

(Through the Bible) Ephesians 4

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of responding to God's work and living a life worthy of our calling as children of God.

Duration: 50:03

Scripture: Luke 23:43, John 21:15-17, Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 4:11, Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 11:13

Topics: "Christian Living", "Gods Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reminding the audience that he is a prisoner of the Lord. He then urges them to walk worthy of their calling, emphasizing that their response to God is important. The speaker highlights how God has done great things for them, bringing them near and providing for them. He contrasts this with the emphasis on works in some religions, stating that God's work for us should come before our response to Him. The speaker also discusses the importance of love as a motivating factor in our lives, contrasting it with greed. He mentions that men are either motivated by love or greed, and encourages the audience to follow Jesus' teaching of loving one another.

Transcript

Now he begins the fourth chapter again with a reminder that he is a prisoner of the Lord. And I beseech you, I beg you, I implore you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you were called. Now notice this is the first mention now that Paul makes of your response to God.

He has spent three chapters telling you what God has done for you, of what God has given to you, of what God has provided for you. He spent three chapters unfolding the glorious mysteries of God's love and grace and goodness. How God has reached out to you, you Gentiles who were once alienated and far away, and He's brought you near.

Now, after spending the three chapters telling you all that God has done, now he turns around and he says, now you walk worthy. One of the problems in the church is that we have been emphasizing the walk first. We've been trying to get people to walk before they even know how to sit.

Paul gets us firmly seated in Christ in heavenly places. And now he says, now walk. You've learned how to sit.

Now walk. In a little while, as we get to the sixth chapter, he's going to say, now stand. And so, as another author of Ephesians has divided it, he's spent three chapters telling you of the wealth and of the riches that you have in Christ.

Now he's going to spend a couple of chapters telling you about the walk that you should have, and then he'll spend the last chapter telling you about the warfare that you are in. So, the wealth, the walk, and the warfare of the believer. Ruth Paxson divides the book of Ephesians that way.

Watchman Nee divides it in sit, walk, stand. But, it is important to note that God's work for us is first of all mentioned before our response to God. So opposite to the religions which teach man to do his work in order that God might respond to him.

And if we are in that works response, I work that God might respond syndrome. We will never have the full relationship with God that He desires to have, nor will we ever enjoy the riches that God wants to bestow upon us. Because our works are always going to be failing and feeble.

It is God's work that matters, not mine. It is my response to God which is important, not trying to get God to respond to me. God is already initiated.

And God is the initiator. Man is the responder. So many times, man seeks to reverse that in the preaching making man the initiator and God the responder.

Such is not the case. Such is not the Gospel. There is no Gospel in that.

The Gospel is that God initiated. God so loved that He gave. And that man responds.

We love Him because He first loved us. The love of Christ constrains me. I am responding to that constraining love.

And so, any work that I try to do for God that does not come from a responsive base is unacceptable. Any work that I try to do to gain favor, any work that I try to do to gain merit, to gain points, to gain righteousness is of no avail. It is only that work that flows freely as I am responding to God and His grace and His goodness to me that has any real eternal merit or value.

And we need to get this correct theology or else we're going to really be missing out on all that God is wanting for us and wanting to do for us. You do not initiate the relationship with God. He has initiated it.

You need to respond to it. You cannot make God love you more. He loves you supremely.

You need to respond to it. Now, when I am responding to God, then I am not really getting all puffed up in my works and boasting in them and going around and bragging about all I've been doing for God. All I'm doing is responding to love that I just can't handle.

Overwhelming love. I respond to it. And so it isn't, oh, I've given so much for God or I've sacrificed so much for the Lord, you can't believe how much I've given to the Lord.

No, no, no. The person who has the true relationship with God is going around saying, you can't believe all that God has done for me. Oh, I can't believe His goodness.

I can't believe. Listen, you'll never believe what the Lord did for me this way. You know, and they're always talking about what God has done and what I do is nothing, man.

It's just a response to this glorious grace that I have received through Jesus Christ. So, respond now to God. Let your walk be in keeping with what you are.

God has called you to be His child that you might in the endless ages to come experience the richness of His grace and mercy and love toward you in Christ. Now respond to that by living in a manner that is fitting that of a child of God. Live like a child of God.

Don't live like the devil. You did that long enough. Now start living like a child of God which you are through Jesus Christ.

Respond to it. How am I to live? With all lowliness and meekness. You see, I'm to live as Jesus Christ.

