

Ephesians 4A

- We've officially moved beyond the first half of this letter, where Paul provides a foundation of Christian theology, so now we can breathe easier
 - Now we turn the page – literally – to the second half of Paul's letter and a new emphasis on our corporate life in the body
 - And you'll remember I introduced our study by dividing Paul's letter into halves
 - The first half, chapters 1-3, focused on doctrine
 - Doctrine are the truths of our faith
 - They explain who God is and how we know and please Him,
 - And they explain who we are and why we need Him
 - And I said we learn doctrine first because it's intended to guide our living
 - The ministry of the word of God for God's people isn't merely listening to teaching
 - Ultimately the ministry of the word is putting into action what we learn
- I think it's ironic that misinformed or immature Christians will sometimes say that they don't find Bible teaching relevant
 - They prefer preaching that's "practical" they say
 - This is like a medical student saying "I don't want to sit for lectures on human anatomy or infectious diseases..."
 - "I need something more relevant and practical"
 - If a doctor doesn't understand the basic science of their profession, they'll never never move on to the practical courses
 - Likewise, if a Christian doesn't understand Biblical doctrine, then he or she stands little chance of adopting the lifestyle of a disciple
 - And even if a pastor taught "practical" advice from the pulpit, I can't replace doctrine

- Because if I call you to think or do certain things or refrain from doing other things, will you understand why?
- And the more important question is, will you obey?
- When a preacher calls his congregation to action based on his own ideas or wisdom, the congregation will ask itself does my pastor's advice seem sensible?
 - But when the preacher presents doctrinal truths from the word of God calling his congregation to act accordingly, the question becomes will we obey God?
 - Proper Christian practice comes only from an understanding of Christian theology
 - That's why Paul himself spent three chapters wading through important doctrine before he gives specific direction to the church
- Therefore, as we move into the "practical" portion of Paul's teaching, I'll refer back to the theology of this letter from time to time
 - So now in chapter 4, Paul's transition into practical application begins with a sweeping call to live a Christ-like life worthy of the magnificent grace we've received

[Eph. 4:1](#) Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

[Eph. 4:2](#) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

[Eph. 4:3](#) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- Paul signals that he's moving into application with the transition word, "therefore"
 - Obviously, Paul's referring back to the previous three chapters
 - And so we could summarize Paul's teaching by saying...
 - "Because God chose you to be an adopted child to receive mercy by faith, and because you have His Spirit and an inheritance and a glorious future..."
 - For all those reasons...

- Paul urges us to walk in a manner worth of this calling
 - He uses the euphemism “walk” to describe our testimony of life in Christ
 - In fact, the word “walk” is our mile marker for the second half of this letter
 - Paul uses the term 6 times at key places to emphasis obedience
- We’re so familiar with this euphemism and so unaccustomed to walking anywhere, that we don’t to consider the picture it creates
 - When I travel to teach, I am usually working with a local team of supporters
 - I enjoy meeting new cultures and experiencing different lifestyles
 - And in many places, the culture is accustomed to walking far more than we do in America
 - I remember on several occasions my hosts and I were preparing to leave for my teaching, and I walked outside to get into the car
 - But I looked up and I’m the only one standing by the car
 - Everyone else has started walking down the road
 - The church was about half a mile away, so naturally I’m thinking we’re driving there
 - While they were thinking it’s *only* half a mile away, so naturally we’re walking
 - This happened to me once in Norway, when the temperatures were in the 20s and it was snowing lightly
 - As they began to walk, I politely suggested that we should drive since the weather was a bad
 - They replied, there is no such thing as bad weather...there is only inadequate clothing
- My point is that in modern cultures (except Norway) we’re in danger of losing an appreciation for this euphemism to “to walk with Christ”

- Even recreational walks around the neighborhood can't give us a proper appreciation for Paul's analogy
 - Walking in Paul's day involved a journey
 - You had a starting place you wanted to leave
 - And you had a destination you wanted to reach
- Furthermore, a walking journey required three things
 - First, you had to have the energy and
 - In Paul's day, a person might walk 20-30 miles a day for days on end to get somewhere
 - To travel between Jerusalem and the Galilee was about a three days' walk of about 25 miles each day
 - Each step in the journey required a small amount of energy, but collectively the energy was significant
- So secondly, walking required persistence
 - There would be times when it was downhill or the scenery was uplifting or the conversation made time go faster
 - But there were times when you walked uphill or in the rain or into the wind
 - You might face threats or periods of boring silence with nothing but the sound of your feet hitting the dirt in rhythm
 - No matter what you found on a given day, you knew you couldn't reach the destination unless you kept going
- Finally, your journey on foot required a sense of direction
 - It's very easy to get lost walking in open territory
 - Unless you have a path to follow or a guide to lead you, you're likely to walk in circles
 - Ask anyone who's been lost in the woods
- Each of these details relates to the euphemism Paul will use in the second half of this letter
 - He is asking us to set our minds on a journey living as disciples of Christ

