

Learning To Put Feet To Your Prayers.



Ephesians 4:1-6

October 2, 2005

R. C. Sproul, in his book, Knowing Scripture, told about a very progressive school outside of Boston where he had enrolled his daughter in kindergarten. He writes: “After a few weeks we received notification from the school that the principal was holding an open meeting for parents in order to explain the program and procedures employed in the kindergarten. At the meeting the principal carefully examined the daily schedule. He said: ‘*Don’t be alarmed if your child comes home and tells you that he was playing with puzzles or modeling clay in school. I can assure you that everything in the daily routine is done with purpose. From 9:00 a.m. to 9:17 a.m. the children play with puzzles that are carefully designed by orthopedic experts and are designed to develop the motor muscles of the last three fingers of the left hand*’ He went on to explain how every minute of the child’s day was planned with skilled precision to insure that everything was done with a purpose. I was duly impressed. At the end of his presentation the principal asked for questions. I raised my hand and said: ‘*I am deeply impressed by the careful planning that has gone into this program. I can see that everything is done with purpose in view. My question is: How do you decide which ‘purposes’ to employ? What final purpose do you use to decide the individual purposes? What is the overall purpose of your purposes? In other words, what kind of child are you trying to produce?*’” Sproul goes on to say: “The man turned white. And then scarlet, and in stumbling terms he replied, ‘*I don’t know; no one ever asked me that question.*’”

We might be tempted to laugh at that—but the truth is that unless we are seeking to understand and embrace God’s *big purpose*—we like that principal will lack a purpose for *our* purposes! We need to turn R.C.’s question around and apply it to ourselves. What is it that gets you up in the morning? What is it that drives you during the day—whether at home, or work—at school or at church? What is the PURPOSE behind *all your other purposes*? No other book in the world better answers that question than the book of Ephesians. This book is all about learning to live life on purpose—**God’s** purpose. Paul has been unfolding this purpose, this **grand narrative of redemption** in the first three chapters of Ephesians. God’s purpose is essentially *this*: To take a world that has been torn apart by sin and put it back together again under the rule of His Son, Jesus Christ—for *His* glory. Ephesians goes on to say that God is presently accomplishing this great plan of redemption through His church. He is taking men and women, boys and girls out of the rubble of man’s sin—and out of that rubble He is constructing a living, breathing Temple called the Church. It is through the Church that the world can look and see what is ultimately coming. Just think about that! Our lives are the **movie trailer** advertising the final episode of God’s epic plan of redemption!

And yet there seems to be a lot working against our personal embracing of this divinely cast role. In his book, It Takes A Church To Raise A Christian, Pastor Tod Bolsinger writes:

“More than any before us, an American today believes ‘I must write the script of my own life.’” The thought that such a script must be subordinated to the grand narrative of the Bible is a foreign one. Still more alarming is the idea that this surrender of our personal story to God’s story must be mediated by a community of fallen people we frankly don’t want getting in our way and meddling with our own hopes and dreams.”

Did you hear someone cry: “Ouch!?” How many times am I tempted to edit the script of my own life? Sometimes God’s script just seems downright messy! Trials. Conflicts. And people! I mean there are days where we could really love the church if it just weren’t for *people!* Seriously—do you ever think like that? If you do, then consider this: Sanitized scripts may seem comfortable for those playing the parts—but they will never get an audience. Comfort makes for lousy drama! Right!? Truth is—if you and I keep trying to re-write God’s script and re-casting our parts to fit our personal hopes and dreams instead of God’s great plan—our “wanna-be” mini-series is certain to get canceled.

And so Paul prays in Ephesians 3:14-21. And he shows *us* how to pray. Pray that God will give you eyes to see His great plan. And His great power to live out your part in that plan. As you listen to Paul’s prayer and begin to practice it in your own prayer life you learn to pray bigger and bigger. You learn to pray for His power in the way you deal with trials and problems. You learn to pray for a greater measure of His infinite love in the way you deal with conflicts. You learn to pray not for your own comfort—but for *His glory!* Did you learn that this week? Have you been aiming more that way in your prayers? I trust you have! And if you have not already—that you will this week!

