

Are You Worthy Of Your Calling?

Necessary Characteristics of Your Calling

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The central thought of the book of Ephesians is that Jesus has brought the way of unity to a disunited world. But first, it must be manifested in the church. This way of unity is through faith in Him, and it is the church's task to proclaim this message and to manifest it.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul focuses on what Christians believe; the function of the church in the plan of God, and the riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Dead sinners are made alive and gain eternal salvation "by grace?through faith." A true understanding of the doctrine of Christ, and experiencing its benefits leads us to a desire to live a holy life.

The last three chapters explain the implications of God's grace for the church, individuals, and families. Beginning in chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul begins to sketch what each member of the church must be if the church is to carry out her part in the plan of God. Paul explains the character we must have if the church is to fulfill her great responsibility of being Christ's instrument in the carrying out of God's plan of salvation.

In this light consider the requirements of our walk in unity:

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Apostle Paul first gives us a general description of the character of the life that we are to live, and then proceeds to deal with it in its specific aspects and in great detail. The general character of this life is that it is to be 'worthy of the calling with which you were called.' Our walk in unity requires that we be worthy of the calling. To be worthy of the calling we must have the characteristics that Paul lists here——'lowliness' (humility), 'gentleness' (an element of meekness), 'longsuffering' (patient endurance), 'bearing with one another in love' (patient outgoing concern). We can certainly expand on those synonyms.

Then, having laid down the general character, he mentions one specific aspect of the

life we are to live. Specifically, that we are to 'endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' So we are to work hard to guard the truth and not be carried about with every wind of doctrine as he says in verse 14. And this we are to do 'with all lowliness and gentleness.'

Then he continues with argument after argument until the end of verse 16. After that he turns to more direct and practical arguments with the words in verse 17: 'This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.' This is the general organization of Paul's approach—general description first, then the specifics. He uses this organization over and over again in his writings.

This is Paul's invariable style of preaching; he does not go on to specifics without first laying down general principles and making sure that they are well established in our minds. Quite often, people want answers to the specifics before they have come to understand the general principles. They ask the 'What if' questions. **What if** this rare thing happens, then what is the right thing to do? They want a specific detailed explanation of that specific incident when there are many principles in the Bible that will cover them. One example is looking on another woman. If a man looks on another woman in a lustful way then he commits adultery in his heart. Adultery is the principle, but the 'looking on a woman' is expanding that, giving the details.

The answer to questions such as these is to go back and find a general principle that applies. The details cannot be properly understood except in light of the whole. The whole is greater than the parts, and controls our understanding of them. The specific problems that arise in our lives should not be considered in isolation. Considering problems without the big picture is to invite error and false doctrine, which will negatively affect finding the right solution and then putting it into practice.

This is why Paul always starts with the general; and it is only after he has made that clear that he addresses the specifics and the details.

Following Paul's example, let us start with the general description of the Christian life in verse 1, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

The word 'worthy' has two basic ideas in it, both of them are important.

The first idea here having to do with worthy, is that of equal weight or balancing. Think of two things that are of the same weight, so that when you put them on opposite sides

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of the scale there is no tilting to one side or the other, but they balance perfectly. The original derivation of the Greek word translated 'worthy' is balance.

Paul is persuading and exhorting the Ephesians to give equal weight in their lives to both doctrine and practice. They must not put all the weight on doctrine and none on practice; nor all the weight on practice and just a little, if any at all, on doctrine. To do this produces imbalance and unevenness.

Paul emphasizes that the Ephesians must make great effort to see that the scales are perfectly balanced. It does not matter how packed with knowledge of the Bible our heads may be, if we are failing in our lives we will be a hindrance to the witnessing of God's way of life. That balance is extremely important.

But, it is equally true to say that if our conception of God's way of life is that it means no more than that we live a good life, that we should be moral, and that doctrine is of no importance, again we will be an interference to the work of God.

When Sue and I left the Worldwide Church of God in 1992 because of corruption of doctrine, word went through the congregation that we had left because we disagreed with the doctrinal changes the Worldwide Church of God was making. One of the ladies in the congregation upon hearing our reason for leaving said to my mother, "I do not know why they left over doctrine. What is so important about doctrine?" Well you see what happened to Worldwide without that understanding and balance of doctrine and practice.

