

## EPHESIANS #52 4:1 1-6-13

### VITAL CONNECTIONS

(Ephesians 4) New year, old book. For some of you a new year means venturing out into places you have never been before. For others, it means returning to places you never should have left. We return this morning to our ongoing study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We have already spent more than fifty Sundays learning from this portion of God's word and I am happy to pick up where we left off in August. For some of you our study this morning will be very familiar. Our text is Ephesians 4:1 on the unity of the church and it is a major passage of Scripture that we cover in our New Member's Classes. There is no other single chapter of Scripture so packed with valuable instruction about the church. If this is familiar ground to us it is so because it is such rich soil for growing up the vineyard of God. **1-3** *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, <sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Let's organize our thoughts this way today. We will glean from this passage two important connections that we must diligently maintain in our thinking and our lives. The first of those two is the connection between doctrine and life, between teaching and practice. And the word that makes the connection is the conjunction, *therefore*. Now, when you come across the word *therefore* you need to ask, "what is the *therefore*, there for?" What purpose does it serve? And it serves to link all that came before with all that comes after, in a way of cause and effect. You see, Ephesians 4 begins a whole new section of this epistle. For three chapters Paul has been setting before us the riches of God's grace in the gospel of His Son. He has told us all about what our Savior has done for us. At the end of it he bursts forth in a doxology of praise. And then he transitions into the practical portion of his epistle. Ephesians can be easily divided into a doctrinal or teaching section and a practical or exhortative section. The hinge between the two is the word, *therefore*. You know what that means. It means *for that reason*, or *because of that*. Paul is saying that everything he is about to tell us in chapters four, five and six flow logically and necessarily from what he has been teaching in the first three chapters. The practical and the doctrinal are not disjointed at all but are as connected as the river is to the spring. One feeds into the other. And, in this case, which one is the spring? Where does the river of Christian living have to begin? In the spring of Christian faith and teaching. This is so very important to understand and appreciate. Some there are in the church who

want to skip all the doctrine and go straight into practical how-tos of the Christian life. They have no use for the first three chapters of Ephesians and for much of the Bible. They love Proverbs. They love James and certain other portions that tell them how to live, but they fail to see the value in all this teaching on the nature of God or man and the way of salvation and the glory that is to come. That kind of thinking that despises doctrine is a major flaw in much of modern Christianity. This last year one of our members critiqued my preaching by saying that my sermons have not been very practical. My response is twofold. On the one hand I decided to work on that. On the other I have to say, "Hey, look at what I was preaching on." I spent 2012 in the first couple of chapters of Ephesians. The emphasis there is not on what we should do for God but on what God has done for us. There weren't a lot of how-to sermons in 2012. No, it may not be very directly practical. But listen, until we grasp what God has done for us we are not ready to do anything for him. Until we know the doctrine we aren't ready to live the life. If you try to do Christian deeds without a Christian mind you are doomed to failure and frustration. From the doctrines of God's word we get direction. From the doctrines of God's word we get motivation.

It is precisely at the hinge point of motivation that this entire epistle swings. The essence of Christian theology is grace; the essence of Christian ethics is gratitude. And the gratitude, the motivation to live Christianly, comes from an understanding of and appreciation for the grace of Christ. We see the same movement of thought in Romans 12. There Paul says in verse 1 *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.* What is the motivation for laying down my body? What makes this self-sacrifice a reasonable service of worship? It is the mercies of God. It's like the hymn writer says, *O Jesus, Lord and Savior I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thy atonement didst give Thyself for Me.* Another one says: *Oh, living, dying, let me bring my strength, my solace from this spring. That He who lives to be my King once died to be my Savior.* The spring of Christian living is our faith in the gospel. Don't ever despise that. Eating doesn't get much work done, but you won't work for long without doing it. Such learning is essential for spiritual health. In fact, for some of you (all of us really), there is a huge gap existing between what you know you should do and what you actually do. That gap exists, in part, because we know more about what to do than why to do. Some of you highly practical types may want to get your mind more in Ephesians 1-3 which can set you aflame with love for the One who has chosen you, adopted you, sealed you and died in your place.

