

Bible Basics Conference 2009: "Walk Worthy of the Calling!"

Part 8

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Place	Catford
Duration	00:32:20
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/cbb003/bible-basics-conference-2009-walk-worthy-of-the-calling

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[00:00:00] Good. We'll begin by reading our scripture then, it's from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 16. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called, in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all [00:01:01] and through all and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore, he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of [00:02:02] the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slate of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, but speak in the truth in love, may go up unto him in all things, which is the head, in Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supply, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. We've heard that the structure [00:03:10] of Paul's letter to the Ephesians involves first of all chapters of teaching and then chapters of putting that teaching into practice, exhortations about how we live out what we've been taught in the first chapters. And we've just heard from Robert about the importance of this prayer, the end of the third chapter. So we're well set up now for some practical exhortations. And I've been asked to speak about the verses that relate, the verses we've just read [00:04:01] that relate to the Christian in the body. Now this seems a strange picture doesn't it? But it's not really because we've already been told that we manifest what we are as the body of Christ where we are in our localities. And here are some of the believers in Imphal, which is a city in Manipur in North East India. Just as they have a responsibility to work out the truth of Ephesians, where they are in North East India, so we have a responsibility to respond to the exhortations of the Apostle Paul where we are in Catford or Ipswich, Belfast. Well there are people here from all over the world. We've got a responsibility to work these things out where we are. That's why [00:05:06] we've come to the practical part of the letter. Let's just recap. Remember we're speaking about our calling and we've seen that in the first part of chapter one, God's purpose, the good

pleasure and mystery of his will. Then we saw there was a first prayer which we've had explained to us. He prays for his readers to know these things, to know what's available to them because of God's desire to bless them for his own glory. We've seen how God has brought his purpose, his counsel to fruition. We thought about his masterpiece, the material he's worked with and the result. In the first part of chapter two we saw the moral side of things, [00:06:01] in the second part the positional side of things. Then we've had in the last couple of sessions the unsearchable riches of Christ, God's counsels concerning Christ and the church revealed and they should be displayed in us. Then we've had, as we've already just mentioned, Paul's prayer for his readers to be strengthened to take these things in. So we get this word therefore and we've often been told when we come across the word therefore we should ask ourselves what's it there for? Well it's therefore in order that we should put into practice the wonderful teaching that we've received so far. It's already been mentioned that in many ways all but one verse of chapter three is a parenthesis, it's in brackets. And right at the beginning of that chapter three we get a reference to Paul as [00:07:06] the prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations. It was the will of the Lord Jesus that he should be a prisoner and as a prisoner it was given to him to be able to write these things down in this letter and other letters which really set before us and particularly Gentile Christians the wonderful truth of God.

We've already had it brought before us, yes there's the gospel but there's also the mystery. And so in that sense he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. What a remarkable thing that the apostle was a prisoner in order that God should use him to bring these things out.

But at the beginning of the chapter that we've read he says if it's translated absolutely accurately [00:08:07] if it's translated absolutely accurately I the prisoner in the Lord. And that's a remarkable thing too because it shows us that the apostle was accepting his situation. As a prisoner he was accepting that his situation was in the Lord, he was submitting to the Lord's will for him and in many ways that sets the scene for the rest of the letter. Are we submitting to the will of the Lord for us in our lives? When we think of the blessing that has come out, the spiritual blessings that we've been thinking about in the first part of this letter, are we getting into the mind of the Lord for what we should be in our lives? [00:09:05] To express these things in a practical way the apostle Paul it was not just that he was a prisoner of the Christ Jesus but he was a prisoner in the Lord.

And later on in this letter in chapter 6 verse 20 he says he's an ambassador in Bonn. And normally ambassadors they're free, they've got liberty to represent their governments to the government to which they've been accredited. Here was one who represented the Lord Jesus Christ and yet he was in Bonn. He submitted entirely to the will of the Lord for him so that he might be a vessel for the glory of the Lord Jesus and for the blessing of his people. But to the extent he was in Bonn, to the extent he was a prisoner, he was limited, [00:10:03] he was restricted. But his letter is really telling us, we who are free to live our lives, how we should walk, how we should carry out our lives day by day. If you like the apostle was a prisoner so that we might work out in our freedom what it is to be Christians who answer for the truth of God in this letter. Walk worthy of your calling. The authorised version used the word vocation but it means calling. Lead your life up to the mark of the calling. That immediately tells us, doesn't it, that this calling is something very special. It's the calling which God has given us. This is a calling card at the top of this screen. People used to leave [00:11:05] calling cards when they visited each other in more civilised days than our day. But what about our lives? Are they a calling card for God? When people come across us, do they see something of the truth of God come out in our lives? Do we leave a calling card for God by the way we live our lives? We should because this verse says here.

