

“Walking in the Spirit”

Ephesians 4:1-16

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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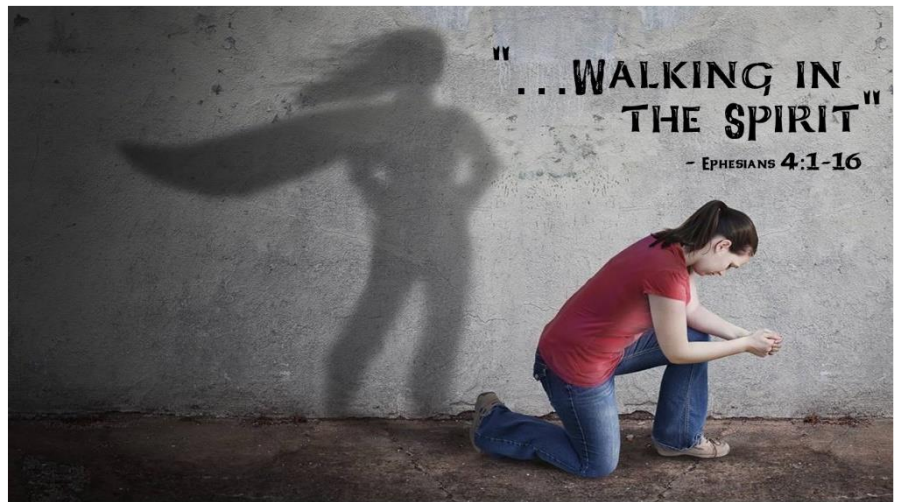
Ephesians 4:1-16 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 [There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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. 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” 9 (Now this, “He ascended” —what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

4:1

“**Therefore**” – Paul, after 3 chapters of leading up to this passage, is now bringing it all together. He has essentially taken us by the hand and walked the journey of the last three chapters with us. He didn’t just throw us in the pool and expect us to swim. He was not in a big hurry...he was more focused upon making sure the Ephesian church...and us too, had in their possession all that was needed for this ultimate step of faith...this commitment of discipleship.

Too many will attempt to start this race in the middle...to take on the world of do’s and don’ts before they understand what God has already done to bring them to that point. To “stand still and know that He is God.” To grasp in worship not just what He is **asking** of us but *what it means* and **why** He is asking. It’s easy to try to *do* something rather than first learn to *be* something. The failure to establish our relationship and communion with Him...to know intimately what worship looks like, will inevitably come back to haunt us in the future. Sometimes *way out* in the future...

Its easy to fall prey to attempting to earn God’s love and favor by our works...our service and our righteous living, but eventually we will burn out and quit. It’s a mistake grounded in good intentions but a mistake just the



same. It seems clear that is why Paul spent three chapters focusing on God and firstly what He had done to wake us from our sleep. Because no matter how impatient we are, our heart must always proceed our behavior. Our actions...*our service and works*, must be a *response* not an *obligation*. If we fail in this, we will ultimately fail in our faith, or worse we will succeed without God and in things that ultimately don't matter to Him.

Our walk in Christ must always be built on the foundation of an overwhelming sense of worship; an awe of our *standing in* Christ...*because of* Christ. Having laid that very foundation Paul only now seeks for a real response on our behalf. Many of us struggle endlessly with the quandary of what aspects are Gods alone and what part do *we* play if we participate in such at all! **This is ours**. Not the empowerment to do so...for that is yet still all God. But it is ours to now step up...to make a decision and act upon such. The practical "living out" of His incredible grace in our world.

Eventually we all come to that inevitable question: How is all that God has done for and in me, supposed to really look like manifested in my living? After all, this all must be more than a belief system...a mental ascent. Real faith...if it is worth anything at all, must eventually...*and vividly*, show up in the practical. This of course may *seem* to be a no brainer, yet it is in fact a chronic issue within the greater church today!

We spoke already about the one who attempts to break out of the gate too soon, but what about the guy who never *does* leave the gate? The one who just hangs out in perceived safety as the years pass, never stepping out of the box of religion. Just living vicariously out in their brothers and sisters around them in the church body, but never stepping up to the plate themselves. We learn all of the buzz phrases and clichés...all of the religious motions and pre-packaged church life. We often emphatically state that we believe but such fails to find a door in which to go out and live such belief with our real lives!

We therefor live *in* it but still ultimately *separate from it*. We 'compartmentalize' our living...our faith into a nice neat little box over here, and our actual day to day living in another over there. Rarely do the two find each other! It's a handy philosophy because then we can justify our secular pursuits while still claiming to be a part of a faith family. We must never forget, that in the end, Christianity is a *way of life...a course of living*. It is more than a belief system. It is an all-encompassing world view.

