarse, or moronic
everything said with a purpose to do good to the one hearing it
or, to give God thanks for His blessings.

Limits the scope of conversation, does it not?

But understand, this does not mean that we are quoting the Bible 24/7 or only willing to talk about spiritual matters. There is conversation that is not corrupt which is designed to encourage, instruct, build relationships, convey important information relative to our jobs and a thousand other things. The point is that our conversation, both in style and content, should be always designed to be helpful to others and glorifying on some level to God. There might even be a light-hearted joke or two in there.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Right between verses 29 and 31 we have this. It causes me to think that in particular the arena of conversation is an area to which the Spirit of God is particularly sensitive and can be easily grieved.

I.