

Ephesians: *Walking Worthily*
Ephesians 4:1-3

For the first three chapters of Ephesians, we have heard Paul proclaim the very heart of the Gospel. We have learned that we as the Church are those who have been chosen, predestined, adopted, and saved by grace. Paul has prayed that the believers might be filled with power through the work of the Holy Spirit, that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith, and that we might be filled unto all the fullness of God! When it comes to understanding who we are in Christ and all that God has accomplished on our behalf, Ephesians 1-3 is as good as it gets! This morning, however, as we transition to Ephesians 4, Paul says, “Therefore, walk in a worthy manner...” Paul will now transition from exposition to exhortation...from doctrine to duty...from describing what God has done to instructing us on what we are to do. So, please stand and let us read Ephesians 4:1-3:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) On Walking Worthily; 2) The Formation of Christian Character; and 3) Making the Turn.

I. On Walking Worthily

I was 26 years old before I ever took up the game of golf. Prior to that time, I thought golf was a waste of time. Why play golf when a man could be fishing? However, thanks to the relentless invitations of an older gentleman in my church named Johnny Shytle, I finally decided to give golf a try. I’ll never forget the day Johnny took me out to the nine-hole golf course there in eastern North Carolina where we lived. Johnny would swing his old driver and the ball would sail down the middle of the fairway. I would swing my driver and the ball would end up behind me on the tee box...a mystery of physics that I have yet to understand. And of course, every time I made a fool of myself trying to hit that stupid little ball, Johnny would smile with a little bit of drool running down his cheek from the big wad of tobacco in his mouth and profoundly say, “It’s a simple game, Preacher. Look at the ball...hit the ball.”

There is nothing so humbling as trying to do something for the first time in the presence of somebody who has been doing that thing well for many years. I suspect that is how the new believers felt when they read Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, and I suspect many people here today may feel the same way once I’m finished with this sermon. It’s one thing to talk about the virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love...it’s quite another to walk in those virtues, amen? So, before we even get started, I want you to give you as much grace as you need to be OK with where you are today. We are where we are, and there is little value in fooling ourselves into believing that we are somewhere that we are not.

When I stood on the tee-box that first time with Johnny in 1996, I was a beginner in the game of golf. I had no idea how to swing a golf club, and me telling myself I was a great golfer would not have been helpful. Wearing all the right clothes and looking the part would not make

that ball fly straight. There are no shortcuts when it comes to swinging a golf club. It takes time, instruction, and practice...lots of it.

When it comes to walking in a manner that is worthy of our calling...which is the call to follow Jesus and to live our lives as Jesus would live our lives if He was us...we can be certain that time, instruction, and practice are required before we will ever exhibit the virtues that Paul lists here in Ephesians 4. We'll talk more about that in a minute but let me first address the elephant in the room.

The elephant in the room is this always present tension between God's unmerited grace and the call for us to walk as those who are worthy of that grace.

Just as soon as we receive instructions from Paul on how to live and we hear this challenge to walk in a way that is worthy, we might jump to the conclusion that our worth is determined by the way we walk! Please don't go there...that is not what Paul said, and that is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Remember: our worth is given to us based upon the fact that we are created in God's image; we were chosen before the foundation of the world; we were predestined for adoption; and though our sin led us to be dead in our transgressions, our worth is reaffirmed and reestablished in that God gave up His only Son to die in our place so that we might be redeemed and reconciled to our Father. Listen to me: Your WORTH is never in question when you are in Christ. Your WORTH is not determined by your WALK; however, your WALK should bear witness to your WORTH.

As a Christian, our WALK should be, over time, consistent with the WORTH that we have been given by grace. In other words, God's grace should both inform and transform the way that we live our lives, amen? If our walk is regularly inconsistent with our deepest held beliefs, it stands to reason that we actually don't believe what we say we believe. Remember Dallas Willard's famous quote: "To believe something is true is to ACT as though it is so."

