

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON THIRTY-SEVEN)**

### **EPHESIANS 4:1-6**

*1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

*3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in 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 you all.*

In this **Lesson**, we will commence our examination of the fourth chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians living in Ephesus. With chapter **4**, we come to an important dividing point in this letter. The first three chapters contain **doctrinal instruction**, the last three chapters contain **exhortation**. This is always the proper order, for it is in doctrine that believers are informed about their exalted position in Christ, which alone makes the exhortation to live holy lives a reasonable one. It is in doctrine that believers become aware of all the resources of grace that they possess, which alone can enable them to obey the exhortation. Until a person has been exposed to sound doctrine, it is unreasonable to expect them to live an exalted Christian life. Persons must first know who they

are in Christ before they are told how they ought to live for Christ. Paul was acutely aware of this. All of his letters contain a beautiful balance between doctrine and duty, and Ephesians is the perfect example.

Accordingly, in the first half of the letter (chapters **1-3**), Paul informs the Ephesian Christians about what God has accomplished for them in Christ, and as a result, all that they have become in Christ, as well as the resources that He has placed at their disposal to help them to live victorious Christian lives.

In the second half of the letter (chapters **4-6**), he exhorts the saints living in Ephesus, to conduct their lives in a manner which would demonstrate that they understood and appreciated all that God had done for them in Christ, all that they had become in Christ, and all the spiritual resources that were now at their disposal.

In effect, God says to us in chapters **1-3**, “I have made you a saint.” In chapters **4-6**, He says, “Now, since that is the case, live a saintly life.”

To put it another way, the first three chapters deal with our **riches** in Christ, while the last three chapters explain our **responsibilities** in Christ. The key idea in the first half of the letter is **wealth**. The key word in the last half of the letter is “*walk*.” Paul exhorts the believers us to walk in **unity** (**Ephesians 4:1-16**); he exhorts them to walk in **purity** (**Ephesians 4:17-5:17**); he exhorts them to walk in **harmony** (**Ephesians 5:18-6:9**); and he exhorts them to walk in **victory** (**Ephesians 6:10-24**).

In chapters **1-3** of the epistle, Paul highlights the wonder of what it means for an individual to be “*in Christ Jesus*.” In chapters **4-6**, he highlights what it means for an individual to be “*in Christ Jesus*” **in Ephesus**.

In verse **1** of chapter **4** he writes, “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*” The word “*therefore*” reaches back to the exalted position of the believers “*in Christ*,” and to all the spiritual resources which have

been made available to them, because of their exalted position. Paul dealt with this in chapters **1-3**. The word also reaches ahead to the responsibilities which their privileged position called them to. The word “*therefore*” indicates that Paul is basing his exhortations on the doctrines taught in the first three chapters.

Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is not to be based on ignorance but on knowledge, and the more we are exposed to the **doctrines** of the Bible and the better we understand them, the easier it will be for us to obey the **exhortations** of the Bible.

There are persons who say, “I am not interested in doctrine, I just want to live a Christian life.” Such persons are revealing their ignorance of the way the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer. It is not possible for a person to live a Christian life if he or she is unaware of their position in Christ and of the resources that are at his or her disposal, which alone can empower him or her to live such a life. There are others who argue that “It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you live right.” This is a similar confession of ignorance. What a Christian believes makes all the difference in the world, because what you believe will determine how you behave!

When I hear persons who are supposed to be filled with the Holy Spirit make statements such as these, I am greatly disturbed, because it indicates that they do not understand and appreciate the magnitude of the salvation that has been wrought in their lives by God and consequently, that they are living well below their privileged position. It also indicates that they have not developed a biblical worldview.

It is the practice of the writers of the New Testament to **explain the doctrine** to their readers before asking them to **apply the doctrine**. We must not act until we are clear about what the Bible has to say about our action.

For the second time in the epistle Paul refers to himself as “*the prisoner of the Lord*.” At the beginning of chapter **3**, he had designated himself as

*“the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.”* Paul was a prisoner because of his connection with Christ, and for no other reason.

In a very real sense, Paul became the Lord’s prisoner on the road to Damascus and he never sought to be free of that divine imprisonment. Yes, he was now a prisoner of the Roman Empire, but much more significantly, he was a prisoner of Christ. He was a prisoner of Christ voluntarily, which is the opposite of the world’s definition of a prisoner! May it please Almighty God to give to every one of us a desire to be prisoners of Christ! He may be reminding his readers of his imprisonment to present them a realistic picture of what he was willing to go through to *“walk worthy”* as a model to them, and what it might cost them to walk worthy.