You remember when Jesus said, Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart. Now, how are we to walk? In all lowliness and meekness.

Now, this is really the natural response to the real understanding of the grace of God for me and my unworthiness of it. You see, if I'm doing my works trip, then involved in the works is the bragging and in the boasting and in the glorying of what I am and what I have done. But when I realize what God has done for me, what God is offering to me, this glorious grace of God of which I am so totally undeserving and unworthy, the effect that I have is that of lowliness and meekness.

As Paul said, that God should choose me less than the least of all the saints to bestow this abundant glory. That I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. And that man who truly understands what God has done is humbled by what God has done.

The man who has had a true confrontation with God is humbled by that confrontation. Walk with all lowliness and meekness. Now, I'm thinking of a certain TV evangelist who seems to have purchased so much time on television and some people have come and asked me what my opinion of him is.

Well, from what I have observed, which is not very much because I have a hard time taking it, if I am commanded as a child of God to walk in lowliness and meekness, if I am commanded as a child of God to walk in love, then these are characteristics that I do not observe. And so, the whole ministry must come into question. I am to walk with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.

What a glorious way to walk. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I'm not to be cursing all of the government officials, the FCC, and all of the ministers that don't go along with me.

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I should be constantly seeking the unity of the Spirit within the body of Christ. Now, it is sad to me that man has so divided the body of Christ and built his fences, and in some cases, block walls.

We are the people. Everybody else is false and wrong. We have the truth.

And they build up these barriers and these walls around themselves. A few months ago, I received a letter where I was invited to speak at a certain denominational meeting. And I got a letter this week after I had

responded.

I thought, well, that's interesting. I'll accept that. And so, I wrote a letter of acceptance and I got a letter back this week from the minister who had invited me to speak.

And he said, I'm awfully sorry, but when I brought up your name, you know, a lot of the ministers were afraid, you know, that, you know, some of our ministers might be influenced by you because you believe, you know, in the validity of the gifts of the Spirit. It might draw some of them, you know, away, so they've decided that they don't want you to speak. You know, I'm sad.

There's only one body. There's only one Spirit. There's only one hope of our calling.

There's only one Lord. There's only one faith. There's only one baptism.

There's only one God and Father of all who is above all, through all, and in you all. There should be a unity in the body of Christ. And the thing I like about being non-denominational or inter-denominational is that it does give us a comfortable place and a comfortable posture whereby we can accept and love and feel free to fellowship with anybody from any denomination who really believes in Jesus Christ.

Now, there are some denominations that will not accept the baptism of another denomination. Some churches that will not accept the baptism of another church. Oh, you were baptized by them.

Well, then you'll have to be baptized again before we can receive you into membership. There are some churches that have closed communion. When they pass the broken bread, you can't take it unless you are an approved member of that church.

Walls by which the body of Christ is divided. One baptism. That is, we were all baptized unto Jesus Christ.

We weren't baptized unto Paul or Apollos or Peter. Or we really weren't baptized a Baptist or a Christian church or a Methodist or Catholic. We should have been baptized into Jesus Christ.

Not into a church. Because a church cannot save you. There's only one baptism and that's the baptism into Jesus Christ.

And if you were baptized into a church, then I would encourage you to just be baptized into Jesus Christ. One baptism. One faith.

One Lord. One God and Father. But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

I love this. What is the measure of grace? The gift of Jesus Christ. And every one of us is given a measure or given grace according to the measure of the gift of Jesus Christ.

Paul said, If God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how much more then shall He not freely give us all things? You see again, when I come to God for my needs, I think, oh, I don't know if God's willing to do this much for me. Well, how much is God willing to do for me? He's willing to send His only begotten Son to die for me. Now, do you need more than that? And so, grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore, He saith when He ascended up on high, that He led captivity captive and He gave gifts unto men. Now, He that ascended, what is it, but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. And He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things.

What's He talking about? The one who has ascended is the same one who descended into the lower parts of the earth. And when He ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. They came to Jesus one day and they said, show us a sign.

And Jesus said, a wicked and an adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but there will no sign be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so must the Son of God be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. When on the day of Pentecost, the people were gathered and Peter stood up to preach to them, he identified his subject as Jesus of Nazareth, a man who proved that He was from God because of the signs and the wonders that He did in the midst of you, who you, according to the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God with your wicked hands have crucified and slain.

But God raised Him from the dead because it was not possible that He could be held by it. For the Scripture said, Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither will you allow the Holy One to see corruption. And we testify unto you that God did not leave His soul in hell.