Walk worthy of the calling. The calling. That calling God has given that we've been talking about. Wherewith ye have been called. We have been called to answer to this calling. So we get here what God has done. It's his calling, vocation. But we as believers on the Lord Jesus, [00:12:01] we are responsible to answer to it according to which you have been called. Now as far as we ourselves are concerned, we are to be marked by two things. Loneliness.

We're also to be marked by meekness. Loneliness and meekness. These are things which are looked down upon in our world today, but they should characterise Christians. Sadly, they don't always characterise Christians as they should. But we should be lowly in regard to God and we should and we should be meek in regard to others, particularly one another. Lowliness means that I realise that God is my God. He's my father.

He is my creator. I am the creature. But of course here in Ephesians, we particularly think of God [00:13:05] as our father, but we must never let that breed a sense of familiarity in our hearts. We should be marked by loneliness when we think of the greatness of our God and father and of the many blessings he's bestowed upon us. But in regard to others, we should be marked by meekness, not elevating ourselves, not putting ourselves before others. This is particularly what our thought life should be like. We should be lowly and meek in our thought life. And then in regard to what comes out in the way we act, we get these two things. Long-suffering and forbearing one another in love. Long-suffering means going on with one another when sometimes it's testing to do so. We find things in each other which sometimes cause us difficulty. Are we marked by long-suffering? God has been marked by long-suffering [00:14:11] with us and that long-suffering should come out in forbearing one another in love. This is an expression which comes out in Ephesians quite a few times, in love, in love. Very often we think, oh I can't put up with that anymore. I'm going to tell that brother just what I think of him. But you know, is that really what God is like with us? No, he's a God who's marked by long-suffering and we should be marked by forbearing one another in love. And really what's coming out in these verses is that God desires to see a unity among the people of God. We've already had the thought, haven't we, of Jew and Gentile becoming one, one new man. [00:15:04] Well, that unity should be expressed among God's people and we should work carefully, endeavouring, the apostle says, to keep the unity of the spirit. There's a beautiful expression of unity, isn't there, in Psalm 133. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, in the bond of peace. I was in a bible reading once and a brother said, this is like a bonding agent. Another brother said, what's a bonding agent? The other brother said, it's glue. And here we've got a bonding agent here in this container, in the bond of peace. There's nothing like peace between brethren which enables them to enjoy the things of God together and to grow together in the things of the Lord Jesus. And Paul really sets before us three contexts [00:16:03] in which that unity should be worked out. He says, there is one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling. And that really is covered by the verses that we're going to look at until verse 16. It's what's true of us as those who are believers on the Lord Jesus, those who have been born again and who've trusted the Lord Jesus as our savior. Yes, we're one body. We've heard about that already. There's one spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit. Well, on the day of Pentecost, he came down and baptized all the believers there in Jerusalem into one body. He entwelt each one and that's been true of every believer on the Lord Jesus since then. They've enjoyed what it is to become part of that one body and to be entwelt by the Holy Spirit. And they have [00:17:04] one hope of their calling which we've had brought before us already in our studies today. But there's another context as well. And that's the matter of one Lord, one faith, one baptism. What we testify to, what we profess, what we say we hold, we believe the Lord Jesus is the Lord of our lives. We say that we believe what God has set forth in his word, the one faith. And we acknowledge all this by submitting to baptism. This isn't baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is baptism by water. And then we

have the context of one God and father.

