

God's Message to Us in Ephesians

Halifax, NS

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Introduction

This afternoon in preaching every book in the Bible, we come to Ephesians.

- Ephesians is somewhat unique among the epistles of Paul in that Paul does not say anything that is specific to them as a church.
 - When he wrote to the Corinthians and the Galatians, he was addressing particular problems these churches had, but his letter to the Ephesians is much more general.
- What he writes to them might just as well have been written to any church.
 - He writes to remind them of the riches they have in Christ.
 - It is an epistle that re-centres believers on our gracious Lord and the marvellous calling that we have in Christ Jesus.
 - And so it is just as helpful for us today as it was for them.

Let's take a look at this epistle under two headings:

- I. Behold your glorious God as revealed through His redemptive grace.
- II. Walk worthy as one who has been called by this glorious God.

I. Behold your glorious God as revealed through His redemptive grace.

A. Look at what He has done for us according to Ephesians chapter 1-3.

- Each chapter lays out something that God has done in our redemption.

1. Ephesians 1: He has given us a marvellous inheritance in Christ.

- a. We are given a summary in Ephesians 1:3-4 where we are told that God **“has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”**

- Think of it—God has a plan for sinners, defiled, guilty, ruined sinners, to be holy and without blame... and to be that *before Him*...
- It is His purpose to so change our condition that we are able to actually dwell with God with our sins removed—without guilt because of them and without selfishness and pride and greed and indifference to God...

b. The blessings include many excellent benefits...

1) There is adoption as sons by Jesus Christ... v. 5.

- We are truly heirs with Christ, brought into the family of God as sons forever with all the privileges.

2) There is redemption... v. 7-9, which brings us the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ.

- What grace is seen in that Christ Himself has bled as a sacrifice, being punished in our place for our sins... bringing complete forgiveness.

3) There is the gathering of us all as one into Christ—so that we receive our inheritance as one with Him (1:10-12).

- 4) There is in verses 13-14 the sealing with the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance—the Spirit is a deposit assuring us that the rest will come.
 - He is also the one who brought us into faith and who keeps us in the faith so that we will never depart from God.
- We have every spiritual blessing in Christ—everything involved in making us holy and without blame before our Father in heaven—that is our inheritance.
 - How gracious our God is to give us such an inheritance when we are sinners and when so much had to be done for us to be accepted!
2. Now let's look at Ephesians 2. Here we are told that He has transformed us so that we would come into this inheritance.
 - This is introduced and summarised in Eph. 2:1 where it says **“And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.”**
 - a. Do you see what the problem was? We were too entrenched in sin and rebellion to come to Christ for forgiveness.
 - We had no interest in coming to Him from our sin until God acted.
 - Having described that desperate rebellion in Eph 2:1-3, verse 4 interjects these words: **“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”**
 - Verses 8-10 testify that our coming to Christ was all by God's grace, not by our works...
 - All the glory for our coming to Christ goes to Him and not to us.
 - We could not come because we were dead, but He imparted life to us.
 - b. And Paul goes on to remind the Ephesians in 2:11-22, that they were brought in even as Gentiles who had been entirely cut off from God.
 - This grace that brought them in was so great, that it gave them an inheritance with the Jews to whom the promises were first made.
 - Both Jew and Gentile can now come to God and enjoy the full inheritance through Jesus crucified: vs 19: **Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...**
- This was such a marvellous thing that God appointed an apostle to receive revelation about it and to declare it to all for the glory of God.
3. In Ephesians 3, Paul speaks about the privilege of being that apostle to the Gentiles.
 - a. In verse 8 he says: **To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...**
 - b. All the sufferings that Paul has had to endure in bringing this message to them are as nothing compared to the privilege of having this ministry...

- In v. 13, he says, **Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

TRANS> So there you have three things that God has done—

- chapter 1, providing an inheritance for sinners in His house,
- chapter 2, bringing sinners too hardened to respond to God into that inheritance,
- and chapter 3, revealing the gospel to the Gentiles to Paul, and sending him to preach.

