

God's Way

August 19, 2018

Ephesians 4:1-6

1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life 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 making every effort 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 of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Today's Scripture is more guidance on Christian living. We can't possibly remember all of the commandments, lessons, and instructions. However, if you live your life worthy of your calling, it will cover all of the exhortations. As I mentioned last week, some of commandments are nearly impossible to live by. Well, it is virtually impossible to live by all of them all the time. This is because it not only goes against human nature but also against mainstream society. We are not strong enough on our own and we do not have enough discipline to obey over a hundred commandments. Of course doing bad is a sin but failing to do good is also a sin. So, the consequences is that we are all sinners. Not one sin is called out to be any worse than another. Not one sin is isolated from the others as the bad one.

In our Friends study group this past Tuesday we were discussing the book *20 Hot Potatoes that Christians are Afraid to Touch*. The author mentioned that people feel down and unworthy due to their self-image. One cause of a poor self-image is religion. Whereas some ministries focus more on covering sins than enjoying the grace of God. Some ministries end up creating more guilt than providing deliverance from it. However, instead of condemning ourselves we should be basking in the Good News. All sin is forgiven - everything is covered 100%. There is something wrong when a brand of Christianity makes more of our sinfulness than on God's grace. In Christ we are not condemned for our sins. In Christ we are forgiven and loved. We need to hear about God's grace, forgiveness, and love - not shame and sin. Which, by the way, is a key reason for why I became a Disciple.

Ephesians has some common themes found in other New Testament scriptures. Salvation is a cause for praise that brings glory to God. Reconciliation to God is an act of grace. Unity of one body, the church, into the body of Christ. We are adopted as children of God. And the virtues are guidelines for Christian living. So, you and I are saved. We are reconciled to God by an act of grace into one body, the church and we are adopted directly into the family of God. With this much blessing how can anyone be down and out? If you get depressed, focus on these things; salvation, reconciliation, grace, the love of Christ and the love of God.

Today's Scripture provides instructions on living a worthy life of love and unity. The call is to live life worthy of God's calling. That means that it takes more than a confession, but to lead a Christian life. This is in contrast to the lifestyle that mainstream society embraces. The Christian virtues that are listed are few; it is a small list - humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peace. We could take the time to analyze each one of these individually. But the point is the relationship. Our relationship with the divine is founded upon characteristics of God. As children of God, we are to embrace these characteristics. Achieving spiritual perfection is impossible but attempting it is called for. It is a matter of devoting effort to head in the right direction. It is the Christian call to change from the former life to a new life.

We have a faith based foundation. God to forgive us, the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, the Bible to guide us, and Jesus to catch us. That's another one of those catchy phrases that I like to repeat from time to time. We have God to forgive us, the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, the Bible

to guide us, and Jesus to catch us. It is not hard to live God's way when love is the ruling factor, when the relationship is based on being in the family of God, and when you appreciate God's grace with admiration and thanksgiving. With the blood of Jesus flowing through our veins (which in essence is what the Lord's Supper is all about) it is easy to obey the word of God. It is easy to live God's way because it is a pleasure to serve the Lord Jesus. The Scripture has an emphasis on oneness. Love is key to being united in oneness. The virtues that were listed are based on love. We have humility, gentleness, and patience because we have love. We are united together because there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.

As I finished my degree I began to reflect upon the free time that I now have. I can now spend more time with pleasure reading, hobbies, and family. I began to wonder how many times I have been negligent due to the pressure of completing an assignment. How many times I have disappeared into the home office for hours at a time and how often I have missed relaxing with the family. I wonder how many times I could have been frustrated and took it out on the innocent. Then it occurred to me that God does not brush me off. God is patient and kind and doesn't give up on me. God gives me unconditional love. God is always forgiving and always encouraging. Therefore, as children of God, we are to be the same. Unfortunately in today's society people brush God aside. When the role is called up yonder people will have to answer for their rudeness and neglect.

The test that we need to pass is the test that Jesus laid out for all of us. Whatever you do to the least of these is what you do to Jesus. So, take this image of Jesus in your mind, there he is on the throne in heaven. I know he loves me but is he pleased with me? Just like I know my mother loved me but she wasn't always pleased with me. I want to make sure Jesus is pleased with me. If I judge this meeting by my standards I would say that he is. But if I judge by his standards things might be entirely different. I want to make sure Jesus is pleased with me by his standards. There are two images of Jesus we should try to keep in mind. One is on the cross, dyeing, bleeding, and suffering. That's where you take all of your complaints and problems. Put your ailments in perspective with the suffering Savior. The other image is Jesus ascended into heaven at the throne. So, take this image of Jesus in your mind there in heaven with all the glory that you can imagine. That's your goal. That's where you want to be. In front of Jesus on the throne in heaven.

Now there is a test that you have to pass. Is the test of judgment found in Matthew chapter 25 - the Judgment of the Nations - where people are separated at the throne of Jesus. We imagine ourselves getting to heaven and we are all happy with all the glory. But it is at the throne where the separation occurs. This is not my word but the red letter word of Christ. It is there where how we imagine things are going to be and how things are actually going to be are different. It is there at the throne where you have to stand in front of Jesus and answer for everything. This is where the wide road becomes very narrow (Matthew 7:13). This is where not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will enter God's kingdom (Matthew 7:21). This is not my word but the red letter word of Christ. It is there at the throne where you have to answer for everything, not just the commandments, but everything. Imagine how you want that meeting to go. It is going to go God's way. If you want it to go your way, that which is favorable for you, then you have to live God's way.