

## Sermon – 10/08/2008 am

### Walk Worthy

Study Text: Ephesians 4:1-2

In this new chapter we come to a turning point in the letter. As is typical of Paul's letters he begins with doctrine, outlining the truth about God and Jesus, and about sin and salvation. In the second half of the letter he deals with the consequences of these truths for daily living. He tells us how we must live as those who are called by God, those saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

This section on Christian living begins with 'therefore' because it follows on from what Christ has done for us. We find the same 'therefore' in Romans and other letters. Paul's letters are balanced with doctrine and practical teaching. Being a Christian is not just a matter of the intellect, of agreeing with some form of doctrine. Sadly some become so preoccupied with doctrine and with disputing on small points of doctrine that they fail to live out the truth of what they proclaim.

Paul was a man of great intellect and he knew his doctrine, but for him to live was Christ, not doctrine. As he starts this new section he reminds us that he is a prisoner of the Lord. Why was he a prisoner? Because he was living out his faith. He was doing what the Lord had called him to do not just talking about his calling and boasting in his knowledge.

On the other hand there are many who do not care for doctrine. They just want ethics and rules for living. They do not care about the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is all they want to hear. Mohandas Ghandi was such a man. He loved reading the Sermon on the Mount but failed to comprehend the cross. He was a Hindu but there are Christians who take the same view. There are those who begin reading Ephesians at chapter 4 because this is where the practical stuff is found, stuff about unity, about spiritual gifts and about how to live.

Some Christians live, or try to live, by the so-called golden rules which they have heard about – love your neighbour, do to others as you would have them do to you, and so on. They don't need to go to church because they know these rules. Besides, there are people in the church who do not obey these rules by their judgment. Take a careful look at the debate about homosexual priests in the Anglican Church. What is the golden rule – love one another. So they say we must love and accept homosexual priests. They do not bother to read any more of the Bible.

Unlike the first three chapters which have only one imperative (2:11), this chapter has many exhortations or instructions about how to live. Do this, do that writes Paul. But he gives these instructions on the basis of what Christ has done for us, and who we are in Christ. If we look at the ten commandments we also find them prefaced by truth or doctrine; 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt; I am your God and you are my people, therefore this is how you must live'.

### Walk Worthy

Paul is writing this letter to a church he knew well. He shares his own situation with them. He prays for them and asks them to pray for him. In this passage he beseeches/exhorts/urges them to walk worthy of their calling. The word 'beseech' means 'to call alongside'. He does not

command them as his subjects but urges them as fellow followers of Christ. Not that his words are only a suggestion of course. He is not giving them various options but urging them to follow one way, the way that is in accord with their calling in Christ.

To *walk worthy* means to live in this way, a way that is different to the way of the world. *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2). Our way of thinking must be different to that of worldly people. Only when our thinking is different will our walk be different. Our thinking must be controlled by the word of God and by the Spirit of God. This is what being filled with the fullness of God is all about. If Christ is dwelling in your heart your life will be different, you will have different aims and different hopes, and therefore different behaviour to those without Christ.

The word 'worthy' means 'becoming/fitting/appropriate'. The other day my daughter saw a mature woman wearing a very short skirt. It was 'most unbecoming' she said. It was not appropriate for such a person to be wearing such clothes. There are certain things that are not appropriate for followers of Christ to do, to say or even to wear. It is not a question of fashion or what other people are saying or doing. It is a question of what is worthy of a person called by God.

*You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore honour God in your bodies* (I Corinthians 6:20). I do not know where the husband of the badly dressed woman was, but would he not have been embarrassed to see his wife inappropriately dressed. Her dressing would reflect on him. What we do and say reflects on Jesus to whom we belong. The church is the bride of Christ. That is the doctrine. The practice is 'therefore walk as the wife of Christ'.

As a believer in Christ you have been born again of the Spirit of God. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. You were chosen by God before the foundation of the world and you were made alive in Christ. You have a new king, a new ruler in your life. Are you proud of your new King and country?

Travelling in a foreign country you become aware of your own nationality. Some tourists give their nation a bad name. I remember walking away from a booking office in Delhi and hearing these Aussie tourists swearing and cursing the local people. I felt embarrassed and ashamed because they were dishonouring my country. How much more ashamed we are when we see the people of King Jesus bringing dishonour to their King. Walk worthy of the calling you have in Christ.

## **Walk Humbly**

Paul does not leave us to imagine what 'walking worthy of our calling' means. He tells us in some detail what this means. He tells us firstly what it means with regard to our attitude towards self, and secondly what it means with regard to our attitude towards others. Both these aspects are interdependent as we will see.

Becoming a child of God totally changes how we look at ourselves. A sinful heart is a proud heart. That pride can be camouflaged in many ways but do not be misled, sin and selfishness go together. We are all born in sin and so all born proud and selfish. The world applauds such qualities, calling them ambition, self-esteem and drive. To get success in this world you have to 'blow your own trumpet' as they say.

A friend of ours went for a job interview. When asked 'do you think you can do the job' he said 'I am not sure but I will try'. He went to many interviews but was not given a job. To get

a job you have to say 'I am the best person for this job'. You have to make your CV show that you went to a good school, that you live in a classy suburb, and that you have many certificates. For some jobs you have to show that you are young and strong, or that you are beautiful. The world is not interested in humility – but God is. The world does not want to hear that others are better than you – but God does.

Humility and gentleness are qualities found in Jesus of Nazareth. Come to me he said *for I am humble and gentle in heart* (Matthew 11:29). Jesus humbled himself in coming into this world in the first place – the sinless Son of God living in the midst of sinners. And while on this earth he lived with humility. As the prophet wrote *a bruised reed he will not break* (Isaiah 42:3). *As a sheep before its shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth* (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus faced concerted opposition and many false charges. He was chased out of his hometown, and it was dangerous for him to go to Jerusalem. The Jews kept on testing him with questions and did not believe anything he said. But Jesus did not get angry or rail against them – as a natural man would have done under such provocation. Rather, Jesus committed himself into his Father's hands. Knowing who he was and that he was going to the Father Jesus took a towel and washed his disciple's feet. In so doing he set an example for his disciples, for you and me to follow.

Paul sought to imitate Christ and teaches all believers to do the same. He was following the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount – 'blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek'. *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought* wrote the apostle. (Romans 12:3). When was the last time you heard that sort of teaching? What about *honour one another above yourselves* (Romans 12:10). Do you know of any schools teaching such things? To teach such things is a recipe for disaster as far as this world is concerned. But such a way of living is honouring before your God and brings his blessing. Which teaching are you following?

## **Walk in Love**

What about our attitude towards others? The last two of these four graces impact on our relationships with one another. We are to be *longsuffering and bear with one another in love* (4:2). We are to be humble and keep on being humble. How many times must I forgive my brother? Seven times? No seventy times seven said Jesus. 'But some people just push me too far' you say. Well the Bible does not speak like that. We are told to be longsuffering not 'shortsuffering'. 'But I was stressed and tired so I snapped' you say. Again the Bible does not make room for such excuses.

Clearly such walking is only possible by the power of God. That was Paul's prayer remember – to be strengthened through the Holy Spirit in the inner man. Did you think this was power to do great works for the Lord? Sometimes the greatest strength we need is to be humble, gentle and loving people.

The love of Christ must ever be in our minds and in our hearts. Why should you be loving and patient with someone who keeps on failing? Because Jesus is loving and patient with you when you keep failing-that is why. Why should you keep on loving someone who spurns your love? Because Jesus loved you when you spurned his love – that is why. *This is how we know what love is – Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers* (I John 3:16). With what measure do you love others?

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