

To the Saints at Kossuth Street . . . A Church Grows

Ephesians 4:1-3

February 6, 2011

Intro. Last Sunday morning we referred to one of the stated values that give direction to our church . . .

Dependence is our strength.

Therefore we rely on prayer and God's Spirit to empower our lives and ministry.

Here are a few more . . .

God's glory is our concern.

Therefore we focus our lives, message and ministry on his supremacy and beauty.

Love is our passion.

Therefore our greatest delight is simply loving God and loving people.

Years ago we expressed our unity by expressing both our understanding of and commitment to the gospel in these carefully worded value statements. Values are simply truth expressed in life. We all agree that God's glory is the highest of all truth statements . . . everything is all about him. The compelling nature of truth, especially the truth of who God is and what he has done, causes us to use the word 'therefore' to reflect the undeniable connection between what we believe and how we live.

Consider these value statements . . .

The Super Bowl is just a game.

Therefore we wear our Steeler jerseys to church and shout 'go Steelers' in the place of 'amen.'

Generosity is out standard.

Therefore we encourage everyone to give 10% of their income and use the rest for themselves.

They appear nonsensical because there is an obvious lack of connection between behavior and belief. The nonsensical lack of connection between behavior and belief is what continues to be your greatest challenge as a child of the living God. Thus, the greatest focus on the church growing in the NT is that of closing the gap in our lives between behavior and belief.

We come to the mid-point of our study of Ephesians. If we were to summarize the message of the book in the form of the value statements we have been considering it would look something like . . .

God's blessings in Christ are graciously, breathtakingly overwhelming.

Therefore we commit ourselves to reflecting God's love and grace in our daily lives and relationships.

Let's read **Ephesians 1:1-6** to see this compelling connection between our beliefs and our behavior.

Note the piling up of terms and concepts that come together to beg, urge, motivate and compel us to greater commitment to reflect God's glory in lives . . . the way we talk, love, listen and serve . . . in our friendships, marriages, anger, jobs and parenting. In the text Paul urges our compliance, underscores the appeal with his own example, uses the term 'all' to remind us no half hearted effort will do and commands us to be eager or make every possible effort to maintain unity. But this is no appeal to

human effort alone, it is only after the teaching of chapters 1-3 that we can begin to understand the source of the power and grace to cause and sustain any type of commitment from us.

This is not a blatant invitation for your best efforts or for you to find something about Christianity that works for you or to dig in and continue doing what you have been doing. The call to connecting your behavior to your belief is a fresh call to a new and greater commitment of your heart and life because the blessings from God in Christ and the glory of God in the church never become static or stale.

Is greater commitment to Christ possible in your life today? If so, what would that look like? How would you ever pull it off if you wanted too? A church that honors God grows. It grows in commitment to match individual and corporate behavior to held beliefs about God. The remainder of the Ephesian letter is about matching behavior to belief. It is a powerful way to grow.

We have been taught and exposed to the kind of spiritual blessings that are only found in 'heavenly places.' Now we are being called to a response of commitment. Let's tell the truth about commitment to Christ and the Gospel.

Your commitment to Christ and his church . . .

1. Is a reflection of your understanding of God's calling on your life. 4:1

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

Calling refers to what God has done in, for and to you. It is the divine initiative. The reminder of God's action in our midst. Cmp 1:18; 4:4

How do you answer the question of what God has done and is doing in your life? That represents your understanding of God's active call on your life.

5 quick answers to what is God's calling on your life:

- God chose you before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless with him.
- God adopted you as his son through Christ for his own pleasure.
- God redeemed you for himself and forgave you through Christ's blood by his grace.
- God revealed to you the plan for eternity – all things in and under Christ.
- God has given you an inheritance guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

These answers represent a portion of the truth found in 1:1-14. If you include all three chapters that the 'therefore' of 4:1 points to, the volume of what God has done for us by grace in Christ becomes staggering.

Small, stagnant or powerless commitment in your behavior to reflect God's glory in his church and his Son is due to a lack of appreciation for God's blessings . . . his calling in your life.