B. But what matters most is that God’s glory is seen in all of this gracious work.

1. Look at how Paul draws attention to God’s glory throughout these three chapters.
 - a. In 1:1-14, he tells us three times that our inheritance was given to us for the glory and praise of God:
 - In verse 6, that His saving work was **to the praise of the glory of His grace.**
 - In verse 12, that we were blessed **that we should be to the praise of His glory.**
 - In verse 14, that He sealed us with the Spirit **to the praise of His glory.**
 - b. In 1:15-23, Paul tells us how he prays that our eyes will be opened so that we will be able to see how gracious God has been.
 - Look at Eph 1:17-19. His prayer is: **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.**
 - c. Third, in chapter 2, as Paul speaks about God’s power that transforms us, he refers to God as **“God who is rich in mercy”** and who saved us **“because of His great love (v. 4).”** His focus is still on the glorious grace of God.
 - And in verse 7 He says that He raised us up in Christ **“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”**
 - d. Fourth, in chapter 3 when he talks about how the truth that Gentiles have an inheritance with Jews was revealed to him, he says that it is for the purpose of making it known, (verse 10-11): **to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...**
 - e. And then fifth, he closes out chapter 3 with another prayer similar to the one in chapter 1 where he prays that the Ephesians will see the greatness of God’s love and power for the glory of God...
 - Let me just quote from 3:14-21: **For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly**

above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

2. Why is God's glory so important? Why does Paul want us to see this so much?
 - a. Our catechisms are right when they declare in the very first question that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
 - We were created in God's image with the ability to know Him and to worship Him and also to reflect (as His image) His glory in our lives...
 - to be a reflection on a human level of God's wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
 - But foundational to reflecting His glory on our human level is beholding His glory as He is revealed to us in His glorious works of creation and redemption.
 - In other words, our business is not only to display His glory to other beings, but also to be those beings who see His glory and praise Him.
 - If we do not see His glory, we cannot begin to reflect His glory.
 - b. God is infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection.
 - If we do not see Him, we miss everything that matters.
 - Our lives are vain and empty, missing out on the grand purpose for which we were made.
 - And it is not just that we miss out, but it is monstrous wickedness, the greatest of sins, to live a human life without worshipping God as God and serving Him as the One who alone is worthy of all honour.
 - Redemption from this great sin is itself a grand demonstration of the mercy, grace, love, power, wisdom, holiness, justice, wrath, and excellence of God.
 - c. What a delight it is when God frees us from our sin and blindness by His grace and enables us to begin to see His glory!
 - We will never really look at Him until we have seen that He is indeed willing to be gracious to us as sinners.
 - We cannot bear to look seriously and honestly at Him until we have some hope of His saving mercy.

TRANS> Brothers and sisters, the more you see the grace of God in giving us, as sinners, such a marvellous inheritance in Christ,

- the more you will delight in Him and the more you will worship Him and the more you will lay down your lives for His glory.
 - You don't grow by moral exertion—by grunting...
 - You grow by grasping more and more the glory of the God who has saved you so that you pour out your life for Him the way Jesus did...
 - And the way Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, did.
- And that brings us to our second main division at the chapter 4 in which we are told:

II. Walk worthy as one called by this great God to an inheritance with His Son.

- Ephesians 4-6 tells us how to do that.

- Paul introduces us to the subject of walking worthy in Ephesians 4:1-2 with these words: **“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.”**
 - As you are called to be an heir with Christ in His Father’s house, you want to be in harmony with your new family—the family of God.
 - The more you realise the privilege of this calling, the more you want your life to conform to the family.
- Do you see what it says in verse 4-6?
 - Eph 4:4-6: **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.**
 - This is not talking about some stupid ecumenical movement where you accept every diverse belief...and “agree to disagree”...
 - This is talking about conforming to the family of God—to the ways of your heavenly Father and of His Son.
 - It is pouring out your life to follow Him.
- In the rest of his letter, Paul speaks of three things you will do as one who is **endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...**
 - Let’s take a look at each of them.

