

CHIEF MINISTRIES

May 2016

How then should we live here on this earth? How should we conduct ourselves? These are questions that Paul addresses in Ephesians 4-6, and we need to pay attention to the 2nd half of the letter as much as the 1st half. You see, our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20) and we have a heavenly standing in Jesus, but we are also in this world, and there are things that God requires of us while we are here - as beloved, redeeming children; as insiders, not as outsiders.

Peter describes our life on earth as the time of our exile (1 Peter 1:7) and he writes, *“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wages war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11)*. He also writes: *“And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that we’re ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (1 Peter 1:17-19)*

What he is saying is that fleshly, worldly things are not for us. They are at war with our heavenly calling and our new nature in the Messiah and because God has paid such a great price for our salvation we need to live our lives here with reverential fear.

In the same way, because of our lofty calling and our heavenly position in Jesus, Paul urges us to *“walk in a manner worthy of the calling in which you have been called.” (Ephesians 4:5)*. This was a repeated theme in his letters: *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”.... “From the day we heard [about your faith] we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God... We exhorted each of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory” (Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12)*

This means that we can walk in a manner that is unworthy of our high calling, and if Paul could exhort the Thessalonians as to how they *“ought to walk and to please God” (1 Thessalonians 4:1)* - as they had already been doing, in keeping with his instructions - then it is possible to walk in a way that does not please God. And if Paul could urge the Ephesians not to *“grieve the Holy Spirit of God”* by their conduct, words, and attitudes (Ephesians 4:30) then it is possible to live and act in such a way that we do grieve the Holy Spirit.

But this is what we need to keep in mind: Paul and Peter are telling us these things because of our union with Jesus. They are exhorting us to please God in thought, word and deed because we are His sons and daughters, because we are redeemed and forgiven, because we are new creations, because we are spiritually situated in heavenly places, because we are objects of His grace, not His wrath.

That’s why the author of Hebrews explains that when God disciplines us, He is treating us as children: *“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives” (Proverbs 3:11-12)*. *“It is for discipline that we have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Hebrews 12:5-8)*

While some teachers today have done a great job at painting an incredible picture of what it means for us to be “in Christ” as the object of God’s lavish grace, they don’t present the rest of the picture, namely, that we must walk this calling out here on earth and sometimes we fall short of God’s ideal and displease Him.

But that is no reason for us to hang our heads in despair and feel condemned. Not at all!! Everything we read in Ephesians 1 and 2 is true, and that is who we are in Jesus. God is simply saying to us, *“In light of what I have done for you, and in light of your exalted standing as children of the heavenly Father and blood bought, blood washed saints - holy ones - I want you to be very careful with how you live.”* This is the basis for Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians: *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ^{v17} Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ^{v18} and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty. ^{7:1} Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 ESV)*

We know for a fact that there were things that took place in Corinth that displeased the Lord - He certainly didn’t love everything He saw there. He certainly wasn’t thrilled with everything His people were doing there, (look around where you’re at right now) and He certainly wasn’t just singing their praises - but that didn’t mean they weren’t His precious, beloved children. It meant that because they had these promises, they needed to separate themselves from *“every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”*

Why can’t we accept these two-fold spiritual realities at the same time? We are dearly beloved by the Father and we are called to please Him. We are seated in heavenly places with Jesus and we need to live lives that reflect that on earth. God’s considers us to be redeemed saints and He sees our faults and blemishes. As Jesus Himself expressed with unmistakable clarity. *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19)*

Divine reproof, divine discipline, and the divine call to repent which means to turn away from sin and turn to God are all a sign of His love. Why can’t we embrace that?

I’m all for the words of the teacher or pastor who says, you need to hear your heavenly Father’s praises. He is thrilled with you. He is beside Himself with love for you and takes enormous pleasure in you.”

