

Walking Worthy of our Calling
Ephesians 4:1-6
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Good morning, everyone, it is good to be with you all today. If you have a Bible with you, please open it up to Ephesians 4:1-6. Today we are going to be walking through one of the most important and one of the most necessary passages for us to hear in the Church today. We are going to see that this passage teaches that one of the most fundamental aspects of the Christian life, one of the most important things that you can strive for in your life is unity with the Church. William Hendriksen reminds us that this passage is first and foremost about unity. He writes that “It is clear as daylight and universally admitted that this section, especially in its opening verses, emphasizes unity.”¹ You see, unity isn’t optional for the Christian. It isn’t a nice sentiment that sounds good in theory. It is at the very heart of the Christian life. We will see in our text that as Paul transitions in the book of Ephesians to instructions for how Church should live, Unity is the very first thing he emphasizes in the Christian walk.

Hopefully you have your Bibles open now to Ephesians 4:1-6

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1:

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6 ESV)

¹ William Hendriksen, “Ephesians,” story, in *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 181.

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Ephesians 4 marks a transition in the book of Ephesians. He begins this chapter with the words “I Therefore”. And as I am sure you have likely heard, every time we see the word therefore, we must ask ourselves what it is there for.

Here Paul uses the word therefore to signal a shift from mostly teaching to application and instruction. The first three chapters of Ephesians are largely theological and doctrinal. Paul spends these initial chapters laying out the Gospel message clearly for the Ephesian Church. Now, in chapter four, he begins some practical instruction on how the Gospel transforms the way we live.

Paul tells us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. That is, more or less, a one sentence summary of the rest of the book of Ephesians. It is, in essence, the heart of the Christian life.

This morning I want to take some time unpacking what that phrase means and what it looks like to live it out. To that end there are three things we can see in this text that help us understand what it means to walk as a Christian.

The first thing we see is:

The reason for the Christian walk

We see the reason that we should walk differently. The reason we should change the way we live clearly in verse 1. Paul tells us that because of what we have heard in the previous three chapters, because of the Gospel, we must walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we were dead in our trespass and sin, we were walking in the manner of the world, living out the passions of our flesh.

But God raised us up from that death. He called us out of darkness and into marvelous light.

Listen to these words from Ephesians 2 Let the beauty of this glorious truth wash over you this morning. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7 ESV)

Paul says THIS is the reason you must change the way you live. You simply cannot continue living how you were. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE for the person who is alive in Christ to live like they are dead in their sin.

Paul says I URGE you therefore, I BEG you brothers and sisters in Christ, as a prisoner of the Lord, as someone who is has been imprisoned for the cause of Christ and who is 100% sold out for the Gospel mission, I PLEAD with you to walk in a manner worthy of this glorious calling; to live a life that glorifies God.

Francis Foulkes captures this beautifully in his commentary on Ephesians. He says, “Christian conduct follows from Christian doctrine, that the duty of Christians derives directly from

the unspeakable debt of gratitude that they owe for all that they have received in Christ.”²

I love that phrase, “the unspeakable debt of gratitude that they owe for all that they have received in Christ.”

Now there may be a temptation to view this “unspeakable debt” as a burden. There is a temptation among some Christian to view our duty of living in light of the gospel as a burden or an obligation. But notice how Foulkes phrases it. It is an unspeakable debt OF GRATITUDE. Brothers and Sisters, it is a JOY to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. It is not an oppressive burden we must carry. It is the natural outward response of a heart that is captivated by the supreme worthy and beauty of Christ. Just as a good tree bears good fruit so a heart that has been raised from the dead and reconciled with God through Jesus Christ will lead to a life lived in a manner that is worthy of this amazing calling.

So the first thing that we see in this text is that the reason for the distinct Christian walk is amazing gift of grace that we have received from Christ.

The second thing we see in the text is:

The Goal of the Christian Walk

This comes straight out of verses 3-6 Where Paul says:

“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:3-6 ESV)

² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 115.

Now you'll notice that we skipped verse 2, and we will come back to that in a minute, but verses 1 and 3 are logically connected. If we cut out verse 2 it would still make logical sense. Paul is saying that we must walk in a manner worthy of our calling *eagerly maintaining* the unity of the Spirit.

Darrel Bock captures this well saying “There is a goal in this effort. The application of the virtues of humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance means being *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. The goal is *unity*, and maintaining it takes work.”³

Now, I think it is worth pointing out that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is to glorify God in all that we do, but one of the primary ways that we do that is through being united as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is seen all through the New Testament.

John 13:35 tells us “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35 ESV)

Romans 15:5-7 says “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Romans 15:5-7 ESV)

There is a clear emphasis on unity throughout the New Testament. It is no wonder, then, that the Apostle Paul makes it the very first thing he highlights as our appropriate response to the Gospel.

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019), 118.

This is established in verse 3 and it is driven home with clarity and authority in verses 4-6. Paul lists of seven “ones” to drive home the fact that the Church, the bride of Christ, is ONE.

He says there is One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all.

Look at what we all have in common Paul says. It doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter what nationality you are. It doesn't matter what side of town you grew up on. It doesn't matter if you like hip hop or country music. It doesn't even matter if you are a Leafs fan or Habs fan. These seven things are the things that matter.

