

A Walk Worthy of Christ

by Peter Masters

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life that reflects the character of Christ through humility, meekness, and unity within the church community.

Duration: 44:14

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6, Ephesians 4:10

Topics: "Personal Sanctification", "Christian Humility"

Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of personal sanctification and living a life worthy of Christ. It delves into the exhortations of humility, meekness, gentleness, and unity within the body of believers. The Apostle Paul's emphasis on being a prisoner of the Lord highlights the strength found in virtues like humility and meekness. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the joy of Christ's descent and ascension, urging believers to set their eyes on heavenly things and live in service to the Lord.

Transcript

Our subject is very obviously, in the first part of this chapter, a walk worthy of Christ or walking worthy of Christ. And here in this fourth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul turns to wonderful doctrinal themes, the teaching of Christ and redemption, Christ's greatness and goodness and wonders, and he turns to practical conduct, the application of the doctrine. And right at the very beginning, in verse one of the chapter, I therefore, all that is said flows on from what has been said before.

So now we're into the subject of personal sanctification. Why does the Apostle begin this topic with the words, the prisoner of the Lord? I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord. And he's repeating himself because he said exactly the same thing at the beginning of chapter three.

For this cause, I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles. Well, we can dismiss at once the possibility that this is just a pathetic appeal for respect. Paul would be entirely unconcerned about that, and he is of course speaking under inspiration of the Spirit of God.

But it's very important and significant that he should begin, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord. Some say that he wishes to indicate at the beginning of the chapter, or the Lord inspires him to indicate, that the Christian life is a sacrificial life, and that may well be so. But there's another reason why he begins like this, because the exhortations he is going to make are open to misunderstanding.

And just glance at verse two, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering. The trouble is that lowliness, or humility, is considered to be a weakness by so many people. And gentleness is considered to be something connected with weakness of character.

And so we have this introduction, I therefore, the prisoner, prisoner for Christ. So the idea is this, we're called to consider the Apostle Paul, who is, well, a man of great tenacity, and action, and courage, and strength. He's a prisoner, because he has been bold enough to preach when it would bring him arrest, punishment, difficulty, hardship, his travels, his efforts.

He's also been a man who was always ready to reprove those people and those things that were wrong, and against the Scripture, against the Lord, no matter what the cost was to himself. So although he does not say this for himself, he's inspired to say it, I therefore, the prisoner. So it is the man of courage, and tenacity, and firmness, and action, who proceeds to exhort us to lowliness, humility, meekness, gentleness, in other words, and these things.

These are not weaknesses, these are not weak virtues, they are the strongest of the virtues, and that is why I'm sure prisoner is repeated here. Well, we think of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We think of when he was on earth, and how he would reprove the Pharisees, and wickedness at great cost to himself.

We think of his courage, of course supremely, in going to Calvary, in suffering humiliation, and pain, and punishment, indeed the eternal punishment due to us for our sin. And we think of Christ, our Saviour, as he was the God-man, of course, but the most courageous man who ever lived, the man who endured more than anyone else. We see him as a man of strength, of course, divine strength in human personality and body, and yet then we consider his gentleness, and his kindness, his humility, his readiness to suffer humiliation.

We see all these things, so of course, these are not mutually exclusive things. Courage, tenacity, activity, and meekness, and humility, and gentleness. No, the latter are the very strongest of the Christian virtues, and we're reminded of that at the very beginning.

Well, you go back to the Old Testament, but I don't want to take up time, and you think of Moses described in those days as the meekest of all men. And you think of him as a leader, and his courage, and the hardship that he had to bear. And you realize that these are strong virtues.

How to be a person of courage and strength, and yet ready to take a stand, and yet humble in mind, and meek, and gentle. These are strong virtues. Well, we proceed into verse one.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, don't misunderstand the word beseech. It's not that to walk worthy, and to have lowliness and meekness are optional virtues, so that we are merely beseeched. We could be commanded.

We are elsewhere commanded to strive for these virtues, to pray for them. But here the Apostle beseeches, and the reason for that is not that there is anything optional about this, but because God wants our voluntary meekness, and our voluntary humility, something we willingly strive for. So we are beseeched, rather than commanded, because we desire and seek help for these virtues.

But initially, I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. The verb to walk could be equally translated, walk everywhere worthily. That's the sense of the original.

Not simply to walk, but to walk all around, or everywhere. In other words, in every place, in every situation, in every age of our lives. If we're saved as youngsters, as teenagers, into young adult life, into old age, and wherever we are found, we are to walk worthily, and be so careful of how we behave.

