

RUF Bible Study – Ephesians
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Ephesians 4:1-16²

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We have arrived to the transition point where Paul moves from theology to practice. He'll continue to mix the two of course, for they combine and mix and affect each other. But there is still a definite move in Paul's thought here.

I wonder how you feel about that. Some of you are sad. You love to talk about theology, ecclesiology and soteriology. You don't like the application of sermons or even conversations. Oh, I know I'm supposed to do something, but just let me think about it more.

Others of you have been dying to get to this point. You love to talk about action, about works, about doing right and good. You love ethics and the practical aspects of life. You don't like to hear the lead up, the theological parts of sermons. Oh, yes, I know I do this because Jesus loves me, but what is it I'm supposed to *do*?

Paul wrote this passage this way on purpose. He wrote us Ephesians 1-3 and then 4-6, not the other way around. Theology matters.

Ephesians 4-6 cannot come before 1-3. Some will say it does, and will act and preach this way. If we are good and do what God requires, then he will save us from our sins. But Paul says salvation comes first, not ethics. He says that we should do good things, we should be kind, honest, loving people, but we do so not to be saved, but because we are saved.³

Christianity says there is nothing you can do to earn the favor of God. Your sins are too great, and God is too holy. If your hope of forgiveness and eternal life and peace with God rests on what you must do, you are doomed. But God has intervened. He did for men and women what they could not do for themselves. He secured our forgiveness by the incarnation suffering and death of his beloved son. How, therefore, ought someone to live who has been given such a gift by no one less than the living God himself?

Aha. That is where we are. We have seen the great heights of God's redeeming love for us. Paul has shown us for three chapters what the incredible throne room of God might be like. But now we are to leave and to go. What will you take away from what you saw, from what you learned?

"Now the apostle moves on from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. So he turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (in the indicative) to what we must be and do (in the imperative), from doctrine to duty, 'from the credenda... to the agenda,'⁴ from the mind-stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living."⁵

Walk

Paul makes us connect this passage with what has gone before. It will not do to pursue ethics without rooting those practices in some sort of larger philosophy or idea. Paul writes, "I therefore..." You may have learned that you have to ask, what is the "therefore" there for? It has to connect to the parts before it. In this case, it connects to Paul's prayer for the church, that we might know Christ's surpassing love and care for us.

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² Sources: commentaries by Tom Wright, Peter O'Brien, John Stott, J.M. Boice; sermons by Rev. Tim Keller, Rev. Rob Rayburn, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson and Dr. Bryan Chapell

³ Thought from Rob Rayburn

⁴ Here is E.K. Simpson's opening paragraph on Ephesians 4:1-10.

"Hitherto, under Paul's trusty guidance, his crusaders have been threading the loftiest passes of revelation, absorbed in the panorama of a massive mountain-chain of Christian doctrine, outspread around their line of march. Now it is time for them to descend from these craggy altitudes, intersected by many a cross-track opening into regions yet unexplored and cloud-capped, to the lower levels of everyday duty and demeanor; from the credenda, in short, to the agenda; for all doctrine truly held prompts to corresponding practice. If faith be the candle, works are the light; take away one and you cannot keep the other (Selden). Our belief fixes the trend of our footsteps. We are, in fact, what we believe (Hodge)."[p. 87]

⁵ Stott, 146

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

So let me say it one more time – do you care about theology? Do you care about learning more about God? Do you try to put yourself in situations where you might be able to do that? Would you read a book on theology? Would you come to Sunday School because a great teacher were teaching about theology? Would you join a church because it carries a strong theology? Would you forsake a theologically weak church even if it had amazing and wonderful programs?

There are opportunities to learn more. Take them. Enlarge and renew your mind. As I have said, I think we are what we believe. Taking care over what you believe, what you think, what you know is a very important thing in life, in the Christian life.

But don't stop there. Please.

This thoughtful Paul urges you therefore to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. The word there, "walk" is exactly right. It's something ongoing, involved, an action.

Christians have to do things. They cannot sit around and say they love Jesus and then have that show absolutely no effect on their lives. My relationship with my wife has to affect what I do. I need to walk in a manner worthy of my calling as a husband, married to Julie. I can't go to Buffalo Wild Wings or Coach's every night. I can't spend all my money on books from amazon.com. I can't go out and buy a boat tomorrow. I can't turn my wardrobe into an urban cowboy one. I can't get the flatscreen tv from BestBuy. I can't sleep in until 10am on Saturday because Drew has a soccer game at 8:30 am. My commitments really do change things about me.

Is that true for us as Christians? Does Christianity affect our spending habits? Should Christians have less debt – Americans average \$15,000 in credit card debt per household. In 2002, Americans spent 65 billion dollars in credit card debt alone. That is a staggering figure, and a very sad one. All that money going to something that is nothing, and not going to many things that would be worthwhile.⁶ American Christians average giving away about three percent of their income.

