

## 8.6.2023 **Big Dogs Have Nothing To Prove**

This is Atlas. He was my special friend. He was 200 pounds of brindle English mastiff love. And I still miss him. Bone cancer took him from us way, way too early. **Atlas was a really good boy.** He loved everyone. [Connie, our mailman] His one fault was that when someone came to the door he would rush the door- not barking with hackles up - but because he was SOOOOO excited you were there.

Here's the thing about big dogs: **they don't have anything to prove.** They know who they are. They know how big and strong they are, so they can afford to be gentle, patient with unruffled calm - unlike certain tiny breeds that need to prove themselves by how yappy and nippy they can be. Mastiffs have a long history reaching back 3000 years. With their massive jaws and unexpected size they were set on the enemy as war-dogs. Romans used them in the **arenas** against bears or lions or human gladiators. And they made formidable guard dogs for the castle. But while that's all in their historical DNA, **there wasn't an aggressive act in Atlas repertoire.** But nothing scared him either. In his doggy way he knew who he was- so he could afford to be gentle, patient, even humble.

Paul has just spent 3 chapters reminding these Asia Minor Christians who they are in Jesus: God's adopted sons and daughters, heirs of God, saved by Grace, sealed by the Holy Spirit and seated with Christ in the Heavenly Places; belonging to God's household, a **multi-ethnic Faith Community in the Lord Jesus Christ;** and, within them, the power of Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or imagine. They [we] are the Body of Jesus Christ who is the Head. **Jesus is "the Big Dog" in the universe- the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is the big, boofy Head and we are His massive, powerful body.** We are the body of The Big Dog in the universe.

Knowing that you are the body of the "Big Dog in the universe" should result in gentleness, patience, unruffled calm **because you have nothing to prove.** Paul has shown them their IDENTITY in God and Christ. That identity should be **the catalyst** for a new way of living.

So ch4 begins with the word: Therefore- which, in this case is a shorthand way of saying: **"because of all that you are in Christ..."** This "therefore" looks back to the letter's first three chapters full of **theology, identity and prayer** and points us forward to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the letter which is all about the **practical application of our identity in Christ.** Ch 1-3 is God's story- what He's done to redeem us. Ch **4-6 is our story,** the practice of our faith. How does this redeemed, adopted, saved by grace, multi-ethnic Body of Christ keep on in an as-yet unredeemed world?

And here's the answer: **"Walk in a manner worthy of your calling..."**

“Walk” is a convenient figure of speech for my “big dog” illustration- ‘cause all dogs love “walkies.”

Atlas took a little time to be reacquainted with his commands- but he quickly re-learned to walk well. Big Dogs MUST be trained to “heel” or “wait” or “sit” on command. You cannot allow a 200-lb dog to walk you. [I see way too many folks letting 15-lb dogs walk them].

***Mastiffs need to walk in a manner worthy of their identity: calm, confident, and obedient to the Master.***

“Walk” is a euphemism, a poetic substitution for “the daily living of your life.” NIV leaves out the euphemism and says simply: 4:1b I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. After describing all God has done for them, and just who they are in Jesus Paul says: “Okay, holding everything I just said in your mind, **now imagine how that person would LIVE- and do it.**”

Let the Master’s calling determine your living.

Walk in a manner worthy of your identity in Christ.

**I started running @ the time I turned 50.** I didn’t think of myself as a “runner.” Then some years ago, talking to someone else Mark Tallarico referred to me as **“a runner.”** That outside observation got back to me, and I started to see myself as “a runner,” instead of seeing myself as a poser or a wannabe. And I began acting like one to the point where it’s become a piece of my identity [hard to let go of]. Paul wants his audience [us] to re-frame who they understand themselves to be in light of the CALLING to be the Body of Christ.

**Calling** in this case is not a calling to specific ministry [teaching, nursing, Inn-keeper etc.] It’s the call of the Good News of the Kingdom to give the risen Lord Jesus Christ our complete and undivided allegiance for the rest of our lives- the calling to BE the Body of Christ -who is the Head.