Brothers and sisters, there is nothing that can affect the security of our position in Christ Jesus. At the same time that Paul is seated in a Roman prison he is also seated *“in heavenly places in Christ.”*

Paul says, *“I beseech you.”* He is literally saying, *“I beg of you, please.”* He could have used his apostolic authority. But, instead, he pleads. He is not simply making a request but he is begging or imploring them. The idea being conveyed is that of begging earnestly or even desperately. The word *“beseech”* indicates that God, in love, urges us to live for His glory. In the Old Testament He said *“If you obey Me, I will bless you.”* But now He says, *“I have already blessed you. In response to My love and grace, please obey Me.”* He has given us such a marvelous calling in Christ; now it is our responsibility to live up to that calling.

This entreaty in **Ephesians 4:1**, is so reminiscent of Paul’s plea in **Romans 12:1**: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* The **basis** of his plea for the believers in Rome to present their bodies as living sacrifices unto God, is the *“mercies of God.”*

Paul was acutely aware of the fact that it was not possible for him to **compel** the believers in Rome to live lives that were pleasing to God. He understood that if saved persons are not motivated to live a life that is pleasing to God, by an appreciation and in gratitude of all that He has done for them, there is nothing else that can motivate them to do so. Brothers and sisters, there is no set of rules or regulations, no code of conduct, no organizational standards, no external force whatsoever, not even the threat of Hell, which can inspire any person to **genuinely** love God and serve Him. These man-made control mechanisms may ensure external compliance with the “commandments of men” but they are utterly incapable of producing true inner holiness and encouraging sincere compliance with the will of God.

The truth is that if “*the mercies of God*” are not enough to motivate us to live for Him, there is nothing else that will have the power to do so.

The word “*therefore*” reaches back to the contents of the previous 11 chapters. It is “*the mercies of God*” that lead us to the “*therefore*.” The “*mercies of God*” that Paul speaks of here are the justification, sanctification, and glorification of the believer which he had explained in the first 11 chapters of the letter. The exhortation by Paul to the Romans to live holy lives that are devoted to God, is to be obeyed in view of these mercies of justification, sanctification, and glorification.

It is very important for us to understand that truth demands an appropriate response. A true understanding of Christian doctrine should stimulate a desire to live a holy life. As an assembly, we have been learning about the unfathomable riches of Christ which we possess. Are we living in the light of these truths? Are they making any noticeable difference in our Christian lives? If not, why not?

The Apostle pleads with the believers in Ephesus to “*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*.” The word “*Walk*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “to conduct one’s self, to order one’s behavior.” It refers to one’s habitual way or direction of life, and so to their life-style.

The word “*worthy*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “in a manner worthy of.” The adjective form means, “having the weight of another thing.” By extension, the word came to be applied to anything that was expected to correspond to something else. A person worthy of his pay was one whose day’s work corresponded to his day’s wages. True grace in the heart must show itself by true goodness in the life.

Paul is exhorting the Ephesian believers to see to it that their Christian experience, or the Christian life that they live, weigh as much as the profession of Christianity which they make. Our profession is that we are Christians. Our practice should be that we live like Christ. In other words, we are to see to it that we practice what we preach. Paul is asking the believers to conduct themselves and order their behaviour in a manner that reflects their exalted **position** in Christ and their **possession** of every spiritual blessing in Christ. There should never be a clash between our doctrine and our practice.

Brothers and sisters, our walk should weigh as much as our talk. Our calling and our conduct should be in balance. We do not become Christians by living the Christian life; rather, we are exhorted to live the Christian life **because** we are Christians. Our lives must measure up to our position in Christ. Paul’s point is that it is not enough to know the truth, we must live out the truth that we know.

As it relates to the life of the believer, the word “*walk*” refers to the whole course of his or her daily living; it refers to his or her habitual conduct before people; it refers to his or her life lived out in the open. **John Vernon McGee**, the late American pastor, theologian, and radio minister, said that “Walking is not a balloon ascension. A great many people think the Christian life is some great, overwhelming experience and you take off like a rocket going out into space. That’s not where you live the Christian life. Rather, it is in your home, in your office, in the schoolroom, on the street. The way you get around in this life is to walk. You are to walk in Christ. God grant that you and I might be joined to Him in our daily walk.”