A. First, you must seek to know the truth taught in the house of your heavenly Father.

1. Paul begins by explaining in Eph 4:7-11 how Christ gave teaching gifts to His church when He ascended into heaven.
 - The gifts Paul emphasises here in particular are people... they are the ministers of the word that He provided for us to know His will.
 - In Ephesians 4:11, he says: **“And He Himself gave some apostles [the words *to be* are not in the original], some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...**
 - All of these are ministers of the word who give us the truth to be believed.
 - The apostles and prophets are first among these because they received revelation directly from God... revelation about Him, about what we are to believe, and about how we are to live.
 - They gave us the scriptures in which we have all that we need to know for life and godliness.
 - And ever since then, God has appointed pastors and teachers as His officers who expound the scriptures to us, explaining them and applying them to us.
2. The goal of their work (the reason that Christ gave them to the church) is to bring us all into (vs 13) **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.**
 - This is not the kind of unity where we agree to disagree, but the unity where we all believe and speak the truth of God.
 - God does not have multiple truths in His house, but He calls us to grow to maturity in the truth that He has revealed.

- Those who mix human wisdom in with God’s word destroy the unity of the church, even if they are very kind and loving toward the rest of the family.
3. Verses 17-19 speak of how the Gentiles who do not know the truth walk in the futility of their minds, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them and the blindness that is in their hearts...
- They live a life of greediness and lewdness in their darkness.
 - But Paul says it is different for believers because you have been taught by Christ...
 - It is for us to learn the truth about our Father, about His Son, about what He has done, and about how He wants us to live as His sons so we can live in the light.

TRANS> But of course, our desire is not just to be united in knowing the truth and knowing the ways of our heavenly Father—we want to walk in the truth...

- Already, Paul has been speaking about knowing the truth that we might do the truth,
 - but in 4:17-24, he turns his focus specifically to conforming our conduct to God’s will which is the second thing we do when we endeavour to walk worthy of our calling.

B. Second, you must seek to behave in ways that conform to the ways of our heavenly Father’s house.

1. Paul introduces and summarises this as putting off the old man and putting on the new man in 4:22-24: **that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**
 - When you are called by Christ, you are done with the old way of life and you come now to live as part of the family of God—in the ways of your Father.
 - You shed the old ways and you embrace the new ways of living.
2. Paul lays out the changes that take place from Ephesians 4:25 to 6:9.
 - a. There must be a complete turn-around in what we do...
 - from lying to speaking the truth (v. 25).
 - from brooding anger to anger without sin (v. 26-27)
 - from stealing to working and giving to others (v. 28)
 - from harmful words to words that help people (v. 29).
 - b. There must be a complete change in our disposition toward others (4:31 – 5:2).
 - That instead of the bitterness, hatred, and malice... we love one another the way Christ has shown us.
 - Let me quote these words, Eph 4:31-5:2: **“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. ^{5:1} Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”**
 - There is no place in our Father’s house for hatred—our Father delights in love.
 - c. There must be a repudiation of all sexual immorality.
 - In 5:3, Paul says to not let fornication or uncleanness even be heard of among us—it is not fitting for Christians.

- In verse 4, he adds that we should not even have the unchaste talk of the world: **“neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”**
- Here is a great distinction between a believer and an unbeliever.
 - A believer won’t have anything to do with sexual sin...even in his talk.
 - In 5:5 Paul says: **“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”**
 - Those who claim to know Christ and engage in such behaviour are only deceiving themselves...v. 6: **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**
- d. There must be a breaking away from all the works of darkness.
 - In verse 5:8-18, there is a call to break our ties with the unfruitful works of darkness and start walking in the light as those filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - In verse 8, he says: **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”**
 - We are to find out what God’s will is instead of wasting our lives with the shameful works of darkness—the partying, the drinking, the immorality, the wasting of time that might be spent for God.
 - He tells us to redeem the time (v. 16)...
 - And in verse 18 not to be drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit.
- So instead of continuing (or taking up) fellowship with the world in works of darkness, we need to be doing something entirely different...
- e. There must be a Spirit-filled life in place of a wine-filled life.
 - Three things will characterise us when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - 1) First (v. 19), we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.
 - We talk of the Lord, of His goodness, of His glory; we encourage each other as we learn of Him.
 - We get together to pray and get together to learn of the Lord.
 - 2) Second, vs. 20... when we are filled with the Spirit we give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of Christ.
 - Instead of praising parties and sexual sins, we thank God for the riches we have in His salvation and in the new lives that He has given us.
 - 3) Third, vs 21... being filled with the Spirit, we submit to one another in the fear of God...
 - In 5:21-6:9, Paul explains that we submit to one another by living in our God-given relationships, giving honour to those He has put in authority over us and loving those He has put under our care in these relationships.
 - a) The world abandons or neglects loving relationships with family or employment to indulge in selfish relationships.
 - marriage is abandoned for hook ups and uncommitted relationships where you don’t look to truly live for your sexual partners...
 - parents ignore and neglect their children and children break away from their parents to hang out with peers...

