

04/08/2024 Ephesians 4:1-16

Let's get straight into today's reading: **I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...**

St Paul in the last three chapters of Ephesians

Has been telling his readers about what *God* has done,
And especially what God has done in bringing together
Jews and Gentiles into one new body,

So that God's reconciling work may be seen by all of
creation,

And so that all may know that God is a God of truth and
love and unity.

Now St Paul starts to draw out the implications of this
For the Ephesian Christians, and for what it means in
their life together,

And he starts this by assuring them

That God has *called* them, that he has *invited* them into
his kingdom,

And then St Paul encourages them to live a life *worthy* of
this calling.

Let's pause here to think about what this means.

I imagine that many of you have been called,

Been invited to weddings: you've received invitations
calling you

To attend the ceremony, the reception,

And you have received the details about the time and the place.

Now: what sort of thoughts go through your mind
When you respond to the invitation?

Well, you consider what would be a fitting present,
You consider what would be fitting to wear to the ceremony,

You consider if it is your place to speak at the reception,
And, if so, you consider what would be fitting to say.

Now, we all know that there is a fitting, a worthy way
To dress at a wedding; that there are worthy gifts to give;
And, if we are called to speak, that there are worthy
words to say.

These considerations are not primarily *moral*
considerations:

You couldn't say that someone *sins*

By wearing boardshorts or trackie dacks to a wedding,
But we all know that such actions are not conducive to
celebration,

And to the unity that celebration of good things
enhances.

St Paul is saying it's like this in Christian life:

We have a calling, an invitation, to the great wedding
feast of the Bride and the Lamb,

And we do well to consider what is fitting, what is worthy
conduct

For people who have been graced in this way.

Now, St Paul begins by spelling out in a few words
What a worthy Christian walk, a worthy Christian way of
life

Looks like in response to this calling.

He says that we should live **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

In the rest of this sermon, let's think about three key words

That St Paul uses: humility, gentleness, and patience.

The first is humility: What is humility? Let's think about it.

Humility is the willingness to take the lower place,
To consider the needs of others before our own,
To not respond in anger and hurt when we are
overlooked

Or dishonoured or rejected.

In the ancient world humility was not seen as a virtue
Because it was linked with weakness and poverty and
stupidity:

To live in humility meant that one was hopelessly low
status,

And not worthy of honour or care or praise.

But think about how different humility is for Christians.

We are free to live in humility because our status
Has been taken care of by God, and he honours us,
Not because we are somehow better than others – that
would lead us to pride –
But because he is a gracious and loving Father.
Let me spell this out further:
Your God created you, and knows you better than you
know yourself;
He has not held your sins against you, but has freely
forgiven you
For the sake of your Lord Jesus Christ,
And not only does he provide for you in life,
But he has honoured you by calling you into his kingdom,
So that you may address the king of the universe as
Father,
And so that you have an inheritance that cannot be
destroyed.

It's by this calling that God has freed us from playing
status games:

We don't have to worry about guarding our place
In the great pecking order of life: If someone is rude to
us,
Or doesn't acknowledge us or thank us for what we have
done,
Or doesn't give us the honour that we think we deserve,
What is that, when we consider the honour *God* gives
us?

More than this, because God honour us
We don't need to be fearful of acknowledging or
thanking
Or honouring other people - as if we will thereby lose *our*
place.
No, by grace, for Christ's sake, in faith,
We are free to live in humility as people called by God.

St Paul goes on to say that we live in a way worthy of our
calling,
In a way that's fitting with the great invitation we have
received,
When we live with **gentleness**.

Now you could say that just as at the heart of Christian
humility
Is the fact that God is in charge of our *status*,
So, at the heart of Christian gentleness
Is the fact that God is in charge of our *strength*.

Sometimes we can get the idea that gentleness –
A word that is sometimes translated as meekness –
Means something like weakness,
But that is far from what Christian gentleness is.
Christian gentleness means using our strength in the
service of others.
It's true that often we are tempted to use the strength
that we have,
Whether it's physical strength, or intellectual strength,

Or financial strength, or moral strength,
We are tempted to use this strength
Primarily to make others do what we want them to do:
To force our will on others to get our way.
It comes naturally to us to act this way with the strength
we have,
But God does not act in this way toward us.
Think about the Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom
all things were created,
And the one who could call on legions of angels.
He is gentle and humble of heart
And he calls people to come to him and find their rest in
him.
He did not force you to have faith, or coerce you to trust
him,
Rather, your Lord Jesus used his strength by going to the
cross for you.
That took real strength, real determination, real focus,
And it showed us what gentleness means.
It is receiving this gentleness of Christ
That we are freed by God to live in a fitting way as his
people,
So that we don't need to use compulsion on each other,
But, in gentleness, can serve one another self-
sacrificially.

Finally, St Paul also said that we live in a way worthy of
our calling,

In a way that's fitting with the great invitation we have received,

When we live **in patience**.

Now you could say that just as at the heart of Christian *humility*

Is the fact that God is in charge of our *status*, and at the heart of Christian gentleness

Is the fact that God is in charge of our *strength*.

So, at the heart of Christian *patience*

Is the fact that God is in charge of our *time*.

As human beings we get impatient when things don't go according to the timetable we set,

Whether it's the traffic lights changing when we want,

Or someone we live with giving up their bad habits right now,

Or the church getting its act together on important decisions

And not dragging things out for decades.

St Paul is reminding us that the God who has called us

Is patient with us: he is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

It's true that when we focus on the things that frustrate us

Then we can be overwhelmed with impatience

And become angry with the world, or other people, or with God.

But hear God's word: your God is patient with you,

He does not reject you because you are not fully mature

In Christian love *right now*: day by day he gives you his Spirit

Through his word; he draws your attention to Jesus,
So that you may share the patience that Jesus has with you

With other people: being patient is a fitting response
To the call that we have in Christ Jesus.

St Paul ends the beginning of chapter four with these words:

bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

St Paul has, in Ephesians, been giving right doctrine,
And as he goes on he underlines how important right teaching is.

But what is right teaching without humility, or gentleness, or patience?

What is right teaching without love?

It is fitting for us, as people called by God,
To make every effort, having received teaching from God,
To live as children of God, who strive to maintain the unity

That God has given as we live at peace.

And this peace is not a papering over of differences,
Or an indifference to correct doctrine,
Or a seeking of unity for its own sake,
But a willingness to forgive each other from the heart,

And to receive each other as God, in Christ, has received us.

Soon we will together say these words:

The Lord be with you; *and also with you.*

Lift up your hearts; *we lift them up to the Lord.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord; *for that is fitting and right.*

And we will prepare to attend a foretaste of the feast to come:

We will receive the body and blood of Christ,

Given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Since we have been invited by God to such a banquet,

Let us live in a fitting way, worthy of our calling,

As we show in our words and actions

The humility, gentleness, and peace that comes from God,

And as we live through faith in Christ

In the unity of the one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

To whom be the glory in the church, now, and for all ages. Amen!