What does the Apostle John have to say about the importance of the doctrine of Christ?

II John 9-11 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

The doctrine (that is, the teaching) of Christ is truth. Ephesians 4:21 tells us that 'the truth is in Jesus.' He is the source from which truth is imparted to us with the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus set an example for us by living a perfectly balanced physical life, in which He put equal emphasis on doctrine and practice. Christ is the epitome of the balanced life.

There must be true balance in our lives for us to be 'worthy of the calling wherewith we are called.' The Bible frequently emphasizes diligence in practical application.

Hebrews 6:9-12 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The author of this epistle commends the church (at a time when they were headed toward the end of an age) for having shown excellent diligence on the practical side of their lives, but then he urges them to show the same diligence in the matter of grasping the doctrines of the faith and especially that of the full assurance of hope to the end. Both the practical side of life and understanding the doctrines of Christ require faith and patience.

The author of Hebrews was trying to help the saints avoid the problem of a lackadaisical attitude toward God's way of life. If they failed to maintain the proper balance between doctrine and practice, they would not be 'worthy' of their calling. We see that it is extremely important that we have balance in our lives. We very often see individuals who come up with pet issues or pet doctrines that they become absorbed with and they become unbalanced with it and before long they have been carried off into a false doctrine. We must have balance of both doctrine and the practical side.

The other idea contained in this word 'worthy' is of something that is 'becoming.' We use this word sometimes in the English language in our modern society. Some translators use 'worthy' while another may use 'becometh.' Ephesians 4:1 might very well have been translated this way: 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that you walk in a manner which is 'becoming of' the calling wherewith you are called.'

In Philippians 1, (where Paul writes about himself in prison and his suffering), the King James translators translated Paul using, 'becometh,' where others use 'worthy.'

Philippians 1:27 NKJV "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ,"

Philippians 1:27 KJV "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the

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gospel of Christ:"

Both these words are accurate although 'worthy' carries two meanings, that is the meaning of 'balance' and the meaning of being 'becoming.' The idea expressed is that of matching, it is of putting on a piece of clothing that is consistent with another, something that is suited to and matches something else. The women more so than the men are astute in this area.

Paul means that we must always avoid a clash of color or appearance. There must never be a clash between our doctrine and our practice. This is something that is recognized in the area of clothing; there must never be a clash of colors that is not becoming. If a person is wearing something that clashes you look at that person and you notice that something is not becoming about the person's overall look.

There are certain colors that do not match, that do not go together; and when we see a person with such clashing, contrasting colors we say that the person is lacking in taste. This society today has lost some of its concern for color coordination. I think we have seen that more so since the Sixties than prior to that.

Sometimes the choice of clashing colors may stem from a person being colorblind. I knew a man who was completely colorblind and had to read the traffic signals by the location of the lights since he could not see the red-yellow-green lights. His clothing coordination greatly improved when he got married and his wife started buying his clothes. This is part of the meaning in the word worthy and the becoming part of it.

Sometimes the choice of clashing colors may result from a lack of being taught in a person's younger years. That happens quite often because it seems that parents today do not teach their children much of anything. I am talking about the world of course.

Often, the choice of clashing colors in clothing in this society is a consequence of rebellious, contrary attitudes by clothing designers and consumers who buy such unbecoming clothing.

We can extend the idea and say that the same clothing is not always becoming at every age. There is nothing quite so ridiculous as to see an elderly person dressing as if he or she were young, and even vice versa. The elderly person in youthful dress looks immature. The young person dressed like an elderly person looks out of touch with reality, and is often disrespected. Both extremes give a bad impression. Not that we should overly emphasize these areas of our lives but this is an illustration that shows

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what this word 'worthy' means having to do with the 'calling with which we are called.'

Paul tells us that women who claim to be Christians should make a good impression. This holds just as true for the men as for the women of course.

I Timothy 2:9-10 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

I thought it was interesting that some of the synonyms for 'propriety' are: correctness, appropriateness, politeness, good manners, respectability, decency, aptness and suitability. Those synonyms certainly apply to being worthy of our calling.

