

THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Sermon: *A Life Worthy of the Calling*

Scripture: *Ephesians 4:1-6*

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You ought to be a positive role model. If you have achieved power, than you ought to use it for the greatest good. If you have possessions, than you ought to use them for those who are less fortunate. When privilege comes, it should be used to lift others up. So privilege always brings responsibility, and our problem is that so often we take privileges for granted. Sometimes the greatest sin we commit is abusing privilege. Sometime we take privilege and use it only for ourselves. This week on a news cast, on one of those little side stories, the news commentator was talking about a movie star whom all of you would know if I mentioned his name, who had just gone back to Hollywood to make a picture. He didn't have anywhere to live for a year and so he went out and rented a place that cost him \$60,000.00 a month. The commentator, as he mentioned that, said "You know, I know a lot of places where you could live very well for \$5,000.00 a month. You could take the other \$55,000.00 a month and send 40 kids to college." And what he was reminding us of is that privilege brings responsibility. Now I want to ask you a question: if you had to think of the greatest privilege in the world, what would it be? Well, I can tell you what it is: *the greatest privilege in the world is to receive the salvation that comes in Jesus Christ and to be called a part of God's family.* The greatest privilege is what God has been moving Heaven and Earth to bring about.

It is the privilege that is the greatest story in the history of the world, it is that He has reached out and included us to be a part of His family. Now that you have this tremendous privilege, how should you live? What kind of responsibility should that privilege bring to you? And in the next five verses He tells you four things that helps you to know that you are to live worthy of the privilege. Let me mention them to you and then we will notice several of them.

The first one, He said, is that you are to humble. The first one is that you are to have a proper estimation of yourself. *The second one, He said, is that you are to be gentle;* that is, you have the correct control over your emotions. *The third one is patience.* You are to have a proper way of dealing with the difficulties of life. And *the fourth one, He said, is that you are to make every effort to make the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* You are to know how to deal with people that you differ with. So let's notice them together.

The first one: you must have a proper estimation of yourself. I'm always fascinated, when someone tells me something, with what is the first thing that comes out of his mouth. Here is the broad subject, and so here is *the first thing you need to know. When God says that you are to walk worthy of the calling which you have received, the first thing He thinks about is that you are to have a proper estimation of yourself; and the question is: why? Why is that first? Well, the reason it is first is because that is how you got in the kingdom.* You see, the only way you can get in the kingdom is to begin to realize that within yourself you are not adequate for all of the demands of life. You can't live up to what you want to live up to, and even less can you live up to what God wants you to. You begin to realize that you are

inadequate for the great demands of life and so you stop, you turn your face towards God, and you say, "God, I need your help." Nobody can get in the kingdom who feels that he is self reliant, that he is self sufficient, that he can take care of himself and he really doesn't need God except for the emergencies of life. So the only way you can get in the kingdom is through humility.

The second reason, I think, is number one is because it is most reflective of who Jesus is. When you read about Jesus, the first thing you think about is that He was a man who had everything God had, and He put it all aside and became a man. When the Wise Men came looking for Him they looked in the king's palace, but He was not there; He was out in the cow stall. He was born to people who were the poorest peasants in Israel. He had absolutely nothing. When He talked about Himself He said, *"I want you to follow me because I am meek and humble."* And when He got ready to purchase the greatest gift the world has ever known, He died on a cross. *If you are ever going to get into the mind of Jesus, you are going to have to learn humility.*

And *the third reason it is so important is that it is the only way you can fulfill what God called you to be, and that is to reflect His glory.* Now I want to ask you: what do you really want people to see in your Christian life? Do you want them to see how good a Christian you are, or do want them to see how great the God you serve? Jesus said *"Let your light so shine before men, not they would see you but they may see your Father who is in Heaven."* In my part of America, Baptist have built an encampment they call Dry Creek. I didn't know there was a dry creek in Louisiana, but they must have found one and built a monument there. Preachers come from all over the world

and preach at that encampment, and one of my friends heard about two very outstanding preachers who were going to be there, and both of them were going to preach the same night, so he decided to go. When the first one finished speaking, he said, "That was a great sermon!" When the second one finished preaching, he said, "Isn't there a great God!" Do you see the difference? What God wants in your life is that people would see you and think about the God you serve; so we are constantly in the processes of being what John the Baptist was, we are constantly decreasing and letting Him increase. We are constantly putting ourselves behind us so that people can more and more see Him. And *if you are ever going to live worthy of the life that He has called you to, the first thing you must learn is humility.* Humility comes from the Latin, and the Latin is *humus.* *Humus* means *rich soil.* And *humility is the rich soil that doesn't care if it is ever noticed. It just produces the crop.* Humility doesn't call attention to itself; it always calls attention to Christ. And if you are to grow in him and be worthy, humility is the first step.

You see, the hardest thing you and I have to always deal with, and the reason we have to work on it all the time, is that ego never can be put behind us. We never get to the place where we can say, "Oh, I've learned that lesson." Ego always resurrects itself; every day you have to deal with it; it is always there. Young people, I sometimes see ego when it comes to church. I'll use two young people who come to church as an illustration. Two young people come to church and they come to worship God. But as they sit in the service, one young person completely disrupts what the other young person is trying to do. What he is saying is

simply, "I am more important than God and you would much rather listen to me than to listen to God." Ego is always in everything we do; we are always trying to call attention to ourselves. If , in a group, we feel we are being ignored, we scream and we shout and we call attention to ourselves. But if we are ever going to learn to walk with Christ we are going to have to learn the first lesson of humility.

