

**The Lowly Walk, Part 1**

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

Code: 1919

**LESSON**

**I. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFORMITY**

**A. Conformity to Social Standards**

1. The pledge

People who live in a society are obligated to act in accord with the standards of that society. For example, a person who chooses to live in the United States is expected to abide by the principles, standards, and laws that govern this society. Employees conform to the standards and objectives of their particular employer. If you join a club or athletic team, you will be asked to uphold certain principles.

2. The penalty

If a person doesn't conform to the standards set by his social structure, he will lose his position within the framework of that organization. He has become a hindrance to the society and is dismissed from it. If you break the law, you will be incarcerated. If you don't do the job your employer hired you for, you will be fired. If you are a member of an athletic team and don't follow the coach's instructions, you will be kicked off the team.

3. The pitfall

The principle of conformity can become extremely binding on some people. Most of us want to be team-players. That's a healthy part of human nature--wanting to belong and gain acceptance. But that desire can become obsessive. John 9:1-23 is a good illustration of that. The Lord Jesus Christ performed a wonderful miracle: He healed a man who had been born blind. Jesus spit in some clay, made a little mud, put it on the blind man's eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man did so and returned able to see (vv. 7-8). The religious leaders began to investigate this miracle. They talked to the blind man's parents, who said, "By what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not. He is of age; ask him. He shall speak for himself" (v. 21). Even though they knew better, they wouldn't acknowledge anything about how he was healed. They wouldn't give

credit to Jesus Christ or glorify God. They didn't want to get involved "because they feared the [Jewish leaders]; for [they] had agreed already that, if any man did confess that he was the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (v. 22). The blind man's parents were so constrained by their desire for acceptance in their society that they wouldn't give credit to Christ for their son's miraculous healing. The things people identify with can become so binding that they become blind to reality. In this case the parents were blind to glory of Christ.

When I was young I wanted to belong to fraternities and certain clubs. In the process I had to endure the most incredible initiations you can imagine. I look back on those days and wonder what possessed me to pursue those things. The drive to belong is very strong. People often will do anything to conform to principles of a secret society because they want so desperately to be accepted--they need an identity.

## **B. Conformity to Biblical Standards**

### 1. The problem

Many people in the church want the blessings, rights, and privileges of being a child of God, yet they're unwilling to conform to biblical standards. To them the need to conform doesn't seem as binding as it does in worldly pursuits. Perhaps the reason is that Satan reinforces commitment to unimportant standards in his worldly organizations while he attempts to subvert commitment to biblical standards.

### 2. The penalty

When a person believes in Jesus Christ and receives salvation, Christ bestows on him all the rights, honors, and privileges that come with being a Christian. But He also wants him to conform to His standards. The New Testament is clear on what is to happen to the professing believer who doesn't conform to those standards. First Corinthians 5:1-8 says that if someone in the church is living in an immoral manner, he is to be put out of the church. Second Thessalonians 3:6 says that if someone in the church is living an unruly life and is not responding to counsel, he is to be put out of the church. And 1 Timothy 6:3-5 says that if someone is teaching doctrine inconsistent with the truth of God, he is to be put out of the church.

Sometimes the Lord puts out such people on His own. Some immoral members of the Corinthian church became weak or sick, and some even died (1 Cor. 11:30). First John 5:16 refers to a "sin unto death," where the Lord permanently excommunicates a believer engaged in habitual, premeditated sin.

If people can rigidly conform to the standards of a relatively important group, certainly Christians ought to make a commitment to walk in the manner God desires.

## **II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S CALLING**

### **A. Our Practice in Christ**

In the last three chapters of the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul calls believers to commit themselves to God's calling. Ephesians 4:1 starts out, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called." In Ephesians 1-3 Paul discusses the rights, honors, and privileges of the believer. In the last three chapters he gives the requirements--the standards by which we are to live.

When we entered the Body of Christ, our Lord gave us rights, privileges, and honors. He granted us "the riches of his glory" (Eph. 3:16). He "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (1:3). And in ages to come He will pour out "his grace in his kindness toward us" (2:7). Based on all that Christ has done for us, Paul tells us what He expects of us: to walk worthy of such a calling. The Lord expects us to act like members of His Body--to make His goals and objectives our goals and objectives. He expects us to be like Him.

