

We've come this morning to the midpoint of the book of Ephesians....the hinge....the pivot point.

Read Ephesians 4.1-3

Chapters 1-3 have been an explanation of, and exultation in the message of the gospel. Chapters 4-6 are devoted to working out the practical implications of the gospel message for our actual lives.

So the first half rejoices in what God did to make us his people. The second half explains how God's people should live.

Verse 1 is actually a very succinct summary of the entire book:

Walk in a manner worthy: that is the summary chapters 4-6

Of the calling you to which you have been called: summary of 1-3

It might help you to know this morning, that my introduction is lengthier than normal, and it's followed by 3 rather brief points. When I'm a listener, it helps me to know where things are headed....maybe you are the same way. Long intro; then 3 short points.

The title today is: **You Need the Gospel**

Let me ask you a question about walking worthy....how easy is the performance of the Christian life for you? How easy, or to say it negatively, how difficult is it for you to 'do' the Christian life? Obey the commands, keep up the practices, maintain the attitudes of heart...essentially, walk worthy? Is that hard for you....does it issue out of your life painstakingly? Is it laborious? Or is it easy....does it proceed from within rather naturally?

My unofficial count of commands in Ephesians 4-6 turned up about 75 commands. 75 do this, or be this statements. And, I must tell you, I am found wanting.

I mean there are some things...for me at least, in Christianity that are easy. I don't want to murder anyone....I don't contemplate illegal drug use, and rarely do bad words come to the front of my mind.

But, that does not mean that fixing breakfast for three hungry, chirping boys when I haven't had any coffee yet, does not reveal an impatient, angry heart.

It does not mean that if you really hurt me deeply, it won't be easy for me to extend meaningful forgiveness.

So I identify with the words of Andrew Peterson in his song, 'Hosanna'. Peterson writes:

I am tangled up in contradiction. I am strangled by my own two hands. I am hunted by the hounds of addiction. I have lied to everyone who trusts me. I have tried to fall when I could stand. I have only loved the ones who loved me. I have cursed the man

that you have made me. I have nursed the beast that bays for my blood. Oh, I have run from the one who would save me. Save me, Hosanna! O Hosanna! See the long awaited king come to set his people free.

So, if I'm going to answer the question, I'll say that the real doing and being of the Christian life is hard for me. Some stuff is easy, but that is nothing special. I'm reminded of Jesus words in **Matthew 5:**

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Don't you love how Jesus ends there? I mean, he is not going to be making excuses for us, is he? Yeah, it's hard....but you better do it. And yes, the Christian life is tough....truly lived of course. Paul doesn't tickle our ears either....he doesn't just give us what we want to hear: 75 times in these 3 chapters he's going to come in and say, 'do this....be this.'

So, living like Jesus, it's hard. Living a life worthy of the gospel is hard. But when you start to circle back to that same question at work like, "why am I doing this?" When family sin resurfaces once again....oh, it's hard then.

But there is help for us here in Ephesians. And understanding the structure of the book is essential to getting this help.

In chapters 1-3, there is one command. But then in 4-6, around 75 commands.

So the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, makes a dramatic turn in purpose at 4.1. In 1-3 the purpose seems to be that we know certain truths. In 4-6 the purpose seems to be that we live in light of those truths. If we want to get help from the book of Ephesians, we must understand this structure.

This structure is not unique to Ephesians. In Colossians, Romans, and Galatians, Paul teaches doctrine....emphasizing the gospel, for the first portion of the letter, and then makes a sudden shift near the mid point, and begins talking about how to bring those gospel truth to bear in the nitty gritty parts of life.

Verse 1 shows us that there is an organic, vital connection between the doctrine of the Christian faith and the practice of the Christian life. Do you see that?

Walk worthy....OF....this calling.

It's because of, and in light the calling, that we go on to walk worthy

And Paul will continue to make this connection as he lists out the very commands of chapters 4-6:

- In chapter 4, all holy living is to be motivated by who we are in Christ. Our move away from sin is a move away from who we were w/o God.
- At the end of 4, we forgive because Christ has forgiven us.
- In 5 husbands are to love wives, in the same way that Jesus loved the church.
- Those under authority are to submit to those in authority because Christ is precious to them.

This is the way it always is in the NT: our practice is motivated by our doctrine. But so often, in Christian churches, good practice is taught, but detached from doctrine. Often in a way that it could be taught a Jew or Muslim. There is the expected emphasis on 'being good,' but little emphasis on Christ. And that is a dead-end, power vacuum, bad way to live.

Be sure to notice that the beauty of the doctrine is THE thing that motivates a changed way of living:

I, therefore a prisoner of the Lord, walk in a manner worthy of THIS calling.

