**The Worthy Walk, Part 3**

**Ephesians 4:2**

**March 21, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. We return to Ephesians 4:1-3 this morning, where the Apostle Paul is exhorting us to walk worthy of our calling as members of the body of Christ.
      1. As we have been considering this great and perhaps overwhelming subject, I think it is all too easy for us to be tempted to abandon being obedient to this call right at the start.
         1. We might look at the words of Scripture here and then consider our own sinfulness and conclude that we will never walk worthy of our calling.
         2. How could we walk worthy of our calling, when Christ is so glorious and holy and gracious, and we are in the trenches battling temptation and sin every moment of every day?
         3. How could we ever walk in a manner that corresponds to the holiness of God?
         4. The idea that we are exhorted to do something we could never do, or so we think, might cause us to throw up our hands in despair, quitting before we even begin.
      2. We have to understand that the worthy walk we see in this passage is not to be equated with perfection.
         1. In fact, built into the very fabric of this passage about walking worthy is the assumption that as believers we will often stumble, fail, and sin.
         2. There is within this exhortation the assumption that we will struggle with various immaturities both in our doctrine and in our life.
         3. But just because we stumble in many ways and constantly face temptations without ever finally defeating every one in this life does not mean that we cannot walk worthy of Christ.
      3. Paul wrote something rather interesting to the Thessalonians about the worthy walk in 1 Thessalonians 4:1…
         1. The phrasing is a bit different because instead of saying they are to walk worthy of their calling he says they are to walk and please God according to the apostolic teaching.
         2. But the concept is the same: Thessalonians, you need to walk in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord because you reflect the truth of His holiness in your lives!
         3. And in this verse he makes this staggering parenthetical: **Just as you actually do walk**!
         4. Here we have an example of a church that was walking in a manner that pleased the Lord!
            1. They had received the apostles’ teaching and the instructions about how to live godly lives that pleased the Lord.
            2. And by the grace of God, they had not only heard this teaching, they had implemented into their lives!
            3. They were walking in a manner that was pleasing to the Lord!
            4. Now, lest we get the wrong idea that these believers were kids who grew up in Sunday school and had no spiritual challenges in their lives, let me remind you of what Paul says about them in the first chapter of this letter.

In 1 Thess 1:9, we see that, before they came to faith in Christ, they were idolaters.

These people were pagans, worshipers of idols.

They were as lost as a polar bear in the desert.

They did not have some spiritual background that gave them some kind of head start down the path of sanctification.

* + - * 1. And what’s more, when they heard and received the gospel, look at what verse 6 says…

They received the word of God amidst much tribulation.

Their conversion from idolatry to Christ meant suffering and difficulty.

This was not the easy-believism or health, wealth, and prosperity gospel sales pitch.

The message from Paul had to be something like this, “Come to Christ and be persecuted!”

Lose your family, your friends, maybe your job, endure affliction and suffering and tribulation, and follow Christ.

And it says they did so with joy!

Down in 2:14, we learn that they were persecuted by their neighbors, those who also lived in Thessalonica, just like the Christian Jews who lived in and around Jerusalem suffered at the hands of the unbelieving Jews.

* + - * 1. They had every disadvantage before coming to Christ being ignorant pagans, and when they received the gospel they faced immense adversity, and so they did not have all the things we often look for that will make it easier for us to walk and please the Lord.
        2. And yet, Paul says in 4:1, they were walking in a manner that pleased the Lord.
      1. Now, we might ask, “Well, how did they achieve perfection?”
         1. And the rest of 4:1 indicates they didn’t!
         2. Paul tells them that they can still **excel still more.**
         3. Yes, they are pleasing the Lord, and yes, they are walking worthy of their calling, but no, they are not perfect.
         4. They can still grow.
         5. They still have room to be more holy.
         6. They are still in the process of sanctification.
    1. It is a massive relief and encouragement to understand that you can please the Lord in your life even without achieving perfection.
       1. When we are seeking to be obedient and confessing our sins when we fall short, we are walking in a manner that pleases the Lord.
       2. The only reason for this is because we are in Christ Jesus, right?
       3. Apart from Christ, we could never live in a manner that pleases the Lord because apart from Christ you must be perfect to be accepted by God, and none of us is perfect, and we never will be in ourselves or even in this life.
       4. But in Christ, we can walk worthy of our calling even if we still have room to grow.
       5. And so that’s the goal: to walk worthy.
       6. And that whatever level we have achieved of the worthy walk, to excel even more in the days and weeks and months and years ahead.
  1. What does this worthy walk look like?
     1. We have seen, first of all, that we must understand our calling as members of Christ’s body, the church.
     2. We are not to be like the world, and we are not to try to walk worthy of our calling in isolation from other Christians.
     3. This worthy walk takes place in the context of our relationships with other believers in the church.
  2. Second, we need to…