Can we joyously forgo some of our pleasures? Does Christianity affect how we handle our money, how we think of our possessions? The answer is no. But it should. Jesus must change the way we walk in our calling.

We are to walk *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Love. Unity.

Do you pursue these virtues? Do you think of this in regard to your television watching habits? To the internet? With your roommates? With your friends? With your body? With your boyfriend or girlfriend? Wouldn't things look different if you did?

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling... in the way you dress. Ladies, have you thought much about modesty with your swimsuits? With what you wear to class? With the next dress you buy? Do you know how this affects men?

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling... with your girlfriend. Don't sleep with her. Don't get in bed together. Don't tempt yourself. Don't be foolish and put yourself in situations where you will fail.

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling... with the media. Stop looking at pornography. Don't uncritically ingest the media's messages.

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling... with your time. Do you spend time with people? Do you rest on the Sabbath? Do you pursue relationships? Are you lazy? Is the church the only thing you're willing to say no to?

Paul says that, as we pursue these things in humility, gentleness, patience, love and unity, that we cannot do this on our own. We need the help of God, and we need the help of others. *4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

We need to be talking about these things and doing it in a context where we love each other because we love God. There will be people at different stages in these areas, some doing better than others, some still clueless, some oblivious, some holding on to these things in a self-righteous way.

We don't need the modesty police to be constituted tomorrow so they can begin checking cleavage baring tanktops and writing tickets to the perpetrators. We don't need to kick everyone who has messed up sexually out of the group – there would be none of us left in it. We don't need to enforce mandatory sleeping hours or a checklist for what you can and can't do on Sunday.

But we do need to talk about it and stop pretending that we can all do whatever we want. We need to lovingly ask the question, and stay with those who struggle and care about Jesus and not just morality because that never saved anyone.

Let me bend back around and finish this point with this – what is the calling we're supposed to walk in a manner worthy of?

In his book about this subject, Os Guinness begins with this story: "As you know, I have been very fortunate in my career and I've made a lot of money – far more than I ever dreamed of, far more than I could ever spend, far more than my family ever needs.' The speaker was a prominent businessman at a conference near Oxford University. The strength and determination and character showed in his face, but a moment's hesitation betrayed deeper emotions hidden behind the outward intensity. A single tear rolled slowly down his well-tanned cheek."

⁶ Including my budget, which is in deficit. Just think of Christians would give the money they spend on credit card debt to the church.

“To be honest, one of my motives for making so much money was simple – to have the money to hire people to do what I don’t like doing. But there’s one thing I’ve never been able to hire anyone to do for me: find my own sense of purpose and fulfillment. I’d give anything to determine that.”⁷

What is *your* sense of purpose and fulfillment? What is your sense of calling? Why are you here? Not at RUF, but *here*, on earth, still living?

In an early draft of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky has the Inquisitor saying, “For the secret of man’s being is not only to live... but to live for something definite. Without a firm notion of what he is living for, man will not accept life and will rather destroy himself than remain on earth...”⁸

Let’s get right to it – why don’t we do the right thing? I don’t love as I should. I don’t act as I should. I don’t talk like I should. I don’t think like I should. I don’t spend like I should. I don’t do very many things like I should and neither do you. All these Christians around, and not much happening. Not much Bible. Not much love. Not much giving. Not much church attending. Not much sacrifice. Not much. Not enough.

“Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”⁹

That is the big idea, the *summum bonum*, the ultimate good. That we are to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

That truth, if you are a Christian, works its way out into your life. It changes the way you think, act, feel, believe, worship, spend, date, eat, study, sleep, marry... everything. We call this sanctification – God working his ways out in your life so you are more and more like Christ. It’s a really big deal.

Finish then Thy new creation / Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation / Perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory, / Till in heav’n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, / Lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley, 1747

Gift/s

Paul moves from walking in these ways because of this calling to talking about our gifts, or more precisely, Christ’s gifts to us. *7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

Here in Oklahoma, there is quite a bit of talk about spiritual gifts. But most of the talk centers on the so-called charismatic gifts, the extraordinary ones, the wowzers. Tongues and healings. We’ll get to that.

What has been given to us? Grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Paul mentions Psalm 68:18 and connects that to what we might say would be Philippians 2:5-11 *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Some think this Ephesians passage: *8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?* means that Jesus went to hell to preach the gospel “down there.” But I don’t think so. I think it means, just like in Philippians, that he lowered himself to become a man and die on the cross as a criminal for us. We would refer to this as Jesus’ humiliation. He was humiliated for our sake. But we also have the flipside – his exaltation. He was exalted to the highest place because he is King Jesus.