Our actions matter. Works matter. Behavior matters. The Apostle James writes that "faith without works is dead." I know that creates tension but remember Ephesians 2:10--immediately following Ephesians 2:8-9 that emphasize that we are saved by grace alone, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them." Church, the walking matters. It's in the walking that the light of Christ enters into the hurting culture. It's in the walking that fatherless kids are adopted. It's in the walking that those enslaved to human traffickers are set free. It's in the walking that homeless people are provided a home. It's in the walking that our children are raised to be leaders instead of glued to their screens. It's in the walking that lost souls come to see Christ and make a decision to follow Him! To say you have faith...to say you believe the Gospel...but then fail to walk in a way that is worthy of your calling...it's a non-sensical scenario.

Let's go back to the tee box in 1996. If you know me, you know I am a very competitive person. I did not find my inability to hit a golf ball to be an acceptable outcome. So, I went to school on the mechanics of the golf swing. To this day I own just about every book ever written on the subject by all the greatest golfers including Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Tiger Woods, and my personal favorite, Gary Player (for obvious reasons--he's 5'6"). (Show image https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Photograph_of_Jack_Nicklaus%2C_Gary_Player%2C_Arnold_Palmer%2C_and_President_Gerald_Ford_Playing_Golf_at_the_World_Golf_Hall_of_Fame_Tournament_in_Pinehurst%2C_North_Carolina_-_NARA_-_7062574.jpg)

For the next several months I watched countless videos on the golf swing, and I even took some private lessons. I got a shag bag and hit over a hundred balls with my sand wedge every day for the better part of five years. My swing got a lot better.

Now, what if I told you that I never played a game golf...I just read about it, practiced my swing, and took lessons...but never played...AND I still think of myself as a great golfer.

Does that make any sense? Of course not. You're not a golfer until you tee it up and play the game, right? Reading about the swing, getting instruction on the swing, and even practicing the swing is for nought if I never play the game.¹ In the same way, you're not following Jesus if you're not walking, right?

Jesus did not die on a cross for us to simply believe in Him and go to heaven. He suffered the cross and rose again and sent His Holy Spirit so that His Church would WALK out our faith, pushing back the darkness as the Light of Christ, bringing hope to the world and glory to God in His name, amen?

Such is why Paul begins chapter 4 by writing, "Therefore..." Therefore...because of what Christ has accomplished...because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit at work in your inner being...because of your adoption as children of God through the matchless grace of Christ on the cross...because Christ dwells in your heart through faith...THEREFORE, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Notice also the personal appeal from Paul's heart to the Church as he sets before them his own example: "I, therefore, *a prisoner for the Lord*, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

The Apostle Paul led by example. His walk was worthy of his calling, and it led him to be a prisoner of Rome but a prisoner FOR the Lord. Following Jesus is costly, but given what Jesus suffered on our behalf...given what He saved us from...should we not walk in a manner that is consistent with the grace that He has given us? So what does that look like? Good question, and that leads us to my second subheading...

¹ I actually went on to be a seven handicap until I had a bunch of kids and now I'm back to fishing!

II. The Formation of Christian Character

Paul qualifies what walking in a worthy manner looks like in terms of our character: “with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...”

Church, before we charge out with great ambition to “do something for Jesus,” note that walking in a way that is worthy of our calling begins with the formation of our character. Paul makes it clear that when it comes to the Church, HOW we walk is every bit as important as to WHERE we are walking to or WHAT we are accomplishing along the way. Humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love are those qualities that should consistently mark the character of our Lord’s Church. Now, I’ve preached on all of those virtues in our *Believe* series back in 2019 which you can find on our Colonial YouTube page ([hyperlink](#)), and I encourage you to check out those messages because I don’t have time to dive into each individual virtue this morning. Instead, I would like to take a minute to speak to the formation of our Christian character.

I’ve said it before...I’ll say it again: You will never outrun your character. Your character will always catch up with you...that is a guaranteed certainty. So...how do we define character? Your character is comprised of the narrative you believe, the values you hold most dear, and the behaviors you regularly engage in that form habits.

