

Therefore

Ephesians 4:1-6

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ August 2, 2015 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort 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 of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6, NRSV)

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This passage in Ephesians 4 begins with the word “therefore” and as my seminary professor taught us many years ago, whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible you have to stop and ask what it’s there for. This is not a throwaway word. No, it’s a word that acts as a bridge between what has just been said and what is about to be said. In fact, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians could be understood in two parts, with this word “therefore” making the very middle. The first three chapters are Paul’s passionate declaration of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. The next three chapters, beginning with this passage, are now going to be what this all means *therefore* in our daily lives.

Remember all those times in school when you sat in some class or another and some teacher up front was giving you loads of information about some subject or another and you sat there wondering to yourself day after day how any of this was ever going to apply to your daily life? Sometimes academia is referred to as an ivory tower, a term which can be defined as “a state of privileged seclusion or separation from the facts and practicalities of the real world.” Paul wants to be clear here there he does not live in an ivory tower. In fact, the Christian Gospel he has just declared is the most relevant message the world has ever heard.

You see, the Gospel is not some myth concocted by vision-seekers living in remote caves or mountaintops, but a message that is rooted in the actual events of history. God really did come to earth in the person of his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived and taught and died and rose from the dead. And the real events of those days now have real implications for these days. The Gospel isn’t just a story given to entertain the world, but a message of power meant to transform the world. But the order is important. Paul knows that. And so first he tells us what God has already done. God always acts first. Then, once we recognize in faith what it is that God has done, we can now begin to understand what we are called to do in response. That’s where the “therefore” comes in. God has done this...therefore...this is what it means for your life and for the world.

Paul begins this second half of his letter on his knees, not praying but begging. **“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord (remember, he’s writing from prison), beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”** What Paul has to say here is of utmost importance. What follows isn’t friendly advice but a critical message of life and death. Now that we know what God has done for us and what God has called us to, we must live up to that calling.

So what is that calling? Let me remind you what we’ve covered these past nine Sundays as we’ve walked through the first half of Ephesians. Through the sacrifice of God’s Son we have been called and invited into the very family of God. The sin and death which once kept us separate from God and the life God intended for us was fully and forever dealt with when Jesus, his Son, became one of us, died on the cross for us, and then rose from the dead ahead of us. The Son of God made it possible for us to be welcomed into God’s eternal family as beloved sons and daughters of that same Father in Heaven.

As Rick so beautifully articulated for us last week as we walked us through the end of Ephesians 3, these are the “riches of God’s glory.” Christ “dwells in our hearts through faith as we are being rooted and grounded in love,” a love which “surpasses knowledge.” If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, trusted him with your life, then there is now a “power at work within you that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all you could ever

ask or imagine.”¹ *If you are a Christ-follower, you are a beloved son or daughter in the very family of God.* This is your calling. Now, Paul begs you, live a life worthy of that calling!

In Jesus’ day when you were a child born into a family it was understood that even from a very young age you took on the work of that family. If you were born into a family of fisherman, then as soon as you were able you were out there helping to mend the nets and clean the fish. A farmer’s children would be right out there in the fields helping with the harvest. Jesus took on the work of a carpenter because his father, Joseph, was a carpenter. A child in the family took on the work of the family.

In some ways it’s still the same. Imagine I was a young man without a place to live and you and your family decided to take me in and give me a roof over my head and three meals a day and a place to call home. Well, as a part of your household I would not be surprised if you made clear to me from the start, “Listen, Jeff, you’re welcome to live here as a part of our family but you need to know that there are certain things we expect in this house. You have to keep your room clean. You have to let us know where you are so we don’t worry. You have to pitch in and do some of the chores. Things like that.” I’d expect that because that’s how it works. When you come into a family you receive the privileges of that family but you also must take on the work of that family. You might say that with the relationship comes responsibility.