But the hinge turns both ways doesn't it? *Therefore* points us back to the value of what has been taught, but it also points us ahead to the necessity of what will follow. Knowing the doctrine isn't the end-all for believers. The spring must flow into the river and the river is the life, the daily, practical outworking of Christian faith. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says we must not stop at the end of chapter three. The word *therefore* bids us to go on because genuine Christianity is not only a faith, it is a lifestyle. This pulpit ministry is dedicated to helping us grow through the consistent exposition and application of God's word. Not just exposition and not just application. But exposition that goes on to show the difference it makes in our lives. That is exactly how it ought to be. And this isn't something to leave to chance. I could say, "Well, I'll just teach the doctrines and leave it up to you to apply it." Or, a more spiritual tone would be, "I teach the word and let the Holy Spirit apply it." That could come from either laziness or cowardice on the teacher's part. Paul is guilty of neither. He sets forth to tell us what Christian living is going to look like. He does more than just say, "Now, look to Jesus for guidance. Let the Lord live thru you." No no. Some people think that is what the Christian life is like. No rules, just kind of follow your heart wherever it may lead. That is neither biblical nor practical. I mean, if we left it like that, how many of you would find yourself, say, around the first of April going to your spouse and saying, "Honey, I feel led to give a large check to the federal government this year. Why they've done so much for us, the lovely parks that we enjoy, the highways, the nice programs for the needy - let's just give them several thousand dollars. In fact, let's borrow to do it. Something in me just really wants to do this." That's not the way it works is it? You pay taxes because its the rule. And Christians have rules too. Some folks don't like me saying that. They want you to know that Christianity is about a relationship with God, not about rules. For the most part I agree with that. The relationship with God is central. But – every relationship I know of has certain rules that govern that relationship. The Bible calls them laws, commandments, precepts, and, if you read the Bible very long at all you discover that there are plenty of these that govern our relationship with God. They are fairly detailed and they apply to you every single day that you live. And, get this, to those who enjoy a grace-based relationship with God, those rules are wonderful!

Let me see, if I can sum up what I'm saying under this first heading by telling you a story from my life. For two years I attended the University of Florida in Gainesville. My last day in Gainesville I will never forget. I packed up everything I owned in my big Chrysler Newport. And then I went in to pray, there by the bed where I prayed for two years. I thought of all that God had

done for me in those two years, the wonderful things He taught me, the tremendous friends I had made. I was overwhelmed with gratitude and began to weep. I cried and cried and cried, for about 45 minutes. I was just blown away with God's grace to me. Finally, I pulled myself together and drove home, singing the entire 40 minutes back to Ocala my hometown. It was an incredible time. When I got to my mother's no one was there. I remember sitting in the living room, thinking about what I had just experienced. I said, "Lord, that was awesome. But now what?" Have you ever been at that place? God's answer to my question was that now you are to show this great love which you feel for me in daily, detailed disciplined obedience. Hah! That's the full expression of this Jesus thing. It begins with knowledge. It goes to the heart and affects the emotions, but then it takes on even greater substance when it becomes a daily approach to living. But listen. You gotta take the whole package.