There are certain things that are not becoming. This is the idea that Paul expresses here; there must never be an element of incongruity or of sharp contrasts in our lives when compared with other brethren. The same principle can be applied to our association with the world. We should, however, be in sharp contrast with the world's wickedness. But we should not stand out like a sore thumb in other areas that hold respect. For example we would not want to be standing up here preaching in a t-shirt. We should be dressed for the formal occasion that the Sabbath is.

Much of this incongruity is also seen in this world's chaotic art. For example, the paintings of Picasso. They are chaotic and they have a mixed match of pictures and colors within them. It is especially seen in this world's music when it despises melody and seems to revel in disharmony, and clashes and discords. An obvious example of this unbecoming, unworthy music is "hip-hop". A decent human being cannot even repeat most of the lyrics, because of the vulgarity and immorality,

This is not true art and music. It is a perversion! Some far-eastern influenced "New Age" religions believe that Satan is the author of the world's art and music when in reality he is the perverter of true art and music. True art always has beauty without chaos, because it always has at its center the characteristics of balance and congruity. There is no true beauty apart from that.

Paul is using this kind of picture: 'Let your walk be as becomes the calling wherewith you are called. Let your walk be worthy of the calling.'

We can take the idea yet one step further by noticing the word that Paul used in writing

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to Titus where he talks about 'adorning the doctrine.'

Titus 2:9-10 Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things

The idea is that the doctrine is, in a sense, the foundation or basic garment, and that the life is a type of adornment that is added on to it.

Paul's exhortation is that we must always be careful that our decorations, and our adornments are suited to, congruous with, and match this foundation garment that we have already put on.

The purpose of the adorning is to make the doctrine attractive, to cause people to admire its results, to look at it and to desire to have it. Paul here, as everywhere else, does much more than issue a general appeal to us to live a good life and to be good-hearted. There is far more to it than that.

The appeal is always in terms of the doctrine; the life must always come forth from it, must always match it. You and I are to live the kind of life that will adorn the doctrine.

Paul proceeds at once to tell us what the doctrine is. It is 'the calling with which you were called,' referring to Ephesians 4:1. The doctrine it conveys is that we are to live this kind of life for the reason that we are 'the called.' This is one of the characteristic terms by which the New Testament generally describes us. We are 'the called of Jesus Christ.'

The church is a gathering of 'the called.' The very term in Greek for Church is "*ecclesia*", which means the called out ones. Paul referred to that in the third chapter of Ephesians: "Now to him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church"—among 'the called ones' or 'the called out ones.'

Peter tells us that we are those who have been called out of the world, "out of darkness, into his marvelous light." Most of the apostles do describe us as the called.

We should not be thought of as someone who has decided to take up a certain type of life. Our lives must not be thought of in terms of something that we have decided to take up. It is the exact opposite; it is something into which we have been 'called.' We have been called to a responsibility to a way of life.

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

The main reason He chose us is to live a holy and sanctified life - we are the 'called ones.'

Certainly it is right not to sin and right to live the Christian life, and these things are good in and of themselves, but primarily we are to live a holy life because we have been 'called' to do this. Do not underestimate the power of your calling. We were called for a tremendous purpose according to the good pleasure of His will. Something that we can be very excited to be a part of.

There are two types of call. The first is a general call that is made to a broad spectrum of people.

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent".

But that is not the only meaning, and we find that it is used in another way that is much more specific, because in addition to the general call there is what has been called the 'effective' call.

Not many who hear the general call respond to it. Two groups are found among those who have received the general call. In the one group, the call is heard but nothing is done about it. In the other group are those to whom the call has become effective, that is, they react positively and do something about it. This is why we are here today because we have received the call and we are doing something about it.

I Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

There are two groups of people mentioned in verse 18—those to whom the preaching of the cross is foolishness, and those to whom it is the wisdom of God. That is a basic

and definite distinction.

There are the 'perishing,' and there are those 'being saved.' The saints are in the process of being saved from the power and condemnation of sin and death, and as having a prospect of eternal salvation as firstfruits of the kingdom of God.