Notice that as Paul urges them to a walk worthy of their identity in Christ- their calling- he goes out of his way to remind them that **his own “worthy walk” has landed him in prison.** He’s **“of the Lord”** just as they are. He’s part of the body of “the Big Dog” who is Jesus Christ and he’s in prison. And it’s no big deal. So Paul is subtly saying that to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” may mean **hard things will happen to you- maybe prison**, maybe worse. **Walk worthy anyway.**

**He’s mentioned his imprisonment twice now** [3:1, 4:1]. He also mentions it in Colossians, 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, and Philemon. **And he never complains about it.** He never frets about what God is doing, or that he’s a failure. In fact in Eph 6 he asks his readers to pray he’ll share the gospel well- **as an “ambassador” in chains.** There’s no sense of worry, or shame, or frustration, or anger over his dire circumstances.

Once again I want to remind you of Atlas: powerful, huge jaws and very big teeth. In ancient days if Big Doggos like Atlas were set on you they could shoulder you over easily and set their jaws to your throat and you were done.

But in this picture you see Ransom hugging him and Shiloh snuggling with him and me using him as a pillow- never a growl, never a threatening sound- not even when he was sick and we had to lift him to his feet with a towel. [With the funny exception of when we took his chew stick away. The next time we got it out he remembered and held it for the next hour- growling at attempts to take it away.]

**Like Atlas, Paul knows who he is.** And in that knowledge he intends to “walk worthily for his Master” even in PRISON. **He knows he’s part of the “Big Dog’s” body.** So *he can afford to be gentle, patient and humble.* And that’s the way he’s encouraging his audience to “walk.” **V1** contains the encouragement to **“walk in a worthy manner.”** And then, as if answering the question: **“What does that mean,”** Paul, fleshes out what that “worthy walk” looks like. **Eph. 4:2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In the Greco-Roman world -Paul’s world- **HUMILITY** was not a virtue. It was the expected attribute of a craven, cowering slave; an attribute of the weak, never to be commended. **GENTLENESS** might be commended but only in a superior’s behavior toward an inferior. Never the other way round or among equals. So Paul, is advocating for a way of life that is counter-cultural- **a cultural revolution** in Christ.

Walking in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ meant to **imitate His HUMILITY-** as in the moment he took on the servant’s role and washed his follower’s feet- and then told them to do the same with each other [John 13]. Paul tells the Philippians **2:3** ...with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves;...**5** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, and he goes on to describe **Jesus taking the form of a servant,** and though God in the flesh humbling himself to the point of death by crucifixion.

To walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ was to **imitate His GENTLENESS-** as in the healing of Jairus’ daughter [Mtt9] or the paralyzed fellow let down through the roof [Lk5] the unclean woman with the blood-flow issue.[Mk5] or even the Gerasene Demoniac [Lk8] .

To walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ was to **imitate His PATIENCE** as with his **ever-confused disciples:** James and John’s mother asking that her sons would be Jesus’ #1 & #2 in the Kingdom; Peter’s bravado that he would NEVER deny Jesus; John announcing that they’d seen someone driving out demons in Jesus’ name and told them to stop because they weren’t part of our brand [Mk9]. That comes up after the Ds were arguing over which of them would be greatest in Jesus’ coming Kingdom. Jesus said: 9:35b If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

The Greek here for patience [*makrothymia*] means “**a slow fuse.**” Paul’s talking, here, about a sort of patience that puts up with life’s irritations, in particular when those irritations come from the annoying habits of fellow believers. It’s “**cautious endurance.**”

“**Bearing with one another in love**” is a bit holy-sounding. It’s actually “**putting up with each other in love.**” I’m pretty sure you all KNOW there’s nothing in the scripture that promises that everyone who loves Jesus will supernaturally “get along.” Paul knows this because of his extensive experience with the churches [e.g. Corinth, Galatia]. The love here has nothing to do with compatibility or likeability, or warm feelings for each other because of long relationships- as good as those things might be. This LOVE Paul is promoting is AGAPE centered in Christ. **It’s a love that cements us together in Christ so we are inseparable – or should be.** We are joined together as if ONE. One in Christ.