I love the little story that Peter Flynn, who is the great Presbyterian writer, tells. Some of his kids built a little treehouse when they were young; and all of the people in the community got together and helped them to build. They decided one day that if they were going to have a treehouse, they had to have rules. And so they came up with three rules. One: Nobody acts big. Two: Nobody acts small. Three: Everybody acts medium. If you can learn to act medium, you are on your way to humility. You see, ego will always get you in trouble. I remember the story about the frog who became real good friends with two birds. He said, "I notice when it gets cold you disappear," and they said, "Oh, we have a condo in Florida; every year we fly to Florida." "You mean you leave all this cold weather? How do you get there?" "We fly, God gave us wings." "I don't have any wings. If I could work it out, would you take me with you?" They said, "Yes." So he devised a method. He found a stick, and he said "If you could fly in formation with this stick between your beaks, I could hold onto the stick with my mouth and you could fly me to your condo in Florida." As they flew over Kentucky, some Kentuckian looked up and said, "Isn't that the most amazing thing you have ever seen in your life? Two birds flying in formation with a stick in their mouths, with a frog hanging on it! What brilliant person ever thought of that?" And the frog said, "I did!"

He was deposited in Kentucky. *The first step to being worthy is to realize you are unworthy.*

The second one: you must have control over your emotions. The word *gentle* is the same word *meekness*, it is the word used when a horse was wild. Can you imagine him kicking in all directions? Here comes somebody to put a saddle on him and he stands up and he claws and he paws; and then somebody takes that animal and puts a saddle on him and all of this energy is harnessed and is going in the same direction. That is this word. God has placed inside of us all of these emotions. Where we get in trouble is when these emotions begin to control us instead of our controlling them, and what we need is someone to come and put a harness on us and to help us use all of these emotions rightly and well. I have known so many wonderful Christians in my life. Unfortunately, I have known some who have been great in certain areas, but they have never learned how to be harnessed. And what has happened is that they have parts of their lives out of control, and it destroys their whole testimony. I have seen some who do not know how to handle food, and they are gluttons. I have seen some not able to handle anger, and so people walk around on egg shells with them. I have seen some who do not know how to handle money, and everybody knows them as greedy. I have seen some who are jealous. Everything else is right except their emotional life. It's wrong.

When people around you notice that somehow all of the energy is there but it is moving in the same direction at the right time, that's what it means to be *gentle*. Jack London has written a beautiful little story that many of you have read, called *White Fang*. It is the story about a boy who found a half-dog, half-wolf and brought it home. Unfortunately, his

daddy raised chickens. After he was home not very long the half-wolf, half-dog jumped over the fence and killed 50 chickens. Daddy looked at the boy and said, "You never can change a chicken eater." The boy said, "Dad, let me try." He would take the wolf-dog out in the chicken yard, and when the dog by his instincts would want to leap at a chicken the boy would take a little harness and hold him back and say, "No!" He just kept on and kept on, and his daddy said, "You can't change a chicken eater." And after he had worked for months he said, "Let me show you, Dad." He took him out in the chicken yard and took the little leash off, and the dog just laid down and didn't pay any attention to the chickens. Finally he got up, got him some water, seemed to be bored, jumped on top of the house, jumped over the fence, and came back home. The person who told me that story said, "All of us live in a world of chickens. All of us want to leap out at something; there is always something there that we want to get to. What we need is somebody to sit down and tell us "No!" and put us on a leash.

The third one: if you are going to deal with the difficulties of life, you are going to have to learn to be patient. Difficulties come in two categories: one, circumstances, and two, people. Sometimes circumstances make me impatient; sometimes people just drive me nuts. I don't know if some of you have noticed, but I really have a problem I want to just openly confess this morning. My wife, at one of our anniversaries, decided to give me one of the Virginian's personalized license plates. So we took the numbers off and she gave me a personalized plate. She is a physical therapist, so the plate is: "Rev and PT". I really have a problem because it is on my car. One of my joys in life has been to drive across town and if somebody get in my way--you all won't let me

do some of this in public-- in the privacy of my car if they pull right in front in me, I have said to them through the years such thing as "You blind bat!" Well, I can't do that anymore; I have "Rev" on my car. All of us need to learn how to deal with circumstances and people, for when the crunch times come and the crisis times come and the pressures come, those of us who can seem to handle things pretty well all of a sudden lose it, and our testimony is gone.

The fourth one: you are going to have to learn to deal with people who you differ with. That's unity. You see, the church cuts against everything in human experience. When God made us he made us different kinds of races, and we made different kinds of nationalities and in those nationalities we made all kinds of little groups, then we have groups inside of groups. Society is all like this. And Jesus came and He said, "*I am going to build a group that is going to take in all of these groups; I am going to put them into one group.*" It doesn't matter what color your skin is, what your nationality is, what your tribe is, what your education is, how rich you are, whatever it is - all of us are the same in the church. And within us there is something that always wants to pull us apart. There is something in Christ that always wants to pull us back together. *And if I am ever going to learn how to walk worthy, I am going to have to learn how to honor what Christ has built. And that is a group with all kinds of diversity and all kinds of differences, but we will understand that who we worship is more important than how we are different.*

Now I wanted to close by asking you a question: have you come to recognize that

the greatest privilege in the world is to be a believer? If I had to make a choice of whether I was going to be a Christian, or to win a gold medal in the Olympics, I would rather be a Christian. If the President called me up and told me the highest award that the United States could give you is the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and I could have that or be a believer, I'd rather be a believer. If they called me from Stockholm and said, "We will give you the Noble Peace Prize, or you can be a Christian - which would you rather have?" I'd rather be a Christian. The greatest privilege in the world is to be a child of God