

## **Axios**

Rev. John Allen

I want you to picture a scale.

An old fashioned one, two trays, hanging from a beam, balancing.

You add a little weight to one side, and it tips...

Add a little weight to the other side, and it starts to balance out.

Picture that scale.

The Letter to the Ephesians has six chapters. And the reading that Ann just did for us comes from the beginning of chapter 4, so right at the mid-point. And this part of Paul's letter is like the fulcrum on this scale.

The first three chapters are all about the amazing things that God has done for us.

Its worth going back sometime and reading Ephesians 1-3, it is a beautiful catalogue of some of the most important and amazing things that God has done for us, God has created us, God has given us purpose, God enlivens us with faith, God came to us in Christ.

Those first three chapters, beautifully lays out, the abundance of God's love for each of us. The fullness of God's love for each of us.

And therefore, Paul says. At the beginning of todays reading, this fulcrum moment, therefore "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

There was a reason I wanted you to picture those scales.

Its the word 'worthy' in Greek, "*axios*"

What it means, in its most basic sense, is balanced, like on a scale. It means, weighing the same as, or balancing.

It is the word from which we get the english word axis, or axel.

So Paul is saying, after these first three chapters, laying out all the good gifts that God has blessed us with, reminding us how deep and unconditional God's love for us is, after laying that out, Paul says: "I therefore beg you to live a life that is in balance with that."

Live a life that matches with that.

Live a life that is commensurate with the fullness of God's love for you.

That is different, in a very important way, than what I think we usually mean when we say "worthy."

That is what our translations say, live a life that is "worthy." When I hear worthy, I think of words like deserve, or earn.

And I think a lot of us at some fall into, or are led into, thinking that God's love is something that we have to earn by our actions.

We start to imagine a different scale, with all the good things we have ever done in life on one side and all the bad things on the other side.

We start to imagine that God is holding that scale trying to decide what we deserve.

So it is easy to hear these words, "live a life that is worthy" and think that what is coming next is a list of all the things that we will need to do in order to earn God's love, but that is not it at all.

Paul is imploring us to see just how much God's love is already tipping the scales of our lives, to embrace the fullness of God's love for us.

And live the kind of life that is in balance with that love.

Live the kind of life that is appropriately responsive to God's love.

This is what Paul will then go on to describe for the remainder of the letter. What a life looks like that is in balance with the love of God. And it turns out that it is also a life that is in balance with community and in balance with others. One marked by humility, graciousness, unity, love, and peace.

But again, we are not doing these things to *earn* God's love. We are doing these things to *respond* to God's love.

Something that I have seen very clearly as a parent is that, at the end of the day, our children want to delight us. It is powerfully wired into us from birth, to be responsive to our parents in this way.

I think maybe one time, a few months ago, Lydia out of nowhere, asked me for a drink of water, and then just looked into my eyes, and slowly poured the whole cup on the floor.

It was so ridiculous I couldn't help but laugh.

And I feel like I could almost watch in realtime as that reaction imprinted on her little brain, "he liked that!" And now, months later, I am still stepping in puddles around my kitchen.

We are hardwired to pay attention to how others respond to what we do and say, and at our best, we are pretty deeply inclined to try to do and say the sorts of things that will delight the people we love.

We do not do these things to earn their love.

We do them as a response to their love.

I am sure that each of us can think of someone in our lives whom we long to go above and beyond for, not because we want something from them, but because it feels like the only thing that we can do that is commensurate with the affection, and love that we share.

This is the image we get here in Ephesians. It is not that we have to behave certain ways in order to earn God's love. It is that we want to behave in certain ways in response to God's love. To me it is the ultimate mode of keeping things in context.

If I ever find that I am not inclined to extend grace and forgiveness to another person, I try remember what God has forgiven in me. And suddenly, my grudge feels out of balance.

If I ever find that I am unwilling to help someone who needs my help, I try to remember the depths that God has lifted me from and suddenly my myopia seems out of balance.

If I ever find myself feeling irritable or impatient, I remember how much patience God has for me.

If I ever find myself feeling proud or self-satisfied, I remember how all I am depends on God.

So picture that scale.

Not one where you have to pile up good deeds to outweigh the bad.

But rather imagine, on one side, all the gifts and graces and love that flow to you unbidden and freely.

Then try to live your life, in balance with that.