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## Living for God's Glory

### Ephesians 4:1-3

**Intro:** Ask any good teacher what the ultimate goal of their profession is and the answer will be along the lines of this principle: that the input should equal the output. The content of their lectures should be assimilated to the degree that a student can pass an examination on the subject. They don't teach for test scores but for quantifiable results. They teach so that student can learn and the information can impact their lives. The Apostle Paul followed this same principle in his major epistles. Anyone who's studied Paul's letters knows that they tend to begin with a doctrinal section which is normally followed by a section focused on practical advice or application of that doctrine.

Most of Paul's letters contain this beautiful balance between doctrine and duty and Ephesians is a perfect example of this. The first 3 chapters deal with doctrine, our riches in Christ, while the last 3 explain the believer's duty, our responsibilities in Christ. With the possible exception of Romans, no NT letter contains a stronger or more exciting presentation of theology. Ch1-3 have spoken of predestination and election, adoption and redemption, the work of the Holy Spirit, rebirth, the work of God in joining people from all nations and all walks of life together in the one holy body of Christ, the church. This is so marvelous a section that Paul ends **ch3** with a wonderful doxology. Yet the letter doesn't stop. Paul immediately goes on to say, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." Paul is telling us that doctrinal input must be matched by an equal, practical output of that doctrine in our lives.

The key word in this last half of the book is walk; while the idea in the first half was wealth. In these last 3 chapters, Paul is going to admonish us to walk in unity, in purity, in harmony and in victory. These 4 walks will perfectly parallel the basic doctrines Paul has taught us in the first 3 chapters. His use of the word therefore indicates that he's basing his exhortations to duty on these very doctrines. He spent 3 chapters spelling out in glorious detail all the things God has done for us by His grace in Christ. Now he brings a call to live rightly but only after explaining what God's done for us. The Christian life isn't based on ignorance but on knowledge. The better we

understand the doctrines of the Bible, the easier it is to obey the duties revealed in the Bible.

To this point, notice the word beseech in **v1**. Paul's use of the word here indicates that God, in love, urges us to live for His glory. He doesn't say, as He did to Israel in the OT, "If you obey Me, I will bless you." Instead, What He says is, "I have already blessed you – now, in response to My love and grace, obey Me." This is where most people drop the ball on the 10 Commandments. They see them as rules by which God's favor is earned but these commands were given to a people who were already redeemed! God didn't say, "Obey these commands and I will love you and redeem you out of slavery." Rather, He said, "I love you and have redeemed you. You are My people; this is how My people are to live." By the same token, God's given us such a marvelous calling in Christ; now it's our responsibility to live up to that calling.

This is not just a spiritual concept that we can just fold up and bury in our spiritual pockets. This truth is of critical importance both to our current Christian walk and our future stance before Christ at the Bema Seat. All believers have been fully forgiven of all their sins, past present and future; so we will never be required to stand in judgment for our sins. But, the Bible does tell us we will one day stand before Christ and our works will be judged by Him, of what sort they were. But, Jesus won't be so concerned with what kind of works we performed or how successful they were. The focus of His judgment will be on what our motivations for service were. If they were performed out of fear, or a spirit of competition or simply for self glory; those works will be tried by fire and will go up like so much dry wood, hay or stubble. The only proper motive, the only acceptable motivation for service for the Lord is out of love and heartfelt gratitude. These works will prove to be gold, silver and precious stones which can only be refined by fire.

**1** – There's an important idea contained in the word worthy. It means to have worth or value. But it's more than that. It means to have a worth equal to one's position. A worthy opponent is one whose gifts are equal to your own. A workman worthy of his hire is one whose efforts match the wages he's paid. This concept's been illustrated as a scale in which the weight on one side always equals the weight on the other, in this case the weight of practice equaling the weight of doctrine: Paul is beseeching them and exhorting them always to give equal weight in their lives to doctrine and

practice. They must not put all the weight on doctrine and none on practice; nor all the weight on practice and just a little, if any at all, on doctrine. Doing so results in spiritual imbalance and lopsidedness. The Ephesians must take great pains to see that the scales are perfectly balanced. But that is hard to achieve.

There are some Christians who are primarily intellectual in nature. They love books, enjoy study, and delight in the exposition of the Bible's great doctrinal passages. This is a good thing. It's right to love doctrine and rejoice at what God has done for us in Christ. Paul himself clearly did this. But the intellectual believer faces a great danger and often has a great weakness in their life as a result of failing to overcome the danger. They love doctrine so much that they stop with just doctrine. They read the first 3 chapters of Ephesians and delight in them; but when they come to **ch4** they say, "The rest is just application. I know all about that." Then they skip ahead to the next doctrinal section and completely neglect what they most need to learn and practice.

