

**Grace Evangelical Church
Pastor Paul Bawden
Sunday, August 9, 2009
"How Tolerant Am I?"
Ephesians 4:1-3**

The story is told of the church family who had a disagreement over how the Lord's Prayer should be recited.

Should the people say when repeating the Lord's prayer,
"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Or

Should the people say when repeating the Lord's prayer,
"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The congregation couldn't come to an agreement.

The local newspaper reported the happening this way.

Some people in the church went back to their debts.

Other people in the church went back to their trespasses.

It's amazing what can cause consternation in a church family, yes in the family unit itself, and among individuals.

What did our text read in Ephesians 4:1-3 – The believers in the body of Christ are to walk worthy (deserving) of their calling, with humility, gentleness, with patience (endurance, slowness of avenging wrongs), **bearing with (enduring patiently, being tolerant) with one another**, endeavoring earnestly (continually), to keep, (to guard) the unity of the Spirit in the bond, (bound together) by peace.

What a great passage of Scripture to encourage us in having heavenly harmony in our earthly relationships, particularly in bearing with, being tolerant of one another.

How does it all work and fit into the shoe leather of our lives.

1. Only eternal doctrine, teaching provides the basis for right conduct for harmonious relationships – bearing with one another (Ephesians 1-3).

The Ephesian letter is a letter of eternal teaching, for it is God's Word, that lives and abides forever as Peter tells us quoting from Isaiah 40. (cf. I Peter 1:24-25; Isaiah 40:6-8). Although some today dispute this reality, and others deny it completely, such a response does not do away with the eternal word of God that lives and abides forever – it is settled forever in heaven.

Ephesians was written by Paul, inspired by the Spirit of God, around A.D. 61, while Paul was in prison in Rome. It was probably a letter that was circulated among the churches in Asia Minor at that time.

(1) Paul starts this amazing letter with a note of praise to God, his and our heavenly Father.

"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" (Ephesians 1;3).

What amazing words for a man in a Roman prison. Paul in his restricted circumstances is not restricted from praising God who has provided him eternal forgiveness and life through faith in

Jesus. May our response be the same as we go through the challenges of life. God is always in control. He has blessed each of us with His innumerable spiritual blessings.

Then, Paul starts delineating what those blessings are in chapter 1 of Ephesians. Paul pens that God the Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before Him. Paul takes us back into the eternal mind of God and His process for world redemption. In love He predestined us to adoption of sons. He marked us out beforehand, which is always an exciting to think about and discuss, for it goes beyond what our human minds can comprehend. But if God had not made a choice no one would be able to come to Christ because of the depravity of the human heart that in no way seeks after God, and spiritually there is none righteous no not one.

Then Paul pens how this redemption came about. It was carried out through Jesus Christ giving His life blood as the payment for our sin, our breaking God's law. All this happened for the believer according to the riches of His grace.

Upon accepting Jesus Christ, the believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of our complete redemption.

Yes, the Triunity, the Trinity is involved in the salvation God provides – God the Father chooses us. God the Son, provides us the redemption we need, and the Holy Spirit applies Christ's work to our lives, making the down payment on our lives that we will arrive in God's presence after this life. God the Father selects us, God the Son, saves us, and God the Holy Spirit seals us – **ALL to the praise of His glory.**

Through faith in Christ we are given the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, which resurrection of Christ provided the eternal basis for the church to be established, of which the risen and ascended Christ is the Head.

(2) In chapter 2 of Ephesians, Paul writes about the spiritual grave we were in before we accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

We who were dead in trespasses and sins have been, through faith in Him, made alive together with Christ, and have been raised up spiritually to have the position of being seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ.

For it is by grace we are saved, through faith, and not of ourselves it is the gift of God, not of works so that no one will be able to boast.

Then Paul talks about what the finished work on Calvary, Christ has brought together in one body all Jews and Gentile who believe in Him as personal Savior. Only the cross and open tomb of Christ could do that. That's why Paul writes that they are both reconciled to God through Christ's cross with the same access to the same Father.

They are now fellows saints in God's household. Both Jew and Gentile who accept Christ as Savior are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

(3) In chapter 3 we discover that the Gentiles and Jews in one body, the church, are designed to show forth the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in high places.

In fact Paul, himself, the least of all the saints, was given the privilege to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. Knowing what Christ has done for the believer should provide boldness and confident access to the Father.

Note Ephesians 3:13-21.

13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

- 14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
- 15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,
- 16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,
- 17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- 18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
- 19** and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.
- 20** Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,
- 21** to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

2. God's blessings of eternal love on our lives provide the only motivation to live out His teaching bringing harmony to our relationships – bearing with one another.

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1).

Therefore, on the basis of God's teaching in Ephesians 1-3, that is who God is, the sovereign loving God, on what He has done in Jesus Christ for the believer in Him, providing him eternal salvation, sealing him with the Holy Spirit, giving Him that eternal position of being seated in the heavenlies with Christ, plus being put into the body of Christ – Jews and Gentiles in one family, both with the same access to the Father through Jesus Christ, the believer should demonstrate in his or her life the Lord's harmony in his daily relationships.