Whether you decide to receive it in faith or not, the greatest gift you will ever be offered in your life is the gift of a loving relationship with your Father in Heaven. If you do receive this gift and come into his eternal family, know that that relationship comes with responsibility. As a part of God’s family you will be called to join in the work of that family. Which is what? Essentially, it is the renewal of all creation, the bringing of the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. When Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, he was teaching us to pray that the work of God’s Family – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - would be accomplished, that everything on earth that is now in conflict with God’s will would be transformed to be in accordance with God’s will.

You see, our Father’s work is to see people who are lost from him come home, to see those who are sick healed, those who are alone befriended, those who are in bondage set free, those who are guilty forgiven, those who are blind see, those who are hungry satisfied, those who are dead alive! This is the work of our Father in heaven, work that even now is taking place all around us, and our calling, as his children is to join him in this work, to let his Spirit which fills us empower us to be his hands, and feet, and voice in this world to participate in seeing these things come to be.

So here’s the question I have to ask before I go further. Are you willing to live a life worth of that calling. I don’t assume that we all are. Some of us are not willing, or at least not yet willing. For you see, there is a world of difference between the person, on the one hand, who comes to church on Sundays because they believe in Jesus but largely remains unchanged in their life apart from this place, and on the other hand the person who not only believes in Jesus but has given his or her life to letting him lead in every moment, every decision, every word, every action. Paul is begging us here because he knows that there are plenty of people in the church, then and now, who are simply hoping that Jesus will forgive them and take them to heaven someday but in the meantime they pretty much want to live their life on their terms following their agenda.

It can’t work that way. If you receive the blessings of the family you must also take on the responsibilities of the family. And some of us here this morning need to face this difficult question and ask ourselves if we are truly willing to give everything away to Jesus and do whatever he says and go wherever he goes because that’s what it means to be his follower. Along with Paul, I beg you to do so, to choose to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, to allow Jesus, who has made his home in and among us, to empower you to join him in the renewal of all creation. Anything else you give your life to will, by comparison, appear cheap and shabby in the end.

Therefore...beginning today and over the course of the next seven weeks as we look at the last three chapters of Ephesians we will come to see just how relevant the message of the first three chapters is in our daily lives. In fact, right off the bat Paul shows us how this message is relevant in the very next verse when he writes, “**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” The first implication of our calling as children in God’s family is that we must do everything we can to maintain unity in God’s family.

¹ All these citations are from Ephesians 3:14-21.

We live in a world that is tragically marked by division. Sociologists tell us there is an ever-widening canyon of divide in our world between the rich and the poor. The upcoming election year is revealing, once again, the deep political divisions which threaten to fracture our nation. Nearly 50 years after the civil rights movement we're having to come to grips with just how much racial division still exists between us. In nearly every region of our world there are political, or religious, or racial differences that are leading to war, or violence or even genocide. In our neighborhoods people are finding themselves more and more isolated from one another, separated by fences or technology or fear. Even in our families, rampant divorce and abuse continues to divide even those whose vows or blood ought to bind them together.

It wasn't any different in Paul's day. In fact, it's never been any different. Ever since the beginning of time when humanity chose its own ways over God's ways, Adam and Eve, and then Cain and Able, and everybody else who followed after was divided from one another and from God by sin and shame and guilt and violence. And so it is into this terribly divided world that God comes and calls children into his family and tells them that his first work in this world is to restore unity. The first thing God wants to do is to establish a family in this world where division no longer has a foothold.

This is a tall order. Especially when we consider that there has probably been as much division in the church over the years as anywhere else. As you know, there continues to be division in the church. Race, and politics, and age, and personality, and preferences threaten to bring division even here in our own congregation. So how in the world can we maintain a unified family in the church when we're submerged in a world so overcome by division?

The answer is in the next verse. Paul writes, **"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."** When I was a kid and my parents wanted to tell me something that they thought was extremely important they would say it over and over and over again to make sure I got it. Maybe it was nagging but it worked. Paul isn't nagging here, but he is repeating himself over and over and over to make sure we don't miss his point. *One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.*

You get his point? At the very heart of God there is oneness. It's a mystery, but even though God is known to us in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – God is still one God. This family of God, though diverse in three is still unified as one. In fact, the unique declaration of the Christian faith is that at the heart of God is a community but that there is absolute unity in that community. It follows then that because there is unity in God there is also to be unity that flows from God. God's children, the church, are unified as one body which shares one hope, one faith, one baptism.