When the 'message of the cross,' is spoken of as effective or powerful, it refers to all the elements connected with it; and to the truth and all that it involves. Therefore, it includes the power of the Holy Spirit, without which the 'message of the cross' would not be effective.

I Corinthians 1:22-24 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The contrast is between the perishing and those being saved: those to whom the cross is a stumbling block and foolishness, and those to whom it is power and the wisdom of God.

Christ appears to the called as the power of God; or it is through him that the power of salvation is communicated to us. We are described as the 'called ones,' that is we have been separated from all others, and have been moved into a new position.

It is also important to recognize the point at which the calling comes in this process of salvation. 'Calling' comes before justification.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Paul spells out the order: 'predestination,' 'calling,' 'justification,' and ultimately 'glorification'! This means that salvation is the result of the powerful action of the Spirit of God whereby God introduces a new principle of life and of action that enables us to believe, understand and react. We are 'called' to believe and we are called to act.

The apostle John records that Jesus clearly stated this in John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;" It is the call that draws us. There is

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power in the call that draws us. We cannot come without it. Therefore we see the miraculous power involved in this calling.

Consider the account given of the first convert to the gospel in Europe as found in Acts. Paul preached to the woman outside the city walls of Philippi on a Sabbath.

Acts 16:13-14 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

The 'call' is described as the opening of the heart that makes a person believe. Without that opening of the heart the Word has no effect. If the Word has no effect we cannot be made alive. Paul taught this in Ephesians 2:1, "you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins," He repeats it in verses 4 and 5, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ?"

God alone can make a person spiritually alive miraculously by a powerful call.

A vivid example of this is found in John 11 in the case of Lazarus. Lazarus had died, been dead for four days; his body was in a grave and putrefaction had already started. Jesus arrived on the scene and commanded the mourners to take away the stone. Then He spoke, saying, "Lazarus" come forth and he came forth from the tomb.

The power was in the call. The power was in the spoken word. That is what Paul means in Ephesians 4:1, by the "calling with which you were called." The word had come effectively, with power, to the Ephesian Christians; the Holy Spirit was in it; the preaching had been in demonstration of the power of the Spirit.

When the word comes in the power of the Spirit it calls us from spiritual death into life and into newness of living. Paul states this fact again in his epistle to the Romans.

Romans 4:16-17 Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and

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calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

Abraham and Sarah, though they were over 90 years of age, were enabled to have a son. This was impossible naturally, but not with God. When God calls, He gives the power and makes the call effective. It becomes certain; it must happen, and it does happen. We are called out of the death and grave of sin. It is a positive powerful, miraculous thing to happen and we are so thankful that it has and is happening to us.

When we were still dead in sin, the powerful word came and called us, and enabled us to hear. It put life into us. Peter says, "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever". The word of the gospel has life in it. When it comes in the power of the Spirit, and the seed is implanted, our response is made in the form of conduct. Remember what it is to be worthy we need both the balance of doctrine and of practice and that is what is involved in our conduct.

Peter adds, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct". Peter had more to say about the characteristics of the one who called us: "but you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light".

We have been called in order that we may produce spiritual things. There is great power in that call.

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul says, we are to be worthy of the calling by which we have been called. We do so by applying the doctrine and knowledge that we have been given by Jesus Christ in the inspired written word. We do so by producing spiritual fruit from the power of the understanding we receive through the Holy Spirit of how to rightly apply the doctrine of Christ.

We have to live in such a way that shows that we have been called by God into this heavenly calling. We can only do so as we know the doctrine. So we have to remind ourselves of some of the things that must always be in our minds governing our conduct and behavior. We have been called to this great and wonderful high calling and our lives must match the calling and be in accordance with it. If we have a wrong form of a doctrine, or false doctrine, then our practice is going to be wrong as well.

When a person enters into any society, he takes upon himself the obligation to live a

certain kind of life; and if he fails in that obligation, he impedes the intent of his society and harms the reputation of its name. This same principle holds true for the kind of life a person must live when he enters the fellowship of the church.

