



The Worthy Life

Ephesians 4:1-6

Week 7 | Feb 18, 2018

Summary: In Ephesians 4 we begin to take the turn, typical of Paul's letters, from the doctrinal to the practical. The first half of the book stated the facts about what God did in saving and creating the church. Now he moves to apply these truths to our lives, exhorting us to live worthy of the calling we've received. "Worthy," Greek *axios*, means "equal weight" or "that which balances the scales." What God does on one side must be matched by what we do, in his power, on the other. But while it's a high calling we're living up to, Paul's attitude is not heavy-handed and his words are not onerous. Rather, Paul speaks as a paraclete "called alongside"—not unlike the Holy Spirit himself—to guide, coach, and empower us. To begin, he says: **A gospel that is all grace can only be lived in all humility.** We humbly think of others more highly than ourselves; we deal gently with people, keeping our strength under control; and we show great patience or longsuffering, dissipating our impulses to anger. A second axiom for the *axios* life: **A community that unites all must be maintained by all.** We are a community of sinners. We have as many vulnerabilities as people and relational connections; so all must do their part, bearing with each other and eagerly maintaining unity in the body. Finally, **ultimate unity is all for One and One for all.** That is, our unity is doctrinal and theological: one body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all. The only way to stay together: We must all be for God and the gospel, just as he is for all of us.

Discussion:

1. Read 4:1-6 in three different translations. What do you love most about this text?
2. Of the three character qualities—humility, gentleness, and patience—which do you embody most? Which do you struggle with most?
3. These qualities will produce a couple of basic actions that are integral our calling: bearing with (passively) each other in love, and being eager (actively) to maintain unity and peace. But one of the hardest things to do is to discern when to bear with someone and not address an issue, versus when to actively confront or engage it. How do you decide which to do?

Can you think of time when you got it right? What about when you got it wrong? Tell your stories.

4. Considering the seven "ones"—one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father God—are there any of these doctrinal areas where you feel our church is not basically aligned and unified? Do you feel out of sync on any of these? Discuss.
5. What is one change you sense God's Spirit prompting you to make so that you can live worthy of the calling you've received?

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

“America in the 21st century does not offer propitious conditions for growing up. Maturity is not a hallmark of our culture. Our culture is conspicuous for its obsession with “getting and spending.” Instead of *becoming* more, we either get or do more. So it is not surprising that many people are offering to sell us maps for living better without having to grow up: maps to financial security, sexual gratification, music appreciation, athletic prowess, a better car, a better job, a better education, a better vacation.

“As it turns out, the maps never get us to where we wanted to go. The more we get and do, the less we are. We regress to the condition of ‘children tossed to and fro, and blown about by every wind of doctrine.’

“There are no maps to the mature life, and certainly not to the mature life in Christ....So if there are no maps, what do we do? We dismiss the expertise of answers. We quit defining our lives by what we think we need. There are no shortcuts to the unity, to the one, to the center.

“The gospel alternative to this cultural welter of one-answer advice and crafty deceit, seduction, and empty promises to a better life is **church**. Church just as it is, revealed to us in Pauls’ One and All: the One circulating all the particular blood cells through the body of Christ. We immerse ourselves in this community that provides conditions congenial to growing up to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Informed by Pauls’ Ephesian orientation, we make ourselves at home in the verbs of God and his glory, in the company of Paul and all saints, in the world of grace and good works, in the work of Christ making peace and creating church, in God’s manifold wisdom and prayer, playful as children in the diversity of the ‘all’ and content to slowly mature in the ‘One.’

“But with this caveat: the church is not ideal. It is not, nor was it intended to be, a gathering of the nicer people in town. God is not fastidious in the company he keeps. There are sinners aplenty, hypocrites in droves, the ill-mannered and unwashed. We will be mightily disappointed if we look around expecting to meet men and women who measure up to the full stature of Christ. These are men and women who are *on the way to growing up*. Not many of them are there yet. We find ourselves among Christians of all ages in all stages of growth: toddlers not yet out of diapers, children innocent and pure in the discovery of what it means to be a child of God; adolescents who are in turns contagiously enthusiastic and sullenly rebellious; young mothers and father who are struggling to come to terms with the demands of parenthood; mid-lifers who got distracted years ago by job and family and are now looking again for what they feel they missed, hoping its not too late; the elderly who are facing death in a culture that denies death and uses every ruse it can come up with to delay it medically and avoid it emotionally.

“I grew up around people who identified the Christian life with inflated emotional states. Grandiosity was epidemic. The ordinary was for people without Christ. We were in training for ecstasy. I soon tired of it. I began looking for men and women who had somehow managed to grow up. Locating them wasn’t always easy or immediate. But patience paid off. I have never been in a congregation in which I have not found them. Some became friends and guides. For others it was enough to know and observe them from a distance.

“I soon learned that the way to maturity is through the commonplace. I had to unlearn much—learn not to overreach, not to strain for high-flown epithets or resolutions, learn to stay as ture as I could to the grain of life as I found it in the lives around me in the congregation and Scriptures that formed my identity.”

Eugene Peterson, “Practice Resurrection”