Yet, according to the word, our heavenly Father is not always praising us and does not always take an enormous pleasure in us, but as long as we are His children, we need not cower in fear and hopelessness. When He corrects us or rebukes us or disciplines us, it is because He loves us and is committed to us. That is the goodness, and that is simply part of having a relationship with the Lord.

The fact that He is not the accuser of the brethren. He is not the condemner of the weak. He is not the author of despair. He is for us, not against us, and that’s why He speaks correction into our lives. Can you feel the father’s love - even when it is stern - in all of this? Maybe it’s in what you’re going through right now. Can you find a place of security in which you can freely confess your sins to God and freely receive fresh cleansing and freely respond to the conviction of the Spirit? And can you take hold of the fact that He is the center of attention rather than us? (In other words, we live for His glory and we belong to Him rather than Him being our celestial bellboy)

Let’s consider some of Paul’s words to the Corinthians; whom he addresses as *“those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2)*. He has glowing words of praise for them and expresses great confidence about their future, and in speaking this over them, he is certainly expressing God’s heart. *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ^{v5} that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge— ^{v6} even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—^{v7} so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ^{v8} who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:4-8 ESV)*

Yet, Paul also had sharp rebuke for the Corinthian believers, and in this too he was reflecting God’s heart. Put another way, God was hardly pleased with some of what He saw in His beloved people, and He was certainly not always singing their praises.

Paul wrote, *“In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good”* (1 Corinthians 11:17). And in terms of abuses at the Lord’s Supper, he asked, *“don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not?”* (Verse 22). Can we really believe that Paul, the source of the grace message for today was so out of tune with God here that God was praising the Corinthians and Paul was not?

Because of the sacredness of the Lord’s Supper, which commemorates the body and blood of Jesus, Paul issued this strong warning:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. v28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. v29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. v30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. v31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. v32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 ESV)

Did God “love what He saw” when the Corinthians were getting sick and even dying because they took part of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner? Was He “thrilled” with them at that time?

When Paul heard about the incestuous sin that was taking place in their midst, he wrote, *“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. v2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2 ESV)*. He even ordered that the offending, unrepentant brother be delivered *“to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”* (verse 5 ESV).

Perhaps the Corinthians should have said to Paul, “Why are you so upset with us? You are such a petty legalist! Don’t you know that our Father is so thrilled with us and always singing our praises? Don’t you understand that there is nothing you could ever do to disappoint Him? You really need to get a revelation of grace!”

Joseph Prince wrote, “Stop examining yourself and searching your heart for sin. Remember that when someone takes his sin offering to the priest, the priest does not examine him. He examines the sin offering.” Yet, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, *“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup”* (1 Corinthians 11:28) and in 2 Corinthians 13:5 he wrote, *“Examine yourselves”*.

And what about Jesus, the Son of God, the very image of God, the exact representation of His character (Colossians 1, Hebrews 1). The one who said that ever saw Him saw the Father (John 14:9)? It looks like He too didn’t agree with this out of balance teaching.

If God always sees us as perfectly holy and righteous in His sight and is never looking at our faults, why did Jesus rebuke fire out of the seven congregations in Asia Minor, saying repeatedly *“I know your works,”* after which He enumerated the good things they had done and the sins they were committing? Can you imagine how shocked these believers would have been to hear these words from the Lord if they had been fed a steady diet of “don’t worry about how your living, you came down to the altar once, you don’t have to come down here in repent again, no, once was enough”.

Perhaps they would have said, “Lord, why are You rebuking us? Why are You reprimanding us of our sins? Why are You threatening us with judgment? And why do You sound disappointed with us? We were taught that You don’t see our faults, that You’re always thrilled with us and there is nothing we could ever do to disappoint You! Jesus, don’t You understand grace?”

To the believers at Ephesus Jesus said, *“I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first”* (Revelation 2:4); to the believers in Pergamum He said, *“I have a few things against you,”* before listing His grievances with them (verse 14); to the believers in Thyatira He said, *“I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols”* (verse 20).