Upon our redemption, God does indeed change our positional standing before Him, but we cannot act as if our salvation experience and position is inert. To live intentionally in a manner that says Christ in us fails to have any power or radical motivation is unconscionable and frankly a simple fraud. It may be some sort of religious belief system but it's not Christianity...plain and simple. Jesus *changes* a person. Today, and every day that follows our salvation!

The teachings of Christ and scripture must follow with a response of action on our part. We are *called* to a new life and moreover to take our place in both the greater and local body of Christ. We are to "walk worthy." To live in a manner that expresses an understanding of the gift and power of salvation and Christ in us. Once again...note the language...we are all *called* by God to walk...to live... in a way that says we understand. Not *perfect*...just in passionate manifest and embrace. Paul says you are born again...so "live like it." Walk in it.

4:2-3

The man who truly understands the first three chapters of Ephesians will live in meekness and with a gentle spirit. I'm not taking about a timidity, or a cowardice or fear, but a humility in lifestyle that says that he or she knows clearly what they are and what roll Christ is playing in who they are now. This is about an other-centered heart and priority of serving others.

It invariable is the individual who fails to grasp the high calling of God who will always tend toward self – indulgence and self-exaltation. The righteous man will “*bear with.*” That’s not just “put up with” but rather such a one will live with, deal with, interact with in all aspects, the other person around them in love. Once again I must note that we are not speaking here about the love of this world. For that version is a far cry from God love. God love is actually based on truth, and that’s why so many don’t want that version. They would rather make up a new version that is not based on truth. God love is sometimes pleasant but frankly often it is not. But it *is* the real thing.

We are to “endeavor to keep the unity of peace.” Let’s face it. A lot of the time, that’s really hard in this culture! That does not excuse us from a consistent attempt to interact with the world around us in a Christ-like manner. However, this “peace” we are called to here is actually a call to peace between professed believers. (...hence “unity of Spirit.) For when there is not a lowliness, gentleness, other-centeredness, long-suffering, and most importantly a *truthfulness* on the part of all sides, finding a unity of peace can be quite illusive. Its sad that Paul even needed to throw out this directive, but after 30 plus years in the ministry, I will be the first to speak to its necessity as well as its chronic abuse!

We are called to endeavor...make an effort...do our part to see this through. All of us. *Each* of us. We cannot speak for another and certainly can’t force another’s behavior, but we are responsible for our own. We are called to love *as God loves*...a love that is based upon truth and grace. A love that is inevitably... often...as it was for Christ, *unilateral*.

4:4-6

The reality is, we’re all in this together. There is no special seating in heaven for Believers church members, or any other church or denomination. It’s a sad fact that such division exists between people who both claim to be believers. We do not all have to agree on every issue, but it is a shame and a disgrace to see brother come against brother...gossip, slander, division, and lies seem to be the tools of much of the greater church today.

Paul saw it well in his day, as much as we see it today, and certainly Christ Himself has for centuries been on the “receiving end” of such. For it was actually those that embraced the mantle of faith that ultimately killed Him. Let us never forget that fact. “*Hosanna Hosanna*” so very quickly changed to “*crucify Him, crucify Him...*” Whatever **we** endure in way of persecution, He endured first and endured far worse. And while He attempted constantly to humbly foster peace and unity, He ultimately did not find it. Yet he tried, just as we must try.

Once again, God love operates in truth. So while the truth is “there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and one Father,” that does not mean that everyone will accept that. But we love in that truth anyway, because HE did! That’s true love...GOD love. We are blessed to have step by step instructions for which to apply when there is a division between believers. (SEE Matthew 18:15-17) Sadly however, it is most often immediately discarded and disregarded when people are in the heat of the moment, and instead things usually go down every bit as nasty as the world out there...often worse than the world out there! I would guess that is why we are being called to walk *in the Spirit*. Because when we act in such a selfish manner, we are absolutely void of the Holy Spirits participation. In those situations, we are out there alone. Part of spiritual maturity...being a godly man or woman, is being responsible for your own actions, and not blaming someone else for them.

4:7-10

Please note the words “*to each one of us.*” If you are born again today then you are to be *in the game*. No one gets to sit out the battle! No one gets a pass because they are too old, too broken down, too uneducated, too little

talent, or too busy. If Jesus is *really* first in your life, then live like it. Talk is cheap. You may not be able to do what the guy beside you can, but that has nothing to do with it. Because you *can* do something if you would set down your excuses and get out on the field.

We are all called to serve the kingdom. But never fear...what you are called to do you are also equipped to deliver! The “Spirit” will be there for you. I’m not saying it will then therefore be easy and convenient, because it never is. If it was, *you* would do it all and likely leave Christ completely out of it. But in our weakness we are made strong because we have to lean on Him.

