

Worthy Of The Calling

Ephesians 4:1-3

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner 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 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:13)

May we begin our message today by echoing the simple reminder that I have given on several occasions lately, that all these things that we are reading and studying about in these scriptures are very “real”.

Christianity is not just “another philosophy” that we can take or leave! And it is not just “good instructions” about how to live! Christianity is about the very God of all creation, Jesus Christ, and about all that He is and all that He has done from eternity past to all eternity future.

And it is about the mysterious unfathomable gift that He gave to us in His death, His burial and His resurrection; and about the mysterious changes and effects that have been taking place within men’s souls all throughout time since.

It is “real” and the more you and I receive it as being real and embrace the changes it has caused to take place within us, the more we will be blessed by it and become the people God desires for us to be.

And may I take these thoughts a step further regarding this word “philosophy”, because men and women do love to follow after their personal ideas and philosophies, about the culture, about social norms, about behaviors, and about life in general!

And unfortunately, for most of the world, even for many who call themselves “Christians”, Christianity does not rise much above the level of a “Philosophy”.

But folks the simple truth is, a philosophy really is nothing more than someone’s “good idea”, and idea that for some reason, has taken hold in the culture; an people have adopted it and developed their personal beliefs and lifestyles around it.

But that is not so with Christianity! While yes, Christianity does have some elements of philosophy within it, Christianity is so much more than an “idea”. Christianity is a Person, a very real person, the very Person of God, the Lord Jesus, the “Living God”.

And as we receive His blessed salvation, Jesus becomes a real living presence within us, all the way down to the deepest recesses of our hearts, our souls, our minds and our spirits, becoming a part of who are.

I realize that you and I have heard and said these words innumerable times before, but I am constrained to keep saying them over and over again, and to ask, have they become as “real” for you as God intends for them to be?

And please do forgive my use of this sometimes “trite” expression, “real”. I flinch a bit each time I say it. But I know of no better word to use, so I’ll use it, and ask again, “Is this Christianity really “real” for you?”

Why is it so important that I continue to ask that question of us? It is because, unlike the consequences involved in accepting or rejecting a simple philosophy, this Christianity has rewards and recompenses that cannot be ignored, beginning first in all the matters of this life, and then following on into all eternity, and for those who reject it, eternal damnation.

Simply put, God is very serious about this Christianity, but “Are we?” And what should our Christianity look like in us when we do begin to get serious about it?

Here, through these words of the Apostle Paul, God very clearly tells to us about some of the ways our Christianity will look once we begin to get serious about it.

Here we read,

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Here, God is reminding us that now that we have received Christ Jesus as our Savior, there is a standard, outside of ourselves, outside of our culture, outside of the realms of ideas and philosophies by which we must begin to “walk”, by which we must conduct each step taken within our daily lives. It is a standard that is “worthy” of our new-found “calling” as “sons of God”.

And note here, the word “worthy”. Folks, it is an honor beyond measure to be a “Son, or a daughter, of God”. And the question that is being provoked here is, “Am I, are you, walking in such a way that is “worthy” of our position as His sons and daughters”?

These words are very similar to those given in Colossians 2. Listen, beginning in verse 6

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him (in Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (Colossians 2:6-10)

From the very first moment you and I received Christ Jesus into our souls, we really did become a whole “new person”. We were “born again” into a whole new way of life, as a whole new person.

In Galatians 2 we read,

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

As I thought through these words over the past week, I asked myself again, “have I changed, and am I continuing to be changed by the presence of Christ within my soul. Am I truly different from the way I was before I received Christ as my Savior”?

And I know, without doubt that I am different. Changes really are taking place, too slowly yes, but I really am changing.

And I am so very thankful that I am not that person I was before I received Christ into my soul. Though I do still often struggle with self-centered attitudes and poor temper and other wrong behaviors, I now know that I have something different that takes place within me when those old ways come on me. God’s Holy Spirit within me immediately rebukes me in my conscience and convicts me of my sin and brings me to repentance.

And as we read in 2 Corinthians 7, the repentance God brings to my soul returns me to the joy of my salvation. Listen to those words!

10 For godly (sorrow)grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

How kind and generous our God is to as He reaches into our souls and brings us back to peace and reconciliation with Him.

