

# ***“Dead Man Walking”***

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***Ephesians 4:1-16***

***May 30, 2021***

***Bob Thompson***

My wife Linda’s sweet mother went to be with Jesus a few months ago. Because of Covid and because we wanted to find a time when as many of us could gather as possible, we postponed the service to Memorial Day weekend. So yesterday we gathered in the barn at their home place to celebrate her life.

Death evokes a range of responses for believers in Jesus. It’s a myth that we’re all supposed to put on happy faces and pretend the loss doesn’t matter. God hardwired us for relationships, and not to grieve is not only unchristian; it’s unhuman. I think of the story of Jesus with Mary and Martha. All of them, including Jesus, break down and weep. And yet Jesus also says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” This is not the end.

There’s another aspect of that story I want you to think about this morning. Have you ever wondered what it was like to be Lazarus after he emerged from the grave? It’s not exactly parallel to Jesus’ resurrection, because Lazarus would die again. He wasn’t raised immortal.

What was it like when he was lying still, dead, and heard Jesus calling, “Lazarus, come out!”? “The last I remember, I had a fever and my sisters were wailing, ‘Where is Jesus when you need him?’ Did I lapse into a coma? Well, that’s definitely Jesus. I better get up and move. But I can’t see anything. There are bandages all over my face. I can’t move. And boy, I’m starved. Can somebody get me a Big Mac?”

He clamors and scrambles through the maze of his tomb, pulling at the strips of cloth. The light at the end of his tunnel is so bright. When he gets out, the crowd gasps and sobs and cheers. “He’s back!”

What do you suppose the rest of his life was like? How attached was he to Jesus? Like the other followers of Jesus, soon he had to face the cruel crucifixion. Do you suppose he more than others believed that was not the end? And after Jesus’

resurrection, don't you think this guy who used to be dead would have had a different level of attention to Jesus as he walked around the rest of his life?

That's the image Paul wants you to have as we transition from Ephesians 3 to 4. Paul has said, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." You were Lazarus. But you have been made alive as God lavished the riches of his grace on you. You're a dead man walking.

I said last week that there's only one command in Ephesians 1-3: remember. Remember how far away from God you were. You were without hope and without God. Now you've been brought near. Remember that. Don't ever forget it. Paul closes chapter 3 with a prayer that his readers would know the extent of God's love – how high and long and wide and deep – and that their inner being would be strengthened with the power that brought Jesus from the dead.

The break between chapters 3 and 4 is unfortunate, in a way. On the one hand, we need divisions into chapters and verses. At least I do. I'd have a hard time following the thought of Ephesians if it were all a continuous scroll. And if you're going to divide Ephesians into two or more parts you'd have to put a division at chapter 4.

It's still unfortunate because Paul's just continuing his thoughts. "I therefore," he writes, "a prisoner for the Lord, urge you...." He's already mentioned his imprisonment and suffering. He repeats it now to continue his thought. He doesn't want them to be discouraged that he's confined. He does want just enough empathy for his suffering to grab their attention. He doesn't blame Jews or Romans for his situation. He credits the Lord. God has not lost control. If he's there it must be because God is using that imprisonment. So he has something to "urge" on them.

There's only one command in chapters 1-3, but there are a bunch in chapters 4-6. There are all sorts of implications once you have realized that God has lavished the riches of his grace on you. We'll need several weeks to look at all these commands, often just summarizing them. You can't stay the same once you grasp God's love and power.

All those commands start with just one that leads to the rest. "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." This is one place I wish the NIV hadn't paraphrased the original. Paul says to "*walk* worthily of the calling to which you've been called." You were dead, and now you're not only alive, you're walking. What does it mean to walk in a way that fits what happened to you? Can you really say to Jesus, "Hey, thanks for all that unconditional love & stuff," but I've got other priorities to attend to besides doing what you want"? I don't think so. If you get God's love and power, you can't continue unchanged.

What could you possibly do to be "worthy" of God calling you out of the grave? Paul will give lots of answers to that question, but he starts with two.