Your commitment to Christ and his church . . .

1. Is a reflection of your understanding of God's calling on your life.

2. Will only grow as your understanding of God's calling on your life grows.

4:1

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you . . .

Note that the appeal is based on your having just been exposed to the truths describing God's calling in chapters 1-3. The urging for life change is rooted in God's gracious calling.

Note that the appeal expects you to offer a positive response. There is an expectation of more than just enthusiastic cooperation. This matching of behavior to belief almost seems like the required minimum for the child of God.

Three elements found in Paul's appeal that are necessary in your life for genuine growth in matching behavior to belief . . .

- Teaching of truth about God's calling on your life.
- Spirit dependent disciplined effort.
- A model of spiritual growth to follow.

You can grow and change . . . speech, anger, laziness, marriage, parenting, worry, bitterness, forgiveness, humility, gentleness . . . it all begins with knowing God better.

3. Require a set of values that are produced supernaturally by God's Spirit.

4:2-3

Note that the qualities or concerns of the worthy walk/behavior are not just difficult, they are impossible. We find each one of these both unnatural and many times uninteresting. Some of these behaviors can be mimicked and modeled for periods of time but genuine Christ-like behavior is only possible with outside help inside you.

Look at the 4 behaviors that describe the life connected to God's calling . . .

- Humility viewed as weakness/servility; lowliness Phil. 2:3-4
- Gentleness meekness, mildness; not overly impressed with own importance; Gal. 5:22-23; not touchy, resentful, retaliatory; 2Cor. 10:1 – Jesus
- Patience bearing up under pressure in hard times; makro-thumos, long or slow to heat up; Gal. 5:22-23; bearing w/one another expands meaning of patience; 1Cor. 13:4; 'in love' serves as bookends (1:2) to this section of the letter.
- Maintain unity no passivity, quietism or wait & see . . . pursue and protect what the Spirit has created in and among us in Christ Jesus. You are at peace (the bonding agent, glue) with God and each other . . . act that way.

Be eager – make every effort, be diligent, zealous.

Summary

Your commitment to Christ and his church . . .

1. Is a reflection of your understanding of God's calling on your life.
2. Will only grow as your understanding of God's calling on your life grows. 4:1
3. Require a set of values that are produced supernaturally by God's Spirit. 4:2-3

Take Aways

1. Acknowledge an area of your life where behavior and belief do not match up.
2. Determine with God's help to find and submit to discipleship in that area of your life.
3. Repent and seek God's help to battle your proud insensitivity to his urgent appeals.
4. Turn from your sin and cry out to God today for him to save you from your sin through faith in Christ.

Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-16 as a group. Glance over chapters 4-6 of Ephesians listing the various topics or issues that are addressed. Discuss/evaluate the statement that 4:1 serves as the topical sentence for the rest of the book of Ephesians.
2. Review the value statements from the introduction. What makes a good value statement helpful? What makes a value statement nonsensical? Share your perspective on behavior matching belief in your own life and in the larger community of the church? What is Paul's message regarding behavior and belief?
3. What is God's calling on your life . . . what does it mean? Review the five quick answers regarding God's calling on your life in the notes and then list five more that you find in 1:15 – 3:21. (example . . . have access to God, 2:18; raised and seated with Christ 2:6) Have group members share their personal evaluation of their understanding of God's calling on their lives as taught in Eph. 1-3.
4. What is the expected positive response that 4:1-3 is pointed at? What would that response look like or sound like in your terms, life or words? What does a nonresponse imply about the reader? What concerns you or causes you fear about responding positively to the appeal of 4:1-4?
5. Describe how it is possible to be something (humble, gentle, patient, maintain unity) when it is impossible for you to behave that way? How do you typically describe commitment to Christ and his church . . . in terms of what? How should the values of 4:2-3 reshape or expand your understanding of commitment?
6. How can your small group grow in the three elements of growth and change described in point 2 of the notes?