In our family circle, employment circle, study circle, in church, and it's lifelong. There are not many things that are appointed to us for life. Marriage, of course, is grandly appointed to us for life, but not many things.

Even your profession, even your work, you will one day retire, and it may be that you very happily leave it all behind. But your Christian walk is right up until the day you die, and then you're his for all eternity. You never lay it down.

We are to walk worthily all the time. Worthily, suitably, appropriately, and so this opens up the specific instructions and commands. But look at these words at the very end of verse one.

Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. Well, this is refinement of translation. More literally, it is simply walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called.

But it's an important term. We are called. What a privilege to be called by God.

It's not of our own doing. We never voluntarily came to God and offered him our hearts. We were away from him, and we would have been away from him all our lives if he didn't first work in our hearts and draw us to himself.

But what a privilege. Worthless people who would never have voluntarily turned to the living God. To be called by him into his love and into his service.

To be called from condemnation and eternal loss into eternal blessing. Undeserved by grace alone. Called to life.

Called to communion with the living God. Called to eternity, eternal bliss, and given a trust. Called to a trust and a commission.

Walk worthily of that calling. You are called people, and it is an amazing privilege. Well, how do we walk worthily? We're called to life and to blessing.

How can we meander around unhappily, miserably? Of course, there are times when we suffer understandable grief, but as a general rule, should we not be happy people, we are called to life and to represent God as the recipients of such blessing. We're called to faith and trust, and we're called to have access to him. How can we fail to pray? What a calling to be plucked out of complete godlessness and unbelief, and given the capacity to pray, and life in the soul.

We're called to that. We must be people of prayer. We're called to God's kingdom, the eternal kingdom.

How can you and I, how can we be covetous people, seen by others as pursuing possessions and personal riches, when we are those who are called to something vastly greater and higher? We're to walk worthily. We're called to heaven and to glory. We're called to be representatives of the living God, always at all times, not to let him down with bad temper, testy reactions.

We hold ourselves and pray for grace under every kind of provocation, because we're representatives of the living God, called to learn of God, and to learn of Christ, and to learn his plans and purposes, and great things. Walk worthily, be a great learner, learn the things of God. Well, what harm we can do to colleagues, to family members, to our children, if we fail to walk worthily? Think of the incentives to live holy lives, to exercise self-control with prayer over sinful attitudes and things.

Think of the cost of your salvation, think of Christ who died for us, think of the blessings we've already received in life. Don't we owe so much to the Lord? Think of the blessings to come. Think of other believers, people who've lived in difficult times, in difficult places, people who've suffered for the faith, and yet they've been loyal, they've lived worthy lives, and here are we in times of peace and affluence, and many possessions, and luxuries, and so on.

Cannot we live holy, worthy, consistent, godly lives? Of course we can, and we must. So I come to this second verse, with all lowliness and meekness. And here is the beginning of the list of specifics.

The Greek term for lowliness, literally means lowliness of mind. It's an attitude matter. Humility, humbleness of mind.

We are to live humbly and modestly, and we'll talk about this. Note the little word there, with all lowliness or humility. It comes in different forms.

There is, for example, theological humility, if you like, in that we never forget we are saved by grace. It is all the mercy of God. How can we be theologically proud when we know that we're saved only by mercy and grace, and Christ has paid the entire price for us.

But then, all lowliness, we must be personally lowly and modest. Oh friends, never, never boast. Stop yourself when the words come.

Don't elevate yourself. We are to live modestly. If you live grandly, you will think grandly.

If you live modestly, you will think modestly. Deny yourself. Don't be jealous, envious, because that's a form of pride.

I should have more. I should have that. I should do as well.

I should be as well thought of. It's the emergence of pride, struggling to express itself, suppress jealousy, envy, divert your thoughts into thanksgiving to God for all his many blessings. Never let us think we're better than others.

Try your utmost to get rid of selfishness, because selfishness is a terrible form of pride, putting me at the centre of my world and my stage, figuring out how I can ever advance myself. Oh friends, let's overcome selfishness. Think much less of self.

If I'm thinking of myself, I have a duty to God to pray for help, divert my thoughts, think of all the people I should be thinking of, and the things I should be doing for others, and praying for others, and yes, even rejoicing in what God has done for others, I must become far less selfish. If you're a young person, and the devil comes to you, and you're a Christian as a teenager, as a youngster, you know he'll play this trick on you, because you're in the period of life which loves to imagine things. And the devil will constantly suggest to you daydreams, and ideas, and thoughts, and you know what? He will put you at the centre of

it all.

