

Blueprint: God's Design for the Church

Ephesians 4:1-3

Welcome this morning. If you have your bibles, open to the book of Ephesians. If you're like me you love the holidays, but then you're kind if glad when the holidays are over so that you can get back to your normal life. I love normal life. I love holidays too. We just finished our holiday season of preaching, 'It's a Messiah,' where we looked at the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the return of Jesus Christ. This morning, we're back in the book of Ephesians, so if you'll stand with me this morning, we're going to be reading from Ephesians, chapter 4, first three verses. I appreciate you being here.

Can I just brag on you this morning? It's cold outside, it was cold in here, you started worshipping, and I don't know if you saw this or not, but it got really warm. It got really hot. I had to take my coat off, and then I saw Terry going to the thermostat, turning it down. If you would worship like this every Sunday, we would save energy, amen! Thank you for warming this place up for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What a privilege it is to open the Bible this morning and hear from our God.

Scripture

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

(Prayer)

Father, I know we ask You a lot because Father, we just believe in prayer. We believe prayer is the way we declare our dependency upon You and we really depend upon You. Father, it would be horrible if one Sunday You pulled Your presence away and just let us see ourselves in this feeble attempt at what we do, but thank you that You're gracious to us, You're merciful to us, You empower us with Your presence, Your Spirit, and You let us just enter into Your presence and enjoy. Thank you, Father. Father, right now, we want to hear You. We want to listen to You. Father, we believe in Your inspired Word. We believe that you didn't just write this to the church at Ephesus, we believe that when Paul was writing this to the church at Ephesus, You had us in mind too. You had a plan. You knew everybody was going to be here this morning. You knew those that couldn't be here, but wow, You've let us live in a time when we can just encourage our church members; we can encourage our friends, our neighbors, to go to the podcast and hear Your Word even during the week. It's amazing, Father. Don't let us be hearers only. Help us be doers of Your Word. Father, we are excited now to study, and it's in Your name we ask Your blessings, amen.

We've studied Paul for many years as a church, and you know his style. Paul always begins his letters by soaring off in the theological heavens and declaring what God has done for us in Christ. It absolutely blows our minds. But you know Paul doesn't stay in the clouds, he always brings divine revelation back down to the earth. We're going to start our descent this morning. We're now in the 4th chapter. After chapters 1, 2, and 3 have told us what God has done for us in Christ, in chapters 4, 5, and 6 Paul is going to remind us of what we should be doing for God since we are in Christ. Here's a principle that Hardin believes in; we don't do for God hoping God will then do something for us in response to our doing it. No, our doing is a response to Him because we believe He's already done everything for us. Please don't ever do hoping God will do for you. Meditate on what God's done for you, and then know that your proper response to what God's done for you flows out of that knowing. Now, verses 1-3, we're going to look at this morning. It sets the tone for the

final three chapters. Paul says, "Therefore," based on what I've been teaching about what God has done for you in Christ, now, I, a prisoner for the Lord urge you, beseech you, beg you, to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, bearing with one another in love, and eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in love. If you read your New Testament much, you know that this theme of walking worthy is one that Paul mentions in just about every one of his letters to a church. In Philippians 1:27, Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:5&11, Paul is going to say walk worthy. When Paul talks about walk, he's not talking about us taking a stroll, he's not talking about us exercising for thirty minutes spiritually. To walk, in the Greek culture, basically was a metaphor for living your life. It didn't talk about a moment in your life, it didn't talk about a day in your life; it talked about the lifestyle you live. There used to be a show on TV called 'The Lifestyle of the Rich and Famous.' I was amazed how people who were not rich and famous would tune in to the show and just be mesmerized by the lifestyle of the rich and famous. Those viewers could only hope, they could only imagine maybe for an hour or a day to be able to live like those people live. Please hear this; Paul is not talking about Sunday behavior here. He's talking about Monday through Saturday, plus Sunday. He's talking about your lifestyle, the manner by which you live your life. You get it, don't you? Your lifestyle is your response to what God has done for you in Christ. He tells us to walk in a manner worthy.

