

Attitudes for a New Year

Ephesians 4:1-3 (12/31/17)

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Ephesians 4:1-3 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

I inherited a black '61 Chevy with a white convertible top from my brother when I was a teenager. A 348 cubic-inch engine with three two-barrel carburetors sat under the hood. It was nice. Late one Sunday night my buddies and I were in the parking lot at a bowling alley where we hung out and I decided to show off to my friends. It was stick shift so I put it in first gear, revved that 348 way up and popped the clutch, expecting to lay rubber all over the lot. Instead what I heard was a loud BANG and then clunk, clunk, clunk. I couldn't believe it. I blew the transmission. It doesn't matter how much power you've got under the hood, if the transmission is broke, you're not going anywhere! And when you try to show off, you're bound to fall. Pride can make a huge mess of things.

TRANSMITTING GOD'S POWER TO OUR PRACTICE (v. 1)

THEREFORE – Paul has described our glorious salvation in Christ in Ephesians 1-3 and ended by assuring us of that exceedingly abundant resurrection power of the Spirit that is throbbing away in the life of every believer. More power than we will ever need to move our lives forward. But that power needs to be transmitted to our lives. That's what is happening in Ephesians 4:1 in that word "Therefore." We're going from amazing grace, love, and power in chapters 1-3 to practice in chapters 4-6. Now we've got to make sure our drive train takes all that spiritual muscle and transfers it into our daily walk – in the church, in all our relationships, in our morals, in marriage and family, and in our war with Satan and his demons. That's where we're going in Ephesians. Plenty of power – just keep the transmission in gear and the clutch engaged! We're in for a great ride.

A PRISONER IN THE LORD – Paul describes himself as a prisoner, not "of" the Lord, but "in" the Lord. He may be in a Roman prison, but far more importantly, he's in Christ and glad to be Christ's prisoner. His circumstances didn't change his confidence and joy in the Lord, and neither should yours. God is in your circumstances and God has purpose in your circumstances. Sit with Paul in that Roman prison and know you belong to Christ, even as His prisoner!

URGE YOU – From that God-given position in Rome, Paul coaches us to tap into that power and live our lives for God's glory. He doesn't say, "I command you." But like a coach or a father, he's coming alongside of us and urging us on, imploring us to live to please God. We are doing the same thing here this morning. This isn't entertainment; this is teaching to build you up, to transform your life from the inside out, from your heart attitudes to your behavior, becoming more and more like Christ.

A WORTHY WALK – Paul is coaching you to walk, to live day by day, one step at a time, worthy of God’s call on your life. God has sovereignly called you to salvation. He has given you an eternal status as His son or daughter in Christ. You have a high and holy calling. Now, let your walk match that calling. That’s what worthy, the Greek word *axios*, means – appropriate. Does this shirt go with these pants? Are they appropriate together? You are called by God, now live like it. Don’t be a spiritual walking contradiction. Don’t live in such a way that people say, “You talk a good talk, but you don’t walk a good walk!” “You go to church? We’d never know it by the way you act here at work. All we hear is complaining and griping and whining. Is that what it means to be a Christian?” Paul counsels the same thing in three other passages:

Philippians 1:27 says “*conduct yourself in a manner **worthy** of the gospel.*”

Colossians 1:10 says “*walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, to please Him in all respects.*”

1 Thessalonians 2:12 says, “*walk in a manner **worthy** of the God who calls you into His kingdom and glory.*”

Now, what does that worthy walk look like?

FIVE ATTITUDES THAT PRESERVE UNITY (vv. 2-3)

Isn’t it interesting that the first thing Paul focuses on for our practice is the unity of the Spirit. Not unity at the expense of truth. He doesn’t tell us to create unity. The Spirit of God creates the unity. We are to diligently preserve it. He uses a very vigorous word *spoudadzo*, to be diligent, work hard at it, make haste for it. As God’s blessed and empowered-by-the-Spirit people in this world, make sure you do everything in your power to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Don’t be guilty of stirring up conflict. It is so easy for differences to separate God’s people. Never forget, the church is made up of sinners, as is your marriage. Dave Harvey’s book about marriage, *When Sinners Say “I do!”* applies to churches too. You have joined a group of sinners saved by grace but still struggling with pride and self-centered sin natures; trouble can easily happen. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the body of Christ.