What's he saying there? *He's saying that the calling is so great....what Christ accomplishes in us and for us is so great, that it makes it worth living for him even if you end up as a prisoner because of the doctrine, which was exactly Paul's situation.*

Now, let's try to get some help to those who feel like the Christian life can be difficult to 'do', to 'perform'.

This is also the main point of the message this morning. So, if you are here to be helped, tune in at this point especially.

The secret of the Christian life is that we actually do more when we hear less about all we need to do for God and hear more about all that God has already done for us through the gospel of Christ.

I'm borrowing some of my phrasing there from Kevin DeYoung. It's a profound sentence, and I'd really like you to think I came up with it, but I did not. Kevin did. You see, how being what God wants me to be as his son is difficult for me?

Oh, how I pray that God helps me to make this clear so that you can be helped. Or that he will help you, in spite of me. So, here we go.....

The structure of Paul's letters is not an accident, and it is not meaningless. Paul writes the way he does because he knows that if you become holy and loving

through obedience to these instructions it will be because the doctrinal truth that comes before the instruction has come alive in your heart through the Spirit.

Another way of saying that:

Paul's choice method of ministering to believers is to re-preach the gospel to them, and then show them how it applies to life. This provides a divinely inspired pattern for your life....and for those you seek to minister to.

There are several places in the NT where Paul explains this pattern for us: In Romans 1 Paul is telling the Romans how excited he is to come to the church at Rome so that he can care for the Christians there. **And then notice verse 15.....**here's what I'm going to do when I get there: I'm going to preach the gospel to you.

He's going to reproach the gospel to people who have already believed it. Why is that?

Now, notice **1 Corinthians 15.1**, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain." And then he goes on to state the gospel.

What's going on there? He had preached the gospel to them before, they had responded in faith. But now Paul feels the need to draw them back to it.....why.....because the gospel is what enables them to keep standing. And it is the the power by which they are *being saved*. So the gospel is still active in them....it's still doing stuff in them, changing them.

Then notice **2 Corinthians 3.18**, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,**1** are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." It's how we behold Christ, that our lives are changed. To pursue a holy and loving life apart from Christ being precious to you, is not the biblical way. And it doesn't work.

ill. the problem is that we often imagine the gospel message as something as one class in the school of Christianity.....Gospel Message 101. So, it's a weeder course, and all the committed pass, and move on....parenting, eschatology, evangelism, wisdom, etc.

But that's not it at all. The gospel, CJ Mahaney says, is the whole building inside of which all of the other classes are conducted. Everything finds meaning in relationship to the gospel message.

Oh, how so many Christians miss this point for their entire lives. They get into the Christian life through the gospel message, and then live their whole lives assuming

and ignoring the gospel, flailing at the commands unsuccessfully. And growing into arrogant, proud Pharisees that are virtually impossible to like.

iii. Two different churches in NYC:

one sermon was on how our affections are often given to things other than God: money, people's approval, pleasure. And the conclusion was: DON'T DO THAT.

ok, I get that. But no gospel. Because see, the only power to not fall into the trap of loving pleasure, or people's approval or money more than Christ is for our affection to be stirred by the good news of the gospel message. If I'm not going to make money my ultimate affection, then I'm going to have to be amazed at what Christ did for me on the cross. I'm going to have to know....down deep that he is the one thing that will bring satisfaction to my life.

Second sermon: God will protect you. On and on about how God will protect us, and that we should not fear. Ok, I get that....don't be afraid. But where does the confidence to believe that come from? The confidence to live in the goodness of that. The gospel. Romans 8---he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.

I can be confident that God will protect me, because he once and for all proved his commitment to me when Christ died.

Do you see the connection? And yet, so often in churches, in Christians lives, we try to associate obedience from God's power....which is the gospel.

Now, in both of these churches, the gospel was actually presented. Accurately, truly, the gospel was explained. Do you know when? Some of you do....you know what I'm about to say. After the sermons were over, the pastor said, "Now, if you are here, and you are not a Christian, I want you to do that God loves you....that Jesus died as your sin substitute, etc."

Now, don't get me wrong....i'm for that. But the subtle trouble there is that the gospel was treated as if it is just for non-Christians.

Get them into the gospel front door, so that they can then move on to the rest of the Christian life. Simply not true.

Oh friend, if you are going to have any success at the being and doing of the Christian life, what you need most is to have the gospel be precious to you:

The secret of the Christian life is that we actually do more when we hear less about all we need to do for God and hear more about all that God has already done for us through the gospel of Christ.

Let me stop quickly at this point, and be sure that when I use the word gospel, everyone in the room understands what I'm saying. Let's look back at 1 Corinthians 15, and pick up where we left off:

"Now I would remind you brothers of the gospel I preached to you...."For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God for the sins that you had done. After he died, and was buried, 3 days later, he rose from the dead. Now he sits at the right hand of the Father. One day he will return.