God gives us the “grace” to deliver. He decides what gift and how much ability. So while there is to be unity in the greater body of Christ, there is also diversity in the calling and abilities within that body. If you are here and claim to be a part of this body...and are not engaged, we are not whole. If you are not part of *any* body and participating in service and blessing others, then you need to find that place that God has for you and get busy.

Part of the redemption of man, is the gifts that He brings to each of us. What a great blessing and privilege to be allowed to work for the king! An honor like no other. These gifts we are told, are for the “edifying” of the body of Christ...the blessing and the building up of the greater church and the individuals that make it up. (1 Cor 14:6, 12, 25, as well as verse 12 of this chapter) In an age where “church growth”...measured in numbers, seems to be the brass ring...the premier motivator and goal of many, Paul takes a noticeably different approach. He is much more concerned with growth in maturity than growth in numbers.

He wanted the Ephesian believers to grow up. He wants *us* to grow up! Healthy mature sheep reproduce quite naturally. Each one of us is given a gift to fill in the body of Christ and we are all called to “step up.” And if each one of us is to manifest the Holy Spirit in our lives through the exercise of the gifts that he brings us; then if someone fails to do so, the rest of the body of Christ is less efficient because it must compensate for the loss!

4:11-12

God gave and equipped the body of Christ the following gifts: I cannot say it is an exhaustive list, and we know there are others listed elsewhere in scripture, but these are those Paul gives us here:

“**apostle**”...a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders...most often specifically applied to the twelve apostles of Christ who walked with Him personally

“**prophet**”...an interpreter, and foreteller, and forthteller....one who pleads the cause of God and urges salvation of men

“**evangelist**”...one who brings the good tidings of the gospel to those around him

“**pastor**”... a shepherd, an overseer of a church

“**teacher**”...in the NT one who teaches concerning the things of God and the duties of man

Jesus and the Holy Spirit not only gave gifts to men and women but gave these gifted individuals to the church...to the body...WHY? ...“*for the perfecting of the saints...for the edification of the body of Christ*” ...

“**perfecting**”...(Gr) “complete furnishing, equipping”

“**edifying**” ...(Gr) “building up”

It is important at this point to note that according to Romans 11:29 God’s gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. Therefore there are many who have never answered in obedience to receive and exercise their gifting, and there are those who once did so and in sinful disobedience somewhere along the way *stopped*. Either they were never called to what they were doing or they are living in disobedience now every day. Note that it is not just that these of verse 11 are given to **do** these things, but they are to “**perfect**” or “**furnish and**

equip” the saints (that’s us!)...in order for *them* to do their work of the ministry and for *them* to edify the body of Christ with *their* gifts.

We can easily single out certain individuals as the “ministers” and lay all of the work of ministry upon their backs with excuses like, “I’m just not called to serve the ministry, the church, the body of Christ.” But according to scripture, that is simply not true. The fact is, we are ALL called to the ministry! (2Cor5:18)

4:13

And how long are we to continue to do this work? Until we... “*come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” Anyone of you there yet? No? Then you are still to be “on the field.” When *can* will expect this state to be a reality? Truthfully and fully, only when the Lord returns for us. Which means as long as we are here, we are to engage...

This means we do not get to surrender and sit back and just wait until He comes for us. We must grow up and keep going and keep growing up. For God predestined His saints “*to be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Rom 8:29). Believers who never become involved in aggressive service for Christ never emerge from being spiritual children. They are undeveloped through lack of exercise. It was because of such that the writer to the Hebrews said, “*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again—.*” (Heb. 5:12).

4:14-16

Paul has said all that He did on this matter so that we might “no longer be children.” So we might cease to be “*tossed to and fro...and carried about by every wind.*” So we will not be tricked by men who desire through deceitful plotting and cunning craftiness to knock us off our feet. God desires that we be strong and mature Christians with doctrinal stability, spiritual perception, personal responsibility, and corporate body direction toward the goal. Too many are content to remain in weakness and immaturity, spiritual infancy.

But this is not the plan of God. We are called to grow up. *Are you?* Or are you indeed still...after such a long time...being “*tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind?*” When we grow up and take our place in the body of Christ as God designed for each one of us individually and all of us as a church, we are “joined and knit together”...we all becoming “one,” we embody “the church,” God’s channel of love, truth, and service to a lost and dying world.

There are those out there today...many even wearing the cloak of religion, that long to trip you up and keep you from growing up and being all that God has called you too. Sometimes they do it through simply pacifying and coddling you. But you will never get that here. We seek unity and we seek peace as God has called us. But we must rise to the call of God, and stand in truth, and we must not be moved from our destiny. For many of us, the call and desire of God remains: **It’s time to grow up.**