- And in work relationships, those in authority oppress their workers and workers are not eager to serve their employer or their clients...
 - except to gain advantage.
- b) But when we are filled with the Spirit, we enter into relationships where there is beautiful love and submission...
 - Wives submit to their husbands, living in conformity to them as one, and husbands, rather than using their authority selfishly, use their authority for the sake of their wives... laying down their lives for them as Christ did for us to bless them.
 - And likewise—children honour and obey their parents... they treat them with the admiration that the children of darkness show to those they idolise—seeking to please them and learn from them.
 - and parents, rather than being put out with their children, seek to nurture them and train them up in God’s ways—unfolding to them the riches of Christ and the life we have in Him.
 - And workers truly seek to benefit their employers and their clients rather than only making a show of doing so...
 - And employers look to truly do good to their workers...
 - How different our lives are in Christ!

TRANS> But is living this way easy for the Christian?

- I tell you, it is not!
 - If you are a new convert, you are breaking away from the old habits of living.
 - If you are one who grew up in the church, you have the world finding you strange and pulling at you to conform...
 - And even worse, other professing Christians who start to conform to the world will urge you to join them in their drifting away from God.
- And there is a living devil who tries to turn you against the Lord and His ways, and who tempts you and entices you to follow the world.
 - Your flesh wars against your spirit, as we saw in Galatians, so that you cannot live the way you want to live as a child in your heavenly Father’s house.
- And so if you would endeavour to walk worthy of your calling, you must always be ready to fight... you must be prepared for war and you must engage in war.

C. That is the third thing that Paul speaks about for us to walk worthy of our calling—we need to put on God’s armour and fight.

1. You can see how Paul introduces this in 6:10-11

- Eph 6:10-11: **Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.**
- We are at war.
 - The world, the flesh, and the devil will not yield easily to us.
- If you do not realise that you are at war and that you will have to struggle and fight against sin and temptation, you will not be able to stand.
 - Jesus told us to watch and pray.
 - When His disciples ignored Him about that, they all denied Him.

- We are not playing games here—there is a struggle for your soul, and our only refuge is in Christ.
2. We are told in verse 13 to put on the whole armour of God, but what is it and how do we put it on?
 - a. Paul lists the armour: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the footwear called the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.
 - There is much that could be said about each piece of this armour...but...
 - b. The general idea here is that we need to trust our Father to provide us with the protection that we need.
 - In His house, He nourishes us with armour... His word of promise and of truth, and gives us strength to believe when the world is telling us lies.
 - Paul says to pray (6:18-20) with all prayer and supplication, being watchful, and praying for those who lead the church (like Paul).
 - Because we are not yet physically in our heavenly Father's house, the armour consists of those things that have to do with our faith...
 - truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, assurance, the word...
 - Tell me, when do you go astray?
 - Is it not when your faith fails?
 - Is it not when you lose sight of what you have in Christ? the salvation? the hope? the grace? the new life of acceptance in Him?
 - You put on your armour by renewing your faith each day—by remembering who your Father is and what He has done for you by saving you and giving you an everlasting inheritance.
 - Take that armour off and the devil and the world will swallow you up.

Conclusion: So we are back to the place we started.

- We only walk worthy of our calling when we keep our eyes on the glory of the LORD whose grace is seen in calling us, desperate sinners that we are in ourselves, to be holy and without blame before Him in love.
 - The goal of it all is our restoration to our Father—coming to our glorious Father.
- We are called to belong to Him through Jesus our Saviour and to inherit a place in His house forever.
 - As you grow in your grasp of the greatness of God's calling, you will also grow in walking worthy of that calling.
 - Glory be to God. May His name be praised forever.