- Our faith has placed us on this journey, this walk
- Our starting point is the place God found us, whether as a child or teen or adult
- It's a place we want to leave, a place of sin, ungodliness, brokenness and hopelessness
- And by faith in Jesus Christ, we've been adopted into a new family, a family with a glorious future and eternal blessings
 - This family is like the Norwegians I mentioned earlier
 - The family of God has set it's mind on following Christ and so it heads out to the road for a walk of faith
 - You can't take a shortcut...there's no car or train
- You just start by placing one foot in front of another, dedicating energy, committing to persistence and under direction
 - The energy for our spiritual walk comes from the Spirit of God, Who pulls us away from worldly distractions and lust
 - So He can put those resources to use in obedience to Christ
- And He encourages perseverance for the journey
 - Sometimes the journey is easy because He puts the wind to our backs and brings friends alongside us to pass the time
 - Other times he strengthens us by giving us hills to climb
 - And all the while He's speaking to our hearts, encouraging us, challenging us, reminding us that the destination is closer every day
- Finally, He guides us in our journey by His word
 - Pointing the way to righteousness
 - And even calling us back to the path when we wander off
- That's what Paul's talking about when he calls us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling
 - In a general sense, he's asking us to set our minds on leaving the world and seeking the destination of obeying Christ

- He's urging us to bring our resources of time, talent and treasure to bear in serving God in whatever way we're called
- He's asking us to show perseverance
- And Paul's asking us to walk in the counsel of God's Spirit so we may stay on track
- I hope that makes it easier for you to appreciate His euphemism, but we know it's a lot easier to talk about these things than it is to live by them
 - Most of us begin the journey with enthusiasm
 - We're eager to please Christ, because we imagine a glorious trip filled with excitement and reward
 - Like the day a family starts a long road trip...
 - But then things don't go as planned...
 - We get a flat, we face detours, the trip takes longer than we expected, fights break out in the backseat...the poodle gets motion sick
 - And pretty soon we're all asking "Are we there yet?"
- The problem isn't the journey...it's our perspective
 - We need to start our journey with the proper point of view
 - Our walk with Christ isn't a day trip, it's not even a two-week vacation road trip
 - It's a lifelong journey
 - And the roads won't always be paved and smooth
 - The roads will have potholes and there will be detours to avoid
- So Paul says in v.2 that if you're going to walk – that is live – in a worthy manner, you must start the journey with the right attitude
 - Paul describes that attitude in terms of three virtues
 - First, we need an attitude of humility
 - In Greek, humility literally means having a lowliness of mind

- Paul says something similar in Romans 12 when he cautions the church not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought
- The idea is to have a realistic appreciation for the difficulty of the journey because of the strength of your opposition and your own weakness
- We must have a sober appreciation for the difficulties that lie ahead
- Secondly, Paul counsels us to maintain an attitude of gentleness
 - Gentleness means having grace for other believers who will face the same difficulties with you
 - It's the natural compliment to humility
 - Humility is recognizing you're not going to just glide through your spiritual journey without missteps
 - And gentleness means being understanding when others stumble from time to time in their walk
- We appreciate others' challenges even as we acknowledge we face our own
 - That's why Paul says we must show tolerance for others in the body of Christ in love
 - We know people aren't perfect
 - So when they show their imperfections, let's react in agape love, thinking of their needs above our own
 - We don't judge or condemn, we show tolerance
- And while we're on the topic of tolerance, let me address the common misuse of the word in our culture today
 - Many people in the world call for tolerance
 - Most of the time the world uses that word very differently than the Bible does
 - The Bible is asking us to show understanding for others in the body of Christ when we sin, when we make mistakes