Remember how in the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul talked so much about the fact that now the dwelling place of God is not a Temple in Jerusalem made of stone but instead is a Temple of the church made of flesh. God no longer makes his home in buildings, but in his children. As we were reminded last week, Christ literally dwells in our hearts through faith.² Therefore, because the God who dwells in and among us is eternally and absolutely united, those of us who are now the dwelling place for God, his children, are also eternally and absolutely united. *The church, therefore, is as indivisible as is the Trinity.*

I like to use the cross as a way to remember this. Let the vertical beam of the cross remind us of our unity with our Father in Heaven. Because of what Christ has done, there is now no division between us and our Father. The sin which divided us is forgiven. The death which kept us apart is overcome. In faith we are now eternally beloved children of our Father in Heaven. But the cross has a horizontal beam as well and the horizontal beam of the cross reminds us that this unity we share with our Father now extends to those who share the same Father, to our brothers and sisters in the family of the church.

I grew up with a brother two years younger. We're friends now but that wasn't often the case when we were younger. Part of the problem was that we were very different in almost every way. There wasn't a lot of common ground. As a result we fought a lot. And as the older and bigger brother I was in the position to win most of those fights. I'll be honest with you, I was not an ideal older brother as a kid. And so my parents were forever after me to get along with Tom. And I'd protest saying that I just didn't like Tom. He'd say the same thing about me. That's the kind of things

² Ephesians 3:17.

kids say, you know. And my parents response was always the same, “You don’t have to like him but you do have to love him because he’s your brother.”

As I thought about that his week it occurred to me that my parents never said this to me about anybody else. Never once did they say, “You don’t have to like that bully Joey Burke down the street but you do need to love him because he’s your neighbor.” “You don’t have to like that man Mr. McAtee who makes you sit on the bench every game but you do have to love him because he’s your coach.” I’ve learned later, of course, that Jesus calls me to love everybody, even my enemies. But it’s different when it’s your own family. There’s a bond there that can’t be changed. And as a parent myself now I will tell you that there are few things that bring me more joy as a parent than when I see my own children showing love and kindness to one another. They are brothers and sisters, a part of the same family, and one of the deep desires of my heart as a father is that they would act like it.

It’s no different with our Heavenly Father. At the very heart of God is a deep desire to see his children as one, lovingly and permanently united. The reason for this, in part, is that if the work of God is to overcome all division in this world then the world must first see that division has been overcome in God’s family. As the world looks at the church, in other words, they must get a glimpse of what God ultimately plans to do with all of creation. Of all places on this earth, the church ought to be the one place where all the things which so often and otherwise divide people in our world do not divide. The unity of God is to be reflected in the unity of God’s family, for in the same indivisible way God is united as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are also indivisibly united as brothers and sisters in Christ.

You may not like me, but you have to love me because I’m your brother. Of course, it goes the other way as well. Our witness in the world depends upon it. Why would others in our world be drawn to Christ and to the Kingdom he brings if they don’t even see that that Kingdom is making a difference in the community of the church? They won’t. And so like a body that is made up of many different parts but accomplishes great things because all those parts work together in unison, or like an orchestra which is made up of many different instruments but makes beautiful music because all the musicians harmonize the same Mozart symphony, the family of the church, though meant to be radically diverse in its membership, is meant to work together in a beautiful unity that is rooted in the very unity of God.