First, be humble. You've probably heard that enough in church not to be shocked by it, but you should be. Humility is not a universally valued virtue. Paul will use a spiritual warfare analogy later in Ephesians. Humility is not what generals use to rally the troops. Imagine Braveheart riding back and forth on his horse, yelling at the Scottish rebels: "OK, guys, get out there and be humble and gentle!" Or Coach Rhule gathering the Carolina Panthers for summer workouts: "Be patient and kind!" The Greeks and Romans thought humility was for the weak, the defeated, the nobody.

Paul says to walk worthily of your calling by God is to be humble. It's not about you. Suffer if you need to. Be kind. Forgive, whether or not someone deserves it. Give the benefit of the doubt. You don't know it all. Listen. Be patient. Don't give up.

Second, make every effort to preserve unity. Work at it. This should also strike you as odd. In chapters 1-3, Paul has said Jesus has already created unity. Why should we have to work hard at something that's already a done deal?

Think about our own Chase Collins, who was just awarded a full ride to The Citadel. Would we say, "Chase, you're in. Isn't that great? You don't have to try anymore. You've been declared worthy. Relax." Absolutely not. You'd say, "Chase, you've been declared worthy. In response, give this all you've got for the next four years." The same with Matt and Molly, who are getting married in August. Would I say, "I now pronounce you man and wife. Your marriage is a done deal. You can stop trying to make each other happy." No, that's Day 1 of the real work it takes to share a lifetime of happiness.

This is a great time at Corinth and in every church to "make every effort." What effort are you making to keep the unity of the Spirit in your church family? I sent out some suggestions this week by email. It's time to make the effort to be here – not just for worship services, but for some extra time – like sticking around today for pizza or joining us for other meals and special Sundays this summer. It's time for the effort of forgiveness to everyone you think might have treated Covid with ignorance or naïveté or callousness. It's time to let it go and move on. It's time to get in touch with people you haven't seen at church in a while.

Believe it or not, that's it for direct commands in the entire Scripture you heard a few minutes ago. That's your whole "to do" list for this week. There are a few more verses in this text, but they just add reasons for walking worthily in humility and making every effort. I'll overview them and Pastor Paul will apply them for you.

First, because there's only one (4-6). Paul uses the word "one" seven times, each time pointing to an underlying unity. There's only one God who created everything. There's only one Lord who died and rose again. There's only one Spirit who's working invisibly. There's only one church and one way to symbolize your part in it – baptism. Yes, I know it seems like there's a lot of difference among Christians but don't ever forget what we have in common is so much greater and deeper.

Second, because God's grace is personal (7-10). So far in Ephesians Paul has used "grace" to talk about what we as believers have in common – the grace that caused dead people to live again. But there's a different kind of grace, and it's the grace that not only values but creates our differences. We are one, but we are many. We don't look the same, we often don't even think the same. We have different pasts, and we have different abilities to serve the Lord. Grace is personal. The Jesus who descended to the earth has ascended to the Father. In his place of power, he doles out gifts by grace. The Bible tells us so.

Finally, because you've got people (11-16). If sometimes it seems hard to keep making an effort, to stay humble, to be kind, to use those gifts, to engage in a body with people who drive you crazy, it's OK. You're not in this by yourself. God has given prophets and missionaries and evangelists and pastor-teachers.

Our job isn't to do everything. It's to equip you to do what God has called you to do. We're on it. I love the image Paul uses of "every supporting ligament." Ligaments connect, cushion, and flex. Ligaments take very different hardened parts of the body and get them working as a team. Be a ligament. We'll equip you.

We love you, our people. We know this Christian life is sometimes really hard. It's hard to remember we were dead. It's hard to keep focus on walking worthily of our calling. It's hard to be humble. It's hard to make every effort at unity.

Sometimes it's hard for us as well – those of us who pastor and teach and lead. But we're not giving up. Don't you do it either.

One of those wonderful pastor-teachers here at Corinth is Paul Cummings. He's going to pick up here and say more about this process of growing up into Christ.

