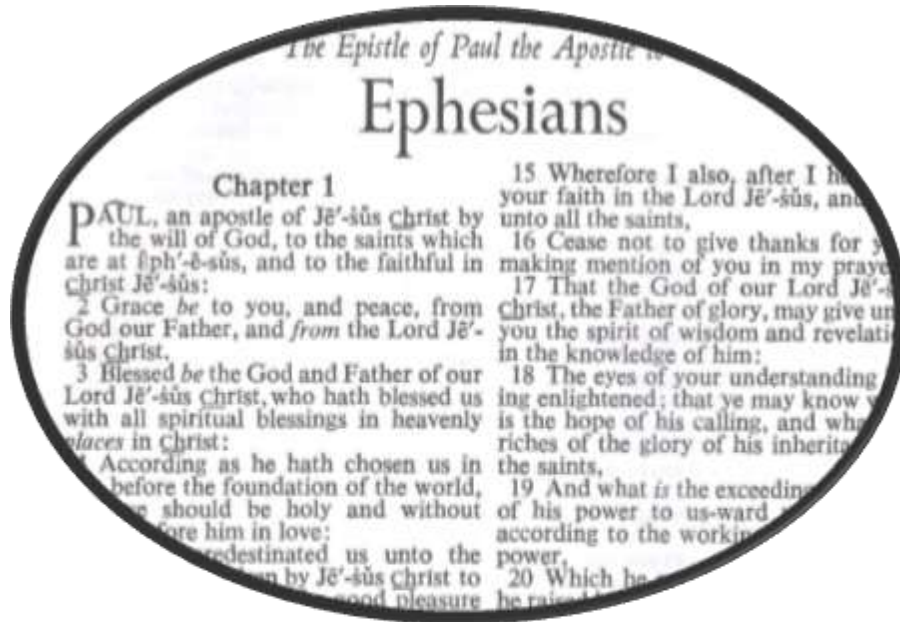


# EPHESIANS – WEEK 4

## WALK THE WALK



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Ephesians 4:1–19 – Walk the Walk*

Paul lays in the structure of how Christ builds the temple of the Holy Spirit – the church. We are one body, unified. He built this body through gifts. Those gifts include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They give us unity in the knowledge of Christ so that we are not tossed to and fro by the winds of false doctrine.

Given this, we should avoid debauchery like the plague.

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1 Ephesians 4:1–6 (NKJV)

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Paul keeps referring to a *calling with which you were called*. What calling?

Paul mentions a lot of things in verses five and six: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. Is the calling one of those, or maybe all of them together?

Almost. The calling is what Jesus said to people as he called them – “*Follow me.*” The calling is to follow Jesus as Lord.

And this isn’t a suggestion; it’s a command. It’s the essence of what it means to be a Christian. You are called.

And Paul is encouraging the Ephesian Christians *to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*. In a way, that’s surprising.

We tend to look up to the first century Christians as perfect saints. We see present day Christianity as a poor substitute for the real thing, and the real thing is the people Paul’s writing to here.

Obviously, that’s idealistic. Paul wrote this to the Ephesians because they weren’t perfect.

They needed to hear it just as much as we do.

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We have, against all odds, been called to a great thing, and we need *to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*.

But there’s more. Paul tells us how we’re to do that, and the method he prescribes here is surprising. We’re to walk *with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit*.

So, walking *worthy of the calling with which you were called* doesn’t mean walking like super-perfect saints. It means walking *with all lowliness and gentleness*.

That makes a lot more sense. If Paul had told us to be super-saints who never sin, well then, good luck with that. Instead he says almost the exact opposite. Don’t act like you’re better than everyone else.

Be real.

2 Ephesians 4:7–10 (NKJV)

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says:*

*“When He ascended on high,  
He led captivity captive,  
And gave gifts to men.”*

*(Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

What gifts? And what’s the connection to ascension?

The gifts will be detailed in the next lesson. Except for one interesting twist, they’re the usual spiritual gifts. More on that tomorrow. The ascension reference comes from Psalm 68:18.

*You have ascended on high,  
You have led captivity captive;  
You have received gifts among men,  
Even from the rebellious,  
That the LORD God might dwell there. (NKJV)*

But Ephesians 4:8 says “gave gifts,” while Psalm 68:18 says “received gifts.” Why the switch? John Calvin answers this brilliantly in his landmark work – *Institutes*.

*Paul purposely changed the word, and employed it, not as taken out of the Psalm, but as an expression of his own, adapted to the present occasion. Having quoted from the Psalm a few words descriptive of Christ's ascension, he adds, in his own language, and gave gifts, — for the purpose of drawing a comparison between the greater and the less. Paul intends to shew, that this ascension of God in the person of Christ was far more illustrious than the ancient triumphs of the Church; because it is a more honorable distinction for a conqueror to dispense his bounty largely to all classes, than to gather spoils from the vanquished.*

Psalm 68:18’s mention of receiving gifts is about things for God’s dwelling place (the tabernacle or the temple). Christ’s triumph over the grave (*the lower parts of the earth*) and over the forces of death (Satan) is greater. The Israelite builders needed to receive gifts to support building God’s dwelling place. In contrast, Christ now gives to us gifts that support building God’s new and better dwelling place – us.