The story is told of a believer who was handing out tracts. A man who could neither read nor write was handed one of the tracts. He asked the believer, “What is this?” When he was told it was a tract, he said, “Well I can’t read it; so I’ll watch your tracks.”

Brothers and sisters, whether we know it or not, people are evaluating our lives. We may claim to be Christians, but is there enough evidence to support our claim. The only way persons can tell is by our walk. The well-known Evangelist **D. L. Moody** once said, “Every Bible should be bound in shoe-leather.”

When I examine my life, I see a yawning gap, a wide chasm between what I say and what I do. My calling and my conduct are not in balance. My talk weighs much more than my walk. I feel so hypocritical at times. But in the midst of my failure to bridge the gap between my profession and my practice, the Holy Spirit is teaching me that the only way to “balance” them is to stop trying to do so in my own strength and to depend wholly on Him to give me the desire and power to live like Jesus.

We must bear in mind that before he made this appeal to the Ephesian believers, Paul had informed them of their high calling. He knew that they could not be expected to walk worthily without knowing what their calling was? Yet this is the mistake which many believers make. They know that they are not living as they ought, and they try to change their ways and improve their manner of living without having any knowledge of the divine standard and its requirements. They try to “**be**” before they “know **who** and **what** to be.” There is tremendous danger in ignoring doctrine and placing emphasis primarily, or even solely, upon experience. Experience in the absence of doctrine is untrustworthy because it may not be rooted in biblical truth. The ultimate goal of all serious Bible study is life transformation!

What are we to walk worthy of? It is “*the vocation wherewith ye are called.*” The words, “*the vocation wherewith ye are called,*” are literally, “the calling with which you were called.” The word “*vocation*”

is the translation of a Greek verb which refers to that effectual call into salvation which God in sovereign grace extends to a sinner. The word “vocation” in English sometimes means “occupation,” but that is not its meaning here. Paul’s thought is that sinners were called into salvation and made saints. They are to be obedient to that heavenly calling and live lives that weigh as much as their calling.



## CALLING WALK

The main idea in the first sixteen verses of Chapter 4 is the unity of believers in Christ. This is simply the practical application of the doctrine taught in the first three chapters of the letter. God is building a body; He is building a spiritual temple. He has reconciled Jews and Gentiles to Himself in Christ. The oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality. Our responsibility is to guard, protect, and preserve that unity.

In verses 1-3, Paul emphasizes **The Grace of Unity**. Unity is not uniformity. Unity comes from within and is a spiritual grace, while uniformity is the result of pressure from without. Each part of the body is different from the other parts, yet all make up one body and work together.

If we are going to preserve the “*unity of the Spirit*,” we must possess the necessary Christian graces. In verse 2, Paul begins to speak of the graces that should characterize the life of the believer who desires to walk worthy of the calling with which he or she is called. He says, “*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*”

“*Lowliness*” is the translation of a Greek word which in pagan Greek meant abject servility, slavishness, a groveling, mean-spirited



disposition. The writers of the New Testament invested the word with a meaning it never had originally. As it is used in the New Testament, the word may be defined as “the lowliness of mind which springs from a true estimate of oneself. It is a deep sense of our own moral littleness and unworthiness.”

“*Lowliness*” is the opposite of pride. When we consider who and what we were before God’s grace lifted us from the miry clay of sin, we should have a humble attitude. Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it. Humility means putting Christ first, others second, and self last. Humility promotes unity while pride promotes disunity.

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves but is really not thinking of ourselves at all. This supernatural attitude in believers has its source in our association with the Lord Jesus and the enablement of His Spirit. Humility makes believers conscious of their own nothingness and enables them to esteem others better than themselves, which is the only antidote for a spirit of disunity in the body. The opposite attitudes of conceit and arrogance, on the other hand promote disunity.

Someone has described humility as “insight into one’s own insignificance.” The truly humble person is aware that he or she lacks the sufficiency, in and of himself or herself to walk worthy, while at the same time also recognizing the power and sufficiency of God to enable him or her to do so.

True humility is not putting ourselves down but rather it is lifting others up. If we concentrate on lifting up others, putting down ourselves will take care of itself. As we go through life exalting Christ and others, then genuine humility will be inevitable. If we exalt ourselves then God will take care of our humiliation for He promises to humble the proud. It is much less painful to do it the first way.

