

We are now embarking on a new chapter, and in some ways a new thought which is built upon what preceded. In the first three chapters Paul has gone to great lengths to demonstrate how God's awesome grace and goodness has been extended to all His people, including these Gentiles, and how this grace is an undeserved salvation which now reconciles all His people to God through the shed blood of Christ, as they place their faith in Him.

He has put into perspective that this new life has been given to us as God has called us and opened our eyes and even given us the faith to forsake the path we were on and to now turn around and follow Him who is life and light and safety as we've been forgiven of the penalty of sin in Christ.

And as Paul has assembled this truth, precept upon precept, he has shown what our salvation is built upon.

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

And now as we come to chapter four Paul is about to show us how we must respond to so great a salvation as he urges us to walk worthily of this new life in Christ.

EPH 4:1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Here in the opening verse Paul once again refers to himself as a prisoner. As I mentioned before, there is a double sense here as to what Paul means by being a prisoner of the Lord. He had mentioned this very thing in EPH 3:1 "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -..."

He was writing this letter from the jail cell of a Roman prison. But, Paul is also demonstrating that he is not just incarcerated, he is bound as one who is placed there for a task. He is bound to the One who called him to be a servant of the Most High God.

This is why he says he is "the prisoner of Christ Jesus" in 3:1, and "a prisoner for the Lord..." in 4:1. He wasn't just Rome's prisoner.

He was first and foremost the Lord's prisoner, which means that no matter whose jail cell he was in the Lord still had jurisdiction over him.

It's kind of like someone being arrested by the FBI in one state and then they're moved by another law enforcement agency to another state. It doesn't make any difference how many law enforcement agencies have that prisoner, they are still under the jurisdiction of the FBI who has the final say as to where they go and how they'll get there.

It didn't make any difference that Rome detained Paul, it was Jesus Christ who had the true jurisdiction over Paul. It was Jesus Christ who had a mission for Paul which included being a prisoner in Rome.

Nothing could happen to Paul unless it passed through the loving hands of His heavenly Father. The enemy had no power over Paul because Paul was the property of God Almighty. That's what Paul meant when he wrote in 1CO 6:20 "you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

The apostle John wrote of the victorious resurrected Christ in REV 5:9 "And they sang a new song: "You [Jesus Christ] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood *you purchased men for God* from every tribe and language and people and nation."

What Christ has purchased He cherishes. And for you and I we should consider what that means because it makes little difference what kind of chains we think the enemy has tried to hang on us. We don't belong to him, we are not bound to him and he has no jurisdiction over us. Does this mean he has no effect in our lives as he comes against us?

No, we would make a mistake to suggest that. Even Paul realized that his imprisonment was partly due to the enemy's activity even as he realized the enemy's tactics against him in other endeavors as Paul tried to minister to the saints.

The Thessalonians come to mind. He wrote to them and said in 1TH 2:17-18 "But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you -certainly I, Paul, did, again and again - but Satan stopped us."

There is real spiritual war, but we are more than conquerors in Christ and our loving God and Savior will use any tactic of the enemy to further the will of God. We just need to have the eyes to see, as did Paul, that God is still on the throne and that though he was in jail, he wasn't ultimately Rome's prisoner, but Christ's. And that was Paul's comfort, because he knew Christ would never forsake him.

But what Paul wants to do in this section of chapter four is to put into perspective our responsibilities to the One who has purchased us and to walk in a way that honors Him. And so Paul continues.

EPH 4:1 "..... I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

There's an aspect of our salvation that we sometimes don't put into perspective, and that is that we have been personally called by God. We have a tendency to think of our salvation as just some sort of gift that we accept by faith without considering that our God and Creator offered this gift to us personally.

This is a one-on-one offer. It's not as though God just takes a shotgun approach to our salvation where He throws it up into the air and hopes it will come down on somebody. Every person who has ever believed on the Lord Jesus has been personally and intimately approached by our Lord as He Himself offers Himself to us through the Holy Spirit, who alone can open our eyes to the truth.

You can't get any more personal than that. And what Paul is trying to convey here is that we must walk in a way that realizes that we each have been individually approached by God to be a part of His kingdom, and that we each are a vital element as we are to walk the path that Christ has set before us.

My path is not exactly the same as yours. And your path is just as unique as God has called you to be a functioning part of the Body. Nobody can walk your path for you. And unfortunately what we see, as trials and tribulations enter our lives, we sometimes conclude that this should not be part of our path and so we try and get off the path. All the while Jesus is saying, 'no just stay close to Me as I lead you in this path.'

This is what happened to Paul. His particular path took him down some pretty dark alleys in a manner of speaking. But he realized that God had called him to walk wherever the Lord led. And it

doesn't mean he was elated over some of the trials where he may have tried to find a different path around certain trials. It just meant that he wasn't going to fight God if the Lord gave him a hard path.

That's what we just saw a few moments ago when he wrote the Thessalonians in 1TH 2:17-18 "But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing *we made every effort to see you*. 18 For we wanted to come to you -certainly I, Paul, did, again and again - but Satan stopped us."