Conversely, some Christians are primarily oriented to experience. They thrive under the teaching found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of this book. They want to know about spiritual gifts and how they can exercise them. They're excited by Paul's teaching about the family and other such things. This is "where it's at" for them; they find the doctrinal section dry and impractical. The problem with both outlooks is that each of these is an error. Doctrine without practice leads to bitter orthodoxy; it gives correctness of thought without the practical vitality of the life of Christ. Practice without doctrine leads to aberrations; it gives intensity of feeling, but it is feeling apt to go off in any (often wrong) direction.

What we need is both, as Paul's letters and the whole of Scripture teach us. We can never attach too much importance to doctrine, for it is out of the doctrines of God, man, and salvation that the direction and impetus for the living of the Christian life spring. At the same time, we can never attach too much importance to practice, for it is the result of doctrine and proof of its divine nature.

Paul's way of teaching this truth in **v1** is to urge us to walk [live] worthy of our Christian calling. Older translations use the word vocation here, but calling is better, at least in contemporary speech. Vocation has come to

mean something we choose, while calling is something which we are chosen for. Remember that the word “church” means “called out ones.” The emphasis here is on what God has done, which is what Paul’s been elaborating on from the beginning of the letter. *Because* God has set His hand upon us and called us, changing us from what we were into what we have now become, we are *now* to live as Christians in this world.

Two parts of this calling deserve special notice. First, God has called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This means we’ve been given understanding. Before our calling we were like the blind man in John 9. We couldn’t see Christ, and we weren’t even fully appreciative of our blind condition since, having never seen, we could never fully value sight. We thought the way to happiness was the world’s way. We didn’t know we were spiritually bankrupt, emotionally warped, and morally naked. When God called us, opening our eyes to the blessed truths of the gospel, for the first time we understood the nature of God’s way and finally saw how desirable it is. This is so basic to the experience of salvation that if a person hasn’t had their eyes opened to see things differently, we may rightly wonder if they’ve actually been saved. How can a person be urged to live a life worthy of his calling if he hasn’t even begun to understand what that calling is?

But there is more than this. The first part of God’s calling involves being brought into light from darkness; that is, it involves understanding. The second part involves God’s calling us out of death into life, which is what Paul emphasized in 2:4-5. This means that the God who has awakened us to a new life also gives us the power to live that life. It’s because we’re now spiritually alive, where before we were spiritually dead, that we are able to heed Paul’s urging and live a worthy life for God.

**2-3** – In the rest of his letter, Paul will develop 2 main themes, both of which are aspects of the worthy life: (1) unity among believers and (2) living a godly life, particularly in regard to relationships. The 1<sup>st</sup> will be seen in v4-16. The 2<sup>nd</sup> goes from v17 to the end. But, in these first 3 verses of ch4 Paul gives a preliminary statement that embraces both. There are 5 specific characteristics of the worthy life presented in our text.

1. Humility. Everyone knows Christians should be humble. Humility is the opposite of pride or self-assertion. If we are saved “by grace . . . through

faith . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast” (2:8-9), it’s clearly evident that Christians cannot be proud. We are to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind [humility] we are to consider others better than (or before) ourselves, as Paul says in Phil 2:3. But it’s not easy to do, because our pride is easily wounded by what we consider to be thoughtless or unfair conduct by others.

Watchman Nee of China tells the story of a Christian brother in south China who had his rice field on a hill. During the growing season he used a hand-worked water wheel to lift water from the irrigation stream that ran by the base of the hill to his field. His neighbor had 2 fields below his and one night that neighbor made a hole in the dividing wall and drained out all the Christian’s water to fill up his own 2 fields. The brother was distressed. But he laboriously pumped water up into his own field, only to have the act of stealing repeated. This happened 3 or 4 times. At last he consulted his Christian brethren. “What shall I do?” he asked. “I have tried to be patient and not retaliate. Isn’t it right for me to confront him?” The Christians prayed, and then one of them replied. “If we only try to do the right thing, surely we are very poor Christians,” he said. “We have to do something more than what is right.”

The Christian farmer was impressed with this advice. The next day he went out and first pumped water for the 2 fields below his and then, after that, worked throughout the afternoon to fill his own field. From that day on the water stayed in his field, and in time the neighbor, after making inquiries as to what caused him to behave in such a way, became a Christian. This is humility. It’s refusing to insist on our rights and actually putting our neighbor’s interests before our own.

Now, in the ancient pagan world, the term lowliness always carried a negative connotation. The Roman world didn’t consider humility as a positive value. In fact, it was included in the list of vices, regarded as the worst of the ignoble qualities of a man. The positive view of humility seen in Christianity originated in the OT where it’s held in contrast to self-exaltation (Ps 131:1-2). As we have seen, Paul contrasts it over against selfish ambition and conceit. Of course, Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of humility. But, since Paul puts it first on his list of desirable characteristics, it’s quite possible he views it as the prerequisite for all the other qualities. In true humility that emulates Jesus, believers are then able to treat others with



gentleness, longsuffering and forbearance.