1. 1 Peter 2:15--The apostle Peter said, "So is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." We ought to silence our critics by our godly life-style. Unfortunately many Christians don't walk worthy of their calling.

2. Philippians 1:27--Paul said, "Let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

### **B. Our Position in Christ**

The first three chapters of Ephesians present positional truth. God has given us incredible resources and riches. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (1:4). He predestinated us in love and adopted us (1:5). He made us to the praise of His glory and accepted us in Christ, the Beloved (1:6). He provided redemption and forgiveness for us (1:7). He gave us wisdom (1:8). He made known to us the mystery of His will (1:9). In the future He will give us an inheritance He planned before the world began (1:10-11). He gave us the Holy Spirit (1:13) and resurrection power (1:19-20). He made us alive from the dead (2:1). We who were at one time lost and cut-off from God have been made into one new man in Himself (2:13-15). He gave us understanding of a great mystery: that of Jew and Gentile being united by the gospel in the church (3:3-6). He made it possible for us to capitalize on all those things by strengthening us with His Holy Spirit so Christ can dwell in our hearts (3:17), so we can be filled with His incomprehensible love (3:18), so we can be

filled with the fullness of God (3:19), and so we can know His power (3:20). Rightly does Paul tell us in the next chapter to walk worthy--to live up to what God has given us. Our identity in Christ dictates our lifestyle.

### **III. THE PATTERN OF PAUL'S TRANSITION**

The transition Paul makes between chapters 3 and 4 is not random. It was typical for Paul to make a transition from doctrine to duty, from principle to practice, from theology to life. Doctrine is always the basis of duty--duty always flows out of doctrine. Doctrine and duty are linked as closely as the flower and the stem, the branch and the trunk, and the trunk and the roots.

The word "therefore" in Ephesians 4:1 indicates the transition--it refers back to the doctrine that the following duties are based on. That was Paul's approach in all his epistles.

#### **A. In Romans**

##### **1. Duty**

In Romans 12:1 Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Paul pleaded with the believers at Rome to do their spiritual duty. In verses 3-8 he informs them of the gifts they're to manifest. In verse 9 he tells them about the love they're to manifest. Then he instructed them to be diligent (v. 11), to rejoice (v. 12), to give to the needy (v. 13), to bless their persecutors (v. 14), and to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (v. 15). In chapter 13 he tells them how to respond to the government and to God's standards. Then he taught them how to respond to a weaker brother (14:1;15:7). In conclusion he discussed how one should carry out his ministry and relate to people in the ministry (15:8;16:27). All those instructions are practical.

##### **2. Doctrine**

But the word "therefore" in Romans 12:1 tells us that that practical section is based on the first eleven chapters of theology. Before Paul said anything about what a believer ought to do, he gave eleven chapters of doctrine. Notice in verse 1 he says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." What are the mercies of God? The great theological truths he related in the first eleven chapters. On the basis of the great truths God has mercifully extended to us, Paul gives us our duty--our "reasonable service." And that duty is based on the righteousness of God, the uselessness of law and works, the saving power of faith, peace with God, standing in grace, the promise of glory, the gift of love, the indwelling Spirit, adoption, reconciliation, our union with Christ, deliverance from sin, freedom from judgment, sanctification, justification, glorification, security, and God's unfailing

promises. That's why Paul pleads with us to present our bodies to Christ. Duty is always in response to doctrine.

## **B. In Galatians**

In the first four chapters Paul discusses the liberty of believers--that because of Christ we are free from circumcision, free from the Mosaic code, and free from the ceremonial law. None of those things brings about salvation. Paul concludes chapter 4 by saying, "Brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman [Hagar], but of the free [Sarah]" (v. 31). We are free--liberated for life. Immediately following 4:31 comes his "therefore" at the beginning of chapter 5: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (NASB). The duty to follow is based on a theology of freedom. Therefore, we are not to be subject to legalism. Then in chapters 5 and 6 Paul discusses the practical aspects of a life of freedom.

## **C. In Philippians**

In the first chapter Paul taught the Philippians great theological truths about Christ (specifically His consoling character and love) and what He had done personally in Paul's life. Then Paul said at the beginning of chapter 2, "If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Behavior is based on theology.