He will cast you in the role of the person who is the centre of attention, and the successful one, in all your imaginings, and your daydreams. Don't let him do it. That'll make you insufferably proud.

Ask for help, switch your mind to better things, don't let him make you a vain, self-centred, self-seeking person. That's pride, and he can do it so easily with us. Self-pity is really pride.

I shouldn't have to be spoken to like that, I shouldn't have to suffer this, I shouldn't have to have that. Thoughts on ourselves, I shouldn't be this unwell, I shouldn't feel this and that. Well, things are hard to bear, and we can sometimes spare a thought for ourselves, but not too much dear friends.

Get your mind onto other things, and better things, because it's all the cultivation of pride, humbleness of mind, esteeming others better than ourselves, ready to climb down, looking for the blessing, and being people of prayer. And meekness, it's not the same as humility. Meekness in Bible terms moves the subject along a little bit.

Meekness may be defined as having a servant spirit, ready to serve, ready to help. Meekness is a spirit which is ready to take reproof. It isn't touchy, oversensitive.

You can't, you can't tell me that. When you have reproof, or somebody takes you to task for something, husband, wife, even a child sometimes, yes, when you have reproof, even if it seems unfair and unreasonable, you say to yourself there's probably truth in this reproof, and I'll think about it, but I won't react in a proud and oversensitive, testy manner. Meekness takes reproof.

Meekness isn't overconfident. You know, there are people who place such Christian people, such confidence in their own judgments, they scarcely think about anything. When they have to make up their mind about something, they do it instantly, without any deep thought.

Why? Because of pride. They trust their judgment. And this is at the root of a lot of unhappy things.

No, a meek person doesn't trust his judgment, even if he's got good judgment, he thinks about it. He's not instantly opinionated, and the person who's instantly opinionated usually is very stubborn with that opinion. Meekness thinks, reflects, and if it's a big matter, an important matter, prays for help, always.

Meekness doesn't insist on its rights, so we need much self-control and prayer to God to accomplish these things, and he will help us. Well, blessed are the meek, said the Saviour, in the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed he comes and uses and helps and rewards meekness of spirit. Then I could read to you, of course, those familiar words about Christ in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 7, who made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death for us, even the death of the cross.

Says James, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble, and if we control ourselves, and if we pray for help, God will help us, and we will develop in humility and meekness, and servant spirit, all of us, with long-suffering, says the Apostle, with long-suffering, suffering, aggravations, in all departments of life, forbearing one another in love, no resentment, no record kept of offences against us, considering ourselves. If I find all these people irritate me, what do I think I do to them, with my faults, and my problems, and aggravations? When aggravated, just remember yourself, you also offer the same problems to others, no hitting back under any circumstances, no despising, forbearing one another, says

the Apostle, in love, and endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Young people, a word for you, you go through teenage, and all kinds of moods come, sometimes get very moody, anger comes, you know, don't use body chemistry as an excuse, if you've been converted, if you've trusted in Christ for salvation, if you love him, by his help, and by his power, you can control it all, and he will help you.

And when suddenly an unaccountable surge of anger, or mood comes, and the devil who knows you're a believer, will somehow stir it, and fuel it, and press it forward, pray to God for help, control yourself, divert your thoughts if necessary, say I'm going to honour him, and you will. You'll be possessed by a strength of character, and a control you'll scarcely believe, the Lord will help. I have been familiar with a person, known a person for decades, who when he was a teenager, certainly not a member of our fellowship, or I wouldn't dare say this, or even connected with our fellowship, but when he was a teenager, a young teenager, he was converted.

So he believed. Yet, I remember he was so moody, and he would be so angry, and he would have the classic teenage moods and swings and problems, and never brought them under control. If I may vent your criticism, I think his parents, though as parents we all fail, I think his parents flattered him far too much, and all the rest of it, but anyway, he never brought it under control.

And you know he's been like that almost lifelong. A very volatile person, a person who can't cope with his moods, a person who gets angry very, very easily, and sadly makes himself look ridiculous, and foolish. Start at the very beginning of the Christian life.

Control all those things. Follow the counsel of the apostle. And you know, I'm not just talking to youngsters.

