

Living A Balanced Life

Ephesians 3:21-4:1

When I say the words “living a balanced life” what thoughts come to mind? We might think it means that we divide our time and passions equally between various things, such as family, church, work, leisure activities, and so on. And I suppose to some extent that would be true. However, the Scriptures teach us something differently about living a balanced life.

But first, as we begin our ascent back to the rim of the Grand Canyon of Scripture, we need to remind ourselves that Paul has spent the first three chapters of this letter writing about the glorious plan of salvation God has provided. Naturally, we would think that plan would include the Jews, but the mystery that Paul writes about is that even the Gentiles are included! Remember that this word “mystery” refers to something previously hidden, but now made known, which tells us that from the very beginning this was God’s plan. We are included!

Remember that this letter was written to Gentiles, and in 1:13 Paul wrote, *“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”*

Being included in that plan involves some pretty amazing things, things too marvelous not to pause to look at them once more before we begin our climb back to the top: we were chosen in Him before the world was created (1:4); we have redemption and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ (1:7); we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13); and as a result, we have received a glorious inheritance (1:18) from the One who raised Jesus from the dead (1:20) and placed all things under His feet (1:22).

God has saved us by grace (2:5), and given us a seat with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:6). Once we were separated from God, but now we have been brought near through the blood of Christ shed on the Cross (2:13). And that same power that raised Jesus from the dead has been extended to us through grace and made us, Jew and Gentile alike, part of the same Body, giving us all access to the Father (2:14-18).

Because of that, we can approach God with freedom and confidence (3:12). Christ has come to dwell in our hearts by faith (3:17), and the love of Christ, which has no boundaries and is never exhausted, has been given to us that we might be completely filled with all the fullness of God (3:18-19).

It would take a cold, dead heart not to be in awe of what God has done for us through Christ! We should do much, much more than merely nod our heads and say “that’s nice” when we are talking about the amazing work of God through Christ. Our response should be like that of the Psalmist: “*Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*” So we realize that we can’t just hear that, receive the loving grace of God, and walk away to live however we choose. Out of sheer gratitude, we should bow before Him in complete submission and worship.

So Paul ended that section of his letter by saying in 3:21, “*...to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever. Amen.*” His next words are, in 4:1, “*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*” It is important for us to remember that Paul didn’t originally divide his letters into chapters or even verses; that was done much later to make it easier for us to find what we were looking for. Because a new chapter begins here, the tendency is for us to separate this into two thoughts. But it is only one thought flowing between two chapters. God has done all of this for us in Christ; therefore, our lives should be worthy of that calling God has placed on us. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, “*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16). Do you see that now?

But what does that have to do with living a balanced life? There are three words in 4:1 that are important to this idea, and show us how to do this *biblically*.

1 Pay attention to the way you live

First, there is the word “live,” or in the King James Version, “walk.” Paul says, “*I urge you [or I encourage you] to live [or walk] a life worthy of the calling you have received.*”

Now, this doesn’t mean the actual process of putting one foot in front of the other; it refers to the way we live. For the rest of this letter, the idea of how we live is right at the top of what Paul is writing about. For example, in 5:2, he tells us to “*live a life of love.*” In 5:8, we read that we are to “*live as children of light,*” rather than darkness. And in 5:15, we are encouraged to “*be very careful how we live—not as unwise but as wise.*” There are others.

But notice something here that is not stated obviously: this must be a conscious decision on our part. We cannot live for Christ in a way that honors Him unless we pay close attention to how we live, how we think, how we behave, the things we

say. Paul is going to get into a lot of detail about that before he ends this letter. But for now, he's saying that all the things that God has done for us should result not only in praise and glory for His Name, as we see at the end of chapter three, but also should result in cleaner, more committed lives on the part of those who follow Him.

Peter Marshall once said, "If God does not enter your kitchen, there is something wrong with your kitchen. If you can't take God into your recreation, there is something wrong with your play."

It doesn't happen automatically. We cannot put our walk with Christ on autopilot and expect that one day we're going to wake up and suddenly find ourselves closer to Him. It is something that we must decide to do. It's kind of funny, the way we think sometimes. I can notice that the car needs gasoline in it if I'm going to drive it very far. But let's just say that I decide that I can just coast along, and it will be okay. You know what's going to happen if I think that way? The car will eventually burn all of the gasoline in the tank, and the car will come to a stop. If I recognize the problem—that the car needs gasoline—and I don't do anything about it, then I shouldn't be surprised when the car stops.

Yet that is the way a lot of people think about their spiritual lives and their relationships to Christ. "I can just kind of coast along, doing whatever, taking each day as it comes, and God's love will take of me. I don't really have to be fanatical about my devotion to Him. I don't really have to pay that much attention to how I live or how I act, or even the things I say, because God's got me."

An attitude like that doesn't lead any of us any closer to God than does ignoring the gas gauge put gasoline in the car. Yes, God loves us, and yes, He does have everything under control. But the love of Christ we've been reading and studying about demands—*demands*—a life given over to Him. Are you actually living for Him, or just talking about it?

2 Recognize your calling

Another word in 4:1 that is very important to us is the word "calling." What is that? Did you know you had a calling?