One author tells about a church that came to legal blows, went to court, and had a settlement with the building going to one side. The whole thing began at a church dinner when an elder got upset because a child got a bigger piece of ham than he did. Just like in marriage, it is easy for the unity of the body to be fractured and shattered because of sin. Sin divides, sin separates, sin nurtures resentment and bitterness and drives wedges between people and couples and families. And when a conflict creates division, we often ask, “How did we get into this mess?”

Here are five foundational heart attitudes that are absolutely essential to preserve or renew the unity of the Spirit. I received a bag of Werther’s Originals for Christmas. They are smooth and sweet and you just swish them around your mouth, drawing out all the flavor you can. These five attitudes are smooth and sweet and will flavor your relationships, whether in your home, in the church, or wherever your steps take you in your daily walk. Let’s unwrap them one by one.

#1 You need humility. What a life sweetener this one is. First, recognize that you’re not as humble as you think you are. In fact, the first step to nurturing humility is to admit pride. Our hearts are thick with pride like cheese is thick with milk. You’re not the most important person in the room. The word for humility here means “lowly thinking.” When you walk down the stairs

into our basement, you have to lower your head the fourth step from the bottom. If you don't, you'll get a shocking blow to your head. Humility means bowing your attitude and so avoid blows to your relationships. Get off your high horse and admit with the apostle Paul, "I am the chief of sinners." You can't come to Christ without humility – God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Remember those two fellows in the temple in Luke 18? One is so full of himself he says, "I'm glad I'm not like other people, like that publican over there!" Then he begins to recite all the great and wonderful things he's done for God; "Am I not a saintly soul, now?" Do you ever find yourself there? So self-focused you want to make sure everyone knows how much you know and how much you do for Jesus? Folks like this love talking about themselves. These are the guys who crow like a rooster when they do some good deed for their wives: "Look what I do for you around here. You should be happy!" Or like Paul Tripp told his wife during one of their spats, "95% of the ladies at our church would love to be married to someone like me." Luella his wife replied, "Right now I'm part of the 5%."

That other poor fellow at the temple in Luke 18 had an accurate self-image. He was so convicted of his sin he couldn't even look up to heaven. He just cried out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." He's wasn't thinking about his rights and how much he's been wronged and how good he's been and how much he deserves and how much better he is than other people. A humble man is quick to confess sin and sees his own sin as worse than anyone else's. Some people are so proud they can hardly say thank you when someone blesses them. Humble people who preserve the unity of the Spirit in the church or in their marriage are thankful people and aren't always blowing their own horn. Philippians 2:3 describes Christ-like humility as esteeming others as more important than yourself.

#2 You need gentleness. Lowly thinking and gentleness or meekness always go together. A humble man or woman is a mild person. Sometimes a wife will say, "My husband is just mean." He's harsh with his words and actions. He's quick to bark at anyone who gets in his way or offends him. In order to guard unity in your family and in your church, you must be gentle. This word is used of a spirited stallion that's been broken to take a harness and saddle. All the power of that magnificent horse gently submits to the bridle. Gentleness and biblical meekness is not weakness, but power under control. Our dog Rico is power under control. If he wanted to, he could tear me up. When I move toward my wife, he quickly moves between us, ready to defend her. The closer I get the stronger he gets. But we say, "Kennel!" and there he goes, right into his kennel.

God says a wife's gentle spirit is precious in His sight (1 Peter 3:4). When you try to restore a brother or sister, you do it with a gentle spirit, looking to yourself first (Galatians 6:1). Like a doctor who gently probes to help you. He doesn't come in the room with harsh and mean-spirited commands: "Take your shirt off! Get up on that table! Stick out your tongue!" One of the most frequent comments from R. C. Sproul's close associates was that he was a gentle, kind soul. He stood his ground on truth, even at the expense of a friendship at time, but he did it with gentleness. Are you a gentle soul? Are you easy to work with? Do you receive correction without a defensive attitude? Are you thankful? There's a lot of sweetness in this attitude.

Now, notice Paul says “*all* humility and gentleness.” Complete humility all the time. There’s never a time for arrogance or pride. Be humble always, at all times, in all circumstances, with all people, even with proud people, even when you are tired, sick, feeling good or feeling lousy. There’s never a time when we’re excused to go off into a rant and rip and tear people up. Sometimes couples who are seriously struggling will act like two prosecuting attorneys, leveling charges at each other, each one trying to prove their case. Whoa, whoa, whoa! You aren’t in a courtroom. You are to be on the same team here. Humility and gentleness...what life sweetening attitudes! Be like Christ who said, “I am gentle and humble in heart!” (Matthew 11:29).