First, your character is formed by the narrative that you believe. For example: if you truly believe that you are nothing more than an impersonal machine formed by time and chance...nothing more than an amoral cosmic accident (as popular science would have you believe)...a creature that has no eternal destiny, nothing to live for and nothing to die for, that your life consists only of this short, miserable tenure on planet earth and then nothing but darkness and the end of existence altogether, then you might struggle in your character formation. Why? Because to develop strong character, we must have a compelling picture of our future in mind. We must believe in our heart that the compelling picture of our future is worth living a life of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and self-denial. Strong character never happens through self-indulgence...never. Such is why the character of our country is in such rapid decline. The more our culture embraces a godless, relativistic worldview that offers only the hope of self-indulgence, the more we can anticipate a country without any moral character whatsoever.

Notice how the Apostle Paul spends three chapters here in Ephesians presenting a powerful, compelling, biblical worldview regarding our election, our blessings, our salvation, our empowerment by the Holy Spirit, our newfound Oneness in Christ, and our destiny as those who are to be filled unto all the fullness of God both now and forever after! Paul knows that for the young believers to live a disciplined, obedient life to the teachings of Jesus, they need first to know the truth about who they are and how deeply they are loved by God. It is only after Paul helps the early church SEE how much they are loved that he calls them to LIVE a disciplined life. What we see determines how we live, so our paradigm or our worldview is essential to the formation of our character.

Note also that our values inform our character. If you don't know your values, you will live your whole life *reacting* to what happens to you and what is said about you, and inevitably you will live a life of blame. You will blame everyone and everything for the way you are feeling and for your behavior that can't be helped because you have given everyone and everything in your life that kind of power. However, if you know your values, you have the power and the choice to *respond* according to your biblical values as opposed to *reacting* according to your feelings.

As a Christian, my highest value is my relationship with Jesus. I know that my destiny is to become like Jesus, and so in following Jesus I am learning to see people like Jesus sees people and to respond to people and circumstances the way that Jesus responded to people and circumstances. So, when insulted or disrespected by others, I can either react emotionally...which is to give power to those people to determine my emotional state and my perception of worth; or, I can look to Jesus and remember that He was also insulted and disrespected by others, and yet He was humble, gentle, patient, and suffered their insults with unconditional love. That choice will always be mine: I can react according to my feelings, or I can respond according to my values.

It is this pattern of our repeated behavior...reacting or responding...indulging or refraining...refusing to forgive or extending forgiveness...always insisting on being understood or seeking first to understand...these are the patterns of behavior that lead to habits, and those habits will eventually determine our character.

The more times I simply react emotionally, the more those reactions become a habit, and I eventually become a reactionary person. However, if I respond according to the value I have in Jesus...if I choose to respond as Jesus responded, eventually those choices will lead to habits that inform my character as well, and hopefully I become a person whose character is akin to the character of Christ.

Remember this timeless truth: What we believe to be true dictates our behavior. Our behavior creates habits. Habits create character.

Allow me to brag about my Mom for a minute...she is a remarkable example of character.

I'll never forget the first time my mom got diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I was with her in the hospital, and I was practically grieving her death before her treatments even began! Ovarian cancer is a killer, and like many well-intentioned family members, I was already preparing myself for the worst by saying something about life after death when my mom looked straight at me and said, "Quit talking to me like I'm already dead. I just have cancer, but that's not the end of this story." I was *reacting* emotionally to her diagnosis of cancer; but my mom was *responding* to her diagnosis according to her deepest held beliefs and values. Following the surgery, the doctor told her to drink lots of water and walk a lot...so that's what she did. Mom ministered thousands of souls to pray for her, and she lived a disciplined life every day, trusting God for those things that were out of her control. When she went into remission, Mom

volunteered with a ministry that cared for women with cancer because she understood what they were going through. Ten years later, when the ovarian cancer returned, Mom responded the same way, and I'm happy to report that she is still alive today, cancer free, and doing quite well!

Church, character is forged in the fires of hardship, challenges, and the countless number of choices that we make every day under all kinds of circumstances. But what we ultimately believe to be true will have a great deal to do with the formation of our character. Our deepest held values will inform the way we respond. Mom believed, and she still believes, that God has a plan and that He can be trusted. So, when hardships came her way, she didn't react emotionally...she didn't blame God or blame the doctors or blame anyone else...she took responsibility for what she could control, she lived a disciplined life, she trusted God, and her character grew as a result. Her Christian character ended up blessing countless people and continues to bless people to this day...that's how it works.