2. Gentleness. Older translations called this meekness, but for us “gentleness” is probably better, simply because meekness is so generally misunderstood. To most, meekness suggests weakness. But that’s not the idea at all. Meekness is power under control. It was the primary characteristic of Moses, according to [Num 12:3](#), but Moses wasn’t a weak man. He was a strong man, strong enough to appear before Pharaoh, declaring, “The LORD says: Let my people go” ([Ex 8:1](#)). In the same way, Jesus was meek (gentle), yet extremely strong; strong enough to clear the moneychangers out the temple all by Himself. Yet, He said of Himself, Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls ([Mt 11:28-29](#)). He also said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth ([Mt 5:5](#)). In the Greek language, this word for gentleness was also used to describe a soothing medicine, a colt that had been broken and a soft wind. In each case you have power but that power is under control.

3. Longsuffering (or patience). This term literally means long-tempered. It takes time to learn patience, and unfortunately one of the chief ways we learn it is through suffering. ([Rom 5:3](#), [Jam 1:3](#)). Within the safe confines of the church, many times that suffering comes, whether knowingly or not, at the hands of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need this characteristic of patience, of longsuffering so that the inevitable wrongs that happen between people in God’s family won’t work against God’s purpose of bringing all things together in Christ.

One early church father described longsuffering as the spirit that has power to take revenge but never does. It is a characteristic of a forgiving, generous heart and it is exactly what God does with us. He suffers long with us; if He didn’t do this, there would be no Christianity. If we don’t do this, there will be no church; at least not one worth going to. Therefore, we ought to suffer long or be patient with each other.

4. Bearing with one another. The suffering aspects of patience come out especially clearly in this next Christlike characteristic, but this one relates specifically to trials we have as a result of uncharitable conduct toward us by other Christians. When the non-Christian neighbor stole the field-water of

the Chinese Christian, the Christian showed patience, gentleness, and humility in the way he dealt with the offense—and won the unbeliever to Christ. But what if that neighbor is a Christian, wronging us in this or some other way? What is to be our attitude to them? Paul says we are to endure the wrong, suffer the slight. Thus, we're to demonstrate a way of life superior to that of the ungodly world and show the special unity which is ours in Jesus Christ. Of course, this characteristic cannot be experienced or exercised apart from love.

5. Unity. The fifth characteristic is that believers are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (v. 3). It's evident at this point, in case we had missed it before, that each of these characteristics is related to the others and that they've all been tending in the direction of this great matter of unity, which is to be Paul's theme for the next thirteen verses. Christians are to be one because we have a common spiritual reality and experience in Christ, as he will say in the very next verses (4-6).

It is important to say two things about this unity. First, it is “the unity of the Spirit,” which means that it is a unity the Holy Spirit has already given to those who are in Christ. This is a wonderful and often a very visible thing. It's also something we should endeavour to keep! This word literally means: being eager to maintain or guard. The verb is used here in the present participle which implies that we must constantly be endeavoring to maintain this unity. It's great to have received this unity from the Holy Spirit but now we need to constantly apply some effort to maintain it. This is a real and wonderful unity, but it's often destroyed by false pride, self-aggrandizement or a sinful striving for position. In fact, when we think our situation is at its best, that's when Satan moves in to wreck it. The spiritual unity of a home, a Sunday School class or a church is the responsibility of each person involved and the job never ends!

So Paul says, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Notice, we do not create this unity. God never commands us to create unity among believers. He has created it by His Spirit; our duty is to recognize it and keep it! We've been given a wonderful unity by the Holy Spirit; this corresponds to the doctrinal truths of Christianity. But, we're also to strive to keep or maintain this unity, which corresponds to the practical or experiential side of Christianity.

Without humility, pride and self-interest threaten peaceful relationships; without gentleness, others may be treated roughly and harmed emotionally; without patience, we may unintentionally cause others stress; without bearing with each other in love, our brothers and sisters may feel rejected, unloved or unworthy of our affection and attention. This should not happen within the body of Christ but it does all the time. The straight and narrow path is littered on every side with the lives of brothers and sisters who have been wounded and taken out by friendly fire. It's been said that Christians are the only soldiers that shoot their wounded. The purpose of the church is to heal the wounded, to comfort the heavy hearted, to be a place of love and refuge from the harsh treatment of the world.

If these 5 characteristics sound strangely familiar, it's because Paul's merely describing some of the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-23). Of course, how can we ever expect to maintain the unity of the Spirit if we fail to walk in the Spirit and thus fail produce the fruit of the Spirit? If the church is going to move forward, if we are going to reach our community with the gospel, we must put into practice the doctrinal truths we have learned from our study of the Scriptures. This cannot just be an intellectual exercise – it should and must have bearing on both are personal and public lives and one is just as important as the other.

Are you walking in the Spirit? Are you living a life that deliberately brings glory to God? Or, are you focused on your rights and on what you think is best for your life? Again, if we only do the right thing, surely we are very poor Christians. We have to do something more than just what is right. We have been divinely empowered to do just that. 😊