May I ask, "Have you taken the opportunity lately to examine your own soul? Have you found that real have changes begun to take place in your soul? Are you different? Can you notice the difference?"

And may I also ask, "Do your closest loved ones also see the difference within you?" They really should be able too! Perhaps you should take the time to ask them. And if they do not see that difference, then perhaps you should go back and reexamine your relationship with Christ and your surrender to Him.

Now please, let's understand. We do know from these scriptures that we will always struggle with sin. That is a given because sin itself never dies to us. It is a constant and tenacious predator. And through the world, the flesh and the devil, sin will always be plying its wiles and temptations.

And the old self within us does not give up easily. Our old self squirms and temps and connives within us, trying to resurrect itself. It remembers its ownership over us in our former life and it wants to regain what it once owned in us. It was truly our slave-master. It tempted us and we obeyed.

We are reminded of that in the words of Romans 6. There we read,

16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

And in John 8, Jesus said,

34 . . . "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. (John 8:34)

But now, in our new life, we truly are different. And the plain truth is, our old self is "dead" completely dead and it has no more real power and control remaining over us. In 2 Corinthians 5, we are told,

17 . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

And here, in today's text we are told that in our salvation, we were "called" out of that old life into a new life and into a "new calling".

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patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:13)

What is it that makes the real difference within us? It is that we now have a “new heart” and a “new spirit” living within us. And not only that, God’s own Holy Spirit has also come to live within us, strengthening us with His power in our inner being, enabling us to begin to be and to act differently.

I love those words in Ezekiel 36 that I quote so often for us.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

As I read these words, and the words given to us by the Apostle Paul, instructing us about how we are to respond to the calling God has placed upon our hearts, I am confident that God will also give me, give you, whatever it takes to carry it out.

So then, what is this “calling” that God speaks about here? It is a lot of things, but it is also only a few, and it has much to do with the “first and greatest commandment”, where Jesus said,

37 . . . “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Our calling is to be found within these same words, first, to love God with all that we have within us, and then secondly, to love each other in the way that Christ loves them.

This “calling” then begins first with our relationship with God. And the most obvious question is, “Do we really love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?”

I faced myself recently with that very question and I quickly came to realize that “No, I do not, not even close!” And I confess that I was distraught for a few moments.

But then, thanks be to God, my thoughts were brought back to words such as these from the Book of Ezekiel, and I was reminded that God will do in me, that which I am unable to do on my own. He has put His Spirit within me; and His Spirit will speak to my spirit and move me to be able to love Him as I should.

And then, His Spirit in me, in you, goes on further and begins to enable us to do other things, such as we read here, to “walk” worthily, agreeably, suitably, and in accord with His plans and purposes for us, and to love our neighbor as our self.

May I pause here and suggest that many of us believers get these two parts of the “Great Commandment” out of their proper order. We reach first to love our neighbors and to minister to them.

And the words of Matthew 25 encourage us along that line, giving food and clothing to those in need, visiting the sick and those in prison. And mistakenly, we begin to think that that is the first and greatest thing that we must do.

And those really are all good things to do and we must do them, but not “firstly”! Firstly, we must give all our love to the person of God. Firstly, we must devote ourselves to a relationship with Him, and then secondly comes our love towards our neighbor.

And again, these words of the Apostle Paul are so very appropriate, beginning right within our own home, because our neighbor is anyone and everyone, including our wife, our husband, our children, our other family members, and then on out into our neighborhoods and workplaces. These words,

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Where better can your humility and gentleness and patience and kindness begin than in your own home, where you are eager to maintain a unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace?

Folks, God gave these words here for a purpose. In the close confinement of a home and family, the self-centeredness and vain pride within us can test the most solid of marriages and families. And it will take the mighty working power of God’s Holy Spirit within us to defeat those sinful natures.

And here, God is simply reminding us that if we will put one foot forward and begin to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, He will be faithful to enable every next step that we take.

He will enable our humility, our gentleness, and our patience. And He will give us strength to bear up to the most difficult of circumstances.

And so He says to us, “Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and I will make your efforts prosper.

Those words again as we close . . .

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