And so because of our “**slow fuse**” [patience] WE WILL NOT allow ourselves to be easily upset with one another. Because we know who we are in Christ we can let things go in all humility. We can – even when irritated- take a breath, and remember who we are [Sons and Daughters of God, the body of the Big Dog in the universe] **and respond with gentleness** like Jesus. And because of the Agape-love of Christ we can DECIDE right now we WILL NOT let any irritating habits of our siblings in Christ drive a wedge between us. And we will **put up with one another in love.**

When someone is to us, **too honest**, when someone is **being long-winded**, when someone doesn’t value a thing the same way we do, when someone repeats the same story [your pastor], when expectations aren’t met, when goals collide, when words intended for humor felt too pointed, when someone’s passion is deemed oppressive, When priorities are different, when we **say the wrong thing**, or forget the **special day**, or see an issue from vastly different perspectives- **in the Agape Love of Christ WE WILL NOT let these things separate us.**

**Agape Love laughs at our quirks and embraces our eccentricities.** It loves us the way God does- in spite of our weaknesses - NO MATTER WHAT. Walking in a manner worthy of our calling means WE, ALL of US, will be diligent to KEEP the unity of the Spirit- in humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance. THIS is precisely what is meant in ch5 21 ...subject yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ.

And while the context here is Christians and their relationships with other Christians- I would offer that our Lord intends for us to live out these qualities [humility, gentleness, peace, tolerant love] among our neighbors, co-workers, family members, acquaintances who do not know Jesus.

As followers of Jesus- as the Body of the Big Dog of the Universe- this is important for to think about because **there is a very angry spirit pervading our culture.**

It despises tolerance, it refuses patience and like Rome in Paul's day it sees "humility" as weakness. This spirit aggressively seeks to impose control over its immediate environment in angry shouting, childish actions and even violence.

**Sometimes, to kill time I go to Facebook and I watch the "Reels."** Reels are short, often home-made videos about anything you can possibly imagine [sharks, dance moves, vacation spots, alligators] And lots of real-life video taken of incidents in progress.

They come up randomly. But clearly there's an algorithm that "notices" **when you watch a shark video** all the way through and it brings up all the shark videos it can find for you to watch.

**I recently watched a video about the phenomenon that is popularly referred to as "KARENS."**

KARENS can be men or women and any race- but the majority seem to be white women with a certain level of privilege in the world who **just "aren't going to take it any more"** from anyone. So they will publicly and loudly accost strangers, police, public works folks, people who get their order wrong, homeowners [HOAs], pet owners, RV owners, people parking their cars. **It's a lot like road-rage.** They are angry, frustrated, scared, demanding the control they believe they should have in life by shouting, scolding, name-calling, minor vandalism, or childish acts [sitting in front of a car, dumping out someone's food].

**The algorithm sent me lots and lots of "Karen videos."** And I watched them...all.

Each one like an accident on the highway and I was the rubber-necker who couldn't look away. But along with **shock** my main emotional response is **sadness.** Here is a representative segment of our population that has lost the ability to **engage humility or gentleness** when something irritates them. They are **stripped of patience.** Their fuse burns so fast, it might as well be non-existent- and they explode. They are **incapable of tolerating** any irritation in love. I suspect if you asked them, they likely think they shouldn't HAVE to be tolerant, patient, or gentle with anyone who's an irritation.

This is the polar opposite of what you and I should be as sons and daughters of God, saved by grace, and coming to know how wide, long, high and deep Christ's LOVE is. We are free to "walk" in a manner worthy of God's calling on our lives. **Because King Jesus is the "Big Dog" of the universe and we are His body- one with Him.**

Like dear old Atlas, we don't have to prove ourselves. We don't have to behave like the yappy, nippy, bitey little dogs. We can afford to live every day . 2 with all humility and

gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And that's the worthy walk our CALLING requires. **And you should think about that.**

**Eph. 4:1** Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you also were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

**Eph. 4:7** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE *THE* CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO PEOPLE."

**Eph. 4:9** (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

**11** And He gave some *as* apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, some *as* pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

**14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.