

Opening Words

You want rest for your souls? Come to the one who is humble and gentle and follow him on the path of humility and gentleness and you will find rest for your battle-weary soul! You will find great peace! You will find your anxieties floating away, your strivings will cease.

50 Ephesians All Humility and Gentleness

“How does a future king and queen act? How does a son or daughter of the King of kings and Lord of lords behave? How does a person who is destined to be a joint heir with Christ conduct himself?”

Those were the words with which I ended our previous broadcast where I spoke about Paul’s exhortation to the church to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. Today, we look in greater detail about this. Let’s listen to Paul’s words again:

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

Paul gives us five steps. We would be wise to meditate deeply upon them.

1. All Humility
2. All Gentleness
3. Patience
4. Showing tolerance with love
5. Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

Each of them presents a challenge and a high ideal toward which to strive. They are a challenge because they cut across the grain of our human nature that is still polluted by sinful impulses. God has made us in his image, but the image of God has been distorted by sin. We don’t think right. We don’t choose right, and our emotions confuse us. The Holy Spirit has come into our lives to put the pieces of our brokenness together and to make us whole again, but we are a work in progress. While all of us have some areas where we are doing quite well, all of us have other areas where things aren’t so smooth. When Paul tells us, for example, to be tolerant with love, that is easy until we must associate with people who are exasperating. When Paul tells us to preserve the unity of the Spirit, that is great, until we find ourselves in a situation where others don’t agree with us and then, after we explain the way things should be, they still don’t agree with us. Then it becomes a challenge.

But this is what he says, and this is where we would do well to slow down and take a good, long look at these exhortations and see how our lives match up.

Let’s start with humility. A good friend of mine, a few years back, pointed out to me that Paul places a powerful little word in front of the word humility. It is the word, “all.” With all humility walk worthy of your calling. All humility. What is *all* humility? I can understand being humble but can I

say that I have all humility? No. Can I say that in every circumstance, every challenge, I demonstrate proper humility? No. Can I say that I am as humble as Christ who humbled himself by obeying all the way to the cross? I'm sorry to say, no.

What is humility? It is important to understand before we proceed further because if we don't, we may think we are pursuing humility, but it may just be a caricature of the real thing, and we'll find ourselves on a wrong trail in our walk.

Some think humility is thinking lowly of ourselves. But Jesus described Himself as humble of heart, and I don't think He thought of Himself as a lowly worm with no value. Humility is simply knowing who we are before God and knowing who God is – and not getting the two confused!

Let's talk about who we are before God. Sometimes people beat themselves up and moan about their unworthiness. Well, we are unworthy, but God did not make us lowly worms. He made us in His image. We are significant. We are important. We are the prize of His creation. But we are still created beings. Our pride is that we have sought to be more than we are – to place ourselves on an equal footing with God. This was the sin of our first parents, and we repeat it throughout our lives. Rather than being content with who we are in Him and how He has made us, we strive to make ourselves something else or make ourselves to be more than we are.

In our search for significance in a world that demeans our worth, we want to know that we are special. This is a God-given desire, but we must learn to discover our God-given worth in the right way. We do it by humbling ourselves before God – remembering that He is God and He has made us. We are His people created for His pleasure and glory. God does not exist to please us. We exist to please Him. This is a life-long lesson.

Humility has nothing to do with beating ourselves up, thinking lowly of ourselves as if we are worthless wretches, but it means learning to take our rightful place before Him, and when we learn to take our rightful place before him, it will help us to take our rightful place before others. In one of the classic passages on humility Peter said:

You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Peter lays out three paths of humility. The first is the path of circumstances. Life brings humbling circumstances to us. God allows them and sometimes God orders them so that we might learn to let go of our prideful ways and embrace the proper position before him and others. Peter refers to this when he tells us to *cast all our anxiety upon Him*. These times are humbling. But if we will let them do their work in us, they will build humility and help us to walk worthy of our calling.

The next path of humility is about our peers. Peter tells us to *clothe ourselves with humility toward one another*. He wants to remove from us desires to conquer others, defeat others, and make ourselves look better than others. In the family of God, we are not in a competition to see who can

be the holiest saint, the wisest counselor, the deepest teacher, or the most passionate preacher. God calls us to humility of mind toward one another and to regard others as more important than ourselves. This is sometimes a painful path because it seems like others undermine us or ignore our God-given importance. But this is God's way of working all humility in us so that we will walk worthy of our destiny.

The final path of humility comes to us through our leaders. *You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders* Peter said! How I wish I had fervently obeyed that verse when I was a younger man! The self-inflicted pain I would have avoided! But I thought I knew more than my elders, my father, and my pastor and I made bad decisions that have remained with me throughout my life. God is opposed to the proud – but, but! He gives grace to those who learn to walk the path of humility toward their elders, their peers, and their circumstances. God gives grace to the humble.

This is part of what Paul has in mind when he tells us to have all humility. Don't just put on some humility but put on all humility. How are you doing in this area? It's a challenge isn't it! But let's seek it. Let's pursue it.

You know, I am afraid that many people think poorly of Christ because they think poorly of us. People can have a skewed idea of Christianity because they don't understand spiritual things, but sometimes they see that we are full of pride, haughtiness, and anxiety over our circumstances. They see us failing to be humble toward our peers, always having to have our way, always making every conversation about us. They see us with bad attitudes towards our authorities – maybe our teachers at school, our managers at work, our government leaders, or our parents. All humility, Paul says. And so, let's ask God every day to show us the true path of humility to bring him glory, to build up our brothers and sisters, and to be a great testimony for our Lord.

Let's quickly hit the next area. Paul says gentleness. We could place the word "all" in front of the word gentleness just as we did with humility. As I have looked at the Greek text, it seems that Paul is pairing these two words – humility and gentleness – and that he wants the word "all" to modify both. All gentleness! In Matthew 11:29 we have these words paired. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS."

You want rest for your souls? Come to the one who is humble and gentle and follow him on the path of humility and gentleness and you will find rest for your battle-weary soul! You will find great peace! You will find your anxieties floating away, your strivings will cease. You'll be healthier! You'll be happier! You will be a greater blessing to others and the Father's smile over you will increase.

This word for gentleness was used in the ancient world to refer to a soothing medicine, to a horse that was tamed and under control, to a wind that had diminished and become soft. Each of these is powerful. Medicine finds viruses and bacteria and eliminates them. Horses are strong and noble and can lead an army to victory. A wind can refresh and bring coolness to a weary person.

These three pictures show us that gentleness is power under control. Gentleness is power that is directed to build others up and help them. When Christ creates a spirit of this kind of power, the power of gentleness within us, then we walk worthy of him, and others see him in us.