That's God as the one who is over all, over the whole of his creation. We already have mentioned [00:18:01] of the many families that God has. And it's in these three contexts that there should be worked out what it is to be true to God, to own God in each of those three contexts. As I said, the first one really is in verses 7 to 16 of this chapter, the immediate one of those who believe on the Lord Jesus. Then from verse 17 of this chapter to chapter 5 verse 21, we get really the second one. And that really relates to our position as those who acknowledge the Lord, who say that we belong to the Lord, who say we follow the Lord. How do we work that out in our lives day by day? That's a subject that's going to be taken up later on. And then in verses from chapter 5 verse 22 to chapter 6 verse 9, we get the thought of showing these things in creation. [00:19:02] And that's where the thought of the husbands and wives and the children and the bond servants come in. So really, in some ways, the apostle Paul is dividing up the rest of the letter for us by referring to these three things. So we're going to concentrate on the first of these now. So there's one body and Paul's emphasizing to us the importance of working carefully to maintain the unity of the spirit. The spirit wants to, the spirit has a unity and he wants us to work it out as those who believe on the Lord Jesus. But there's also a variety. That's what comes out in these verses too. Each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. We already had this before. This is why we don't believe in one man ministry. It's because of this verse and other verses. [00:20:02] When the Lord Jesus ascended up on high, having done the wonderful work of Calvary, having been raised out from among the dead by the glory of the Father, he let captivity captive. He was triumphant. What did he do? He gave gifts to men. What are these gifts? They were the very ones who were once the subjects of Satan. Once those who could be said to be dead in trespasses and sins, but they've been translated now from being those who were once far off from God, once marked by that disobedience that we read about in chapter 2. Now they're translated into being those that the Lord Jesus can give for the blessing of his people. And so we see the thought of variety because the Lord Jesus has given gifts to men. And we've already had stressed, haven't we, the power that we see in the resurrection of [00:21:08] the Lord Jesus, which is now made available to God's people to enjoy these things. Well, that comes out in verses 9 and 10. Who has done this? Yes, the one who once descended into the lower parts of the earth, but the one who descended into the lower parts of the earth has also ascended above all the heavens to fill all things. Often we look at our weakness, but we forget the greatness of our savior who has given gifts to us. Let's value his gifts. Here they're presented not so much as abilities, as persons. Persons who have been changed through the wonderful, gracious work of God.

[00:22:04] And in these verses, the apostle speaks of these gifts. We all love gifts, don't we? But do we love these gifts? Do we treasure these gifts? We've already heard about the apostles and prophets. I don't have to say too much about that. Plenty has been said about the apostles and prophets. They're foundational. We don't have apostles and prophets in the sense that is meant in these verses now. They're foundational. We saw that from the end of chapter 2. But there are gifts that are still given, that are ongoing or continuing, as this slide says. Evangelists. Those who have the gift of appealing to those who are lost and preaching in such a way that men and women, boys and girls, feel convicted they must believe on the Lord Jesus as their savior. We're not talking about everyday witnessing here. We're talking about the gift of evangelism. [00:23:04] Challenging men in a particular way. In such a way that they respond by trusting on the Lord Jesus as their savior. But there we also get shepherds and teachers. And in this catalog, these two are really twinned. It's as if they should be gifts that go together. Shepherds and teachers. Those who look after the flock of God and those who teach them the word of God. And what's the purpose? It's for the perfection of the saints. Am I speaking about sinless perfection here? Am I saying that the idea is that we'll all be sinlessly perfect