Simply because Paul was hindered from going to the Thessalonians he didn't stop pursuing what he thought was God's will. But that's different from pursuing a path which would have taken him away from the Thessalonians and to the south of France where he could hang out on a beach where there were no problems.

Paul was always pursuing a path which was service oriented, not self-oriented. And if God made it clear that that particular path was shut off then he would pursue another path of service, not inactivity. And what motivated Paul was the realization that God had personally called him, and out of gratitude Paul wanted to honor the Lord as one who walked worthy of such a high calling.

The NIV puts verse one like this. "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." He's saying each of us has received a calling from God. And now we are responsible to live lives worthy of the calling.

The NIV falls a bit short in conveying the subtle nuances of this verse, however. Paul uses a sort of play on words here. A better translation would be [I] "entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the *calling* with which you have been *called*."

There's a double emphasis on the election of God's people. But this election carries with it the responsibility to walk in that calling. When we think of calling we have a tendency to limit it to people like pastors or evangelists and missionaries. 'Yes, I've been called to the ministry.'

But what Paul is saying is that no, everyone is called to the ministry as they are called into the Kingdom of God by faith in Christ. And if every one of God's people will realize that we've all received a personal call then that will begin to affect us in a way

where we will walk in that call with much more zeal and conviction because the call is a call to action.

God is a God of action and this is why none of us should assume we can sit on the sidelines simply because we may think our call is unimportant or not as "glamorous" as the Pastor, evangelist or missionary.

We are to imitate Christ. And this brings up Paul's exhortation in this first verse. The NIV says, "I urge you"; the NAS says, "I entreat you", while the NKJV says, "I beseech you".

This is the Greek word *parakaleo*, and it means to call to one's side, call for, to summon. Paul wanted them to realize that though he wasn't there in the flesh, he was there in the spirit and he was coming right alongside of them as though he would put his arms on their shoulders while drawing them near and saying, 'come on let's go forward.'

And this is the way the Holy Spirit is exhorting each one of us today. He is our Comforter as Jesus tell us in JOH 14:16-18 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another [Comforter] to be with you forever - 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

This word comforter or, counselor as the NIV and NAS puts it, is almost the same word we have in our text here in Ephesians. It is *parakletos* and it means, summoned, called to one's side, esp. called to one's aid.

Just as Paul is coming alongside these Ephesians to encourage and exhort them to live lives worthy of their calling, there is One who is closer than Paul whose ministry it is to always be at our sides to encourage us to live those lives to the glory of Christ as He gives the strength.

Each day the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to glorify Christ as He comes along side to strengthen us and build us up and use us as we're willing to be used. And that's part of the problem with all of us. Sometimes we're simply not willing. It seems all of the encouragement in the world will not get us off of first base.

And yet the Holy Spirit will not cease being the One who lovingly comes along side to urge us, beseech us to look to our high calling in Christ. Paul gives us a glimpse into the way the Holy Spirit

assumes the role of a loving parent who loves His children when writing to the Thessalonians as Paul places himself in that role as led by the Holy Spirit.

1TH 2:11-12 "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

No one wants to see us grow in Christ more than Christ Himself and this is why He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us and encourage us as we walk as pilgrims in this life.

This is another interesting play on words here in the first verse which the NIV puts, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." The phrase "live a life" is better translated walk. And so the NAS correctly translates this as, "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called."

Now at first glance it might not seem like that big of a difference and yet in the context of what Paul has been saying the contrast is very clear. Paul begins by stating that he is a prisoner of the Lord. The word prisoner in the Greek could actually be translated, bound, in bonds, a captive.

The irony here is that Paul, though in bonds, was walking in his faith. And the implication is that unless we are truly bound to Christ, and in Christ, we will never be able to truly walk to His glory. What would be a stumbling block to most, Paul says, being bound in Christ sets us free.

And yet many times in our lives we don't walk in the freedom of Christ because we're bound with the things of this world. We're bound in our trials, we're bound in our material possessions, we're bound with sinful practices.

Paul wants us to be bound so that we can walk, but he wants us to see that only as we are bound to the One who gives us life can we truly walk because we are walking in His steps in His power.

This is what Jesus meant in MAT 11:29-30 "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

To be yoked to Christ is to be united to Him. That's what being yoked is. This is a term that is used of animals like oxen who were

often used in pairs to plow fields or turn large grain wheels. The yoke was a wooden device which was like a cross bar and had two hoops of openings for the heads of the animals to be placed in. This cross bar was then steered by the farmer.

Often times they would take a veteran ox who had spent years under the yoke, and who had proved itself as a willing animal, and they would take a young ox who was somewhat wild and needed to be broken to submit, and they would yoke the young ox with the veteran.

The veteran animal who was strong in his work would not yield to the newcomer. And as the yoke tied them together, the newcomer learned that to struggle was useless and after a time would submit. It initially viewed the yoke as an encumbrance and an inconvenience, but soon found safety and confidence in being yoked to one who was not there to harm but to help in the burden.