Many times we refer to someone as being "called" to the ministry, so when we read this verse, we think that Paul must have been writing to preachers. But remember at that time there was no such thing as a separate clergy; all believers were seen as called by God. And the problem is compounded by the fact that the

King James Version uses the word “vocation” here, a word that means something else entirely in our day. But this word does not refer to a career, or a way to earn a living. So don’t get that confused.

The word translated “calling” here was originally used to refer to an invitation to a banquet. Those who were invited were “called.” But this calling is much, much more—it is the very love of Christ, which is so high and long and wide and deep, that calls to us. The voice of Christ calls out to us today, and is calling out to you this very moment. There is nowhere you can go that the voice of Christ cannot reach you. It sounds across the years and the miles, calling us back to God. This calling of God is on every one of our lives, not just the preachers! It is a calling to all of us to bring honor and glory to the God Who has made our salvation possible.

Is this a new concept to you? Then go back and read Romans 8:28—you know, the verse that we use a lot of times to comfort ourselves when things go wrong? It begins like this: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...”* Do you remember the rest of it? *“...who have been **called** according to his purpose.”*

The truth that we believers have a calling on our lives is found throughout the New Testament, and in some very familiar verses. Here’s one: *“I press on toward the prize for which God has **called** me heavenward in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14). And another: *“...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his **calling**...”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11). And we’ve got to include this one from 1 Peter 2:9—*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who **called** you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

There are more, but you get the point. Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27). Our Heavenly Father has called out to us, is still calling out to us, is calling out to you right now, inviting you, urging you, pleading with you, even begging you to come to Him, to follow Him, to surrender all of your life to Him.

He’s not asking you to do anything for Him that He has not already done for you.

3 We should make sure our lives balance with His calling on our lives
Right between those two words, find that word “worthy” in verse one. It

literally means “equal weight.” It means “to balance the scales.” So picture a set of scales here on the pulpit. On one side of the scales, we place this calling of God on our lives. On the other side, we place the way we live. Get this: God’s calling on our lives on one side; the way we respond on the other. Are they of equal weight? Do they balance? Our calling and our conduct should be in balance. Our personal lives have everything to do with it.

We’re not talking about earning your salvation. That is not what this is at all. Our salvation has been bought and paid for by Jesus’ blood shed on the Cross. This is about making sure that I acknowledge the grace and work of God in my life, and then making sure that I live according to that—that my life is worthy of the calling of God when put on the scales. This is about responding to Him the only reasonable way that makes any sense at all.

In Daniel 5, we can read the story of Babylonian king Belshazzar. He was hosting a great banquet for his nobles, and they were drinking wine from the gold and silver goblets that had been stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem. The Bible says that the fingers of a human hand appeared and began to write on the wall. Belshazzar’s face became pale, and the Bible even says that he was so frightened his knees actually knocked together.

But he didn’t understand the words which were written on the wall. After a search, they sent for Daniel, who interpreted the message: “God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ***You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*** Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

“You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” What would God say to ***us*** this morning? Would He say to us that our lives have been weighed in the scales and found wanting? Does your life match the calling God has placed on your life?

I knew a man years ago who was very active at his local church. When the doors were open he was there. He was the first one to show up whenever work needed to be done. He participated in worship. But he had an explosive temper. His temperament did not match the calling of God on his life.

I knew a man who was very arrogant. His haughtiness showed in the way he spoke to people and treated people. You could even see it in the way he walked! He was a pastor, and his life did not match the calling of God on his life.

I see people on Facebook all the time who one day will post something about loving Jesus. They'll even post Scripture verses. Then the next day something unpleasant happens in their lives, and they get on their computers or their smart phones and use all kinds of unkind, even filthy, language. Their behavior while on those devices does not match the calling God has placed upon their lives.

Charlie Chaplin was an English comic actor whose career took off long before movies had sound. He became one of the most famous men in the world by the time he was 29 years of age. All around America, "Charlie Chaplin Look-alike" contests were held. One day, on a lark, Chaplin decided that he would enter one of those contests, just to see what would happen.

He came in third! The question has to be asked: "What if we had a Christ-like contest?" Where would you place? This contest would not be based on whether or not you go to church, or whether or not you are an American. It would be based on your devotion to Christ, your commitment to follow Him, your decision to walk with Him, and learn from Him, and live like Him.

Are you living a balanced life? Does your willingness to submit to Christ's absolute Lordship over your desires, your goals, your feelings, your emotions, your finances, your leisure, and everything else, match the calling God has placed upon your life? Should all of those things be placed on one side of the scale today, and the calling of God for your life placed on the other side, would the scale balance, or would it jump up in the air?

Does your attitude match the calling of God on your life? How about that bias, that prejudice, that book you're reading, that television show you watch, that website you visit? Are they worthy of the calling God has placed on your life?

Don't make the mistake, though, of depending too much on the good things you do. The Bible tells us that all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. They're just not good enough to balance the scale to get you into heaven. So I repeat: this is not about earning your salvation. This is about returning your love and devotion to Christ for what He has done for you by living for Him.

Is your life in Christ balanced? If not, are you willing to make the necessary changes and adjustments—and do it for Him?

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