1. Cultivate Godly Character (v. 2)
   1. We have looked at the first two aspects of this: humility and gentleness.
      1. Humility is to submit to the Word of God as our authority and to take the position of a servant in relationship to others, seeking what will help others in their walk with Christ.
      2. Gentleness is very similar in that it calls us to sit under the authority of the Word of God and refrain from any and all retaliation against others for personal offenses.
      3. When we put these together, we see the complete picture Paul has in mind as we are completely and totally subject to Scripture, using what God has blessed us with to build others up and never to build up ourselves.
      4. Notice how Paul says in v. 2 that we are to walk worthy **with all humility and gentleness**.
         1. The word **all** in that context indicates that everything we do is to be done in this manner.
         2. Humility and gentleness should be qualities that direct and permeate everything in our lives.
         3. In every decision, every question, every situation, our first response is always to ask, “What does the Scripture say?”
         4. And then in every decision and every question and every situation, our motivation is to be what would edify other believers and further the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.
         5. We might wonder what that looks like in the nitty-gritty details of life.
         6. Paul will explain how this works out in various relationships and circumstances in the last part of this chapter and then in even more detail in chapter 5, so you’ll have to stick around for that.
   2. Now, there is one more virtue of godly character we must cultivate if we want to walk worthy of our calling as members of Christ’s body, and that is **patience**.
      1. Patience is, to put it mildly, in short supply today.
         1. Researchers at the National Center for Biotechnology concluded that in the year 2000 the average attention span for an American adult was about 12 seconds.
         2. Since then, and especially with the advent of social media and smartphones, the attention span has shrunk drastically.
         3. Research suggests that in 2015 the attention span of the average American adult had shrunk to a mere 8.25 seconds!
         4. Now, to put that in perspective, scientists believe the average attention span of a goldfish is 9 seconds.
         5. The average smartphone user picks up their phone an average of 1500 times per week!
         6. That amounts to over 3 hours every day.
         7. Patience is not an area where we naturally excel, any more than humility or gentleness.
         8. That’s why patience is listed among the Spirit’s fruit, because it is the product of the work of the Spirit of God in our lives.
         9. We can define patience like this: Patience is the expression of a heartfelt trust in God’s sovereign plan.
         10. Patience is the manifestation of faith in God’s goodness, wisdom, and sovereignty when life is difficult, for whatever reason and from whatever source that difficulty comes.
         11. Thinking about that meaning of patience, how do we cultivate patience in our lives so we might walk worthy of our calling?
      2. To cultivate patience, first of all, we need to understand two things: God’s character as patient and God’s sovereignty over all things
         1. The Bible repeatedly describes God as being a patient God.
            1. One of the greatest revelations of the character of God came to Moses in Exodus 34.

Moses had asked God to show him His glory to give him assurance as the Israelites journeyed to the Promised Land.

And in Exodus 34:6, God passed by in front of Moses and proclaimed His name…

Notice how God referred to Himself as **slow to anger**.

In the Greek OT, it’s the same term as we find in Ephesians 4:2 translated **patience** (although as an adjective rather than a noun).

God is slow to anger because He is a patient God.

In fact, the Greek term itself indicates someone who has a long temper, someone who can endure much provocation without becoming angry.

* + - * 1. God is also described as patient in Romans 2:4…

In this passage, we see people who refuse to repent of their sins because God does not judge them immediately.

God continues to shower the ungodly with kindness, and the ungodly thinks it’s because God is never going to judge them.

But Paul says that the reality is that God’s judgment is waiting because God is patient.

He gives the wicked time to consider their ways, repent of their sins, and trust in Him.

* + - * 1. We see much the same thing in 2 Peter 3:9…

When people mock God for not judging the world, Peter says we need to understand something fundamental about the character of God.

God is a saving God.

He is not delaying His promise because of some deficiency or inability to fulfill it, but He is waiting because He is patient and allowing men time to come to repentance.

* + - * 1. Atheist Robert Ingersoll was lecturing one time against God, when he suddenly stopped the lecture, took off his watch, showed it to his audience, and challenged God to judge him.

He declared, “I’ll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I’ve said.”

Unsurprisingly, Ingersoll lived beyond the five minutes and went on to finish the lecture.

Later on, a Christian was listening to the events of the lecture recounted to him, and he responded, “Did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?”

* + - * 1. Our God is a patient God, and we see that over 2,000 years have passed since the birth of His Son, but He still waits and is calling sinners to repentance, withholding judgment to give time for salvation.
        2. If we want to cultivate patience in our lives, we need to first understand that our God is a patient God, and we are simply reflecting His character when we exercise patience with others.
      1. The patience of God must be considered in relationship to God’s sovereignty.
         1. Look at Isaiah 46:9-10…

What an amazing statement by our glorious God!