**John Vernon McGee** offers the following illustration of humility of mind and adds a practical application: “The story is told of a group of

people who went in to see Beethoven's home in Germany. After the tour guide had showed them Beethoven's piano and had finished his lecture, he asked if any of them would like to come up and sit at the piano for a moment and play a chord or two. There was a sudden rush to the piano by all the people except a gray-haired gentleman with long, flowing hair. The guide finally asked him, "Wouldn't you like to sit down at the piano and play a few notes?" He answered, 'No, I don't feel worthy.' That man was Paderewski, the great Polish statesman and pianist and the only man in the group who was really worthy to play the piano of Beethoven. How often the saints rush in and do things when they have no gift for doing them. We say we have difficulty in finding folk who will do the work of the church, but there is another extreme—folk who attempt to do things for which they have no gift. We need to walk in lowliness of mind."

The word "*meekness*" is the translation of a Greek word which describes the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance. "*Meekness*" is not tantamount to "weakness." Rather it is strength that accommodates to another's weakness. It is real strength, but it does not have to display itself or show off how strong it is.

The word speaks of restrained patience, and patient trust in the midst of difficult circumstances. It speaks of having one's emotions under control and is the opposite of self-assertion, rudeness, and harshness.

The truly meek individual is one who submits to God's dealings without rebellion, and who submits to the unkindness of human beings without retaliation. He or she is willing to set aside his or her rights for a good cause. He or she is willing to suffer loss for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we adorn the gospel when we show its power in enabling us to bear injuries without anger or a desire for revenge. In so doing we are like our Lord. In **1 Peter 2:23**, Peter writes the following about Jesus Christ: "*When he was maligned, he did not answer back;*

*when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly” (New English Translation).*

Concerning the Greek word translated “*meekness*,” Arch Bishop **Richard Trench** said that it “is closely linked with humility, and follows directly upon it.... because it is only the humble heart which is also the meek; and which, as such, does not fight against God, and more or less struggle and contend with Him. This meekness, however, being first of all meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of His elect.”

Allied with meekness is “*longsuffering*.” The Greek word translated “*longsuffering*” literally means long tempered (as opposed to short tempered). It speaks of a patient holding out under trial; a patient restraint of the soul from yielding to passion, especially the passion of anger. It is bearing patiently with the faults and weaknesses of others. “*Longsuffering*” is the opposite of anger. A lack of patience often leads to wrath or revenge.

“*Longsuffering*” reflects an emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune. It expresses the capacity to be wronged and not retaliate. It is the spirit which never gives up, for it endures to the end even in times of adversity.

The word “*forbearing*” is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “to hold one’s self upright or firm against a person or thing, to put up with, to bear with, to tolerate.” It pictures restraint under provocation and includes liberal allowance for the faults and failures of others. The word is in the present tense indicating that this should be the lifestyle of the believer.

Paul encourages the saints to make allowance for the faults and failures of others. Forbearance is not a question of maintaining a façade of courtesy while inwardly seething with resentment, but is a Holy Spirit

empowered positive love to those who irritate, disturb, or embarrass us. We are to bear with one another “*in love.*” It is in the sphere of love that we are to be patient with each other as misunderstandings arise, as cutting words are said, as unkind actions are done. The love shown at Calvary was a forgiving love. Ours should be the same.

Perhaps we can now understand a little better why Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit with might in the inner man! The graces of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance are not naturally inherent in us. They are not the works of the flesh, but the fruit of the Spirit. In **Galatians 5:22-23**, we read the following:

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

*23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

In these verses, Paul urges the Galatian believers, not to make their liberty from the law a base of operations from which to serve the flesh, but rather to live their Christian lives motivated by divine love. If they would yield themselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit, they would manifest the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Paul does not speak of the “works” of the Spirit but the “fruit” of the Spirit. The choice of “fruit” here instead of “works” is due to the conception of the Christian experience as the product of a new and divine life implanted in the believer. The believer lives in the Spirit, that is, he or she derives his or her spiritual life from the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the motivating force producing the fruit of the Spirit. The word fruit is singular, which fact serves to show that all of the elements of character spoken of in these verses are a unity, making for a well-rounded and complete Christian life.

Paul’s exhortation is for the Galatian believers who have divine life resident in their beings, to conduct themselves under the guidance,

impulses and energy of that life. It is the responsibility of the believer to live the highest type of Christian life, depending on the grace of God which will make that possible. The responsibility of the believer is to desire to live a Christ-like life, to depend upon the Holy Spirit for the power to live that life, and to step out on faith and live that life. When he or she does this all the infinite resources of grace will put in operation all the activities of the Holy Spirit in his or her behalf.