What do you think the devil tries to do with a mature, responsible adult, who shows much humbleness of mind, and meekness, and servant spirit? But if the devil can make a fool of you one day, he will. And if he can slowly work upon you, he has a malicious, wicked, evil grin. And if he can bring you, as a mature Christian, to the point where you behave like an unsaved teenager, and you rampage around in a furious temper, and you lose your self-control, and act out of bad-tempered pride, what a triumph for the devil.

He's brought you down. He's made an utter fool of you. You've lost Christian self-control.

Don't you think it is his ambition to do that widely and frequently to Christians, and hurt the family, and spoil the witness, and cast endless doubts into the minds of the children? Don't let him do it, friends. These exhortations are so important for us, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. Pray hard.

Control yourselves. And you know, husbands, wives, I often say this, don't ask me for a specific, specialised book on marriage. Yes, pastor, but I don't want a book on sanctification.

I want a book on marriage. I want a specialist on marriage to write me a book, and I can sit down and read it for hours. You know, the Bible is much better than a book on marriage.

Listen to this. This is all you need to know for marriage. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Oh, there are things that husbands have to be firm about to wives, and there are probably more things that wives have to be firm about to husbands. But still, there is kindness, and affection, and respect, and humility of mind, and meekness, kindness, servant spirit, as in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. And then, you are so happily married, and the Lord draws you so closely to each other, don't find yourself a specialist.

It's all here in these beautiful, wonderful exhortations. Everything we need to know. Well, verse 3, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit.

We're talking about the local church here. This is not about ecumenical inter-church unity. It's about the spirit of unity among true believers in an individual church.

Endeavouring. Very interesting word that. Very, very literally, it means speedily.

It's a speed word, a haste word. But the translators are quite right here, because it has come to mean, or it had come to mean, in classical Greek, diligently. Although the root is hastily, speedily.

You can see how it would move the sense of the word. To diligently, with great effort. So endeavour, with every effort, to keep the unity of the spirit.

Keep it, partly because it's already there. God has given you unity. All you can do is spoil it.

The scripture hints. Now, be very, very careful and diligent to keep it. You can ruin it with gossip, critical spirit, indifference to others, unkindness.

But you don't have to ruin it. You can keep it and even develop it. But essentially, the keep word here means watch.

Be watchful and guard the unity by being careful. Take steps and measures. Pray that you won't hinder or hurt unity.

Pray that you'll appreciate other people. Pray that you'll find ways of expressing affection and help. And take yourself in hand when tempted to gossip or to be critical.

Here it is in verse 3. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Go beyond natural differences. Now here we have the privilege and the opportunity of expressing fellowship in a special way because we are what the sociologists would call a multi-ethnic church.

And that is a wonderful thing. And so we say to ourselves go beyond natural differences in the expression of fellowship. Don't stick only with people who are identical to yourself.

We express fellowship and we strive to right across the fellowship. We don't stick with the same, to use an old-fashioned word, class of person. Although we are nowadays largely a classless society.

But people can still gravitate to their own likeness. And that's wrong. Fellowship, peace, togetherness, oneness means we go beyond these natural divisions.

And we go beyond our age group. Do you ever speak to the young? If you're young, do you ever move among those who are older? It's a wonderful thing. And so we mix much more freely.

We don't just, as drawn to a magnet, stick to our own kind, almost in fear and dread of reaching beyond that. So these are precious and important exhortations. And unity and peace, that means oneness, involve

respect, a desire for the good of others and their edification and making them happy and sharing experiences.

And none of us should be lazy in these things. So, verse 3, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And as we look to verse 4, look at the argument that the Apostle brings in here.

The seven famous ones. Seven, the perfect number. Seven ones.

Don't you realise how much you are one? He seems to say. Verse 4, there is one body. There's only one church.

He's mentioned before, for Jew and Gentile, for every nationality, one church of Jesus Christ. And one spirit. We're all saved by the same spirit.

We have the same, equal access to God through Jesus Christ. There is no caste system in the Christian gospel. There is no priesthood except the priesthood of all believers, with equal access to Christ and the same work of the spirit in our hearts.

There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling. There's one anticipation of heaven. Same heaven for all of us.

Same happiness for all of us. Now, many good exegetes, as I'm sure you know, believe that there are differences of reward in heaven. Well, I have to confess to you, I line up with those who believe there is no difference in the rewards given to believers in heaven.

