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Live Like This
Ephesians 4:1-6

One of the most important decisions young people make when they are 18, 19 years old is the direction of study or training they will enter to equip them for life's employment. College, technical school and training is very expensive. Some people take all sorts of evaluation and inventory tests to determine their interests, aptitudes and abilities. College and career choices seem to change on a monthly basis during those years. Pursuit of a certain direction can hinge on a bad teacher, a failed test, a friend's comment. It takes a lot of work and thousands of hours of study and sleepless night and nail-biting exams until you finally get that diploma that states you are ready to go out and land the job. Yet, the percentage of people who are working in the direct field of study they initially pursued is very small. I am a case in point, although I studied Civil Engineering at Washington State and worked in the field, I am in a different field of employment. That doesn't mean study is a waste. Not at all I value all the things I learned in my study and all the discipline and insight. I use the specific things I've learned on occasion. I teach math to my boys. I fix and design things. But I am not living in keeping with the benefits and training I received. Now that is OK with education. We change. God directs us to do other things with our life. But it's not OK to fail to live in keeping with the spiritual benefits and position we have been given as those who are in Christ. Our actions cannot be of recreational response to so great a salvation we have been blessed with.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. Chapter 4. We are at a turning point in the book. A hinge. The first three chapters of

Ephesians Paul has been laying out for the gentile believers living in Ephesus what an incredible position they have been blessed with because they are in Christ. In 1:3 He tells them that they have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. They have been given every thing they need to live the Christian life in the place of unseen reality where life really matters. He reminds and (and us as well) that we have been chosen by God and that decision 1:4 was decided before the worlds were created. His plan for us was to walk in love and holiness as He adopted us into His family as son's and daughters. He has lavished on us forgiveness we don't deserve 1:7. He has bought us out of the slave market of sin. He has given us an inheritance that lasts far longer then this earth. He has given us a hope, a purpose, a calling to significance. He has promised His power and strength to work mightily in those who believe. Chapter 2:4 He lavished His mercy and grace upon us even when we were dead in our mistakes and sin. He raised us up and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It is by His grace that we are saved. And we are saved for a reason to walk in the good works that He has prepared for us and hand-crafted us for. Jesus is our peace who came and broke down the walls of brokenness and division and hostility. We were granted total access, 24 hours a day, into the throne room of the king of the universe. God has then created something never dreamed of in the Old Testament, an entirely new group of people who are believers called the church. He has empowered us with resurrection power in the inner person and loved us with an inconceivable love and is able to exceedingly abundantly beyond all we ask or think. All of this so that through the church we might bring Him glory.

Therefore....say Paul in chapter 4:1-6 (READ). The first three chapters of Ephesians describe in detail all we have been given in Christ. In the Old Testament, God told the Jews, "If you will obey me...then I will bless you." Now God is saying, "I have already blessed you now in

response to my mercy, love, grace, power...do what I say. He has called us and lifted us up to an incredible position in Christ. We have an amazing identity in Christ...so then we ought to live up to it. Because of this chapters 1-3, live like this. This is your position in Christ Ephesians 1-3 so then this ought to be your practice in life Ephesians 4-6. Here is where you stand before God Ephesians 1-3 so this is where you ought to walk and live Chapters 4-6.

Paul is exhorting us to live life in keeping with what we have been called to. Paul challenges us to renew our commitment to Jesus in a radical way that ought to transform the way we think, our attitudes toward others, the words that come out of our mouths. The change ought to be so apparent that it literally invades our business life, our home life our marriage life, our entertainment and social life. When Christ comes in and moves even the dog ought to know that you have changed.

So why doesn't it happen? If God's salvation is so good and His power so great and His love and mercy and grace so all consuming and satisfying. If God can take someone dead and wallowing in the garbage heap of sin and make them new. If God has torn down the walls that divide and cause hostility between us. Why are we not walking in Christian obedience and experiencing the unity that we so long for? If belief determines our behavior...then why are we not accepting the challenge to live out our faith? We want discipleship without discipline... and that just doesn't happen. We try to do what we can get by with. We compare our relative holiness against other people rather than God's righteous standard. Why? Because we have this million dollar salvation and have given a 5 cent response to it. Our actions of response prove we are unimpressed with the salvation and work of God. Right beliefs, correct theology that is presented in Ephesians 1-3 ought to lead to correct conduct...but so often there is a short circuit that happens between Ephesians 3:21 and Ephesians 4:1. It gets cut out because the doctrine may be in our heads but it never works it way down into our

hearts and threads its way to our hands and feet and minds and attitudes. That kind of belief is useless. I call it doctrinal hypocrisy that is only one more source to inflate our overly puffed up egos.

Perhaps that is why Paul entreats us in 4:1 on the basis of being a prisoner of the Lord. Perhaps Paul wants us to know that walking worthy of the Christian calling, living in obedience to the truths is worth being imprisoned for and even dying for. Are you living for something that is worth dying for? Every man must die...but not everyone will really live. Paul is saying that this truth is worth the sacrifice made to live out. So do it. Follow the king. Obey your commander. He is reminding them that he is writing these things from prison. That means that if one gets radically righteous enough to live out the truth He is writing about it will be dangerous, real, risky and could be very unpopular. Paul is not writing about a cushy, nice middle class, comfortable, self-help way to go about solving your problems.