## **D. In Colossians**

The first two chapters of Colossians contain some of the most exalted presentations in Scripture of Jesus Christ and the truths of the gospel. Chapter 1 is arguably unparalleled in its treatment of the glory of Christ (rivaled perhaps by Hebrews 1). In chapter 2 Paul declares that the believer is complete in Christ--he needs nothing more. Beginning in chapter 3 Paul tells us we were risen with Christ and seated at the right hand of God. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. When Christ appears we will appear with Him in glory (vv. 1-4). Then in verse 5 he says, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (NIV). From Colossians 1:1;3:4 Paul presents doctrine, but from 3:5; 4:18 he gives the duty.

## **A Good Kind of Conformity**

God expects conformity in the Body of Christ--not conformity to rules and regulations out of fear or legalistic pride, but to righteousness out of deep love and affection for Jesus Christ. We should strongly desire to do what God wants us to do because of all He has done for us. We should walk worthy of Him. A believer is a child of God, a member of God's family--he belongs to the heavenly

Father--and that says something about how he ought to live. We disobey God when we fail to live up to our identity.

#### **IV. THE PRIORITY OF KNOWLEDGE**

We are to walk worthy of our calling, but to do so we must know the principles we are to follow. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1 Paul says, "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more." First Paul taught them how to walk and then exhorted them to do it. Instruction must come first--a person can't be expected to function on what he doesn't know. So we must search the Word of God to know the principles of life.

##### **A. The Search for Wisdom**

1. Job 28:1-12--Much of this chapter describes the lengths people will go to mine treasures from the earth: "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they refine it. Iron is taken out of the earth, and bronze is smelted out of the stone. He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection, the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death.... The stones of it are the place of sapphires; and it hath dust of gold. There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the falcon's eye hath not seen; the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing" (vv. 1-3, 6-11). Man will do anything to find treasure, but with all that effort he won't find the wisdom of God (v. 12).

2. Proverbs 2:4-6--Solomon says that when you put as much effort to know the wisdom of God as people exert to find gold and silver, then you'll know God's wisdom. But until you know God's wisdom, you won't know how to live.

3. Colossians 1:9-10--Paul says, "We also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (v. 9). The result is in verse 10: "That ye might walk worthy." The worthy walk is predicated on knowledge. So is being fruitful in every good work (v. 10), being strengthened with might (v. 11), and giving thanks (v. 12).

##### **The Danger of Teaching Duty Without Doctrine**

I teach the principles of the Word of God so you can live by them. I could tell stories or appeal to your emotions, but ultimately you'd forget what you heard. Pastors and teachers throughout the church weaken the Word of God when they exhort people about duty without teaching them doctrine. When

the principles are removed, the motive is gone.

Let me illustrate it this way: let's assume you all drive 55 miles an hour on the highway. The reason you do so is based on a regulation that tells you to drive 55 miles an hour. Your duty is predicated on that regulation. Near the first of April you don't suggest to your wife that you would like to send a large check to the government because they've done so much for you. You don't send it necessarily because you want to; a government regulation requires you to send it.

The Christian life is lived out in a similar manner. People don't do things arbitrarily. Unless they know the reason, you will have a difficult time getting them to commit to the duty. Pastors and teachers must teach doctrine. Otherwise they will become nothing more than cheerleaders, leading people to commit to things without knowing why.

James 3:1 says, "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment." The Lord will hold me accountable for dispensing His truth to His people. I want to discharge my ministry to the fullest, and that means I must teach you the principles of Scripture. I'm not interested in intimidating you to conform legalistically or emotionally. My responsibility is to teach the Word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to apply it. If I were to try to whip people into an emotional frenzy or tell them to do things without providing them a theological reason, I would be leaving them empty. Doctrine is the key to Christian living.

## **The Key to Church Renewal**

There are people in the church who claim that it is more important to show love to people than teach doctrine. That kind of unbiblical thinking often comes under the heading of church renewal. Several suggestions are typically made on how to renew the church. Some think the structure needs to change--eliminate the congregational setting and use small groups to emphasize interaction. But those kinds of changes often wind up being external and superficial. People can attempt reorganization of the church every six months and still never experience renewal. Why? Because Ephesians 4:23 says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." The church will be renewed only when it teaches God's truth so His people can know it. If that happens it matters little how the church structure changes. Once the people are renewed they will carry on the Lord's work.