And this King Jesus gives us the gift of grace, and he gives us roles to play in the church. *11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

There are other gift lists in the Bible and from this we know that this is not the complete list, and we wonder if there even is a complete list. Paul only mentions four here – apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. We know that there are or were also gifts of mercy and service, hospitality, tongues, healing, and others.

I think that here we have two sorts of gifts – the one is the beginning and the other is the maintaining. The beginning gifts are apostle and prophets. These are gifts that start God’s work. I think that God built his church with the apostles, and that this was a particular calling for a particular time because an apostle had to see and hang out with Jesus. Thus, I do not think that the gift of apostle remains for us today.

⁷ Os Guinness, *The Call*, 1

⁸ found in Os Guinness, *The Call*, 2

⁹ Os Guinness, *The Call*, 4

The second is that of prophet. Like apostle, I think that this is a particular office of speaking the words of God for a particular time and place. Thus, the prophets wrote down the words of God, and we have them in the Scriptures. Like apostles, I think that this gift has ceased. Otherwise, if people were really prophets, we would need to be writing down their words and incorporating them into our Bibles.

In contrast, the building gifts are evangelists and pastor teachers. These are gifts that build the body of Christ and tell us what God wants us to believe and do. These stand on the shoulders of the apostles and prophets. Since we believe our Bibles are complete and sufficient, we no longer need this prophet gift. But we do need pastor-teachers. We need people to explain to us what the prophets wrote. We need to be shepherded by the men who devote their lives to such a calling, and sit under the teaching of ones who have studied and are gifted to explain to us what God's word says.

These are only four of the gifts mentioned in the Bible, What about the charismatic gifts? We need to reclaim the word "charismatic." Charismatic means "gift." Everyone is a charismatic Christian. We all have gifts given to us, and you need to figure out what your spiritual gifts are. You should explore those gifts, asking God where and what you should do, what you're passionate about doing, what you're good at doing. And you should elicit feedback from others who know you.

And what are these gifts for? They are *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

The gifts don't bring glory on themselves. They are to serve to build up the body of Christ.

One of my gifts is pastor-teacher. That's why I'm doing this very thing right now. Is this an end to itself? Have we accomplished our objective if we hold this meeting – if you come and I teach? No. This is to bring glory to God, to reach students for Christ and to equip the saints to build up the body of Christ and reach out to redeem the world.

Are you being equipped? Are you then going out and doing ministry?

Sometimes I hear people complain about RUF and the church. And many of these complaints are very valid. But you're talking about *you*. You're not very warm and inviting. You don't care enough about evangelism. You don't reach out to people around you. You aren't involved in missions enough. So let's change together. Let's be different then. Let's be equipped and build up the body, using our gifts. Let's think of things we can do for each other and those around us. Let's use our gifts in the church. There are all kinds of needs – Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, giving opportunities, service projects, prayer meetings and prayer teams, phone calling, visiting people, writing and speaking and teaching, meals to be made, projects to be organized. Are you doing something, are you involved somewhere?

And let me mention this since we're in Ephesians and in this passage: these here are teaching gifts. I think Paul is emphasizing those here because one of the things that is killing the church is uneducated Christians. He's going to go on to talk about maturity, and, don't worry, so will we, but it's in the context of being deceived by false doctrine. We are really stupid Christians.

Can you name the ten commandments? Can you name the apostles? Can you name the books of the Bible? Do you understand and converse about moral, civil and ceremonial law? Do you know the *ordo solutis*? Can you map out Bible geography? Can you outline the book of John for me? Can you explain the various heresies that were dealt with in the ancient church counsels? Do you have a grasp of church history?

We need teachers, not entertainment or infotainment. You need to care about teachers. And one of the best teachers I have ever known and listened to is in your very town. His name is Mike Biggs, and I think he is amazing. You should learn from him any chance you get. Any time he is talking about the Bible or theology and you aren't there, you're missing out.

This is one of the things we try to care about in RUF. We want to pursue good Bible teaching for you, taught by PCA ordained teaching elders. I suppose you can judge for yourself if this goal is effective and accomplished.

Maturity

We are called to walk according to our calling, using our gifts to build up the body of Christ. The next question is why? Or to what end?

If we were to follow through on the metaphors, we might ask: when do we reach the destination of our walk? Or: How do we know when the people are fully equipped?

Paul writes this: *13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Paul is into the body. There are other metaphors for the church– a temple, a bride, a family. But he's going with the body, this time highlighting the idea that bodies mature. Thus, we all need to grow up. We all need to grow up to mature manhood and to be working correctly in the right proportions. Ladies, later on in chapter five we'll talk about how the men need to think of themselves as brides, but here you have to think of yourself as a mature man.