Oh yes, many good people, they think they can find texts, but I don't believe they can. I think they misconstrue them. But they think they can find texts, they're good people, that say, if you've worked very hard for the Lord, you'll get a much bigger reward in heaven than those who perhaps haven't done so well.

Oh no. Heaven is the most magnificent reward of grace alone. And thankfully, we all have the same glorious, eternal reward.

That's my belief anyway. Though, if you feel otherwise, well, we're free in this matter because it isn't as absolutely clear as most things in the scripture. But certainly, we have the same hope of heaven.

There's only one place to which all true believers go. Verse 5, one Lord, that refers to the Saviour. Holy Spirit has already been mentioned.

One Lord, one Saviour for the Jew, the same Saviour for the Gentile, only one way of salvation, repentance and trust in Christ. One faith. Some think that means one Christian faith.

One set of doctrines and beliefs. And it often does mean that in the New Testament. But here, I believe it means one trust.

One way of coming to that Saviour. There's one Lord, only one Saviour who saves through Calvary and there's only one way of coming to him and that is by faith. By trust in what he's done.

I think it's a subjective faith here. One way of faith. One baptism.

Just the same. We'll set aside the mistake of infant baptism for the moment and what is baptism? It is a sign of our having died and been buried. A sign, a picture of death and resurrection and there's only one

way of salvation.

I died to my old life. My old life is buried and gone and I've risen to a new life with Christ and I've been washed completely and now I follow him through the waters of baptism. One Lord, one faith, one trust, one baptism.

Verse 6 One God, Father that is, one God and Father of all who is above all. He's the one authority over all believers and he's through all. He operates through his people, all of us.

We represent him and he's in us by the Holy Spirit and so those are the arguments. Verses 4 to 6 for the respect for oneness and togetherness. Now, what's my position? We say to ourselves.

Do I glide through my Christian life and my church the family in which I worship acknowledging people saying a few nice words but never really thinking of what I can do for others, how I should be closer to people, how I should help how I should cooperate and join in as one family in the Lord. Well, that's the strength of the exhortation here. God would have us together deeply and preserving our peace and oneness and spirit of cooperation.

But I'd like just as we close although I'll come back to some of these verses, I'd like us to look at verse 10 because it gives us an opportunity this morning in this study to end with Jesus Christ. Let's look at verse 10. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things.

Sanctification it's for Christ so that we can be pleasing to him and represent him and here's the great incentive. We're children of heaven our future is before us. Verse 10 He that descended when Christ descended it was an occasion of tremendous joy and happiness hosts of angels sang peace and goodwill to men joy and happiness and so it was God with us Emmanuel God in Christ had come down to man to take our part to be our representative the incarnation what happiness and joy redemption would be possible Christ would make an atonement for us.

There would be a new burst of revelation and the gospel age would come. What joy and happiness in the descent of Jesus Christ then you think of his ascent back into heaven he that descended then ascended far greater joy just think of it if his coming was a cause of rejoicing his departure into heaven is far greater not only because he has clearly succeeded in accomplishing all he came to do to bear away our sin so that we could be forgiven and saved and know him he has not only accomplished everything but no longer does he have to suffer joy when he came and then you hesitate why should there be such joy what is he going to have to do he's going to have to bear our sin he's going to have to suffer indescribable agony concentrated eternal agony so therefore much greater joy when he ascends afterwards no more humiliation no more pain he's fought the fight the battles over and done the suffering the humiliation is behind him he's now far above all his enemies so far greater joy but as Christ ascended into heaven you know this world lost its attraction to us just think of that I read a verse of a hymn by John Kenick my all to heaven is gone he whom I rest my hopes upon his way I see and I'll pursue that heavenward way till him I view can you see the sense of that we don't think of that too often do we he's gone he's risen what's left in this world for us when he's no longer here my benefactor has gone to his eternal home the best person ever to be in this world far far better infinitely better than the sum total of human goodness he's gone my chief interest has gone he's on high in eternal glory no wonder the apostle says set your affection on things above not on things of the earth how can you live humbly modestly without covetousness your dearest friend your saviour to use an old fashioned word your hero your lord and king your redeemer isn't here he's moved on long ago and our eyes upon him and we're going to join him and we're not going to

feather our nests or make our roots in this world or over pamper ourselves or fall in love with the things of this world because we're heading on high and we're going to serve him and represent him with character and humility and modesty and meekness and servant spirit and helpfulness all the days of our commission for him on earth I had to go on to verse 10 because the opportunity is there to close with our glorious saviour and set our eyes on him

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