This word, worthy, is where we get our English word, axiom, from, and you know that our English word, axiom, and deals with weight. This word that Paul chose literally means 'to weight as much as.' I will never forget when I enrolled in Mid-continent Baptist Bible College and one of the classes I enjoyed most was Greek language. I loved Greek. What I discovered about the Greek language is that it is very picturesque. I mean, there were some words that when you saw the word in Greek society and how it was used, it just painted a picture in your mind of that word, and this is one of those words. This word literally means 'to balance the scale.' It's the picture of the ancient scale, not like our modern scale. In our modern scale, if you want to know how much you weigh (hoping you don't really weigh that much) you step up on the digital scale and look down, and it digitally tells

you how much you weigh, and you now wish you didn't know how much you weighed. In the ancient world, you had a balance, you had an instrument on this side, an instrument on that side, and if nothing were on those instruments, they would perfectly balance the needle in the middle. But if you wanted to know how much something weighed, you put the thing being weighed on this side, and then started putting a standard weight on that side until the scale perfectly balanced. When this side weighed as much as that side, you knew how much this side weighed because it was being measured against a standard. Paul says our life, the life we live, should balance the scale; us, you and I, on this side, should weigh as much as what's on that side.

I don't know about you, but when I was younger, (not now that I'm older) I always had that fear of not weighing enough. When you are in high school, you're 4'11 1/2", and you weigh 99 lbs., you dread gym class; you dread basketball practice. I just had a fear ever since I was little of not weighing enough, and I think it happened to me on the farm. I have this vivid memory of my papaw and my dad working and them taking a breaker bar, (you know what a breaker bar is, right) putting a socket on the end of the breaker bar, putting it on a bolt on a nut on a tractor, and then my dad trying to break that nut loose and it not breaking loose. Then papaw would get on the breaker bar with him and they would try to lift it up, but still can't break it loose. Then they turned it to the other side where they could pull down on it, so my dad got up on top of the breaker bar with all of his weight trying to push down on it, and it still wouldn't break loose. Then they took a long extension bar, an 8 ft. piece of pipe, 1 1/2" in diameter, slid it over that breaker bar, and my dad got on the extension pipe, and when he got out there about 10 ft. away from that nut, that nut unloosed every time. I'm a kid, I wanted to please Papaw, I wanted to please Dad, and I can remember my first time when they got the breaker bar out. Being young and nimble, weighing about 65 lbs., I beat my dad to the end of the pipe. I'm out on the end of the pipe, holding on to the fender of the tractor and my weight won't move the bar. Now I am jumping up and down with all 65 lbs., trying to move that. It never moves. I'll never forget this; my papaw looking at me saying, "Son, you don't have enough lead in your britches!" There was me thinking there was something wrong with my

britches, getting down off the pipe, trying to find some more lead that I could put in the pockets of my britches! Then it suddenly dawned on me. No, Papaw wasn't talking about my britches; he was talking about me. There wasn't enough me in those britches to do the job because I didn't weigh as much as was needed.

Paul's begging us, based on what God's done for us in Christ to have a lifestyle that balances the scale. Now what's the standard measurement? It's the calling to which I've been called. Philippians 1:27 says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Colossians 1:10 says, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 says, "Let your manner of life be worthy of God. In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul is talking about suffering and how it makes us worthy of the Kingdom and worthy of our calling. But nowhere does Paul use this phrase except Ephesians, "Worthy of the calling to which you have been called." What is that? What's this standard of weight that my lifestyle should perfectly balance, weigh as much as?

You know us here at Hardin, it's got to be verse by verse; it's got to be in context so we don't read out thought into this. Paul is saying something to the Ephesian church just a little differently than he says to the other churches he writes to by using this phrase, "the calling to which you have been called." What is that calling? I think if you read Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, it's obvious. We've been called to membership in the body of Christ. In Ephesians 1, we've been called out of sin, amen. We used to be dead in sin, dominated by sin, and because of redemption in Christ and the forgiveness of sin, we have been set free from sin so that we are redeemed. But then when you get to chapter 2, the church is not just redeemed, we're reconciled. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are not at peace with God and we're at peace with each other. Do you know what God's plan is? It is to take Jews and Gentiles, now guys, this is the race card; the race card dominates our society, dominates our politics. If you were in Greek society if you were in the biblical world, there were just two races, so it was easy. If you weren't a Jew, you were a Gentile. If you were a Gentile, you were a Jew. You either checked Jew, or you checked Gentile. It was that easy. Now listen to what happened in reconciliation.