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges the Ephesians to lead the kind of life that matches their Christian responsibilities. He is insisting that there should be a balance between doctrine and practice. So he provides a standard by which possible courses of action can be weighed. True Christians will always work to do what is most in accordance with their responsibility. By definition it is a calling we have received—not one we have acquired by self-effort. As we read Ephesians 4:1-3 again, we will elaborate on some of the verses.

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul specified FOUR VIRTUES that evidence this essential proportion between calling and character: humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and loving forbearance. These are all qualities necessary for good relations with others in the church.

1. Humility

First, and foremost, there is humility. Before Christ, humility was not counted as a virtue at all by the Greeks. The ancient world looked on humility as a thing to be despised. In the days before Jesus, humility was looked on as a cowering, cringing, servile, ignoble quality; and yet Christianity sets it in the very forefront of the virtues. This is one of the great paradoxes of God's way of life.

There are a couple of directions to its meaning.

a) Humility comes from self-knowledge—not self-centeredness. It comes from the knowledge about our own unworthiness. It is simply to recognize that we are so unworthy. When we come to understand the truth about ourselves, it is the most humiliating thing in the world. One evangelist in Worldwide used to call it 'when a man comes to himself.'

Most of us, at one time or another, in our dreams have envisioned ourselves as the hero

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who rescues in the nick-of-time, or the all-wise leader who leads his followers to success, or the winner of a beauty pageant, or the most skilled musician, or the vocalist who performs superbly.

Deep down most of us, at least occasionally, have these glimpses of greatness. They usually come in the middle of the night in our dreams after we have read a novel or watched a movie. After all we still have plenty of human nature to overcome. Tenure in God's church, however, does tend to work much of this out of us.

True humility comes when we face ourselves and see our weakness, selfishness, and failure in work, in personal relationships, and in achievement. Then we get an accurate view of ourselves. It is a very low point in our lives but is where we begin the rest of our lives spiritually.

b) Humility comes from setting our life beside the life of Christ and in the light of the demands of God. God is perfection and to satisfy perfection is impossible in the human life. As long as we compare ourselves with second bests, we may come out of the comparison looking fairly well. It is when we compare ourselves with perfection that we see our failure. That perfect example of course is Jesus Christ. We use Him as the standard and we hold our lives up to Him and it is very depressing most of the time.

Self-satisfaction depends on the standard with which we compare ourselves. If we compare ourselves with our neighbor, we may well emerge self-satisfied from the comparison. The apostle Paul minced no words to the Corinthian brethren when he warned of the foolishness of making comparisons with one another.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Part of the reason for this is that they never reach that higher standard that God has placed before us. It is the same as in sports if you are playing basketball against someone who is of equal or lesser skill than you are you will never really rise to much greatness in the sport but if you always play against someone who is vastly superior to your skill it forces you to improve. Obviously, the standard of humility is Jesus Christ and the demands of God's perfection—and against that standard there is no room for pride. Humility is based on the realistic view of how weak we really are, the perfect

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example of Jesus Christ, and the realization of the awesomeness of God the Father.

2. Gentleness

Gentleness is linked with humility. I think the King James translates it as meekness. The element of restraint is included, so that it means controlled strength and not passive weakness.

There are a couple of inferences to its meaning.

a) Gentleness is the middle between two extremes. The person who is gentle may still become angry. But he is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. In other words, the person who is gentle is the person who becomes angry by indignation at the wrongs and the sufferings of others, but is never moved to anger by the wrongs or the insults that he himself has to bear.

The apostle Peter explains why we must be gentle by describing Christ's suffering:

I Peter 2:18-22 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

So we see that we were called to this purpose of suffering and of patiently enduring the wrong that is done to us in this society.

b) Gentleness is translated from the Greek word 'praus,' which is the Greek for an animal that has been trained and domesticated until it is completely under control. Therefore the person who is 'praus' is the person who has every instinct and every passion under perfect control.

Obviously, since all human beings have human nature that is naturally contrary to God,

it would be incorrect to say that such a person is entirely self-controlled, because such complete self-control is beyond our power; but it is correct to say that such a person is God-controlled. Such a person is God-controlled because the Holy Spirit is working in him.

3. Longsuffering

Longsuffering is similar to patience. It is the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation that is not quick to retaliate or promptly punish someone who has insulted, offended or harmed us. It is the opposite of anger and is intimately associated with mercy.