## **B. The Source of Renewal**

Church renewal occurs when people's minds are renewed by God's Word.

1. Ephesians 1:17--Paul prayed "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding

being enlightened." God knows that the heart of renewal is to know His truth.

2. Philippians 1:9-10--Paul prayed "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent." We need to know doctrine and theology or our love will be less than God's love, which is discerning and knowledgeable.

3. Colossians 1:10--Paul again prayed "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

4. Colossians 3:10--Paul said, "Put on the new man, that is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

5. 2 Peter 3:18--Peter said, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." We need to know the Word of God. We should hunger for it--we should search for it as for treasure.

6. Colossians 1:28--Paul wanted everyone to be mature and complete. He described the ministry this way: "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

7. 2 Timothy 3:16-17--"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." You need to know God's Word if you're to do "all good works."

### **C. The State of the Church**

The church must know the Word of God. But for many years that has not been its approach. Christians have become so intent on relating to one another that they have forgotten about the foundation of relationships. I remember reading some years ago about a survey in Time magazine about people's working knowledge of the Bible. The people they surveyed had to have spent a certain number of years in the church, with a certain amount of Sunday School training and be at least freshmen in college. They were asked several Bible questions and the following are some of their answers: Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers. Eve was created from an apple. Jesus was baptized by Moses. The gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John. Jezebel was Ahab's donkey!

Fortunately that deplorable situation is changing. I think more Christians are reading and studying the Bible. You can't live what you don't know. You can't live within the framework of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and walk worthy of it unless you know the standards. We must know the Word of God, yet feel we can never know enough of it. The apostle Paul knew a great deal, yet the cry of his heart was, "That I may know him" (Phil. 3:10). James desired to "receive ... the engrafted word"



(James 1:21). And Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that we might grow by it" (1 Pet. 2:2). God's standard is the basis of our behavior.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called." God calls us to walk worthy of Him. What happens when we do so? Hebrews 11 is a testimony to the great heroes of faith. The first one is Abel, who offered God a more excellent sacrifice (v. 4). Next is Enoch, who pleased God so much that one day he walked with God into glory--he never died (v. 5). Noah walked with God in faith as he built the ark (v. 7). Abraham and Sarah walked worthy of God (vv. 8-19). Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses walked with God against all opposition (vv. 20-29). They lived up to what they knew. Even Rahab, the prostitute, walked with God (v. 31). Then the writer of Hebrews said, "What shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tested, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy)" (vv. 32-38). If you walk worthy of God, the world is not worthy of you.

### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. What generally happens to someone who doesn't uphold the standards of society?
2. How can conformity become obsessive with some people? Illustrate that from Scripture.
3. What does the New Testament teach about those who don't conform to biblical standards?
4. What does Christ expect of us?
5. What are some of the resources and riches God has given us?
6. What is the basis for duty?

7. Give some examples of how doctrine preceded duty in some of Paul's epistles.
8. Where can a believer look to find the principles of life?
9. According to Colossians 1:9-12, what things are predicated on knowledge?
10. What happens to the people when their pastors function only like cheerleaders?
11. What is the only way that church renewal can ever take place (Eph. 4:23)?
12. Give specific examples of believers who walked worthy of God?

### **Pondering the Principles**

1. Review the section that discusses our position in Christ (see p. 3). Ephesians 1-3 delineates many of the blessings God has given us as a result of being in Christ. Read Ephesians 1-3 and record the blessings God has already given us and those He will give us when we are with Christ in heaven. Thank God for everything He has given you. Be especially thankful for the blessings that are most meaningful to you.
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What is Scripture able to do for believers? We must search the Bible to know the principles of life. Job 28:1-12 shows what lengths people will go to recover treasure from the earth. To what lengths do you go to discover the principles that will guide and bless your life? If your goal as a believer is to glorify God and be all that you can be for Him, then a practical knowledge of Scripture is essential. Do you read the Bible on a daily basis? Are you understanding what you're reading? How much of what you read do you try to apply every day? To be all that God wants us to be, we need to mine the depths of God's Word and be continuously applying to our lives what we find. Examine what that kind of commitment will cost you in time and energy. Be willing to make it.

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