The right response to that message is to repent of your sin, trust in what Jesus did in dying and rising. If you respond that way, you will be saved. And you will go from being an enemy of God, to a son or daughter of God.

If you are here, and you have not responded to the gospel---be sure that today is the day.

I Promised 3 observations from the text:

1. Preach the Gospel to Yourself

Now, there are many activities that Christians get involved in because of their faith. They come to church....they pray with other believers....they read their Bibles....they take the Lord's Supper....there's a long list. A good list.

But, we cannot neglect that a primary activity....a primary discipline if you will, of the Christian life is that we hear the gospel, and preach it to ourselves. And honestly, at the heart of most other Christian disciplines: Lord's Supper, fellowship, prayer, Bible reading, worship....ought to be remembering and drawing joy from the gospel message.

Now, I've already said that the structure of Paul's letters provides a divinely inspired pattern for both my own life, and for how I seek to serve other believers.

Re-preach, explain, extol the gospel, and then connect that to daily life.

The difficulty there as Milton Vincent has pointed out is that:

"the gospel is so foolish (according to my natural wisdom), so scandalous (according to my conscience), and so incredible (according to my timid heart), that it is a daily battle to believe the full scope of it as I should."

How can you fight fear? Overwhelm temptation? Resist the world, the flesh, and the devil?

One way....daily rehearse the gospel until Christ is precious to you. Everyday, seek to freshly be amazed at what God has done for you through Christ.

This happens as we read the Scripture; as we listen and sing worship music, as we listen to preaching, as we talk about the gospel with others, as we repent of sin, as we read good books.

I don't think it's an accident that as Paul concludes the first half of the book of Ephesians, he prays for the Ephesians. And what he prays for them, is that Christ would be precious: 3.17-18.

So, friend, is there some pattern in your life where you are coming alongside your heart, and saying, "hey buddy, wake up, wake up....this is awesome....Christ died for us enemies....he rose victorious.....he beautiful...."

ill. driving through Austria, and trying to wake people up, 'man, this is so beautiful....wake up, wake up...'
-that's what we should daily be seeking to do with our callous hearts

Two applications

1. Related to parenting.....and oh, do we have to be careful in our parenting. We must give moral instruction to our children. There is no doubt about that. But we have to be so careful about boiling life down to commands that are to be obeyed.

Equal effort in parenting must be giving to leading our children to love the gospel of Jesus Christ. It must be precious to them.

If it isn't, we end up with two sorts of children:

a. we end up with kids that are pretty good at keeping the rules, but he don't love the gospel or treasure Christ. Those are called Pharisees in the Bible....proud, self-righteous, and legalistic.

b. or we end up with kids that struggle to keep the rules, and they end up as rebellious, self-destructing lovers of pleasures.

Yes, our children need moral instruction: plenty of do this and don't do that. But in and through and all around that moral instruction, they must have you leading them to treasure the gospel.

If all we do is instruct, and never connect that to the gospel.....we are just parroting Sesame Street moralistic instruction.

Enough parenting advice from the guy who only has preschoolers.

2. I'm really concerned about how distracted we are getting in our info-crazed, technology driven culture.

I was telling a friend just last week that I'm finding my own tolerance for reading anything serious is being weakened. I want it now, in short bits, and in the form of a video if possible. That ain't good.

So, I'm not making up rules here. But God chose to reveal himself through the written word. That is not simply a historical coincidence. Like the Bible is not in video because it was written 4,000 years ago. No, the God who exists above all constraints of time, chose to reveal himself through the written Word.....so we need to be sure that we adjust our lives to Him.

So, I don't know if it's the Blackberry always in front of your, or Facebook, or Cable News or whatever.....I'm just sounding the alarm that we can distract our hearts away from the gospel, as well as sin our hearts away from it.

2. The Holy Spirit Makes the Gospel Vivid

There are so many places in the Bible that we could go to see this truth. That's just notice it in and around today's text.

Notice it in Paul's prayer at the end of chapter 3.16: that God would grant us power through his Spirit in your inner being....so that you can treasure Christ.

The Spirit is the delivery system of the power flowing from glory to our hearts.

What is the power? The power is the gospel itself, and it brings Christ to us.

The Bible says that the gospel IS THE power of God. Outside of heaven, nothing has a more dense reserve of power than the gospel message itself. And when that message is received by faith, it unites us to Christ. And we experience power to fight sin...to live with joy....to live for God's glory.

But don't miss this: the Holy Spirit is the delivery system. Or to use another Biblical metaphors, he is the flashlight in a darkness that points us to Christ and the gospel.

So, as you are preaching the gospel to yourself....as you are seeking to draw your heart's affections toward the gospel, please savor the tender involvement of the Holy Spirit with you in that process. Without, the discipline would have no effect.