Listen to what God did in Christ. He took the two (Ephesians 2:15) and made one new man. Does everyone hear that? See, we've been part of the church too long, and here's what we've lost sight of; we are a race of people. You are awfully quite this morning. So now in the biblical world, there are Jew and Gentile church, and if you're in the church you don't check Jew or Gentile anymore because you now make up a new race of people who are now living on the planet who has been redeemed from sin, and you've been called out of sin into participation with the body of Christ. Guess what the definition of the Greek word for church is. It is 'ecclesia,' which is 'to call out.' God didn't just call you out of sin to live a personal Christian life; God called you out of sin to bring you into participation, fellowship, membership, of the household of God, the church of God, and the description he uses for the church is that we are a holy temple of God, where God's presence lives that His Spirit is building. So in the Old Testament, that temple theme, it was a building; no, the true temple of God is you and I, a people.

Do you get it? Here's the standard; you are a member of the body of Christ. Can I ask you this question? How many of you don't have enough lead in your britches? Can I be totally honest with you? If God were going to measure me, wouldn't you kind of want Him to measure us right now? I mean, we're in church. We just worshipped. We're listening and some of us are taking notes, that ought to be worth a few more grams! What you're going to discover is when He gives the standard of a church member, it's not just about what we're doing on Sunday morning; it's about what we're doing at home with our spouse. It's about what we're doing at home with our children. It's about how Christian children relate to their parents. Then he's going to go into our work life and talk about our relationship with our employer and our relationship with our employees. He's going to talk about how we worship as an individual and as the body of Christ. He's going to talk about how we wage war against Satan. He's talking about your life. Now what I want to ask you this morning, quite simply, is this; how are you doing? In 2018, can we resolve not to lose any more weight and resolve to get stronger, get heavier, spiritually, so we balance the scale?

Now this is just the introduction, but Paul wants to make sure we understand how we do this. Because if my lifestyle is going to balance the scale to me being a member of the body of Christ, he brings in two prepositions that introduce me to three graces, three virtues I must have in my life as a Christian and we must have in the life as a church, with all humility and gentleness, with patience. Notice each one of these is introduced with a preposition, 'with.' So as we live our life trying to balance the scale, I've got to be humble. I've got to be gentle. I've got to be patient. Now, you've got to understand this; humility is a Christian virtue, but it was not a virtue that was prized in Greek society. If you read the Greek philosophers, you stayed away from humility because it killed you, it defeated you, and it was reserved for the lower class people. If you read Greek philosophy, here's what you wanted; you wanted to be self-assertive. You wanted to believe in you. You wanted to get ahead. It was a 'me first' society. It kind of sounds like America. America is not sounding like a Christian society anymore when our theme is 'me first,' and 'us first.' Everything we're going to do has got to benefit us first, and if there's enough left over, then maybe there's enough for everybody else. It's what fuels our sports, 'me first,' 'I'm the best.' It's in every venture we have--me, me, me, me, me. You know I'm telling the truth. All of a sudden, we are a new race of people. So I'm the Christian in politics, I'm the Christian on a sport's team, I'm a Christian in academics, I'm a Christian in the band, I'm a Christian at work, I'm a Christian at home, and if I'm going to balance the scale, I've got to be humble. Do you know who my example of humility is? It is Jesus. This is why in Philippians 2 Paul tells us that we can have the mind of Christ. We can think like Christ thought. We can do what Christ did. He told us to think of others as being more significant than you. When is the last time you did that, honestly? Can I just say it takes a pretty secure person to be humble? As a matter of fact, I propose on the Day of Judgment, most of the people that we prize in our society are probably the most insecure people on our planet. Because the reason they're motivated to do what they do 24/7 to the sacrifice of themselves, the sacrifice of their families, their sacrifice of life Christian principles, is an insecurity within themselves that if they can prove to you who they are and you tell them who they are enough, they just might believe it about themselves. But you

will never believe it hearing it from someone else. So we get on this performance cycle that is over and over and over and over. It is the elevation of self over others. Now Paul comes along and tells me I'm supposed to be humble, I'm supposed to put you ahead of me. I'm supposed to think you're more significant. I'm not just supposed to look after my interest; I'm supposed to look out for your interest.