He is utterly holy; no one is like Him!

And what sets Him apart in this passage?

It’s His sovereignty over all things.

His purpose will be established.

He will accomplish all of His good pleasure.

See, God is patient because God’s plan is never in doubt.

God does not need to hurry, because He knows that He will accomplish His will exactly when He has determined to accomplish it.

Our impatience often stems from our limitations, right?

We only have so much time, and we have very little control over our circumstances, and so we get anxious and antsy and impatient.

But God never has those concerns because He already knows He will accomplish everything He sets out to do, and the end is never in question.

* + - * 1. Remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:11?

Do you see how Paul says that God works all things after the counsel of His will?

God has never asked anyone for advice.

He takes His own counsel, and He planned the end from the beginning, and now He is pursuing His purpose without any hurry or rush or anxiety or concern.

Everything is exactly on schedule, just where it should be in God’s purpose for history.

God isn’t running late.

He isn’t rushing trying to get caught up with the times.

God has determined the times, it says in Acts 17.

And so God is never frustrated or impatient because He is right on schedule with everything He intends to do!

* + - 1. As believers, if we want to cultivate patience, we need to have this vision of a sovereign and patient God!
         1. When we feel impatient, as if we or others are not progressing as quickly as we think we should, we need to remember that God is patient and sovereign, and everything is still on schedule.
         2. When that person we have been praying for salvation for years, maybe decades, continues to resist the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should not grow impatient and give up, knowing that God is far more patient than we are, and God continues to give time to repent.
         3. Patience, then, is directly connected to our understand of and faith in God’s sovereign wisdom and goodness as He works out His plan.
    1. James gives us a wonderful and practical example of patience in the closing comments of his letter, James 5:7-11…
       1. What a remarkable statement!
       2. Be patient!
          1. How long?
          2. Until the coming of the Lord!
          3. As long as we are living in this fallen world, we will need to be patient because sin and sinners will constantly do things that challenge our patience, that cause us to get angry or frustrated, that challenge us to wait patiently on the Lord.
       3. And one of the primary manifestations of impatience is described in v. 9 – complaining against one another.
          1. We are called to walk worthy of our calling as members of Christ’s body, and that puts us in the crosshairs of this verse with patience, doesn’t it?
          2. How easy it is to complain about the brother or sister who bothers us!
          3. How quickly we can lash out at someone for their imperfections, for their sinfulness, for their weaknesses!
          4. But James tells us to be patient until the Lord comes and not to grumble against each other.
          5. Let me ask you a question: Do you find yourself complaining against other believers often?

Do other people constantly bother or annoy you?

Are you constantly disappointed by the shortcomings of others?

Do you find yourself speaking negatively of the brethren because of their imperfections and struggles?

If so, you are not cultivating patience in your life.

There is a time, as we know, for confronting a sinning brother or sister, and James even talks about that in vv. 19-20, but there is a difference between going to someone to help them with a sinful struggle and complaining about someone who is not living up to your expectations.

* + - 1. And notice what James identifies as the key to patience: think of the outcome of the Lord’s dealings.
         1. The Lord has a plan.
         2. In every difficulty you encounter, in every person God brings into your life that causes you frustration or grief, God is doing something good for you.
         3. The Lord is full of mercy and compassion, and He is showing you compassion and mercy, and so like Job, we need to endure with patience!
         4. The reason we are often impatient is because we don’t know the end of the plan, right?
         5. And that’s where faith comes in.
         6. Do we trust that God is merciful and compassionate even when we can’t see what He is doing?
         7. Do we believe He is wise and sovereign even when it appears that the world is out of control?
  1. We are called to walk worthy by manifesting humility, gentleness, and patience, reflecting the character of Christ as we live our lives for His glory in this fallen world.
  2. Now, not only do we need to understand our calling and cultivate godly character to walk worthy of our calling, but we also need to…