The application of our first point is this: Pursue balance ®. Well-rounded maturity is what I mean. I think you'll get the point here. I would like to suggest that there are, in the Christian world, believers of three types. Seventeen years ago my wife and I attended a certain charismatic renewal meeting at a church in our community. It was an hour of energetic and emotional praise, followed by lively testimonies, fervent preaching and then a long time of unusual, experiential Christianity on the back side. I was blown away by it all, and left there with all kind of thoughts running through my head. I thought of the different Christian groups I had been with and how distinctive they were. There is the very Presbyterian crowd. These are the folks from our denomination, conservative Presbyterians with informal but dignified, controlled, expressions of worship. We are a people who love the word, and love to be taught. We like to worship too, but the emotion is not exactly front and center if you know what I mean. The conservative Presbyterian brand of Christianity tends to center on doctrine. How different the charismatics, the pentecostals! Among them, you find a real hunger for Christian experience. They seek for a piety that grasps the love of God in the heart and is expressive. Their brand of faith tends more toward the mystical and emotional. Then there is a third group I have been with. By virtue of my home-school connections and other opportunities I have often been among those greatly influenced by the work of Bill Gothard. Gothard's emphasis is on neither doctrine or experience, but on practical Christian living. Everything in his organization is how-tos. How to win the hearts of your children, how to influence your city, how to overcome anger. This is their big thing - principles for living. Now I mention these three groups - all of which have a great deal to commend them - to give you some handle on

where you may be. Each of these groups represent a particular, legitimate biblical concern. Doctrine is vital, real experience is vital and so is practical Christian living. Balance means well-rounded maturity, means that your life includes each of these elements in proper proportion and emphasis. The cognitive, the affective, and the practical. Beliefs, emotions, actions. Mind, heart, will. You can't neglect doctrine for the sake of experience and practice. You can't neglect practice for the sake of experience or doctrine. You got it? Balance is key. So, the doctrine-hounds, the persons who cares only about right doctrine and teaching the Bible, are imbalanced. Their lives often lack real fervor for worship and witness. They may have their eschatology down but lack any wisdom on how to lead their families. Then you have the experience-hound. This person jumps from one meeting to the next, one fad to the next, looking for something deeper, something more, something with a greater charge. In the looking they find some good stuff, some good stuff, but they don't develop a theological foundation and their lives are often chaotic and fruitless. Then there is the how-to hound. The practical guy who wants just the rules, just the bottom line, but his doctrinal ignorance and lack of intimacy with the Father leaves him ill-equipped to face temptation. He becomes imbalanced and shallow. You see the problems that arise? This imbalance is often reflected in worship styles. Some come to church primarily to learn doctrine, just meat for them, while others want just sweets - they want to sing and share a lot. The third group wants neither meat nor sweets really. They just want some fast food how-tos so they can get on with the business of living. Different ones of us naturally flow to certain streams. That is why it is good to know yourself, where you tend to get off track, and to pursue balance in your spiritual life.

OK, take a deep breath and move now to look at the second connection of Ephesians 4:1. This is the connection between calling and life ®. *1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.* The connecting word here is the word "worthy." It means fitting or suitable. The exhortation is toward a lifestyle that fits with something. What is that something? Well. *Philippians 1:27a conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.* There Paul wants us living a life that is in harmony with the gospel we preach. When I was ordained I took a vow saying that I would endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the gospel by my manner of life. Do you understand what that means? Its the same thing that church members commit to when you promise to live as becometh followers of Christ. The opposite of the word "becoming" is the word "tacky." When a decoration or a suit of clothes is out of place we say it is "tacky." It is unfit, unsuitable and therefore unworthy. Now, we

all know how ugly it is when an individual who preaches the pure word of God betrays that message by a life of gross impurity. It is worse than wearing stripes with plaids. Such a person is walking in a manner that is unworthy of the gospel. I Thessalonians 2:12 *walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.* When we take the Lord's name upon ourselves we become representatives of His kingdom and His character. There is a serious responsibility connected with that. People will make judgments about our God by what they see in us. So the idea here is to live a life that fits with the gospel, that fits with the God we call *Father*. We are to be holy as our Father in heaven is holy.

