*DEVOTIONS*

September 4 - 9

*Live Worthy of God’s Call*

**Monday, September 4 Ephesians 4:1-3**

*“Lead a life worthy of your calling”*

 This chapter depicts the church in action, living its calling. Verse 1marks a transition from the prayerful description of God’s grace and salvation in the first 3 chapters to an explanation of the consequences of grace in chapters 4-6. If God’s love is so great, if his salvation is so powerful, if God has granted such reconciliation, all of which were explored in chapters 1-3, then believers should live accordingly. They should value God’s love enough to be shaped by it. Verses 2-3 describe a life worthy of God’s calling as being marked by humility, gentleness, patience, tolerant love, and peacekeeping. Attention first goes to the ego and then to loving relations. An understanding of God’s work is always an attack on the ego, not to obliterate or humiliate the self, but to bring it into relation with God and to redirect its interests. In losing life we find it.

 Living worthy of the call also requires eagerness to keep the unity of the Spirit. We are asked to value unity, be attentive to it, and invest energy in it so that it is not threatened. It is based in the oneness of God and the oneness of the gospel, which works the same for all people.

*May how I live, Lord, be a worthy reflection of your love for me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 5 Ephesians 4:4-6**

*“For there is . . .”*

 In these three verses, Paul gives the theological reason for the ethic of unity championed in verse 3. Christians must maintain the unity of the Spirit because everything they hold of any significance they hold with other believers. Seven items are preceded by the word “one,” and in each case the oneness expresses both the uniqueness of the item and its foundational value for unity. All seven express the reality that there is only one gospel and that to believe that gospel is to enter into the unity it creates. Christianity is a shared faith.

 The similarity of verses 1 and 4 underscores that living worthy of one’s calling will mean living in unity, for all share the same calling and are on the way to the same destiny. Verse 5 emphasizes that while the world may know numerous “lords,” Christians know only one, and this implies that the one Lord is not going to give contradictory commands to his followers. Similarly, only one baptism exists and that is baptism into Christ. Lastly, the greatest basis for unity exists in God himself, who is internally united as Father, Son, and Spirit.

*You unite us in yourself, Lord, that we may live united in the world. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 6 Ephesians 4:7-16**

*“Gifts Christ gave to the church”*

 Paul’s concern for unity is balanced by an emphasis on diversity and the responsibility of each person. Unity does not mean that individuality and individual responsibility are lost. Unity reigns, but Christ does not work merely at the universal level. He works in the individual and gives grace to each person. In this case, “grace” does not designate saving grace but grace for ministry. Paul could as easily have written, “To each of us *ministry* has been given.” In other words, Christ gives grace to each person to do the work of one’s calling.

 In far too many churches people come, listen to a preacher, and do little else. No wonder the charge has been made that the body of Christ seems to have one big mouth and many little ears! But that is not how Paul viewed the church. While it is true that some have a special responsibility to teach and preach, Paul stresses that every Christian is responsible to build up the church. We have all received grace for ministry and must live worthy of our calling. We are all expected to work to strengthen the church.

*May all of us, Lord, do the work in the church to which you have called us. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

September 4 - 9

*Live Worthy of God’s Call*

**Thursday, September 7 Ephesians 4:17-19**

*“Live no longer as you did before”*

 In order to lead a life worthy on one’s call, one must refrain from living as one did before. In verses 17-24, Paul gives several oppositions: former “Gentile” life versus present life; futility versus truth; darkened and ignorant versus taught; putting off the old being versus putting on the new; deceit versus truth; impurity and lust versus righteousness and holiness; separated from the life of God versus created to be like God.

 For Paul to ask his Gentile readers not to live like Gentiles sounds strange, but “Gentile” is used here by Paul not in the ethnic but in the moral sense. Paul’s primary concern is not with a list of specific sins, but with a distortion and disorientation of the mind. Thus, sin in the believer’s life is fundamentally a malfunction of the mind, for the mind that should be focused on God and his call is instead focused on itself and the call of lesser things. It is futile in its thinking, darkened in its understanding, ignorant, and hard hearted toward God. Sins are not the cause of the problem, but the result; the problem lies in the mind and in choices made against God.

*Transform my mind, Lord, so I may daily live your call. Amen.*

**Friday, September 8 Ephesians 4:20-24**

*“Live as faithful followers of Christ”*

 Paul’s words assume that life is different for Christians; they state that an encounter with Jesus has changed things. Unfortunately, too many people claiming the title *Christian* serve self as fully as non-Christians. They allow the non-Christian world to define life rather than the God who created them. All of us too often seek conformity to this world’s scheme, or at least recognition from it.

 Paul’s expressions for the depth of relation and union with Christ assume the kind of faith that is not merely belief about Jesus, but an involvement with him and openness to him. Since he is the Lord who leads both by word and by action, the language of learning from him is natural. The truth that is learned is the truth of the death and resurrection of Christ, from which all other truth is understood. We identify with his death and resurrection by dying to self and rising to new life, which here are expressed as “putting off the old being” and “putting on the new.”

*I reject a self-centered identity, Lord, in favor of a Christ-centered identity. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 9 Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2**

*“Follow the example of Christ”*

 This section details in practical terms what the Christian life described in 4:20-24 looks like. Given the focus on *truth* in 4:15, 21, 24, it is no surprise that truth-telling is the first of Paul’s ethical injunctions. The motivation for telling the truth is that we are members of the same body of believers. Next, Paul addresses anger, telling his readers that while they may at times find themselves angry, they are not to sin in their anger. Verses 28-29 give two contrasts: instead of stealing from others, provide generously for others; and, instead of abusing others with your language, help others with your words.

 Living contrary to the way of Christ causes the Holy Spirit to grieve for us, a truth that emphasizes the personal nature of God. Like a parent is grieved by their child’s misbehavior, so is the Spirit by ours. Verses 30-31 tell us to bring goodwill, not ill will, to our relationships. After all, God brought us goodwill, not ill will, by sending his Son into the world. Summarizing all that Paul has said in chapter 4 is chapter 5’s “Imitate God.” We take our character from him.

*May I treat others, Lord, as you have treated me. Amen.*