### ***Paul Cummings***

As we transition from verse 13 to the end of the chapter, Paul will equip us to do the work God has ordained us to do. It's this whole idea of unifying, growing, equipping, and maturing us.

We are going to grow to know Christ so intimately as a body (14-16). The body doesn't always grow at the same proportion. When I was born, my head was the size it is now. Later my body caught up with my head. The body doesn't grow at the same speed but it does all grow in unity together. The body will grow together, and we want the body to grow so that we will mature and not be tricked by this world.

Clever tricks are what I am all about. I can take a fishing lure that looks like a small sunfish and it throw out in the water to cleverly trick a bass to eat it when I fish.

What are some of the cleverly disguised lies of this world and that the culture tries to feed us? It's not just personal salvation but unity in the body.

Historically the church wrestled with Gnosticism. It's an idea that the gospel wasn't enough. You had the gospel but if you were 'really on the inside' there was an extra bit of information for only the most holy, select people. The early church also said the blood of Christ wasn't enough. Works have a big part to play in your salvation. That cleverly disguised lie has continued on in the church today.

What are some of these cleverly disguised lies that infiltrate the church at the sake of the church's unity? How can we retain unity and recognize these lies?

*First, interpretation.* Just because some texts in the Bible need interpretation doesn't mean it's all up for interpretation. There are parts in scripture where we need to have correct historical context. Jeremiah 29:11 was not written for you. You gain inspiration from it but it's not written for you unless you were a captive of Israel in a foreign land. The context of that is not for us today.

God's word talks about his sovereignty, his holiness, God as Creator, Savior, what God calls sin, and what he will do when he comes back again. These are all consistent from cover to cover. There is never a place in the Bible, for instance, that says he was Creator but now he is not, or that God is not really in control anymore. Just because some places in scripture need interpretation doesn't mean the majors do because they are consistent from cover to cover.

*Second, science.* Just because we know more science now does not mean we know more than God. There is a myth that human enlightenment puts us in a realm where we can sit in judgment of what God has commanded.

How long ago was it that we thought the earth was flat? How long ago was it that we figured out that washing hands might actually save our lives? It was 1845. So within the last 176 years, we discovered that washing hands can save our lives. The concepts of gravity, the water cycle, what the earth's core is like, etc., all of those things are found in the book of Job which is considered one of the oldest books in the Bible.

We are in the process of figuring small things out. But before we get high and mighty about what we know, God's knowledge is eternal. Just because we know more science now does not mean we know more than God.

*Third, culture.* Just because culture's number one value is personal freedom does not mean it's God's. Our culture and our society is screaming at us—be what you were created to be. If you feel you were created to be something else, then be that. Whatever makes you happy, then do that. Whatever you think is right, do that.

That is the oldest lie in the book. In Genesis 3, Satan says "Did God really say this? Do what you want, not what he wants."

Personal freedom is our society's number one value but it does not mean it's God's. God's number one value is his holiness and our recognition of it. We recognize his holiness and love him back by obeying him. God doesn't want us to just believe in him; the demons believe in him. God wants us to adore, trust, and obey Him. Personal freedom may be the world's number one value but it's not God's.

Then there is this idea that we are to hold to the truth in love becoming more and more like Jesus Christ (15). If you want to know what God's will is for your life, it's to become like Jesus Christ. We will hold to the truth of God's word. Any church or group of believers will lose their unity if they deny that the word of God is the ultimate authority for all of life and all of God's people.

Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." How will that happen unless you hold tightly to it while walking in the darkness? We are to take His word and hide it in our heart, hold onto it, so that no matter where we go, we can refer back to it, and it gives us life.

"He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." (16) No one here right now is the head of the church physically in bodily form. Christ is the head of the church. Everyone else in this building is a servant. We are not called to come to church and see what we can get out of it but our job is to serve.

We as the church are created to serve one another for the glory of Jesus Christ. We work together so that we might grow together not for our glory but for the church's glory. Amen.