With that understanding, go back to Ephesians 4:1. Here it says we should walk worthy of what? Of our calling. © This is one of those terms used often in the New Testament with respect to salvation, but it is not a term many of us understand that well. Look at it with me in the New Testament. II Timothy 1:8b-9a *join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,<sup>9</sup> who has saved us and called us with a holy calling.* You'll see right away that believers are passive in this calling business. We are the called. God is the Caller. II Peter 1:10ab *be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.* Notice there the connection that exists between being called and being chosen. They are closely related concepts. Really I would say that those who are chosen are the ones God calls. Now, in a sense, God calls all men to salvation by the proclamation of the gospel. There is that outward call. But that is not the call that secures our salvation. The call that distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever is a calling in the heart. It is the powerful drawing of a man to the Savior by the Spirit. You know the verse, "Many are called but few are chosen." What that means is that many receive the outward call, but only a portion of those receive the inward call of God. Many women heard Paul preach in Acts 16 but it was only Lydia who was drawn to the truth by the Spirit. She received the effectual call of God and was saved. Look further at the book of Romans 1:6-7a *you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints.* Romans 8:30 *these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.* The predestined, the called, the justified are all one tight group. Everyone God chose he got around to calling. Everyone he calls believes and is justified. I Corinthians 1:9 *God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* Understand that we are called out of darkness into what? Light. Out of sin, into holiness. Out of alienation into fellowship with the Lord. This is glorious. I Corinthians 1:26-27 *consider your calling, brethren,*

*that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup> but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.* You see again the connection between choosing and calling. And please understand that this calling is out of something bad and into something really, really good. It is a calling by grace unto holiness ®. And so we must, we must order everything in our lives according to this call. Everything we do should be designed to fit what God has made us to be. We have a gracious calling so we must be gracious people. We have a holy calling so we must be holy people. Anything else would not be worthy, would not fit, would not adorn but instead detract from the beauty of God's work. So, the goal of our moral conduct is simply a harmony with what God has done for us, a walk that fits our talk, a life that fits our faith.

I close with my Matherville story that many of you have heard. But it works. When I was in seminary in Jackson, Mississippi I had opportunity to preach every other weekend in some little country church in rural Mississippi. These churches could not afford their own pastor, or were between pastors, and looked to the seminarians to fill their pulpits. It was great for guys like me who needed the experience it supplied. So, one week I was assigned to preach in a town called Matherville. I had never been to Matherville and since it was a three hour drive I figured that, instead of wearing my suit all that way, I would just bring my suit along and change when I arrived at the church. So, for the long drive I wore my winter, bum-around-the house pants. These pants were old off-white bell-bottoms that were badly faded. The zipper on these pants had turned completely inside out. The head of the zipper was gone and had been replaced by a paper clip. In addition, there was a huge ink stain on my left pocket from a pen that had once exploded in there. This is what I wore around the house on cooler days. My plan, you see, was to stop when I got to Matherville and change into my suit at a McDonalds or something. But when I arrived in Matherville I found there was nothing open there at all. Not to worry. I figured I would just change at the church while they were having Sunday School. Sure enough I arrived during their Sunday School hour, slipped unnoticed into the restroom, with my Navy blue pin-stripe suit only to discover that inside my jacket there was a vest, but no pants. My first thought was, "I have no pants." But then I realized, "Oh yeah, I've got these things." Boy oh boy, was I ever a sight! Here I was meeting these folks wearing my nice navy 3-piece minus one important piece. Suffice it to say, that my outfit didn't match. It was not becoming. What I had down here was not worthy of what I had up here.

I reflected later about how similar that is to many so-called Christians. What they say looks so good, so nice, but how they live, what they do doesn't match. Instead of beauty and harmony there is clashing and discord. Brethren, these things ought not to be. You must insure that there is a connection between your doctrine and your life, and your calling and your doing. Where these are disconnected, repentance is needed. Confession, acknowledgement of our sin – maybe our hypocrisy-- and then a fervent appeal to a gracious Savior to bring correction and coordination. As Paul calls us to practical Christianity this is where he begins. As those called of the Lord, loved by the Lord, we pursue a balanced spiritual life and a blessed agreement, a glad harmony between what we, by grace, are and what we do.