*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? – 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NKJV)*

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This gets into one of the most intimidating concepts in Christianity. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We are God’s dwelling place. That’s a responsibility I didn’t plan on.

3 Ephesians 4:11-13 (NKJV)

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

These are the gifts referred to in 4:8. But pay careful attention to the wording. It doesn't say that Jesus gave specific spiritual gifts to certain Christians (though that's true). It says that He gave these gifted people to the church *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry*. This has profound implications.

First of all, in combination with what we learned from 4:8-10, this means that we should think of the church as a whole as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The gifts Jesus gave for the building of God's dwelling place are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The receiver of those gifts is the whole church. That's the full interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit collectively. Each one of us is part of that temple.

Secondly, this puts a great responsibility on those people who are identified as gifts. Just imagine what that must have felt like. It's one thing to think of giving to the church. It's something else to see yourself as a gift. You, and your whole life, has been given to a project. How then should you live?

And notice how the wording of 1 Corinthians 6:19 fits this when it says, "*you are not your own.*"

While some people have greater gifts, roles and responsibilities than others, every Christian should be intimidated by what they've been called to.

If you think your role is destined to be minor, think again.

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Have you ever felt you were part of something bigger than yourself? Every team sport teaches this. Almost every business runs this way. Doctors need schedulers and accountants. Pilots need mechanics.

But they get to see how everything fits together. Christians don't. We have to be content knowing that what we do fits into some grand scheme of things, even though we can't fully see how.

But that's because the grand scheme of things is so grand. It's beyond our comprehension anyway. We probably know about as much as we could handle already.

The result is a confusing combination of awe and unsatisfied curiosity. The more we see the more exciting it is – and the more we realize there's more to see.

This is the connection between faith and works. Do more and you'll see more, and that'll encourage and excite you as your faith matures.

4 Ephesians 4:14–16 (NKJV)

*that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

And what was the purpose of Jesus giving *some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry?*

*That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine!*

Yes, this is another purpose construct in the Greek. Here we see God’s careful planning in how He grows His church.

But notice something else that’s disturbing. This time God’s playing defense. He’s anticipating *the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*, and He’s readying His church for the attacks.

OK, so why doesn’t He just smack these “cunning, crafty, deceitful, plotting” men halfway across the galaxy? He’s all powerful, right? Why, does God let His enemies have free reign to make their mischief, and require His church to play defense?

That is the question. Somehow, that’s His glorious plan. We’re not going to understand it (in this life anyway).

Just be in awe. He knows what he’s doing, even if we don’t.

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God definitely allows these struggles. Let that sink in for a minute. Lots of bad stuff happens. We’d like to think that an all-powerful God was not looking or something when those bad things happened.

But that’s not it.

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. – Isaiah 55:8 (NKJV)*

This verse gets quoted all the time. You might be sick of hearing it; it’s not satisfying. We want to understand what’s going on and God’s response to our complaint it to say, “You don’t understand what’s going on.” Grrrr.

Yeah, well, tough. That’s His story and He’s sticking to it.

The Bible’s supposed to humble us, remember?

5 Ephesians 4:17–19 (NKJV)

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

This is the conclusion of all the preceding logic and doctrine. Starting in 4:1, Paul writes that we are to *walk worthy of the calling with which you were called ... There is one body ... But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift ... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers ... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.*

So here he concludes, *you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.* Even though this should be obvious by this point, Paul hammers the point home by busting on *the rest of the Gentiles.* They *walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

Gee Paul, tell us how you really feel.

But this isn't all that over the top. Paul is inspiring the Christian Ephesians to make the kind of big lifestyle changes that were the hallmark of early Christianity. He uses a dramatic sales pitch – trying gross them out so that they will flee the lifestyle they once knew.

But he's also writing this to us. If you believe, then act like it.

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The real keeper here is Paul's dramatic portrait of how *the rest of the Gentiles walk.* While he's specifically writing about Ephesian non-believers, it's still a general description of the destructiveness of sin. Does this apply to our age?

You bet it does, particularly the phrase, *"being past feeling."* The NIV translates this as, *"Having lost all sensitivity."* The ESV says, *"They have become callous."*

Paul is describing what modern medicine calls desensitization, or in the case of recreational drugs, tolerance. In their pursuit of pleasure, people need more and more sex or drugs or whatever to achieve the same high.

Paul Revere and the Raiders, in their 1966 classic *Kicks*, nailed this perfectly with the line, *"Kicks just keep getting' harder to find, and all your kicks ain't bringin' you peace of mind. Before you find out it's too late, girl, you better get straight."*

Paul Revere had it right, but Saint Paul had it first.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Are you impatient?
2. How does the idea that you're the temple of the Holy Spirit affect you?
3. How has your role in the church evolved?
4. What thing that you don't understand bothers you the most?
5. What aspect of sin horrifies you the most?

*Items for prayer:*