#3 You need patience. “Yeah, tell me about it. When’s this sermon going to be over?” Ask yourself, “How patient has God been with me?” This word means living with a long fuse before you explode. “Macro (long)-thumia (wrath).” Why do we get impatient? One reason – we’re proud and think we’re more important than other people. Have you ever stood at the check out and start to make those sighing sounds as the elderly gentleman up front is fumbling with his cards in his wallet and taking forever to check out a can of soup and a little bologna. But wait a minute. What makes you think you are more important than him? Pride leads to impatience.

Patience isn’t easy, especially with some people. You know who they are in your life. They may be wrong, but God is using them to expose your own heart’s pride and self-centeredness. Luther said all of life is patience. “I have to be patient with the pope, the heretics, my family, my wife.” Hear that father out in the car on a Sunday morning, impatiently beeping his horn while his faithful wife is inside getting the seven kids dressed for church? Impatience quickly leads to anger. Charles Spurgeon said, “Little pots boil quickly.”

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24, “The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged.” Patient when wronged. That’s when your patience is tested. If you get hurt at every insult, if you can’t handle people ignoring you, if you can’t deal with little put-downs and side-swipe insults, you need to spend time with Jesus and see how He handled His opponents. You need patience to sweeten and preserve the unity of the Spirit, whether in your family or in the church, whether on Monday mornings at work or Sundays with people who are getting on your nerves.

#4 You need loving forbearance. The word forbearance literally means “putting up with.” At one point Jesus said “How long must I put up with you?” (Mark 9:19). Some people will bug you over and over, and then over and over again. We all have these people in our lives. There are plenty of things that people say and do which would naturally really get your goat, but notice how Paul includes love with forbearance? Love isn’t self-focused! Love is concerned for the other person and so for the sake of the other person this attitude of forbearance puts up with lots of stuff you would naturally just react to.

So is there ever a time that true concern for the other person means you stop forbearing and confront? There may be, but rarely. You need God’s wisdom to know when to back off, when to ignore, and what is serious enough to go after. Pastor H. B. Charles of Jacksonville, Florida, advised in his book *On Pastoring*, “A dog can whip a skunk any day, but it may not be worth the stink.” (p. 96). Pleasing God and preserving the unity of the Spirit is more important than getting even or settling matters right now or proving that it’s pagan to have a Christmas tree or have an

Easter egg hunt or whatever the issues are. You may get in an argument and feel like going outside and settle the matter right now. Remember Robert Duvall in *The Apostle*? He was the preacher when a troublemaker came in the back and began mouthing off. Duvall the preacher raised his credibility with the kids watching from the side windows as he stepped outside, took off his coat, and taught that church troublemaker a thing or two. There may be a time for action, but the general rule for life is loving forbearance. Luther could blast away at anyone who disagreed with him. Calvin, in loving forbearance, wrote to Mr. Bullinger, "If Luther should even call me a devil, my veneration for him is notwithstanding so great that I shall ever acknowledge him to be an illustrious servant of God."

Friends, loving forbearance applied every day would solve probably every marriage problem. Love wants the best for your spouse and you're willing to die to your own pride and rights and so-called honor in order to bring about a peaceful solution. Loving forbearance is a major life-sweetening, Christ-honoring attitude for God's people.

#5 You need to seek peace with all men. Ladies and gentlemen, we want to nurture a church full of peacemakers. Verse 3 says in effect, "I'll do whatever God says to do in order to preserve our fellowship in this church. I'll pursue peace with everyone. I'll be a peacemaker and help resolve conflict by humble confession and forgiveness. I'll sow peace wherever I can. And when I break that bond of peace by my own stubborn, proud, self-serving reaction, I'll do all I can to reconcile with my brother or sister or that family, whoever it may be." Take the sweetness of James 3:17-18 and pray through it over and over.

James 3:17-18 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

SO WHAT?

We've got a powerful engine of gospel truth at work in our hearts as believers. But that power needs to be transmitted to the wheels of our lives. Examine your own heart. Is pride and selfishness ruling and ruining your relationships? Do you need to be reconciled with anyone, Your spouse? Your child? Your brother or sister you may have offended in the hallway? Let these Christ-like attitudes of humility, gentleness, patience, loving forbearance, and pursuing peace with all men sweeten your heart. Practice them in all your relationships as you walk worthy of God's calling you to Himself through the gospel of Jesus Christ.