Longsuffering is a characteristic of God himself. It can mean steadfastness in the endurance of suffering but more often in the New Testament it describes reluctance to avenge wrongs.

There is a pair of implications to its meaning:

- a) Longsuffering describes the spirit that will never give in and which, because it endures to the end, will reap the reward. It is the spirit of Christian patience that never admits defeat, which will not be broken by any suffering or trial, by any disappointment or discouragement, but which perseveres to the end.
- b) Longsuffering is the spirit that has the power to take revenge but never does. It refuses to retaliate. It bears insult and injury without bitterness and without complaint. It can suffer unpleasant people with graciousness and fools without irritation.

Remember what we just read in I Peter 2:20:

"?But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God".

This longsuffering is best seen as an attribute of God. In I Timothy 1:16, Paul spoke of the perfect patience of Jesus to him. In I Peter 3:20, Peter spoke of God patiently waiting in the days of Noah. God the Father and Jesus Christ are the epitome of longsuffering individuals.

We see only a glimpse of the lives of our fellow human beings; and it is everything we can do to have patience with them. God sees every perversion, murder, theft, and lie and yet He patiently carries out His plan of salvation for the same people who are contrary to Him.

Longsuffering can only be attained as a fruit of the Spirit, not by itself as an independent character trait. It is not a form of ethical conduct, but it grows from the common root of love and bears fruit only along with the other fruit.

Love takes precedence in the list of spiritual gifts of the fruit of the Spirit and carries the attribute that it suffers long. Longsuffering is long and patient endurance of offense. Since patience is an aspect of long-suffering, they are very closely related in their intent.

Patience is cheerful or hopeful endurance, patient waiting. Therefore, longsuffering is the quality of patiently tolerating the actions of others against us, even when we are severely tried. In God's church every once in a while these situations flare up that sorely try us. But, if we are worthy of our calling, then we will conquer those instances with this Godly longsuffering.

4. Loving forbearance

Longsuffering finds its expression in loving forbearance. To bear with another (literally, "hold him up") is to put up with his faults and idiosyncrasies, knowing that we have our own. Loving forbearance means that nothing that a person can do will make us seek anything but his greatest well-being. There we see one of the greatest challenges and responsibilities of members of God's church. Though a person may insult us, we will never feel anything but kindness towards him.

That means this loving forbearance is not an emotional thing but a thing of the will. It is the ability to retain unconquerable good will toward those who do not love us, and even towards those whom we cannot stand to be around.

There are "people of the lie" who because of the filthiness of habitual and flagrant sin repulse us. Even these people should be treated with loving forbearance, nevertheless, we should not tolerate sin. Loving forbearance is the quality of mind that compels us never to feel any bitterness, never to feel any desire for revenge, but always to seek the greatest well-being of every human being no matter who he is. It is very hard to be angry at someone or want to seek revenge for someone if you are praying for that individual for their betterment and for their good will. You cannot genuinely pray that and still remain angry with them.

Love is a recurring theme in Ephesians. The four virtues Paul recommends here are all aspects of love and are exemplified to perfection in Christ.

Philippians 2:1-5 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

By doing these things, we 'endeavor to keep the unity in the bond of peace' within the church.

Peace is right relationships between man and man. This oneness spoken of in verse 2, this peace, these right relationships, can be preserved only in one way.

Every one of the four virtues depends on the eradication of self. So long as self is at the center of things, this oneness can never fully exist. In a society where self-centeredness predominates, people cannot be other than at odds with one another. We saw this in its greatness this week at the democratic convention.

A major test of the identity of the true church is when the members have conquered and annihilated the old self and the new selfless man has come forth. "Peace" is the bond that ensures that this God-given unity will not fall apart.

The absence of these virtues will jeopardize Christian unity. That is why Paul presses us hard to exert all of our effort to maintain the oneness in Christ that binds all members to each other because we are bound by Him and to Him. Because of this we are bound to one another.

Unity in the church already exists as given in Christ through the Spirit. Christ is our peace because He broke down the wall of separation that results from sin. By paying the penalty for sin He gave us the opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness, thereby eliminating the hostility that naturally exists in human beings toward God.