1. Tolerate Difficult Christians (v. 2)
   1. This is the natural outflow of patience, right?
      1. Patience requires that we tolerate others who are still in process.
      2. It requires that we not complain about them, that we not reject them or give up on them, but that we persistently endure in loving and praying and encouraging those who are difficult in the church.
   2. Earlier, I mentioned that embedded in this verse is the assumption that none of us is perfect or will be perfect in this life.
      1. And here we see that plainly.
      2. Patience is necessary in our relationships with one another because we are imperfect and sinful.
      3. And we only need to tolerate people who are weak, who are sinful, who fail, who do things that frustrate us, who seem to be spiritually stuck or immature.
      4. And the reality is that each one of us not only has to tolerate others, but we also need to be tolerated by others.
   3. This word translated **showing tolerance** is a somewhat rare word in the NT, only used 15 times.
      1. But in nearly every instance, it is used of putting up with someone or something that is grating and obnoxious.
      2. For example, Jesus said in Mark 9:19…
         1. This is the word Jesus used to describe His tolerance for a perverse and wicked generation characterized by unbelief!
         2. This was not an enjoyable experience but a trying experience, one that was exhausting.
      3. In Acts 18:14, Gallio the proconsul of Achaia said to the Jews…
         1. He was no fan of the Jews.
         2. In certain situations, because of the law and his position in government, he was obligated to put up with the Jews, but that’s all it ever was.
         3. He never delighted in them or enjoyed their company.
         4. If he had to deal with them, it was simply tolerating them because of how obnoxious they were to him.
      4. This word is used again in 2 Timothy 4:3, where we read of unbelievers within the church…
         1. Sound doctrine is intolerable to the unconverted church person.
         2. They will not put up with it.
         3. And so they find teachers who suit their ungodly desires, being utterly intolerant of truth.
      5. So, when we come to Ephesians 4:2 and we see this, we have to understand that Paul is not speaking of people we generally like but once in a while do something annoying.
         1. He’s not even speaking of people we find moderately difficult to deal with.
         2. Paul is talking about people who are naturally completely intolerable to us.
         3. These are the people that, if they weren’t in the same church, you would be perfectly fine never seeing again.
      6. We are called to walk worthy, and that means that we willingly put up with and tolerate even the most difficult person who is also a member of Christ’s body.
         1. Sometimes it’s not even something sinful, right?
         2. Sometimes it’s just a personality, or they have some idiosyncrasies, or they have different preferences than we do.
         3. I’m thankful that, even though I went to U of A, all of you people who root for the devil tolerate me.
         4. As sinners, don’t we find any and every reason to create divisions amongst ourselves?
         5. But here Paul is calling us to take all of those reasons we normally would separate and divide from each other and instead to tolerate one another!
   4. Now, I want you to notice in v. 2 the way we are to tolerate one another: in love!
      1. Oh how vital it is to see this!
      2. We might think when we read the word **tolerate** that it just means we grind our teeth together and deal with the fact this person has been put in our lives by God.
         1. But the words **in love** modify this idea of showing tolerance.
         2. It’s not simply that we live with it begrudgingly.
         3. We are to put up with difficult people in the church in love.
      3. When Paul says we do this in love, he means first of all that love is the motivation for tolerating others.
         1. Why do we tolerate difficult people?
         2. Because this verse makes me.
         3. Well, ok, but we need to move beyond that because this verse says that love must be the motivation for tolerating difficult people.
         4. We recognize first of all that as difficult as that person is for us, God still loves them.
         5. God is at work in their lives.
         6. Jesus died on the cross for their sins.
         7. The Holy Spirit dwells within them.
         8. We have to remind ourselves of these truths so that we can love someone who is otherwise intolerable to us.
      4. But not only is love the motive, but love is the manner in which we tolerate our difficult brothers and sisters.
         1. We treat them with love.
         2. And that brings us back to patience (right?), because love is patient.
         3. It means we show kindness.
         4. It means we are gentle with them, not retaliating if we have a grievance against them, not seeking revenge.
         5. It means we are humble, seeking to build them up in their faith.
         6. Do you see how all of this hangs together?
         7. You can’t be humble and intolerant of your brothers and sisters!
         8. You can’t tolerate someone without having a spirit of gentleness.
         9. If you are impatient, you can’t walk worthy because you won’t be able to put up with difficult people.
         10. Love must drive this tolerance of those who frustrate us, and we must not tolerate them in a worldly sense, but we must bear with them by showing them love.
2. Conclusion
   1. These two things we have focused on today – patience and tolerance – are utterly absent from the world today.
      1. No one has any patience for anything today.
      2. And we live in a time where what is called cancel culture is running rampant.
      3. Anyone who is different than the mainstream narrative is immediately excluded.
      4. The culture of worldly tolerance has created one of the most intolerant generations in American history, if not the most intolerant generation we have ever seen as a nation.
      5. Of course, the world has no ability to be patient because the world rejects the will of God.
      6. And the world can’t really be tolerant because, as Titus 3:3 tells us, the world is hateful and hates one another.
   2. But do you know what all of this means?
      1. It means as the church we have an unprecedented opportunity.
      2. We have the opportunity to put God’s glory on display.
      3. And because the darkness is so dark, when we cultivate godly character and tolerate difficult Christians in the church, the light of the glory of God will shine brilliantly through us.
      4. The world will see what genuine patience looks like, and the world will see what true tolerance means.
      5. And Christ will be glorified as we put His holy and righteous character on display.
   3. Brothers and sisters, we are called to walk in a manner that pleases the Lord.
      1. We will never accomplish this perfectly, but we are able by God’s grace to walk in this manner.
      2. May we heed the Lord’s admonition to cultivate godly character and tolerate difficult Christians for the good of His church and the glory of His name.