at some stage in our lives as a result of the work of these gifts? No, I'm not saying that. This is the thought of maturing and completing the believer. We'll always have that sinful nature in [00:24:03] us until we get to glory. But God is looking for a perfecting, for a maturing, for a completing of the believer through the work of these gifts. And these gifts are given for the work of the ministry. The ministry of his word, the ministry of his truth is what he uses to perfect the saints and he wants to build up the body of Christ. We're the body of Christ. Each one of us are members of the body of Christ. Those two references at the bottom, the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ from verse 12 of this chapter are really subsidiary thoughts to the idea of perfecting the saints. Anybody here think that saints are only those made so by the Pope? Of course he doesn't make saints, he only thinks he does. No, those who believe on the Lord [00:25:04] Jesus, we're saints. You say I don't feel much like a saint but God says you are a saint. The ones that Paul was writing to in Ephesus, they were saints and we're saints by God's marvellous grace. But are we living saintly lives? That's what we've got to ask ourselves. This is what God wants to work out in our lives day by day and particularly together as believers on the Lord Jesus. Remember that's the particular context of our verses. What's God aiming at? Well, if you see trains in India, you see a lot of people on them and they're all trying to get to one place and they hang on any way they can to arrive at the station. This is a pretty good example. But God doesn't want it to be like that with us, just about hanging on. He wants us to grow. And how do we grow? Well, he wants us to all, not just some, not special ones, but all, [00:26:08] young and old, sisters and brothers. These truths aren't just for brothers. It's a complete misconception to think that these truths are only for brothers because they're the only ones who take part audibly in the meetings. That's a complete distortion of the teaching of this letter. These things are to be gone in for by sisters as much as brothers so that we all arrive at the unity of the faith. There's that one faith we read about and it should result in us having that same understanding, grasp of that one faith and working it out in practice. But not just the faith, but the knowledge of the Son of God, the person of whom we've been speaking about in our meetings, the one who we heard just in our last address, is the centre [00:27:08] of all that God is doing. The Lord Jesus Christ himself, the knowledge to know, to know the Son of God, a perfect man. It says in the authorised version, Mr Darby's translation says, full grown man. It's that idea of maturing and completing. And then the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ. Somebody talked about the Apostle Paul raiding the Greek language to try and express, well, try is probably the wrong word because the Holy Spirit was leading him to use these words. The fullness of the language is wonderful. Yes, these are the things that we're being told God wants us to arrive at. Now, it's probably true that the perfection of these things will never be accomplished until we get to heaven, [00:28:04] but it seems to me in these verses that the standard is being put before us as something we should be seeking to accomplish with God's help, even down here, so that we're no longer babes. We've already had reference to this thought. We don't want to be babes in the sense of those who are constantly helpless. We certainly don't want to be like children in the sense of those who hear one thing, hear another, and go off after this, and they go off after that. Trust to and fro like this boat carried about by every wind of teaching that men get up to. I must just say this. I saw recently Sir David Attenborough in the paper. I think it was saying that this Lemur, which was meant to be one of the clearest evidences of evolution three or four years ago by him, [00:29:06] who's, as you all know, a very respected man in these things, has now turned out to be a completely, well, do you mind me saying red herring? And yet, how much was said about this? Very little indeed. It was quickly forgotten about that this thing that three or four years ago we were told showed definitely the reality of evolution has now been quickly swept away. Now they've seen after all the things it's meant to represent are not really true at all. You see, you can be impressed by what man says. The scientists say one moment. The next moment, they've jumped it. We do have to keep clear in our hearts that what God says in his word can be dependent upon. We don't want to be tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of teaching that men get up to.

Hold, but holding the truth in love. In love, [00:30:03] remember that phrase again, in love, grow up into the Lord Jesus in all things. And here's a little boy. I hope he's going to get taller than I am. He's standing, he's hoping he's going to get up to the level of these other people who stood on this door and have gradually got higher and higher. Yes, we're growing up into the Lord Jesus, the head. Our body has a glorious head, the Lord Jesus in heaven. And the more we focus on him, the more we're occupied with him, the more we see ourselves growing up into him, the more we will enjoy what it is, the whole body fitly joined together, connected by every joint of supply. We often talk about ourselves as members of his body, but do we realize we're joints of supply? To each one, we are a joint of supply. We can bring something of Christ to each other. And as we do that, according to the working in its measure of [00:31:06] each one part of the body, the body increases to itself, building up in love. Somebody who already said the body is an organic living thing. It's Christ. In fact, often in the scriptures, well, I say often, but there are many, there are a number of references to the Christ. And that word means the Lord Jesus and his body, the head and the body together. Do we realize that the Lord Jesus is desiring that we should grow up into him? Because as we grow up to him, we shall manifest him in this world, in this world for God, the Father's pleasure and for the blessing of others who see us, particularly in our localities. That's where we have a responsibility of representing the Lord Jesus. This is just a summary. I've overstepped my time, so I'm not [00:32:05] going to speak about what it says here, but I'm going to pass the baton on to the next brother who's going to deal with the next verses of this wonderful chapter. Thank you very much.