1. The Old Testament motivation was entirely different from the New Testament motivation (Exodus 19:5-6).

"If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Words Moses was told to tell the nation of Israel when God was about to make the covenant of the law with His people – which has been called the Mosaic Covenant.

But notice carefully, "If you do this you will be blessed."

There was a condition tied to the blessing God promised the nation of Israel. If Israel obeyed the Lord, then it would be evident that Israel was God's possession, and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. If Israel didn't obey the Lord, it would be evident that they weren't God's people. Of course the Abrahamic Covenant was still in affect, and God would not cast off His people forever. But blessing for the nation of Israel was tied to their obedience to the Lord. God always forgave the nation when the nation turned back to Him, but when the nation continued in idolatry, the northern kingdom was sent into captivity (721 B.C.) and the southern kingdom was finally sent into captivity (606, 596, 586 B.C). After 70 years, the nation was permitted to return to their

homeland. In spite of all the happenings to the nation of Israel since then, the nation of Israel still has a future today, miraculously being declared a state in 1948.

But the law principle is clear. If you obey God you will be blessed by Him (cf. Deuteronomy 7-8).

Now the New Testament teaching, after the church began at Pentecost, is set forth in the book of Ephesians we are considering today.

2. The New Testament motivation for having harmonious relationships with one another is entirely different from the Old Testament teaching (Ephesians 1:3; 4:1).

What did Paul write in Ephesians 1:3? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

What does Paul write in our text in Ephesians 4:1 in our text?

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

Why should we walk, or maintain a life that is worthy of the calling with which we have been called – that is the call to salvation, to be part of God's forever family, knowing we are His forever? Why do we want to please the Lord in all that we think, say, and do as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Is it in order to be blessed by the Lord, as in the Old Mosaic system of the Law? Not at all. Thank the Lord!!

The only reason we want to please the Lord, to live worthy of our call to salvation is that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

We have been given eternal blessings in Christ Jesus.

The blessings of God's eternal love are the motivation for us to live lives worthy of our call to God's eternal salvation.

The love blessings of God described in Ephesians 1-3, provide the motivation to put into shoe leather what is described in Ephesians 4:2-3.

Note the stark contrast.

**Live under the Mosaic Law/System.
"If you obey God, you will be blessed."**

**Live under God's Grace.
"You are blessed by Me, therefore do in the power of the Holy Spirit."
Live your life heartily, with soul, and spontaneity, having eternal purpose for the Lord.**

The choice is ours even as followers of Jesus Christ. For it's possible to live as a believer in Jesus Christ thinking that if I do such and such, I will get a greater blessing from God, or get more brownie points. Of course that is living under the law, which is really legalism.

Living under grace is to recognize how blessed we are under grace and let God's love blessings be the motivation for pleasing the Lord.

I remember growing up that there was a popular television program called the "Millionaire." This very wealthy man, every week, would give a million dollars to a certain individual or family to spend as they wanted. It was interesting to see how that million dollars would affect those who received it.

Did the individual or family that received the million dollars do anything to gain that money. If they obeyed the man, did he give them a million dollars. No. There was no law system at work there.

Rather, he gave the million dollars as a blessing to them to be used for their purposes (a demonstration of his grace). That million dollars became a real physical motivation for them in living their lives sometimes for good, other times not so good.

Friends, God has given us that which can't really be compared to a million dollars, for that can be here and gone tomorrow as we have seen in the recent economic crisis.

Paul describes God's blessings to us in Christ this way in Ephesians 3:8 – He calls them "the unfathomable riches of Christ." Really the untrackable riches of Christ – the riches of Christ which can not be fully explored. Like one starts with a small spring that runs into a creek, which runs into a river, which runs into a larger river, which runs into a gulf which goes out into the ocean.

The eternal riches of Christ are untrackable, are beyond exploration.

And then we like to sometimes live under the law for we think then that we have it together spiritually, when in reality we are bringing disrepute on the eternal riches we have in Christ through His grace.

So how is the believer's relationships affected when he or she let's the love blessings of the Lord motivate his or her life?

3. Acting on God's eternal blessings in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have heavenly harmony in our earthly relationships – bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Note what that involves.

(1) Humility.

"with all humility."

When we realize that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, we first have humility. What is humility. It's a right view of God and a right view of self.

Pride, on the other hand, someone has said, is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it.

****A right view of God** – He is eternal, sovereign, and a God of love and grace who has provided me salvation through faith in Christ with all things that pertain to life and godliness. All the believer has and will have is all because of God's great love for him or her. God must always be number one in the believer's life.

The person blessed by God with all spiritual blessings always keeps in mind it's the Lord that he lives for not himself or someone else.

****A right view of one's self** – I am a creation of God with eternal value, but I have sinned and am under His condemnation, but God loved me and provided me His salvation through faith. Now I am God's child, a son of God, a saint, and a member of God's eternal family. It's all because of God's grace, and He gets the glory. It's not a reason for pride, but a reason to be grateful to the Lord, and praise Him for His grace to me and the living hope he provides me in Christ.