Listen: God has called us as His redeemed children to live into the compelling picture of our identity in Christ by living a disciplined life...a life marked by humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love. By the way, this is the life you have always wanted...it is the life Jesus died to provide for those who believe. Our Christian character marked by humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering and love will woo a lost world to Jesus...it absolutely will. But the formation of this kind of Christian character requires us to WALK. We don't develop character through laziness. We don't develop character by taking the easy path. We don't develop character through self-indulgence. We develop Christian character by following Jesus and obeying His commands. We develop Godly character by taking responsibility for ourselves and living a disciplined life. And every time we make good choices that honor God and serve others, we are forming habits that shape our character. Unfortunately, every time we defy the teachings of Jesus and live a life of self-indulgence, we are also contributing to our character.

That's how it goes...we are always becoming---either something glorious that will one day be a wonder to behold, or something that will be hideous beyond description. C.S. Lewis writes: Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.

Now is the time for transformation of our character through the redemptive blood of Christ. Now is the time for change. A time will come when it will be too late. Alexander Maclaren writes:

We carry on into another world the selves that we have made here. Whatever death does—and it does a great deal that we do not know of—it does not alter, it only brings out, and I suppose, intensifies, the main drift and set of a character.

Now is the time to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, amen? Let us ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to walk in such a way that brings glory to God.

III. Making the Turn

If you are golfer, you know that no matter how bad you played the first nine holes, there is something hopeful about making the turn and starting the next nine holes. There's a second chance to get it right. But before we start the second nine, we take a little break, use the bathroom, grab a hot dog and a beverage, and off we go. I think for a lot of us, that's where we are this morning. We're not too proud of the way we have developed our character thus far, but we're ready to make the turn in the hope that the back side will go a whole lot better than the first nine.

Well, that's not a bad way to look at your life if you are in Christ. Because of the cross and the empty tomb, it is never too late to ask for forgiveness and to ask God for the grace to change your life and your character. Your next chapter may be the most compelling chapter of your life if you allow God to redeem your past and to prepare you to shine brightly with His presence as you step into tomorrow. That said, even after we have been forgiven by God's grace, character change is a process...it requires walking...but through the power of the Holy Spirit, it most certainly can be done.

If we want to change our character, we must first begin by examining our worldview. Do we actually believe what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1-3? If we truly believe that we are chosen, adopted, saved by grace, and empowered by the Holy Spirit...if we truly believe that Christ dwells in us through faith and that our destiny is to be filled unto all the fullness of God...then it stands to reason we will begin to make choices according to those beliefs. Take some time this week and examine what you actually believe to be true. Go back and read Ephesians 1-3 and underline what you believe to be true in what Paul writes there. What we "see" determines how we live. Pray and ask God to open your eyes to what is true...so that you see correctly. That's the first step to changing our character.

We must also ask ourselves, "What values do I hold most dear that inform the way I will respond to the circumstances in my life?" I invite you to identify your deepest held values and then journal your habits this week. Identify how often you react emotionally to a situation as compared to the number of times you respond according to your values. We will all react emotionally at times...that is part of being a human being. But remember: it's the repetition of your choices and behaviors that create habits, and habits create character.

Finally, remember that you have the power as a human being made in the image of God to start new habits. You can choose to get up an hour earlier and spend time with God, waiting on God to speak to your heart. You can choose to turn off the TV and go for a walk. You can choose to read more books and play less video games. You can choose to eat less sugar and more broccoli! You can choose to start a spiritual conversation with the person next to you on the plane rather than sticking in your earbuds. Church, thank God every day for the freedom we have to choose LIFE over death, to choose what is the RIGHT over the wrong, to choose to honor JESUS as our

Lord above everyone and everything else. And remember that every time we make good choices, we are creating new habits, and those new habits will inform our character as believers. The goal is right there in our text: to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you develop godly character...ask the Holy Spirit to help me develop godly character...for it will only be when those within the church walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling that our collective witness will be a light in this hurting culture. It begins now...one choice at a time.

Let's pray.