- We tolerate a mistake in the sense that we show patience and give opportunity for the person to learn and do better in the future
- But the world calls for tolerance in the sense that we *accept* their sin
 - They call for the world to be tolerant by accept various sexual sin as normal and legitimate
 - And they call for Christians to be tolerant toward other religious viewpoints by agreeing they are equally valid to our own
 - In other words, tolerance means accepting any viewpoint or preference while silencing any opposing view
- Ironically, the modern view of tolerance is self-contradictory
 - By the world's standard, any mutually exclusive point of view in inherently intolerant
 - If you hold a view that by it's claims eliminates all other views, it must be rejected simply because it holds an absolute view
 - If you believe only one kind of marriage is true marriage, than you are intolerant
 - If you believe that there is only one way to God, then you are intolerant
 - And anything intolerant must be bad the world declares
- You can see the enemy's fingerprints on this one, can't you?
 - He's working in the minds of the unbelieving with a call to tolerance
 - He's insulate them from the mutually-exclusive claims of Christ by predisposing them against any absolute truth
 - We need to be careful to not bring the enemy's definition of tolerance into our theology
 - We will tolerate mistakes among us as Christ does for us
 - But we not declare evil to be good for that is never the loving thing to do
- Finally, Paul says we need patience

- Patience was an essential requirement for any long journey
 - Impatient people usually don't even start long journeys, much less finish them
 - Our walk with Christ may last 3, 4, 5 decades or even longer
 - We have to bring an attitude of patience to this walk, or we're likely to burn out quickly
- If you've ever watched a Christian begin their walk of faith with a burst of energy and then quickly flame out, you've almost certainly seen someone start with the wrong attitude
 - Excitement and anticipation is good, but it must be accompanied by patience
 - Perhaps no one sat them down and explained from scripture that our walk with Christ isn't a sprint, it's a marathon
 - And so how we start will have a lot to say about how we finish
- We need to start with humility concerning ourself and gentleness for others walking with us
 - We need to devote energy, but not in bursts...we must measure out the energy so ensure we give attention to our walk in a daily way
 - We need to persevere for the tests we know will come against us
 - And we need to seek the counsel of God in His word throughout the journey so we don't lose our way
- And for all these things, we need patience in our heart
 - Patience for ourselves and patience for others
 - And with patience and love and tolerance, we'll preserve our unity
 - We'll give grace to others, remembering no one is perfect
- And speaking as a pastor and on behalf of your elders, we especially value and need your patience and tolerance and love
 - We're on the same walk with you

- Which means we're also walking away from sin and weaknesses of one kind or another
- And we're moving toward a destination of godliness and sanctification
- We're going to stumble, we're going to have our bad days
 - We don't ask you to excuse our sin, much less approve it
 - But we do ask you to tolerate it with patience for the sake of our unity, even as you pray for us to do better
 - And we'll do the same for all of you
- Which leads us to the next part of chapter 3

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph. 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Eph. 4:6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

- Paul supports his call for the church to act in unity by reminding us that we are already united spiritually
 - It's like telling two siblings to treat each other in brotherly love
 - I always wondered what brotherly love was
 - For the longest time I thought brotherly love was intended ironically to mean dislike
 - Because my relationship with my brothers growing up was anything but loving
 - But Paul isn't speaking ironically, of course
 - He saying the body of Christ is united in important, eternal ways
 - So let's act like it
 - And to illustrate his point, Paul lists seven ways we're already united with one another
 - These seven aspects of unity are all spiritual

- They are markers that identify us as part of the same family and destined for the same eternal future
- Therefore, they argue strongly for us to live and think in ways that reflect our unity
- So let's take a brief look at these seven aspects of Christian unity
 - First, there is one body Paul says
 - The word body refers to the universal church
 - Every person on earth who has been born again by the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ is a member of the Church
 - We are one body of people
 - The point is that there are not multiple separate bodies
 - In human terms we may break up the body of Christ in various meaningless ways
 - Different denominations, theological views, affiliations and even just multiple campuses work to divide us in earthly ways (often regrettably)
 - But these things don't change the fact that we are one institution
 - Therefore, no one can come along and claim to have "rediscovered" the true church (like the Mormons)
 - And no one can claim that their unique style of worship or teaching or location or whatever defines the true church
 - The body of Christ transcends such superficial things
 - A true confession in the Name above all Names is the one and only requirement to become a part of that body
 - And no one has a monopoly on the name of Christ or His body
- And secondly, that one body is held together by the indwelling of the one and only Spirit of God