Ephesians 2:13-18 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who

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has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father

Paul sees a profound oneness made possible through Christ by God's Spirit, not a vague spiritual identity.

The early New Testament church had a solid foundation of peace, tranquility, and stability. It was not mere absence of conflict, but a positive heartfelt-peace. It is more than an outward conformity to a principle of non-violence but rather an inward recognition of the principle of good will toward all others.

After a while many in the New Testament church allowed doctrine to be watered down or totally rejected. The members strayed doctrinally which resulted in their moving away from peace because of the striving over words. So, because they moved away from true doctrine they also moved away from true practice of Christianity.

Eventually this striving over words (which includes lying and the manipulation of words to deceive) manifested itself in the development of false doctrines. Members were promised peace in their lives with the suggestion that the religious requirements should be easier, and with this they were lead astray.

David wrote in Psalm 28:3, "Do not take me away with the wicked ? who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts."

This has been a problem that has attacked the church down through the ages. An apostasy begins when Satan entices spiritually weak leaders in the Church to believe that God's requirements are too demanding. So the spiritually weak leaders begin to subvert faithful leaders and to promise a more peaceful religion, or an easier religion.

The spiritually weak leaders begin to strike up a friendship (an unholy alliance) with worldly leaders. The spiritually weak leaders collaborate with the worldly leaders and eventually get rid of the faithful leaders and the true doctrines they were guarding. This scenario has happened over and over again to the saints down through the ages.

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This false promise of peace is very clearly depicted by an Aesop Fable. I used this several years ago in a sermonette but I think it is profound in its simplicity:

Once upon a time, the wolves sent an embassy to the sheep, desiring that there might be peace between them for the time to come. "Why," said they, "should we be forever waging this deadly strife? Those wicked dogs are the cause of all; they are incessantly barking at us, and provoking us. Send them away, and there will be no longer any obstacle to our eternal friendship and peace." The silly sheep listened, the dogs were dismissed, and the flock, thus deprived of their best protectors, became an easy prey to their treacherous enemy.

We see there that the peace that we are to have in God's church is a very valuable thing that can very easily be taken away. Christ gives us comforting words by comparing His peace with the world.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

There is power in our calling and in that power there is also assurance.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation ?"

We see there where true peace exists. It only exists within the church of God, within the body of Christ .This peace does not come by sitting back and doing nothing. Psalm 34:14 commands, "Seek peace and pursue it."

We have a hymn that we sing very often "seek peace and pursue it earnestly".

I Peter 3:14 "? be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

The pursuit of peace is not merely an elimination of discord, but is produced by a conscious effort to bring it about. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We have been called into the family of God; we are God's children. And we are to live in a manner that will reflect credit and glory upon the family and upon our Father.

The honor of the family is in the hands of the child when it goes to a party; and if the child does not behave as he should, the hosts will not blame the child as much as they will the parents; and rightly so. The honor of the family is in the hands of the child, and you and I are children of God. So we must uphold that standard which God has held out in front of us.

So, as we live our lives we must always remember that we are children and members of God's family: 'Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.' And because we are spiritual children, we are heirs. We must think not only of what we are now, but also of what we are going to be. We are not only children of God, we are heirs and joint-heirs with Christ.

We read of people being groomed for certain things, and taught manners and conduct and behavior before being presented at Court or before taking part in some great event. I am sure John Kerry was groomed very carefully and helped with his speech so that he would be ready to be presented. Weeks and weeks of effort went into that. Similarly we are to live our lives always remembering that there is a day coming when we will be presented to God.

While giving glory to God, Jude says:

Jude 24 "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,"

We are to live realizing that in the future we are going on to glory. And having been presented we will be given our reward, and enter into our inheritance.

Are we making the best use of our calling? Are we walking worthy of the calling with which God has called us?

Do not undervalue the power—the exceeding greatness of His power given to us who believe. We must be strengthened with His power by His Spirit in the inner man, deep down not just on the surface. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. 'May you walk worthy of the calling with which you were called' making the effort that is necessary and remembering that worthiness requires both correct use of doctrine as well as the correct application of the

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doctrines in our lives.