But now we come to a new portion of the book of Ephesians. We move from our identity to our roles. From position to practice. From awe to action. From our heavenly calling to our earthly conduct. Let’s begin this new section in Ephesians 4. Tonight we will look at verses 1-6:

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

If God’s script calls for taking a world totally messed up by sin and **from** that mess doing a work in people’s hearts that forms them into a new entity called the Church—*what is your role?* What is your script for this assignment? You find it right here in these opening verses. Paul breaks it down even more in the remaining 2 ½ chapters. But the main things you need to know are in these six verses. First of all...

I. God *Wants* You To **Pursue** Unity (1, 3)

Paul begins in verse one by calling us to live out our identity. Who are we? We are sinners who have been chosen by God, reconciled to Him and to each other through the cross work of Christ:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

The original metaphor is lost in the NIV translation. Paul literally is saying: *Walk worthy* of your calling. He assumes you are already praying as he taught you to pray in the immediately preceding verses—and now he is saying that it's time to **put feet to your prayers!** Or to put it slightly differently: It is time to get your spiritual feet in line with your head!

Illustration: My soccer coach: “Jerry—Play your position!”

God commands you to live out who you are. He is summoning us to push our beliefs beyond a theoretical knowledge to *real time* practice.

Objection: Shouldn't we just expect this to happen? Isn't this just what Christians do?! It is what they *ought* to do by God's grace. But the doing is *not* automatic. Later on in this passage, we will see in Ephesians 4:22 that our default mode is to revert to our *old habits*. There must be a conscious application of the Gospel to our need for God's ever present strength and from that the faith needed to follow through with obedient action.

As if this wasn't clear enough, Paul adds in verse 3: “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*”

I draw your attention to the phrase: “**Make every effort.**” The word in the original language means to “take great pains.” One translation goes so far as to render this phrase: “**spare no effort.**” Wow. That's pretty strong wording. But notice—he is not saying that you are responsible to *cause* the peace to happen. In chapter 2, we learned that Christ has already done that. He is saying that obedient faith often requires some serious effort.

Example: Read Acts 2:42-47. Luke's snapshot of a day in the life of the early church. Looks really neat but.....

Excuses? It is at this point that our creativity starts to kick in and we become pretty good at coming up with excuses:

- “I just don’t have time for relationships.” (Then why are you here on earth?! You need to get back in touch with your purpose—and then start looking at your other purposes!)
- “I have been burnt so many times before in relationships” (That may be true. But you have the Gospel now—and you are in a church where we take its power and commands seriously).
- “I just hate dealing with any sort of conflict” (Jesus didn’t enjoy getting in the middle of conflict either—but He looked beyond it to a greater joy! Hebrews 12:2).
- “I am not very comfortable around people” (What are *you*?! A “person.” A person who was made to know God and to know and serve other people!).
- Key issue above all else: Don’t miss God’s drama!!!!

The fact that we struggle with excuses like these and others reminds us that the real problem with pursuing unity has as much to do with me on the inside as anything I have to deal with on the outside. Which brings us to the second truth in this text:

II. God Shows You Where Unity Must Begin (2).

Unity is so challenging because of the residual effects of sin. Every relationship this side of glory has the potential for something somewhere, sometime to go wrong. A misunderstanding. Forgetfulness. Impatience. And so God through Paul zeroes in on some important character qualities that are “non-negotiables” (absolute “musts”) for a redemptive relationship. Before I specifically get into these, I want to point out something very important. These qualities are “front-loaded.” That is Paul places them here at the beginning of this section on Christian life and practice because they are foundational to everything else he is going to be addressing in the remainder of Ephesians. To give a little more of a specific example of what I mean, I believe that *marriages* go wrong at Ephesians 4:2—not Ephesians 5:22! I also believe that if we are not committed to the character of Christ portrayed in these verses—we will fall flat on our faces when it comes to our spouses—or any other relationship for that matter. So what are these necessary ingredients for fostering redemptive relationships?

