

Crossing The Bridge
Ephesians 4:1-6
Series: Ephesians [#11]
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Theme: **Position And Practice Are Equal Partners In Healthy Faith.**

Introduction

As we return to Ephesians this morning, we are at chapter 4. This marks a major division in the letter. In the first 3 chapters Paul has been lifting us up, encouraging and challenging us with truth about our wonderful *position* in Christ. While he has more to say about that along the way, his emphasis now shifts to drawing out some of the implications of these truths. He moves from writing about our *position* to our *practice*.

In healthy faith position and practice are equal partners. Paul follows his familiar pattern of beginning with solid truth and then linking it to practice. It is one thing to know truth from the Bible, and another to live it. It is possible for the truth we learn not to *cross the bridge* into daily life and practice. A number of reasons. First, there are some Christians who don't understand that the truth in the Bible is not just something we are to know, but also to live.

For most of us, however, that's not the case. Rather, we might not want to turn loose of some things in our life, or truly give God control. We might be afraid ... "What will it really mean?" "What will people think?" If you look at the picture of a bridge on the outline sheet, it doesn't look to be that scary to cross this bridge. But, how about [projection images] ...

- Bridge #1 — boys on high bridge
- Bridge #2 — single plank, low bridge
- Bridge #3 — horizontal planks, suspension bridge
- Bridge #4 — high, narrow suspension bridge
- Bridge #5 — Peekaboo Arch
- *Crossing some bridges* can be scary, and not just physical bridges.

This morning, and throughout much of the rest of Ephesians, our focus will be on *Crossing The Bridge*. The main point to take in this section is that position and practice are equal partners in healthy faith.

The Importance Of Linking Position And Practice.

The first word of the chapter is an important word, "*therefore*." Sometimes we don't pay attention to words like these. They can seem to be "filler words" — words without any real significance on their own. "Therefore" sums up what has gone before and joins it to what follows. It is a pivotal word here, linking the *position* of the first three chapters with the

emphasis on *practice* in the last three. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones thought this word was so important in this context that he devoted the entire first of eleven sermons on these six verses to it.

“Therefore”—looking back to our position. Verse 1,

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

Let’s briefly summarize some of the highlights. In chapter 1—as a believer you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; God has showered you with His grace. Paul’s examples:

- God has chosen you to be His child.
- God has redeemed you.
- God has revealed the mystery of making sense out of everything and summing everything up in Jesus.
- God has made you and inheritance for Himself and given you an everlasting inheritance.
- God has sealed you with the Holy Spirit.
- God wants you to have a rich knowledge of Himself and His blessings to you.

Chapter 2 deals with God’s gracious work of salvation to deal with our deadly problem of sin.

- *From* being dead in sin, slaves to sin, dominated by Satan and being condemned in our sin, *to* being made alive with Christ, being raised up with Christ, being seated in the heavenly places in Christ.
- This is a work of God’s grace, motivated by His love for us, and received by us through faith in Jesus.
- And, God gives His own perfect peace.

In chapter 3 we saw that:

- God has given you a stewardship of ministry for Him that brings joy and counts for eternity.
- God has given you the privilege of making His wisdom known to angels.
- God desires to be at home in your heart, *i.e.*, to be in control at the core of your being, and to fill you with His fulness, to work with His power in and through you, to make you all He wants you to be.

These are great truths, wonderful realities. If you are a Christian, they are true of you whether you realize it or not. This is your *position* in Jesus. But even if you know them well,

gain comfort and assurance from them, their role is not complete at this point.

Remember, the “therefore” looks *forward* as well. It is looking forward to our practice.

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

Paul is saying, “In light of your great blessings and standing with God, I urge you, I appeal to you to live worthy of your calling. Live worthy of your position in Jesus Christ.” Let’s look at the word *worthy* for a moment. Originally it had to do with scales. Not the mechanical or electronic scales we use in our homes today. Scales which balance what is on one side with what is on the other.

Now the word *worthy* had the idea of bringing the one side that was lower up to match the other, and so they would *balance*. When the lower side is brought up even with the other side, it has been made *worthy* of the other. And, the two sides are balanced. In our Christian life, the greater the gap between the two sides of position and practice, the greater the danger to our own spiritual life—to bringing God glory as we should, to our peace and joy with Him, to our service and witness. *Position and practice are equal partners in healthy faith*. The rest of this letter gives us some specifics of what this means. In these verses we learn about ...

Some First Steps In Linking Practice With Position.

I’m breaking them down into two areas. First, in your own character. Verse 2, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience.” Paul begins with “all humility.” Last week, as we thought about Fathers who make a Difference from 1 Peter 3, we noted the character trait of being “humble in spirit.” Humility has never been a greatly admired quality. It wasn’t in the Roman world of Paul’s day, or the Greeks before them, nor in the world of those who followed them. True humility is described in Romans 12:3, where Paul wrote

“... I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

The Bible tells us that God hears, give grace to, teaches, blesses and honors the humble; and that He, in His time and way, humbles the proud. Jesus said, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). And Philippians 2 tells us He humbled Himself, He sacrificed His place and rights of heaven to come to earth for us, to take our sin upon Himself and die for us on the cross. So, Paul tells us, “You have a wonderful, grand position in Christ. But don’t let it go to your head! Grow in Christ-like character, live out true humility as the Holy Spirit works in you and reshapes you.” Cross the bridge to humility.