But He has been raised again. Jesus in Luke's Gospel chapter 16 said, there was a certain rich man who fared sumptuously every day. And there was also a poor man that was brought daily and laid at his gate full of sores and the dogs were licking his sores.

And the poor man died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. More also, the rich man died and in hell he lifted up his eyes because he was in torment. And he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus there being comforted.

And he said, O Father Abraham, would You send Lazarus that he may take some water and touch my tongue with it because I am tormented in this heat? And Abraham said, Son, remember that in your lifetime you had the good things and Lazarus the evil. Besides that, there's a gulf that is between us that is fixed and it's impossible for those that are here to come over there or for those that are there to come over here. He said, if that be the case, then I pray, please send Lazarus back that he might warm my brothers lest they come to this horrible place.

And Abraham said, they have the Law and the Prophets. They will not believe the Law and the Prophets. Neither would they believe even if one should come back from the dead.

Jesus tells us that prior to his death, Hades was separated into two compartments. In the one compartment, those who were being tormented, the unrighteous. In the other compartment, those who were being comforted in Abraham's bosom.

For we are told in Hebrews 11, when it lists off these great men of faith in the Old Testament, that they all died in faith not having received the promise. But they saw it afar off and they embraced it and they claimed they were just strangers and pilgrims. But they all died in faith not having received the promise because God has reserved some better thing for us that they, apart from us, could not come into the perfected state.

Now, Isaiah tells us that a part of the mission of Christ in chapter 61, to preach the Gospel unto the poor, to bind the broken hearted, and then also to set at liberty the captive and to open the prison doors to those that were bound. So that when the thief on the cross said, Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom, remember me. He said, today you will be with me in Paradise.

So, when Jesus died, His Spirit went into Hades. But into that compartment where Abraham was comforting those who had died in faith. As they were awaiting the fullness of time when God would fulfill the promise of sending the Messiah.

For they all died in faith, but they could not ascend into Heaven because it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could put away their sins. All they did was foreshadow the sacrifice of Jesus Christ whereby sins could be put away and man could have access on into Heaven. And so Jesus preached to those souls that were in prison.

And on the third day when He rose again, He led the captives from their captivity. He opened the prison doors to those that were bound. He led them from their captivity.

And the graves of many of the saints were open and they were seen walking in the streets of Jerusalem after His resurrection from the dead, Matthew 27. So, He who has ascended is the one who first of all descended into the lower parts of the earth. In order to open the prison doors to those that were bound, in order to lead those who had by faith been waiting for the Messiah, in order to lead them on into glory.

And He gave gifts unto man. And to some He gave apostles. And to some prophets.

And to some evangelists. And to some pastors and teachers. So, He anointed some men to be apostles.

He anointed others to be prophets. Others to be evangelists. Others to be pastor-teachers.

Now, what is the purpose then of the church? What is the purpose of these men that God has gifted? For years, because of my seminary experiences and my exposure to Oswald J. Smith and his missionary conferences, and because of my denominational background, I thought that the primary purpose of the church was the evangelization of the world. And so, I was always trying to preach evangelistic sermons in order that I might evangelize the world. Because, after all, that, I was taught, was the primary purpose of the church.

And as the result, the people in my congregations have been exposed to evangelistic preaching over and over and over again. Every week, they were hearing messages on the importance of receiving Jesus Christ and being born again. The new life that you could have in Christ.

Repent. Turn your life over to Jesus. Surrender your life to Him and be saved.

Now, I would oftentimes have extremely powerful evangelistic messages that the Lord had laid upon my heart. I mean, I would just have my heart burning with this message because it was so dynamic and powerful, it would surely convert the heart of a sinner. And I'd be so excited, ready to deliver this powerful message, and surely no sinner could resist.

And I'd go to church, and there wouldn't be a single sinner in the house. Oh, how frustrating. I'd take my frustrations out on the people.

If they had only been witnessing this week as they should, they'd have had some of their neighbors in church with them tonight. You're a disgrace to God. You're a failure.

And I'd begin to beat the sheep that were there. Jesus didn't say, Peter, do you love Me? Beat My sheep. Yet I was.

Jesus said, do you love Me? Feed My sheep. But you see, I was so into evangelism that I never took the people beyond that level. I never brought them into the fullness in Christ.