- A. Humility—The Greeks never used this word in a positive context. It is the opposite of man’s thinking because fallen man’s goal is to better himself. But the Gospel reveals that to be an impossible goal. It humbles us by reminding us of the depth of our sin while pointing us to the hope of a Savior who is *bigger* than our sin. It frees us from the illusion of our own goodness (which is actually nothing more than a fig-leaf covered nakedness) so we can be covered with the beautiful robes of Christ’s righteousness. And in the comfort of his forgiveness and acceptance, we are free to deal with our own sin and failures (Matt. 7:1-5). The freedom

to talk about my own sin and deal with it is a miraculous gift of God's Spirit that immediately begins to free up human relationships and at the same time begins to play out the script of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ before a watching world!

- B. Gentleness—This word is often translated with the word, “meekness” and is often confused with weakness. But it really means “*strength under control*.” Peter O’Brien, in his excellent commentary on Ephesians defines it as “the willingness to waive one’s rights.” (p. 278).

How would this look in a parenting relationship (which happens to be one of the relationships we are most tempted to use the “strength” of our position to motivate our children)? What would a *gentle* parent look like? Would certainly have order in the home—expectations spelled out along with appropriate consequences for disobedience because Proverbs says not to be unloving. Yet for every time you offer constructive criticism, you would be looking for ten occasions to offer words of encouragement!

- C. Patience—What does patience mean? To be humble and gentle for a *very long* time! It is practically expressed in the next word...
- D. Forbearance—Which means withholding what you think they may deserve.

When you put all these together, you have a snapshot of the character of Christ and a picture of exactly what He did for you and me. He used all His might and strength so we would not have to pay the penalty for our sin! And when we begin to put on His character in response to all that He is to us in the Gospel—something powerful begins to happen. We become actually do become an accurate portrayal—a trailer if you will of what God is planning to do when He finishes the work of redemption. We act out *His* glorious script—instead of our own!

But how can we do this? What hope do we have of participating in this kind of relationship with each other? That brings us to our final point...

III. God Has *Provided* All That *You Need* To Live Out Unity (4-6)

This is a fairly familiar section, but not always readily understood. What you see here appears to be seven great unities. (Notice the repetition of the word, ‘one’ seven times). But if you look at these unities more closely, you may notice that three of them are *Persons*—the **Persons of the Trinity**. And the other four unities have to do with our Christian experience in relation to all Three members of the Godhead.

Let me explain what I think I see here. Every blessing we have comes to us from the Triune God. Look at the first two words which are coupled together. There is *one body* and *one Spirit*. There may be many visible churches—some truer to historic Christianity than others—but there still is only *one body of*

Christ. Why? Because there is One Spirit who has baptized all true believers into that One invisible body—the Church. The blessing of being in this body is given us by the Holy Spirit who placed us into Christ’s body the moment He regenerated us.

Then there is one hope, one faith, and one baptism. Why? Because the Lord Jesus is the object of our hope and faith. And when we were baptized, we specifically identified with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is Jesus Christ in whom we have believed. Jesus Christ into whom we have been baptized, and Jesus Christ for whose coming we wait with expectant hope.

Finally, there is one Christian family that embraces all true believers because we have the same God and heavenly Father.

And it is no accident that all these Triune blessings appear in the context of our unity. What hope do we have that relationships in the Church can be what God designed them to be? These blessings are based on and connected to the three members of the Trinity.

It is as though Paul is saying: Just look at what the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit has done for you! Consider all that the Triune God has invested in His Church! You say—what do you mean? Simply this: ***That Christ hung on the cross for our sin. And when that happened, the Trinity as it were was ripped apart to give us our unity with the Trinity and peace with each other!!!*** The Triune God did all this in order to produce in you and me humility and gentleness, and patience and forbearance!

No wonder Paul says: “Spare no effort.” If God didn’t do so with His own Son—why should you and I be stingy with *our* lives?! You have nothing to lose but your own weak script. And *everything to gain by submitting to His!*