So here's the picture, and I've got to tell you, my flesh struggles with this. I've been waiting in line for hours because there are only so many tickets, so many good seats. I got there early, I'm waiting in line, and the next thing I know the guy in front of me calls up his buddy who just got there, and in the country, we call it cutting line, and he just cut line. I got to Disney, and I despise the line cutters. Why? Because when that person let another person ahead of them and because I was behind them, he just got ahead of me too! Can I be totally honest with you? In my flesh, I'm not concerned about him. Do you know who I'm concerned about? Me. Wow. When is the last time you applauded someone for cutting line, because they are now more significant than you? You say I'm meddling. I know I am.

This is the reason some of us do not have enough lead in our britches. I'm not talking about you just desiring to bring someone up to where you are because you're blessed by God. I'm talking about you desiring to bring them up to where you are and then they get ahead of you. Can you imagine how the church would be if I and who I am, secure in Christ, was the least and the last? Did you just catch that? Do you understand where that puts the body of Christ in relation to the world? Fully mirroring who Christ is. Let me just remind you that as a Christian, you don't have anything to prove. That's why Jesus could strip Himself of His garments and put on a towel, stoop down, take a bowl of water, and wash His disciple's feet. It was because He knew who He was. When you know who you are, you don't have to prove anything. See, if you believe in eternal security of the believer, your security lets you have a lower opinion of yourself than you have. It exudes humility and gentleness. Now, the Greeks, the philosophers, Aristotle, all those guys, they thought that the virtue was to be in the middle of the extremes. So Aristotle believed this

word Paul uses here was the balance between not ever being angry and being too angry. So Aristotle defined this virtue as this; you're always angry at the right time, and you're never angry at the wrong time. How are you doing? How many of you are always angry at the right time and you've never been angry at the wrong time? Just stand up or raise your hand...Thank you for being humble. What this word is talking about is being in control of yourself, knowing how to respond to others. But for us, especially if you're like me from Dexter, it is another word picture. It is the word picture of the horse, a twelve hundred pound horse, brute strength, under the command of a hundred and ten pound lady on the horse's back because she has a rein in her hand, which connects to a bridle, which connects to a bit, and all the power of that horse is controlled. If you're going to walk worthy, you've got to control your strength with patience. There are two Greek words translated by our English word, patience, in the New Testament. One of them means to be under in order to stand, *hypomone*. It is the picture of a weightlifter who lifts the weight and he stands under it, and as he stands under it, he gets stronger so that he can master more weight. Then there is another word, which is this word, *makrothumia*. It means large sufferings, large feelings, longsuffering, the ability to suffer long with people. How are you doing in that area? You've got to have these three graces. This word is opposite of that word, short-tempered. I've never figured out why people brag about being short-tempered. If I had a short temper, I don't, but if I had a short temper, I would probably never show it in the church. There might be times I would have to get up and leave, but I wouldn't show it. Yet it doesn't bother you to show it to your wife, in front of your children, or at work. I actually hear stories about some of you and what you do at work when you lose your temper, and it breaks my heart! And you like to brag about being short-tempered.

You know I'm a farm kid, and I remember one time when I was little we got woken up in the middle of the night. Beside the four grain bins, Papaw's shop was on fire and it burnt to the ground. Papaw and Dad were examining it and everything was a total loss, they thought, but I found something that wasn't a loss and brought it to my Papaw. I said, "Papaw, I know you lost everything, but you didn't lose this." I brought him a big

wrench. Papaw said, "Son, that wrench isn't any good either." I said, "But Papaw, look at it; it's fine!" Do you know what Papaw did? He took it and we went out and he put it on a tractor, and when he put his arm pressure on that wrench, it just bent. My papaw said, "It lost its temper in the fire. It will never be any good when steel loses its temper."