Now some of these wolves in sheep's clothing might say, "Jesus says, I see each of you as beautiful, holy and righteous, and I love what I see!" The Son of God Himself takes strong exception to this. That's why He said to the believers in Sardis, "*I know your works. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God*" (Revelation 3:1, 2)

Jesus does look at our works, and sometimes He finds them incomplete, calling us to repent because of His great love for us. As for always seeing us as perfect, nothing could be farther from the truth for the believers of Laodicea, to whom He said, "*I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say I am rich, I have prospered and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked*" (verse 15- 17)

But here's what we need to remember: God still loves us deeply even when He does see our flaws and failures, and rather than cast us off or condemn us, He calls us back to Himself. That's the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit's conviction and the reason for the Lord's loving rebuke (see again Revelation 3:19; "*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*")

Think about it for a minute, as a parent do you have to see your child as perfect and without fault to love him or her? Do you say to them when they have a bad day, "You're not my child and I'm not your parent!?" Then why do we need to erect an un-biblical theology that states that God doesn't see our faults and blemishes in order for us to feel loved and secure? We are accepted because of Jesus, and that's the ground of our security. Now it is our holy privilege to walk worthy of that high calling, drawing near to God in confidence, "*with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*" (Hebrews 10:22)

And let's remember that to each of these congregations addressed in Revelation 2-3, Jesus gave wonderful words of encouragement, including precious promises to overcomers (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12), culminating with verse 21 in chapter 3: *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne.* And those who overcome certainly brought joy to the Father's heart. Without a doubt, they were the ones who pleased Him! Paul wrote: *and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* (Ephesians 5:10). *So whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please Him* (2 Corinthians 5:9). *So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.* (Colossians 1:10). *Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more* (1 Thessalonians 4:1). *But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts* (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

And so we can look at the 2nd half of Ephesians (chapters 4-6), Paul gives us specific instructions on how we are to live to please God, including these exhortations, just in chapter 4: *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is one body and one spirit -- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call* (verses 1-3). *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ* (verse 15). *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds* (verse 17). *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as good for building up, as fits the occasion, and it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* (Verses 25-32)

Nowadays, when you call believers to live like this, you're immediately charged with being into "sin management" and "behavior modification", whereas Paul's heart and mine is to say, Jesus has wonderfully redeemed us and transformed us by His grace and mercy, and now we belong to Him. Let's live lives that are worthy of His great

name. Let's become like Him in thought, word and deed! Let's stop living the old way of life, and let's live in the newness of life in the Spirit!"

That's Paul's whole emphasis, as he continues in Ephesians 5 with specific instructions based on our calling to imitate God: *therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness or foolish talk or crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be Thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, and idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-10 ESV).*

And so with all respect to the good intentions of some of these teachers both in the free world - yes, even some mega-church pastors on TV and those in the prison system who purport themselves to be "the best teachers on the unit", I'll stay with Jesus and Paul and the rest of the Scriptures here, confident that I have been accepted in Jesus, the beloved son (Ephesians 1:1-6), that the One who began a good work in me will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6), and the Father has lavished His grace on me and called me His own (Ephesians 2:4-7), and that no one can bring a condemning accusation against me, since Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34)

Because of this we make it our business to please Him, bringing Him joy, not grief.... pride not pain... always remembering the depth of His kindness towards us. For, "*as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust*" (Psalms 103:13-14). And perhaps the most amazing thing of all is this: when you get to know Him intimately, He is really not that hard to please.

Doesn't your heart just burst with a holy desire to bring Him joy and to walk worthy of your high calling as a child of the Father, seated with Jesus in heavenly places? With Paul, I desire to say at the end of my life, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" (2 Timothy 4:7) And I can't wait to hear him say on that day, "*well done, my good and faithful servant..... Let's celebrate together!*" (Matthew 25:21)

I am driven and captured by love. Are you?

Chief

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