In Hebrews 6, it says, therefore, setting aside these first principles of the doctrines of Christ, the repentance from dead work, the baptism, laying on of hands, let's go on into maturity. I wasn't doing that with the people. Because I thought that the primary purpose of the church was the evangelization of the world.

Isn't that what they taught me in seminary? But then I came across this passage in Ephesians 4 and it transformed my life and my ministry. I found out God didn't call me to be an evangelist. I never felt that He did.

I was uncomfortable trying to be an evangelist, but that was the mold that the denomination fit me into. And I realized that God called pastor teachers too. And this is the area where I was very comfortable and I loved.

But the purpose of the church, the purpose of the pastor teacher was the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry and building up the body of Christ. I've been tearing down the body of Christ. I've been beating the body of Christ.

I've been driving them away. I should be building up the body of Christ. The pastor teacher.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God into the fully matured man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And I had a whole new philosophy for the purpose of the church. It isn't the evangelization of the world, but it's the building up of the body of Christ.

And so I then began to focus my ministry on building up the body of Christ, loving the body of Christ, ministering to the body of Christ, strengthening the body of Christ, teaching the body of Christ the Word of God, feeding the body of Christ. And as a result, as they began to mature and come into this maturity in Christ, their lives became a witness to the world around them and others came to know and came to find out what was going on. And evangelism was the byproduct of a healthy body.

That we no longer be like children who are tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to deceive. There's always been the curse of these weird doctrines that blow through the church. And there are always those little sheep who will follow anybody ringing a bell.

Not matured. They come with their starry eyed. Oh, I heard the most wonderful thing the other day.

We can all be perfect now in these bodies. Oh, bless God I'm perfect, you know. Oh, help us God.

Children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine and slight of men. Cunning craftiness. And boy, I mean they are there.

What cunning craftiness. These letters that they send out on their computers. Cunning craftiness.

I mean they are masters of deceit. They lie and wait to deceive. But, speaking the truth in love.

And that's how the truth should be taught and spoken. In love. Not pounding the truth into people.

Not ranting and raving. But speaking the truth in love. That we may grow up into Him in all things.

That growth through the truth of God. Which is the head even Christ from whom the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies according to the effectual working in the measure of every part making increase of the body to the edifying or the building up of itself in love. So, Christ the head.

And all of us really fit together, joined by the Spirit, made a part of that body. The beautiful body of Christ functioning together, coordinated together by the Spirit coming into the fullness. But, you know, we look at the body of Christ today in the world and it's fasting.

And no wonder the world isn't interested. You know, the church is so divided. Divided over the dumbest things.

It is only as we really come to that unity in love that the church will have a powerful witness before the world. Building up itself in love. Now this I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord that you no longer walk as the Gentiles.

So, we are told, first of all, walk in a way that is fitting as a child of God. Now we are told that we are not to walk as the Gentiles. And that word is used for the heathen who walk in the vanity of their mind or empty-headed.

Because they have their understanding darkened because they are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Because of the blindness of their heart. So, their hearts are blind.

Thus they are ignorant. Ignorant of the life of God that is available to man. And they are alienated then from God.

They are past feeling. And have given themselves over to lasciviousness. To work all uncleanness with greediness.

You are not to walk as the Gentiles who walk in lasciviousness, in sexual impurity. Working all uncleanness. A catharsis.

Filthy. And greed is usually the problem behind it. Today, the real problems of the world you can trace back to greed.

The greed of man. All of the social ills come back to the greed of man. The exploitation of people.

All comes back to greed, wanting for myself. But that's not what you've learned from Jesus Christ. If so be that you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus.

What did He teach? Love one another. Even as I have loved you. And He has taught that love should be the motivating factor behind our lives and behind our actions rather than greed being the motivating factor.

Now, there are two powerful motivators in the world today that move men. And you are moved by one of the two motivators. Men are either motivated by love or they are motivated by greed.

The man apart from Christ is motivated by greed. You see the results in the world around us. The man who is in Christ is motivated by love and you see the effects within the church.

Wherever they are following the truth that is in Jesus. What a glorious thing to be around people motivated by love. Motivated by the love of Christ.

What they do, they do in the name of Christ. What they do, they do for Jesus Christ. For the love of Christ constrains me.

And thus they are giving because they are motivated by love. Whereas those that are motivated by greed are only interested in getting. Now that's not the way you've learned from Christ.

But you have learned that you should put off concerning the former manner of life, the old man which is corrupt according to his deceitful lust. You are to put him off. Know ye not that the old man was crucified with Christ.