The gospel never ceases to be true, but it is the Holy Spirit that makes it vivid to the soul.

So ask for the Spirit's help, and depend on Him to draw you close to Christ.

Notice this same thing in chapter 4, verse 3:

Paul is saying to the, maintain unity in the church. But it is called the unity of the Spirit because this unity is the work of the Spirit. He seals it.

And so it is with any spiritual good that happens in and through us and even between us. It comes about because of the work of the Spirit in us.

3. The Commands of God Can't be Separated from the Gospel of God

In our passage there are 5 moral commands. The first 4 are very much related to one another:

- Paul tells us to be humble--this is to have an accurate assessment of self, not an inflated one.
- He tells us to be gentle—this is a disposition toward others: quiet restraint, mild, patient.
- And then patience—this is the opposite of being short-tempered. It is the man who is slow to anger. A patient man, is a man who bears wrongdoing w/o retaliating.
- And then to bear with one another carries with it the idea of being able to put up gracefully with the weaknesses and sins of others....not grudgingly, not with a constant attitude of disapproval, but lovingly.

Now immediately what jumps to my mind is that none of these qualities are natural for me.....and I doubt for you. We need the Spirit working in us, if we are truly going to bear the consistent fruit of humility, and gentleness, and patience, and long suffering, and love.

These are the ways of dealing with one another that lead to unity....the charge of verse 3. A thousand things seek to separate us---busyness, and self-centeredness, and disagreement and one another's sin.....

But if unity is to be maintained in this church it will be as we deal with each other in humble, patient, gentle ways. It will happen as we bear with one another in love....ie, put up with one another.

iii. Rick was telling me recently that there is a saying in his line of work....something about keeping the governments secrets that says, "everybody is a dirt bag".

The idea is that, in the intelligence business, those guardians of the secrets should be very careful about trusting anyone.

Now, let me not take this too far with us, but let's be honest, and say that there are things about me that rub some of you. Hopefully, if I know what they are, I'm working on them. But there are things about others in this church that rub you....at least a bit....at least some of the time.

And so Paul, wisely, calls us to humility, gentleness, patience.

But those things are not a switch that we flip on, and suddenly have no problems with.

That is not something you are able to do. It is not something that the Ephesians were able to do. If we were to flip ahead to Revelation 2, and read Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus....maybe 30 years after Ephesians was written, we would find that though this church had a holy disapproval of wrong doctrine, they had lost their first love.....

They knew in their minds what was right....they rejected wrong doctrine....but they had stopped loving one another. They, I think its safe to say, were not patient, humble, and gentle like Paul had instructed them to be.

Now, what would have been the right pastoral approach as it relates to these Ephesians?

What is the right approach now toward all of you. Because this text wants you to be humble, gentle, and patient, that is what I want for you.

How should I aim for that?

Yell at you: be patient. Stop being mean....stop it. Be good. Don't be a jerk.

Now, I'm borrowing this from an article we've included in Grace News 2 weeks in a row....

iii. Imagine with me for a moment that your life is a tall, tall glass of ice cold white milk.

Now, imagine with me for a moment that the commands of God (humility, gentleness, patience, putting up with people in love) are that big bottle of Hershey's Chocolate Syrup.

Now, once you put that syrup in, what happens?

Now, one of the big frustrations in my life has always been that the spoons in the drawer are shorter than the glasses in the cupboard.

And this creates a real dilemma when it comes to making a good glass of chocolate milk.

So, it's critical that some sort of utensil be found that can get down to that chocolate on the bottom, so the refreshment can be had.

Preferably something thin...as as not to club around down there....

Preferably something with a scoop...so you lift a max amnt off the bottom

Preferably something metal so it clanks...that just gives me confidence

You with me here?

Here's the point:

If the milk is your life, and the chocolate are the commands of God....what is going to reach down there and stir them up, so they come up and are actually seen in our lives?

You can just get on your stump, and say do, do, do. Be, be, be. That's what preachers do sometimes. Its what us parents do a lot of. Its how we deal with our own hearts most of the time.

BUT FRIENDS THAT IS A SHORT SPOON. That is empty....its pure moralism, and it is devoid of the power of the gospel.

Or, we can preach, and re-preach the gospel to ourselves and others.....we can behold the beauty of Christ.....we can ask the holy Spirit to stir up affection in us for the cross.....

FRIENDS THAT IS THE LONG SPOON.

The Gospel seen and treasured again, and again, and again, made alive in us by the Holy Spirit is what makes wrecked sinners into holy, loving saints.

Friend, where is your struggle today?

What is the fear that has taken hold of you?

Where is the anxiety that is making you into a jittery mess?

What is the sin struggle that clings so closely?

Get the gospel churned up in your heart.

Start with seeing its beauty.

You will be changed.