And this is where we sometimes find ourselves. We find that being yoked to Christ means that we must go where Christ leads. And we find that a scary proposition, or maybe we find that it's burdensome or inconvenient, but Jesus all the while is saying, 'no, My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' And yet we find ourselves saying, 'I don't so see anything easy or light about this.'

But what makes it easy and light is not the path, which can be rocky and treacherous, but the One we're yoked to who gives the strength to go forward with an objective in mind, and that is to reach the prize, while in the process glorifying our Savior who is right by our sides the entire time.

But I can tell you from experience and from the sure word of God that if we will not submit to Jesus, we will find ourselves submitting to someone; either self or others, or the world. And what we end up finding out is that what we thought was freedom turns out to be another form of bondage. That's what Paul was telling the Galatian church.

GAL 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

It was also to these Galatians that Paul warned them not to add anything to the gospel which would actually make the gospel null and void. The Jews wanted to add the law as a part of the gospel.

The Galatians were not the only ones who did this. In fact, many Jews in Jerusalem tried this same tactic.

It was the apostle Peter at the council in Jerusalem which was called to deal with this problem that he said in ACT 15:10-11 "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

The law, or even an unbiblical approach to the word of God, can become a yoke if it's not used in a biblical way. We can actually add to the word or detract from it and find ourselves placing burdens of people we shouldn't. Don't eat this, don't wear that. And instead of living in the freedom of our salvation we put a yoke on people which enslaves.

Only Jesus Christ is a true yoke with no burdens. And as we truly trust that His yoke will be easy will we find what being set free in Him is all about and in that freedom we can truly serve without reservation as Paul did, knowing that no matter what road Christ puts us on He will never leave us or forsake us.

But the exhortation is still there. "Walk worthy of the calling with which you've been called." This exhortation has never changed. Even Abraham was called to walk with the Lord.

GEN 17:1 "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless."

But how do we do this? What does it mean to walk with the Lord? Well, Paul continues in our text.

EPH 4:2-3 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Walking with God means humbling ourselves before Him. But that humbling will manifest itself in this world to other people. And this is where Paul is going in the rest of this letter. We live in a community of believers as we are in the Body of Christ. And to the degree that we live in this community to God's glory we demonstrate that we are yoked to a God who enables us and strengthens us to live in the love of Christ.

Notice what Paul says here. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." I'm going to give an overview of these next two passages and deal a little more specifically next week. But I think you'll begin to get a flavor of the type of attitude God wants us to have toward one another and the world as well.

The Greek word for humbleness, according to Strong's concordance, gives the sense of (1) having a humble opinion of one's self (2) a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness. In other words, it does not think too highly of oneself to where others take second place.

PHI 2:4-5 "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:..."

And then Paul goes on to explain how Christ emptied Himself as He gave all for you and me. When we begin to approach others in the Body of Christ with this attitude it allows us to be servants instead of takers only. There's nothing wrong with taking, but that should not characterize our entire Christian walk.

Paul, on occasion, took as the brethren supplied whatever needs he had from physical to emotional. But he always reciprocated by reaching out to others even when he was in jail, as is the case with Paul as he writes these Ephesians.

But along with being humble we are to be gentle. This carries the idea that we are not lording anything over anyone. Rather, we are meek and approachable. Someone who is overbearing is not easily approachable, nor do people desire to approach them in most instances.

What characterizes gentleness is our Lord Jesus Christ who said, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am ***gentle and humble in heart***, and you will find rest for your souls." (MAT 11:29)

Jesus was no wimp. He was as bold as they come and yet He was gentle and humble as He gave Himself for others and was approachable by all. This speaks of His servant-hood. And this is why our Lord came in the first place.

MAT 20:28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

So, if we are to be humble and gentle we will also be predisposed to want to be servants of others. But in the process of availing ourselves to serve we will also find that many people will be hard to serve.

This is why Paul adds, "be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph.4:2b-3)

This is the tough part of serving and considering one another as more important than ourselves. Sometimes it's difficult to try and serve people who either aren't interested in being ministered to, or will take advantage of your efforts.

This is why Paul says, "make every effort". Being a servant takes real effort because it will often go against what our natural inclination is which is to be the one being served. Now, as I've said before, there's nothing wrong with being served, but that does not exempt us from serving in the process.

We can't check out simply because we have needs. The person sitting next to you this morning also has needs. And we need each other. And when you find that you don't seem to be able to reach out and meet needs it gives you a sense of uselessness and it makes it very easy to want to give up. Make every effort.

Making every effort will often call upon us to be patient with people bearing with them in love. In today's vernacular this could be translated, 'patiently put with each other in love.' This assumes that we will sometimes be unlovely, which infers that we may even sin against each other.

Now this doesn't mean we condone sin, it simply means that we must understand each other to be sinners, though saved by grace, and we need to be patient with each other, as the bumper sticker says, 'God's not finished with me yet.'

In this way we can begin to diligently preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I want to expand on this next week and help us to see some of the practical ways in which we can do this.

But as we close today may we be reassured that God is infinitely patient with us and has an infinite love for us as He encourages us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling He has given us. And He is the One who enables us to accomplish this to His glory.

HEB 13:20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."