Then, secondly, our character is to live out “all gentleness.” A common misconception is that gentleness is weakness. But that is not the meaning at all. The word means to have your strength under control. Remember, Jesus said “I am *gentle* and humble in heart.” Christ certainly was *not* weak. He *is* God the Son! When He was here on earth, He did not blow

people away with His unlimited power. His power was under control in every time and circumstance.

It's been said, "You don't use a cannon to kill a flea" (W. Wiersbe). That is gentleness. Think of an Old Testament example in King David. David had been driven out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom. He was on the run. He came across a man named Shimieï, a relative of King Saul. The record in 2 Sam. 16 tells us Shimieï came out cursing David, throwing stones at the King and his group. You see, Shimieï was bitter at David being on the throne instead of the late king Saul, or one of his relatives. One of David's aides said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head." David restrained his men. They continued to travel toward the next stop ... and Shimieï continued, at a bit of a distance across from them, cursing the king and throwing stones. David displayed *gentleness*, strength under control. Whatever our privileges, position and power, balancing our position with practice means being *gentle*.

Then, a third step, "with patience." Patience is the ability to *hang in there*, to hold out against the tendency to pass judgment, to get angry, to give up, to strike back, to get even. It is a quality, along with gentleness, which is part of the fruit the Holy Spirit works to produce in every believer.

Pauls' testimony in 1 Timothy is that he found mercy in God so that God "might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1:16). God's patience *with us* is a powerful example. God's patience *in us* also is a powerful example. These are three *first steps to crossing the bridge*, to linking, balancing practice with position in an equal partnership.

Moving on from our own character, the second broad area is in your relationships with others. This starts at the end of verse 2, "showing tolerance for one another in love." The word tolerance means to endure, to bear with, to put up with. In many ways, being tolerant is a practical application of *patience* which we have just considered.

When Jesus' disciples could not cast a demon out of a boy and the father brought this son to Jesus, Jesus said to the disciples, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I *put up with you*?" (Matthew 17:17). When Paul defended his apostleship to the church at Corinth, he used a bit of humor when he wrote, "I wish that you would *bear with me* in a little foolishness..." (2 Corinthians 11:1).

This tolerance is to be motivated by and done "in love"—with the other person's best interests, with God's interests in view. For the Ephesians, it may well have included ...

- the occasional Jewish-Gentile issues;
- new and more mature believer issues;
- class and status issues;
- slow to learn and obstinate issues ...

Whatever the issues then, whatever the issues today, healthy faith moves across the bridge from knowing we are all one body of equally valuable parts to being tolerant with each other.

Next, Paul tells us to “be diligent to preserve” the unity God has created among His people—“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (3). Be ready and eager to, be diligent to, make every effort to, stretch and strain to preserve the unity God has created.

This statement tells us it is not our job to create the unity, but the Holy Spirit has created it. As we saw back in chapter 2, Christ is our peace—the peace between Jew and Gentile, between all people. He was broken down the dividing walls, He is our peace who has brought us together in one body. As we, the church are going to be the everlasting display of God’s grace, so we are to live in light of that grand purpose, as Paul wrote in 2:7. Paul did not specify any major problems among the Ephesians on this point, but his call is clear and strong.

Sometimes it seems that believers make little effort to preserve our God-given unity and allow almost any little thing to stretch and break it. There is a church with a roof that’s green on one side and red on the other. Why? Because some members of the church adamantly wanted green and other members adamantly wanted red. The disagreement was so intense that the church was going to split because of it. Finally, this compromise was reached. But, of course, the red and green roof is a visual testimony to that church’s lack of unity.

Sadly, there are many more silly things that actually have led to church splits: the color of the walls, the kind and color of carpet, etc. And these are just the tip of the iceberg—people who don’t talk to or acknowledge others; power struggles; things that sometimes go on for years.

Remember, Biblical unity is not lock-step agreement on every question and issue. Nor does it ever require setting aside or compromising on God’s truth. It is a commitment to the togetherness we have in Christ, recognizing this is the way God has designed us, that it is part of fulfilling our calling.

Just to make sure we get the point, Paul gives us seven reasons, seven reminders in verses 4-6 of why we should be eager, be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We share in ...

- one and the same body—the church;
- one and the same Holy Spirit;
- one and the same hope of eternity with God;
- the one and same Jesus;
- the one and same faith.

- the one and the same baptism into the body of Christ.
- We share in the one and same God the Father.

Conclusion.

Paul calls us to *cross the bridge*, to continually cross the bridge, to bring position and practice into balance. *Position and practice are equal partners in healthy faith*. It gets down to walking so close with Jesus in light of the truth of the Bible, linking our position and practice so that the character and life of Jesus will be clearly seen in us. That's when we are *really* living for Jesus.

In your time of reflection and response to God this morning, begin the process of evaluation. When you are placed on the scale, how balanced are you between position and practice. Yes, there will always be room for improvement as long as we are here on earth, just as there are times for adjustment and readjustment. But looking at yourself now, what do the scales show? Ask God to enable you to have and keep a dynamic, growing balance—and so to have a *healthy faith*.

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