That the body of sin should not reign as king over you any longer. Put off that old man, corrupted because of his deceitful lust. And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind and that you put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Now, this is the way I'm to walk. After the new man, the new nature in Christ. Righteousness and holiness.

Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man the truth with his neighbor for we are members one of another. Now, be angry and sin not. There is an anger that is not sinful.

That anger at sin, that anger at unrighteousness, that anger at evil, that anger at bigotry. Jesus, when he came into the temple and saw the money changers there, saw the desecration of the house of God, saw the commercialism, was angry. And I think that he is equally angry with the commercialism today within Christianity.

And he said, My father's house is to be called a house of prayer. You've made it a den of thieves. And he drove them out angry.

Again, when he came into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and there was a man with a withered hand and the Pharisees watched to see what he was going to do, he said to the man with the withered hand, Stand forth. And he looked upon that Pharisee crowd with anger because they would, because of their narrow bigotry, keep this man from receiving the work of God, the healing of his withered hand that day. And he looked around upon them with anger.

Anger because men, through their traditions, would hold back the work of God from other men because that's not the way we do it. That isn't according to the bylaws of our denomination. There is an anger that is not sinful.

Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down on your wrath. Don't go to sleep at night holding a grudge.

It's apt to destroy you during the evening hours. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Don't give any place for the devil or for the devil's work in your life.

You know, so many times we give place. We say, well, I have a right. And we say, go ahead, sit there.

I have a right to be swayed. Don't give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more.

But rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good. Notice that he might be able to give to those who have need. In other words, the motivation for working is not just to provide for my own needs, but I might be able to give to someone else who has need.

Let him that stole steal no more, but work with his own hands so he can give to the poor, so he has something to provide to others. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the ears. This is something that I think that we need to really take to heart.

There is a form of jesting many times even among believers that is not really proper. Filthy communication. Jestings over sexual things or filthy things.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which will build up someone. Not that which will tear down someone. Not that which will destroy someone else.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Again, back in chapter 2, He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. Now, don't grieve the Holy Spirit.

How do I grieve the Holy Spirit? Well, I grieve the Holy Spirit when filthy communication comes out of my mouth. For He is pure. He is holy.

I grieve the Holy Spirit when I speak to someone in anger. When I sort of put myself on a pedestal to put others down. That isn't the work of the Holy Spirit.

It's to build others up. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice.

Now, these are the things that grieve the Spirit. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, malice. On the positive, be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

There it is. Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted. Not hard-hearted.

Tenderhearted, forgiving one another. By what measure? Even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Remember now the lessons that Jesus taught on forgiveness.

There was a certain man who had a servant who owed him 16 million dollars and he called him in and said, pay me what you owe. And he says, oh, I can't pay you. Give me a little time and I'll try.

This man went out and caught a fellow servant that owed him 17 bucks. He took him by the neck and he says, pay me what you owe me. He says, oh, I'm sorry, I can't right now.

Give me a little time and I'll pay you. He said, no way man, you've had it. And he took him to court and had him thrown in the debtor's prison.

Now the Lord who had forgiven him the 16 million dollar debt called him in and said, how much did you owe me? 16 million bucks. And didn't I just say, well, I forgive you the debt? Yeah, yeah. How is it that I hear that you got hold of a fellow servant that owed you 17 bucks and you had him thrown in debtor's prison because of his debt? He said, that's not right.

You see, we are to forgive as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us the 17 million. Who are we to hold these small grudges or debts against each other? Tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. This is one of the first scriptures my mother had me memorize when I was a little boy.

Planted in my heart when I was two years old. Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. When our little girl was about three, she was in one of those moods that was insisting that we spank her.

Though I was always reluctant to spank them. But it was one of those days when she kept pushing and pushing and pushing until she gave you no alternative. And so I brought her in and I sat her down and I said, alright, that's it.

I've had it. Now, do you know what the Scripture says? And I was going to quote to her Ephesians 6.1 Children, obey your parents and the Lord for this is right. And she says, yes, I know what the Scripture says.

And I said, what does it say? She said, be ye kind one to another. I said, that'll work this time, but not again. Smart little kids.

But oh, what a verse to take and work on this week. To allow the Spirit to work in our hearts with just this verse. Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another.

Even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. What beautiful exhortation. Father, we thank you for your word and help us, Lord, now to walk in a manner that becomes a son of God.

That we might, oh God, put off the old man with his desires and with his affections. And that we might put on that new man after Christ. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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