This is why Paul begs us to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To be clear, he’s not saying that we need to make this unity happen because it already exists. He’s saying that we need to make this unity *visible!* We are already unified as brothers and sisters. Now we must make sure that this unity is on display for the world. As Jesus once said, the main way that the world will know that we are his disciples is because they see us love one another.³

In this passage Paul gives us a taste of what he is going to talk about along these lines in the coming three chapters. Before I close let’s take a quick look at some of the ways we are to maintain this unity. As I do, I want to you look around you, with your eyes and in your mind, at the other people in this congregation. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ, to whom you are indivisibly united in Christ. Some of them you like; some of them you don’t much like. Either way, they are still your brothers and sisters and Paul gives you four ways you are to make your unity visible to the world.⁴

You are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...with all humility. Do you know what it is that lurks behind almost all division and discord? Pride. The people we easily like are the ones who give us the respect we think we deserve and the people we don’t much like are the ones who treat us like dirt. That is not the way of Christ. Our view of others in the church is not rooted in how they view us but in how our Father views them. You are no better or worse than that person in the church you can’t stand. You both are beloved children of the same Father. Let this reality humble us all in the ways we see one another.

You are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...with all gentleness. In the original language this word “gentleness” was often used to describe a domesticated animal like a horse, an animal which had tremendous power but had been trained to restrain its power to accomplish something good. The point is that in the church, just

³ John 13:35 – “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

⁴ I’m relying heavily on commentary on this passage from John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), 148-150.

because we have the right, or authority, or power to do something, for the sake of our brothers and sisters we may choose to refrain. As the humble person thinks little of his own merits, the gentle person thinks little of his own rights.

You are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...with patience. Sometimes this word patience is translated as “longsuffering.” In a family there are bound to be things that annoy and aggravate. It’s true of your blood family at home; it’s no less true of your spiritual family in the church. The key is to remember how longsuffering God has been with us. I found myself praying the other day about a personal moral weakness that I have struggled with since I was a youth. I can’t begin to imagine how many times I have asked for God’s grace in this area of my life and yet God continues to extend his grace. God has been infinitely patient with me; how can I not then strive, with his help, to be patient with you as well.

Finally, you are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...bearing with one another in love. As you may know, the sort of love God has for us and the sort of love he then wants us to have for one another has little to do with feelings and sentiment. Rather, the love God models for us is a love of decisive action, a love that leads me to seek the best for another even when I don’t much care for another. It’s the love that led Jesus to die for a world that hated him. It’s the love that now must lead you to do good works for your brothers and sisters in Christ even if they never return the favor.

These things are not easy. There is no other way to say it. Look around you at the other people in this church. We’re a community of people who, in many ways, are very different from one another. There is so much in us that can potentially divide us. Yet we are brothers and sisters, children of the same Father who has invited us into his family with all its privileges and responsibilities. If we are ever going to share in the reconciling work of our Father in this world we must first make visible to the world that reconciliation has already occurred between us. At the very least that will require humility, gentleness, patience and forbearing love.

Thankfully, we do not have to generate these things ourselves. For God, in Christ, has already humbled himself first, taking the very form a servant who died for his enemies. God, in Christ, has already shown us gentleness, thinking little of his own rights for the sake of those he came to save. God, in Christ, has already shown us patience, freely pouring out on us his grace over and over and over and over again. And God, in Christ, has of course already demonstrated his love, not in his feelings but in his actions, with his life, in his death.

What our Father, through Christ, has done for us, may Christ now do in and among us so that we, by his grace, may do in and for this world God loves. Along with Paul I beg you, let us all *therefore* live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

Amen.



The Next Step **A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application**

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-6. What do you notice first?
2. When Paul begs us to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, what sort of life do you think he envisions? What have we been called to?
3. Why do you think that Paul believes unity in the church is so incredibly important? Do you agree that it is?
4. Why do you think that over the course of church history there has been so much division in the church? Why do we have such a hard time maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?
5. When you think about the church, do you think about it in terms of a family? How might it change things when we begin to see one another as brothers and sisters who share the same Heavenly Father?

6. When we relate to one another in the church as brothers and sisters, Paul says we are to relate to one another with humility, gentleness, patience and forbearing love. Which one of these qualities is most difficult for you personally? Why?
7. What is one thing you think would help our congregation here at Faith live more fully into the unity we share in Christ?
8. How have you been most challenged or encouraged by this message? What do you recognize needs to change in your life?