II Timothy 3:12 says "indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Get used to it, I'm writing from prison. But I'm not a prisoner of Rome. I know who is in control and who has placed me here and could take me out of this suffering condition in an instant if He desired. Truth written behind the bars of prison can be a very powerful testimony. Richard Wurmbrand in *Voice of the Martyr* tells about Tahir Iqbal, a Muslim convert to Christianity who was imprisoned December 7, 1990 in Pakistan. He died in prison July 19, 1992. He was a paraplegic confined to a wheel chair. When asked about the possibility of being hanged he said, "I will kiss my rope, but I will never deny my faith." That kind of talk is an ice cold splash of water in the face of our drowsy, television, self-help, pansy kind of Christianity. It ought to wake us up and get spiritually dressed and ready to do battle

It is from the sacrifice of prison that Paul calls on us to, pleads with us, entreats us to live life, to walk in a manner that is in keeping with our calling. The focus is not that we are worthy of this walk, but the

position, the identity, the privilege we have been placed we had better live in keeping with it. This might be similar to the brotherhood of marines who wear the uniform. If you are going to wear that uniform then you had better live in keeping with it. Don't you dare bring shame to the marines. Along with privilege come responsibility. If God's love is so great and His salvation so powerful and reconciliation so complete then live accordingly. We ought to value God's love enough to be shaped by it.

So why do we fail so much? Why is church so often marked by division rather than unity? If the Bible says they will know we are Christians by our love, then why is it we are known more for our strife and fighting than our love? Paul explains. The reason for the war on the outside is because of the war that is on the inside. James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not that source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel..." The war is on the inside and so it squirts outside. That is why James talks about the tongue. It is simply a looking glass on what is really going on inside the heart. Whatever quality of liquid is in the well will be what pours out of the fountain. If believers can't get along with God there is little chance of them getting along with God for it is only when the peace of God is ruling our hearts that we will change and build unity. Colossians 3:15 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful." It starts on the inside.

Where does Paul say we need to start? V.2 Interesting. Humility. All humility in every situation. That is hard isn't because we are very selfish proud people. We like the idea of being humble until we are humiliated. We like the idea of being a servant until we are treated like one. If we are going to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace we are going to need to put on these spiritual attitudes and actions. Humility is top of the list. It means that we are putting Christ

first, others second and self last. It means we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to or less highly than we ought to. Jesus modeled for us what humility looks like when he knelt down and washed the dirty feet of the disciples. Humility is a heart attitude that recognizes God's love for other people and values them willing to put their needs first. It is the total opposite to pride that wants my needs met first, wants the light to shine on me, wants all the credit for achievement. In contrast humility works to make others look good and seeks to serve others with dignity and respect. Is your attitude humble? At work? On the ball field? At school? How about at home? Do you seek to meet others needs above your own and value and love them as God does?

Gentleness. Or meekness in the King James. Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under control, Gentle people are not harsh and don't fight to get their own way. Gentle people are considerate, they bear up with others without getting easily irritated or stash resentment in the back of their minds toward others. Gentleness is vital to maintaining unity in the body because it smoothes out rough edges and creates a safe place for everyone. It never has to rant and rave because it is strength that is in control.

Bill Hybels writes about his father in his book *Honest to God*. He remembers sailing with his father on Lake Michigan when the violent 50 mph storms would rage and all the other sailors would dash for the harbor, Dad would smile ear to ear and say, "Lets head out farther!" He could make the tough business decisions. He didn't hold back the firm hand of discipline that blocked Bills rebellious streaks. He never doubted that dad was a strong, tough and thoroughly masculine. Yet, for 25 years he spent nearly every Sunday afternoon standing in front of a hundred mentally retarded women at the state mental hospital. Gently and patiently he led them in a song service. Few of them could even sing, but he didn't care. He know it made them feel loved. Afterward he stood by the door while each of those disheveled, broken women planted kisses

on his cheek. As a little boy, Bill had the unspeakable privilege of watching his 6 foot three 220 pound masculine dad treat these forgotten women with an incredible gentleness that marked him for life. That is great picture of gentleness. Strength under control. That is the kind of actions of gentleness that are needed in among us to build unity toward one another.

Patience. Gives people more time who might be aggravating and slow to come along. We tend to get impatient very easily. To wait 15 seconds at a stop light or drive the river road behind a car that is actually doing the speed limit drives us to frustration. Our culture has primed us to want it now and expect it now and when it doesn't happen and we don't get it, we blow up or take off. Patience is essential in the body of Christ if we are going to be diligent in pursuing peace. Patience also people to make mistakes, to take some time to understand and learn. Patience cultivates an atmosphere of grace that gives people space to regain their footing. Patience kindly waits for God to do His work in people and waits for people to repent and receive that freedom from Him. (Swindall p.100)

Showing forbearance to one another in love. That is tolerating people. This is the action side of patience that is always ready to forgive. We would all agree that its unrealistic for Christians to pretend there are no differences among us. I'm glad we are not all the same, or think the same. It would make for a very boring place. But friction comes because we are different. Paul wouldn't say be patient unless there was a strong temptation to be impatient. Paul wouldn't say be humble, gentle and show forbearance toward one another unless we have a tendency to struggle in those areas. There are differences in the body of Christ. Philippians talks about two ladies that couldn't get along with each other (Euodia and Syntyche or otherwise known as Odious and Soon touchy). There are still ladies and men in todays church that have trouble working together. But the basic fact of unity is that each of us is going to

need to work to maintain it by pursuing these attitudes in love toward each other.