You're useless when you lose your temper. If you lose your temper, you don't have enough lead in your britches, spiritually. See, what this word means is that we are long tempered. Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? It is because the Bible says God is longsuffering! He is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to life. That's what we've got to be. You moms listen to me! You've got to be longsuffering with your children! You can't snap at them. You husbands have got to be longsuffering with your wives. You Christian employers, please, if you are going to balance the scale, it is not about how much money you give to church, it is not how many times you attend church, it is how you treat those employees. Employees, the same thing goes for you.

Now we have two participles, 'bearing with one another in love.' We are ready for action; I've got the virtue of humility, I've got the virtue of gentleness, I've got the virtue of patience, and now guess what. I'm a Jew and I've got to bear with Gentiles. I'm a Gentile and I've got to bear with Jews. You make it modern. You know your fleshly biases and your fleshly prejudices. But let me remind you that in the body of Christ, we are all equal, and guess what you've got to do. You've got to bear with one another. I don't know about you, but I feel this word, 'bear with one another.' it is a heavy word, a weighty word. I'm not bragging here, but the last few days it has been really cold in Dexter. It has been so cold that my water on the farm that is not supposed to freeze froze. The hydrant beside the barn froze. The show animals are having to be water daily by me, two five-gallon buckets, walking seventy-five to eighty yards with two buckets in my hand, about four point eight gallons in each bucket, up to one hundred gallons a day. Let me just tell you there are times when I didn't know if I could bear it, but I did. But the real picture here I've got is my grandsons and granddaughter who are tired and they need Papaw to pack them. But Papaw is tired too, and I feel their weight! Here is the

thought, "Papaw, don't drop me!" "I won't drop you." You have no clue how your wife feels. She is wondering when her sin, what she can't get a handle on, when you will get tired of her, when you'll get worn out from her! There are some husbands who sense that too. There are some children. I'm telling you, when your life balances the scales of being a member of the body of Christ, you won't drop her. You won't let her down. You won't fail. Do you know why? It is because you are bearing her in love.

See, there were four words for love in Greek society. There was the sexual love, the family love, the friendship love, and then they had this other word, *agape*, but they didn't know what to do with it. They didn't even have a definition in their dictionary, literally. They didn't use it. You can't find the use of *Agapao* outside of Bible. Isn't that amazing? But it was a Greek word. So when Jesus came along, He picked up on this word and He basically gave it this definition; it is a love that arises, not because the person loving has a need, but because the one being loved has a need. If we were totally honest with ourselves, most of us love because we get something out of it. Yet, Christian love is loving with no strings attached, loving with no expectation; therefore, you can't fail me and I won't fail you because I'm not loving you based on your performance. I am loving you because you have a need. Because you have that need, I will bear with you forever. Some of you are going to have to bear with us. We are not where you're at. You're way ahead of us. We didn't have the advantage you had. We didn't have five generations of preachers in our families. Don't give up on us; bear with us. We're the new race. We are the only race that doesn't give up on people.

Do you know what we are eager to do? We are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace. This means you make every effort to maintain that unity the Holy Spirit brought to us when He convicted us, regenerated us, brought us into the family, let us sit down at the family table, made us a brother and a sister in Christ. He sealed us with Himself. Do you know what our responsibility is? It is to maintain the unity because that bond that holds us together is peace. Go back, read Ephesians 2, and see how those of us who are far and those of us who are near, it didn't matter if you were near, you still wasn't in, but in Christ, you came in

because God made peace between you and Him. His place wasn't just to bring you in; His plan was to bring me in. He wanted you and me to be at peace with each other. So that wall of hostility, that wall of division, that wall of separation is gone, and there is a peace that only comes from God. Now, I'm not talking about absence of war. I'm talking about no tensions, no hostility, and no ill will. I'm talking about no matter what you've done to me, I still am at peace with you so that I can really shake your hand, I can really hug your neck, I can really love you as a brother and sister in Christ. Why? Because I will not be the one who causes a disruption of the fellowship of the body of Christ that the Holy Spirit brought into His body.

Does anyone see the danger of neglecting yourself spiritually and not having enough lead in your britches? In 2018, will you spiritually eat, feast, fellowship, and exercise in Christ? Let's balance the scale. We are the manifested presence of God in this community.