

II. PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE EPHESIANS EPHESIANS 4:1-6:20

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INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S CHALLENGE EPHESIANS 4:1

Like most of Paul's letters, Ephesians contains two main sections. The first section is doctrinal, and the second section is practical.

In the doctrinal section of Ephesians, Paul explained the significance of the prayer he was praying for them. Then he recorded the content of his prayer for the Ephesians. In his prayer, he revealed that he was praying for the same blessing to be granted to all saints. He offered his prayer in behalf of all believers of his day and of every day since. It applies to all believers today. His prayer probably was the most breathtaking and far-reaching prayer ever prayed. The burden of Paul's prayer was that all believers be granted the spiritual strength to understand that God's goal in giving salvation to people is to eventually bring everything in the whole created cosmos into the unity and harmony he intended for the world to enjoy in the beginning. Paul prayed about a magnificent goal that is going to be fulfilled in the distant future, but he was eager for believers to understand it in advance. He prayed for God to open the eyes of believers' hearts to enable them to see and understand the ultimate end of God's plan of salvation.

Though Paul wanted the Ephesians and all believers to understand that a superb new world awaits believers at the End, his prayer was not starry-eyed and impractical. It has a practical application to the daily lives of all believers. When we know the goal to which our lives are headed, it inspires us to live today in a way that is worthy of what we eventually will become. It gives us hope and strength to be faithful until that day comes. Therefore, Paul followed his exalted prayer with practical instructions concerning the kind of life that is worthy of the splendor toward which believers are headed. In chapters 4-6, he presented a practical challenge for all believers to live daily in a way that is worthy of the ultimate harmony toward which our salvation is leading.

1. *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you (4:1a)*
2. *To walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called (4:1b).*

Paul began the practical section of his letter to the Ephesians with a challenge that encompasses everything he was about to say in the remainder of this section. He challenged them to walk in a way that was worthy of the high calling Jesus had given to them.

Paul based his challenge on his condition as a prisoner. He had just stated that he was a prisoner of Jesus for their sakes, so his challenge was based on that compelling fact. Since he became a prisoner because of his effort to bring glory to them, he had a right to appeal to them to use their freedom to accomplish that for which he was in prison. His

challenge had a powerful impact on the Ephesians, and it should have an equally powerful impact on us today.

Paul's challenge had to do with how believers walk. However, he had much more in mind than a person's gait or physical movements while walking. By their walk he meant their way of living every day. As they walked and lived each day, they were to behave in a way that demonstrated the goal and purpose for which Jesus had called them. That purpose was to restore unity to the whole creation.

Paul had gone to the Ephesians to take God's call to them. The call was a call to trust Jesus and receive His salvation. Paul had explained that the salvation to which Jesus called them had a long-range and eternal goal. That goal was to bring all things together in peace and harmony. What manner of walking and living could reflect that ultimate goal? The only way to show it is to walk in unity.

Paul gave that challenge to the Ephesians in one brief statement. Then he spent three chapters explaining and elaborating on that challenge. In chapters 4:1-6:9, he outlined five different ways of walking or living that reflect that unity. Each of those ways of walking not only pleases Jesus today but also shows Jesus' passion for the ultimate perfection of salvation at the End. In the same way, as believers walk and live in the manner Paul recommended, their lives are leading the world closer and closer to Jesus' ultimate ideal.

The five ways of walking or living that Paul recommended each contain two contrasting ideas. The first challenge contains two contrasting ideas that complement each other. They seem to be contradictory, but they actually are both necessary to accomplish unity. Those ideals are unity and diversity (4:2-16).

The other four ways of walking and living that Paul recommended each contain a negative and a

positive. Each explains a way that believers should not live, and a contrasting way that believers should live. Those ways of walking or living are pertinent and applicable to believers in every age and everywhere (4:17-6:9):

Finally, Paul closed the practical section of the letter with a challenge for the Ephesians to be empowered (6:10-18). They were going to need power from God to walk and live in the manner he challenged them to live, so he outlined for them the way to be empowered to live a worthy life. Believers today need to learn how to have that power just as much as the Ephesians did. We need to draw on that power every day, so we will be able to live a life worthy of our high calling.

The practical section of the Book of Ephesians is a powerful appeal for all believers to live lives worthy of the perfect harmony into which they will be united in the End. The natural outline of Paul's appeal in those chapters is:

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| A. | Walk in harmony and diversity | 4:2-16 |
| B. | Walk not like other Gentiles, but like Christ | 4:17-24 |
| C. | Walk not in violence, but in love | 4:25-5:1 |
| D. | Walk not in lust, but in light | 5:3-14 |
| E. | Walk not as unwise, but as wise | 5:15-6:9 |
| F. | Be empowered to walk that walk | 6:10-20 |