Notice it doesn't say we are to be diligent to "produce" the unity. It says that unity is already there. We are called to maintain it and foster it and help it grow and strengthen. We don't need to create it. Unity is created by the Holy Spirit. Unity does not come from creating structures that are more uniform or help us communicate better. Unity doesn't even come from a clear mission statement that is written out and memorized. Unity doesn't even come when the leadership leads well. Unity comes when the Holy Spirit empowers people to change on the inside in such a way that the attitudes are transformed and people begin to change in their actions toward others on the outside. When the inner person is at war, the outer person will be at war. But when the inner person is at peace with God, then the outer person will be at peace with others. Unity cannot be created, but it must be valued and maintained. So how much do you value unity? How much effort do you work at maintaining unity, resolving differences, exercising gentleness and patience and forbearance toward those people of the Christian body who irritate you? I think too many of us sacrifice unity on the alter of our preferences at the very first showing of differences. That's pride rearing its ugly head and why Paul started the list with humility.

Why? What is our motivation? Should we have peace at all costs with all who claim the name of Jesus? Should we never argue about theology or stand for truth. Of course we ought to stand for what we believe. But do it in love. We have many things in common. V.4 There is one body of Christ, one spirit, one hope of our calling as we long for Christ's return. One Lord (Jesus), one faith, one baptism One God and Father of all who is over all and through all. We have many things in common. We have many things that unite us that we share together. Paul wants us to be motivated to be patient and humble and forbearing with each other by reminding us to concentrate not on those things that are

different but on the essentials that we are very much in agreement on. We ought to have unity in these essentials and then freedom in the incidentals and love in all things. This ought to motivate us to a common love.

How can we care for another person who doesn't like you? How can we get along with someone who like music that you do not enjoy? How can you get along with someone who opposes you and frustrates you and drags their heels and covers up your dreams and ideas with piles of wet blankets? How do you maintain the unity of the Spirit with them instead of growing cold and hostile toward them? Unity comes when we concentrates on the things that unite us. One Lord, One faith, one baptism, one body

The strength of the church comes from our unity and love for each other. The strength of the church never comes from its numbers. The church is not an organization, it's a body. The strength of the church is not because we can coordinate enough Christians and produce enough swing votes to impact an election. That is not where the power of the church lies and it never has. In fact, in history when the church has welded political power it has gone sinfully corrupt and grown ugly and weak. Does that mean the Christian ought to stay out of politics. Absolutely not. We need to be pursuing righteousness for our communities and country. But we must remember that is not where the strength of the church lies. Zechariah 4:6 "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts." It is the Spirit working in the body of believers that is the true power, and unity is produced and formed by the Holy Spirit.

So I want us as a body of believers to be diligent to preserve the unity of the body. I want us to value unity, to concentrate on those things that we have in common. I want us to be diligent in this area by watching what comes out of our mouths. Our mouths are a sight glass that reveal what is down in our hearts. Our words reveal whether our

attitude is one of humility, gentleness, patience and tolerant love that builds unity. Our words also reveal pride, ego, harshness, irritability and judgmental attitudes that would and fragment the body of Christ. I want us to listen to our words this week. What do you hear coming out? How gentle are your words? What tone of voice are you using? Do the words that you speak create a safe place for others or do you tend to send out sharp flaming darts that cause people to put their defense shields? Perhaps God wants you to grow in the area of patience. Do you find yourself saying phrases like "hurry up", "haven't you learn that by now?", "You ought to know better" to a child or new believer? How is patience or the lack of it reflecting in your words? How about forbearance? Is your mouth well accustomed to forming the three words "I forgive you" or are they more familiar with anger and rejection words or no words at all in an effort to punish them with silence? James 3:18 says that "The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

A peacemaker will choose to commit to love everyone whom God places before them and not to embrace just the favorite few people that we feel most comfortable with in this body . Choose this morning to commit yourself to lovingly interact with those who irritate you, those with whom you may disagree on some things. Listen to your language; when you start saying "we" and "they," "us" and "them," catch yourself. Refuse attitudes are self-serving and self-protective and put people in a box and discard. We do that kind of thing out of fear, or out of the desire to hang on to our place or position. Don't go there.

To be a peacemaker is to be an initiator in relationship to others. I want to close with the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi to be a reconciler, a peacemaker, a person who makes a difference, a person who is part of the solution instead of part of the problem in maintaining community. This prayer may suffer a bit from its familiarity to us, but try to listen to it again with new ears: (Doug Goins)

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is darkness, light; and

where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may

not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love;

for it is giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and

it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.