Think of Christ for a moment. He who was God humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Christ always had the proper view of His Father, saying He came not to do His own will but the will of His father. He kept learning obedience as He submitted to His Father's will to win for us His eternal redemption (He was humble – Matthew 11:29).

Christ always had the proper view of Himself. Never egotistical. Never taking personal what was said to Him or said about Him. Yes, He was God, but He also had emotions, and feelings, as He wept over the death of Lazarus and the city of Jerusalem,. He got hungry and thirsted.

Humility is not pushing one's self along, but depending on the Lord for His wisdom, guidance and strength.

"They that know God will be humble," John Flavel has said, "and they that know themselves cannot be proud"

One who is humble before the Lord recognizes that God has blessed him or her with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

The believer blessed by God will also be . . .

(2) Gentle.

Gentleness is also one of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. The fruit of the Spirit is really Christlikeness, so gentle is part of the life of Christ indwelling in the believer. In fact Christ describe Himself as "gentle" (Again -Matthew 11:29). "I am gentle and humble of heart."

Gentle means to be kind, to be considerate of others feelings, expressions, and needs. It does not mean to be a door mat but to display an understanding spirit. It is the opposite of I don't care how you feel. Rather, how can I help you. Or just listening to a person. It is the opposite of being vindictive. It has nothing to do with being weak, indifferent, timid, or cowardice. Gentleness is really power under control, like the horse that has great power, but he runs only where the master directs. It is really power under the control of God. The gentle person also responds to the teaching of God's word.

The believer blessed by God will be

(3) Patient

Patient means to endure, yes to be slow in avenging wrongs, long-suffering. **Stott writes – longsuffering toward aggravating people. Yes, the patient believer endures negative circumstances and never gives into them.**

Again, Christ is the supreme example. He endured all kinds of ridicule, was falsely accused, persecuted, beaten, and hung on Calvary's cruel cross. In the midst of it all, He didn't strike back, but asked His Father to forgive them for they knew not what they were doing. Think as well of Abraham, who having patiently waited, received the promise (Hebrews 6:15). Noah took 120 years to build the ark without any rain in sight. I'm sure he received some ridicule as he preached God's righteousness.

The one mistreated does not return evil for evil. He does not complain when his calling may seem less glamorous than someone else.

The patient believer accepts God's plan for him without grumbling and complaining, and goes forth in the power of the Spirit to serve his Lord with enthusiasm.

(4) Bearing with one another (or showing tolerance of one another – continually – present tense here).

The idea is to endure patiently with one another continually.

****The Negative.**

Paul is not writing about doctrine here. Wrong teaching must be dealt with directly as Paul and John do in their letters.

Paul is not talking about that which is sin here, that which is against God's law and word. For we are to confess our sin to the Lord and go on in fellowship with Him doing His will. We are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. We are to seek to restore those who have gone astray from the Lord.

****The Positive.**

What Paul is referring to is - when we differ on ideas, or tastes, or on what method to use to get to a particular end. He is talking about philosophy of ministry, type of music, how to reach people for Christ.

Paul is referring to what Peter says, "love covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). That does not mean that God approves of sin or should we, but bearing with one another keeps sin from becoming any more known than necessary.

The proverb says that "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." (Proverbs 10:12).

It means that we can agree to disagree on some issues, the non-essentials, and still be friends in the body of Christ.

And when we start getting impatient with people, just remember how patient, bearing with, Christ is with us. My, He never gives up on us. Nothing can separate us from His love.

Booker T. Washington was the renowned African-American educator. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman.

Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely.

"It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

This is all possible because of what summarizes it all.

****The Summary – Christ's love.**

Humility, gentleness, patiently enduring, bearing with one another is all to be done in agape, Calvary love. In fact these four virtues are really just a description of what Christ's powerful supernatural love is all about. As I Corinthians 13:7. Love bears all things- a different word than in Ephesians 4:2, but it means the same thing.

What happens when believers in the local church walk worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus – with humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance? What does Ephesians 4:3 say?

4. Unity in the church, in our families, and among us as individuals is maintained when we let God's blessings motivate our lives in the power of God's Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

When we exercise Christ's humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance of one another, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is preserved or guarded in our individual lives, our family lives, and in our church life.

In fact as we show humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance in our relationships with one another in the power of God's Spirit we are being diligent continually (endeavoring earnestly) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, or demonstrating that we are bound together in peace with God vertically and with each other horizontally.

God gives us the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It is up to each of us in the power of the Holy Spirit to seek to keep that unity through humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearing one another.

Of course, Satan doesn't like seeing followers of Christ enjoying God's unity for it displays that Christ has come, He loves us and we love Him.

That's why we seek in the Spirit's power to accept one another in our differences, major on the majors, keep a forgiving spirit, and serve the Lord with enthusiasm.

Perhaps A.W. Tozer summarizes Ephesians 4:1-3 when he wrote:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

May we always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Then, regardless of what happens in our relationships, we will keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