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

- Our membership card for the Church is the Holy Spirit

- We don't check your ID as you enter this building
- But Paul says the Lord certainly checks for that ID card before you enter His body spiritually
- In Acts 8 we see a case where a man wanted to enjoy the benefits of membership without possessing the proper ID card

Acts 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

Acts 8:21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

- Simon was an unbeliever seeking to enjoy the power and recognition that came to the apostles by the Spirit of God
- But as Peter observed, his heart was not right with God, which is why he lacked the Spirit
- He had attached himself to the body of Christ, but he was not part of that body because he did not possess the Spirit of God
- Thirdly, Paul says we have one hope in our common calling
 - We have the same hope concerning our future, the hope of resurrection and eternal life
 - Our common eternal hope is perhaps one of the most powerful unifying principals of Christianity
 - No matter how diverse our socio-economic backgrounds
 - No matter how different our dreams for the future
 - No matter how differently our lives turn in this life
 - Nevertheless, we all share exactly the same understanding and expectation for what we will have waiting after our death
 - What other group can you say that?
 - Knowing we share an eternal future should silence any petty difference that divides us now

- One day we'll both be living in eternal bodies in the kingdom serving Christ
- I expect that some day you and I will run into each other
 - And when we do, we'll probably laugh at ourselves, at our foolishness and our meaningless disagreements
 - And we'll marvel together at our our shared blessings in Christ
 - You know, we could skip the first part and just jump to that second part now
- Fourth and fifth, we serve one Lord by one faith
 - These points should be self-explanatory
 - There is one Lord, meaning one Savior God
 - As Peter declared

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

- Here again, the world would call us intolerant for our unwillingness to accept there may be other ways to heaven
 - But holding to the truth is not intolerance....it's love
 - Our message is the only one that saves
- Likewise, we have entered into the family of God by one faith, which means one confession
 - The only way to salvation is by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ
 - As Paul said simply

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- Faith in a specific church does not save you
- Faith in a good work does not save you
- A faith in in your own goodness or worthiness will not save you

- The word “faith” requires an object, something you place your faith in
 - And if you don’t place your faith in the right thing, you will be disappointed
 - But as Peter wrote

1Pet. 2:6 For this is contained in Scripture:

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”**

- Christ is our cornerstone, and so we are united by a shared faith in the one and only Savior
 - No matter what other disagreements or disputes might divide us, we have agreed on our Savior
 - And that common faith unites us just as much as it divides us from the unbelieving world
- Sixth, we have all experienced one baptism
 - Paul is speaking about the spiritual baptism that comes by the Spirit of God
 - The baptism of the spirit comes at the moment of our faith
 - And in fact, it is inseparable from the moment of faith
 - That common experience unites all believers
 - It is our common experience of being born again
 - In a way, it’s like all of us had the same spiritual womb
 - We were all birthed in the same process
- Just to clarify, Paul isn’t talking about water baptism, because clearly we didn’t all experience the same water baptism
 - Some believers are never water baptized whether by disobedience or lack of opportunity
 - For example, the thief on the cross was never baptized in water
 - Yet Christ said he would be in paradise with Jesus

- Furthermore, different churches practice water baptism in different ways
 - I believe that scripture teaches that there is only one correct way to practice water baptism
 - Nevertheless, I cannot say that my brothers and sisters in Christ who were water baptized in a different way are less a part of the body
 - We share the same water baptism, and therefore we are no less one simply because we performed different rituals
- Finally, we are all the children of the same God and Father
 - I mentioned that my brothers and I didn't get along very well growing up
 - Now that we're adults, we've mostly put those things behind us
 - Recently, my father has been enduring some difficult health issues
 - He's required care and attention from me and my siblings, which has caused us to come together as a family
 - My father's situation has reminded my brothers and I that we are part of the same family and the same father
 - And so it should be with us as the family of our God and Father
 - No matter what difference mark our earthly lives
 - No matter how much we disappoint, disregard or annoy one another
 - No matter how often fail to show love to one another...
 - Blood is thicker than water, as the saying goes
 - We are all children of the same God and Father Who called us into His family
 - None of us had reason to expect or deserve our adoption
 - We are all in need of God's grace and we're all brothers and sisters
 - So let's act that way as we walk this journey together