I have two boys. Cal is almost nine, and Drew is six. Cal lost his first tooth last weekend, which is really late for your first one. He is getting taller and taller. But he's not a mature man, is he? In a few years, we'll go on a trip to talk about the birds and the bees, how his body is changing, about sex and all that goes along with that. In a few years, he'll gain more and more responsibility, and Julie and I will allow him to make more decisions for himself. We're considering some sort of ceremony for all of our children that will stand in the place of a passing of age ceremony. Maybe when they're sixteen or eighteen. They'll be

required to do some things to prove that they have listened and learned from their parents, and then they will be regarded as an adult with different privileges and expectations than a child.

We don't want our kids to be toddlers forever. Or teenagers forever. They need to mature. They need to grow up. Paul says the same thing about us. That we need to mature spiritually, no longer being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, cunning or schemes.

We are to grow up in the unity of the faith. We are to grow up in the knowledge of Christ. We are to grow up to measure the stature of the fullness of Christ. We are to grow up to speak the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into Christ. We are to grow up so that we regard each other as important in the body. We are to grow up in love.

Grow up. That can be pretty demeaning statement. Act your age. It's okay for Anna to act four years old, because she is four years old. It's not okay for you to act four when you're twenty.

Are you still unconnected from the body? Are you still absent from the means of grace, the work of the church? Are you still thinking that the world revolves around you, your wants, your hungers, your timetables, your view of reality?

When are you going to grow up? Paul says we shouldn't always wish we were nursing babies, or catered to five year olds, or skinny fifteen year olds, or perfectly fit and young twenty year olds, or stylish twenty seven year olds, or in our career thirty five year olds. I don't know what "age" he envisions is the mature adult. Maybe fifty. Maybe seventy. Maybe ninety.

And here again, dare I say it, Paul forces us to need each other. As Rob Rayburn writes, "Paul's vision of spiritual maturity is not an individualistic vision. It is very much a corporate vision. Ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church, is supreme in Paul's view of the Christian life. And it is supreme in Paul's thought because it is supreme in Jesus' thought. He said, 'I will build my church,' not 'I will build up each believer and let him live for me as he wills.'

That is very important for us to hear and face because ecclesiology does not usually reign supreme in our thinking in the same way. The church is not the be all and end all of our existence that it is in the mind of Christ himself and in the teaching of his apostles. If individualistic, American Christians were to write this section of Paul's argument, in all likelihood they would have listed other gifts in v. 11 - gifts that were more popular and democratic, gifts that any and every Christian might receive, gifts that didn't imply a difference between the church's officers and her people - and they would not likely have defined spiritual maturity in terms of the place a believer occupies in and the contribution he or she makes to the life and ministry of the church."

We need each other.

And we need the truth in love.

James Boice writes of this well in his commentary on Ephesians: "I was impressed with this emphasis some years ago when I was studying the seventeenth chapter of John in which Jesus prays for his church, highlighting six marks by which the church is to be recognized: joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity and love. Each of these is important. But it struck me that love is the most important, which can be seen either by subtracting it from the other marks or by expressing it in every way possible. Subtract love from joy. What do you have? You have the kind of hedonistic reveling found in the secular world, the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Joy is distorted.

"Take love from sanctification. The result is self-righteousness, the kind of thing that distinguished the scribes and the Pharisees of Christ's day but allowed them to be filled with hatred, so that they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ when he came. Sanctification is destroyed.

"Take truth from love. The result is bitter orthodoxy. Truth remains, but it is proclaimed in such an unpleasant, harsh manner that it fails to win anybody.

"Take love from mission and you have colonialism. In colonialism, we work to win people for our denomination or organization, but not for Christ.

"Take love from unity and you have ecclesiastical tyranny, in which a church imposes human standards on those within it."

... "But if instead of subtracting love, you express love.... Love for God leads to joy; nothing is more joyful than knowing and loving him. Love for the Lord Jesus Christ leads to holiness; as he said, 'If you love me, you will obey what I command.' Love for the Word of God leads to truth; if we love the Bible, we will read it and grow in a knowledge of what the Word contains. Love for the world leads to mission. Love for other believers leads to unity.

Can we attain this sort of vision? Can the church really be this way?

Can we have this sort of authentic community, loving Christ together in unity, truth and love?

I think so, because Paul thinks so. We need to be equipped, to use our gifts to build up the body and to grow up.

We need to eat our fruits and veggies, to make our bed and clean our rooms, to help our brothers and sisters, to study hard and do our best in school, to exercise, to trust our parents, to make friends and stay away from strangers, to say we're sorry, to use soap when we bathe, to turn off the television and get good rest, to know when and what to say no to and yes to, to keep our hands to ourselves, to respect our elders. We need to grow up into mature manhood.