What unites us is INFINITELY MORE SIGNIFICANT than the things that divide us.

So often in the Church we focus on our differences. We look down our noses at people who do things differently. We think to ourselves or, even worse, say out aloud things like: “those people always were a suit to church, they must be so stuck up”. “Those people don't sing enough hymns” “those people sing too many hymns” whatever it may be, we are constantly emphasizing our slight differences rather than celebrating the AMAZING things that we have in Common.

I often wonder if we truly understand and appreciate how remarkable it is that the Church is composed of people from every walk of life, from every socio-economic class, from every unique sub-culture, from every tribe, nation, and tongue. It is absolutely AMAZING that we are united through One faith in Jesus Christ, in his death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection from the dead. That through the ONE Holy Spirit we are united in One body.

Do you understand that?

Do you see how remarkable that is?

NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD is this kind of diversity across cultural, economic, and generational barriers.

Listen to the beautiful way that one of the greatest Christian Apologists John Chrysostom wrote about this unity in the 4th Century A.D.

He writes this:

In the human body there is a spirit which holds all together, though in different members. So is it also here; for to this end was the Spirit given, that He might unite those who are separated by race and by different manners; for old and young, rich and poor, child and youth, woman and man, and every soul become in a manner one, and more entirely so than if there were one body. For this spiritual relation is far higher than the other natural one, and the perfectness of the union more entire; because the conjunction of the soul is more perfect, inasmuch as it is both simple and uniform. And how then is this unity preserved? “In the bond of peace.”⁴

It is my earnest prayer for the Church that we all might gain a better understanding and a better appreciation of the unity that we have in Christ.

The things that unite us INFINITELY outweigh the things that divide us. Our petty disagreements and preferences do not hold a candle to the infinite worth of the Gospel which binds us all together to Christ.

Notice the word that Paul uses in verse 3. “eager to MAINTAIN the unity of the Spirit”. He doesn’t charge us with creating unity. He tells us that we ALREADY ARE UNITED. The Goal of our Christian walk is to maintain the unity that we Already have in Christ. We are already

⁴ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. William John Copeland and Gross Alexander, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 97.

united in is One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all. It is our job to make sure that we are outwardly reflecting the internal unity of the Church. We must put the unity that we have in Christ on full display for the Glory of God.

And if we turn our attention now to back verse 2, we will see how we are to do this. Paul tells us how to maintain our unity in the Spirit by laying out four important Characteristics of the Christian Walk.

The characteristics of the Christian Walk

These characteristics are clearly seen in verse 2. Look there in your Bibles with me. Verse 2 reads “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,”

The first of these things that Paul says must characterize our Christian walk is humility. Now humility is one of those words that we throw around all the time in the Church. It can be one of those words that we hear so often that it tends to lose its meaning. Or, if we are not careful, we end up adopting the world’s definition of humility. Which is almost always false humility. The Greek word Paul uses here actually refers to the idea of lowliness.⁵ It was often used that time to describe slaves and servants. So what Paul is getting at is the idea that we must humble ourselves and seek to serve one another.

Remember what Jesus says to his disciples after washing their feet in John 13

“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to

⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 115–116.

you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (John 13:12-17 ESV)

Jesus is the Lord of the Universe, and he kneels down in the dirt to wash his disciples’ feet. And he tells us to do just as he has done.

And so, we ought to be humble. We ought to look for opportunities to lower ourselves to serve one another in love. Christians don’t serve each other begrudgingly but with Joy and gladness at the opportunity to love one another as Christ has loved us.

This kind of remarkable, self-sacrificial humility is a key aspect of maintaining and promoting unity in the Church and it is foundational to walking in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The second Characteristic of the Christian walk that Paul points out in verse 2 is Gentleness or, as it is often translated, meekness. This characteristic is described by C.L. Mitton as “the spirit of one who is so absorbed in seeking some worthy goal for the common good that he refuses to be deflected from it by slights, injuries or insults directed at himself personally, or indeed by personal considerations of any kind.”⁶

I think this is absolutely something that we need to hear in the Church today. I feel like gentleness is a lost art in the Church. Christians, especially Christians on social media seem to delight in quarrelling and bickering. I am reminded of a joke made by comedian Emo Philips that you may have heard but it illustrates this point quite well. It goes like this:

“Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"

⁶ C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians (New Century Bible; London, 1976)*.⁶

He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!"

Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over."

Now obviously this a joke and an over exaggeration of the disunity and fighting that is present in the Church but it does highlight the fact that Christians are overly divided. We have our tribes and our convictions and we don't leave much room for those we disagree with.

This was made abundantly clear over the last couple of years. Covid-19 served as litmus test that revealed a lot about the Church in North America.

I am talking about myself too. Over Covid-19 I had to get rid of all my social media because I found that I loved watching all the fighting and drama on social media. I didn't get involved but I had an unhealthy curiosity. I enjoyed the fighting.

This is something I repented of. An appetite for drama and controversy has no place in the Christian life. Christians should not be quarrelsome, and I firmly believe that enjoying watching the fights made me just as quarrelsome as actually participating in them.

We are to be Gentle; we are to be Meek. We are to be so committed and so focused on the cause of Christ that we do not get distracted by small differences of opinion or personal slights. We ought to be able to not get caught up in unnecessary fights because we are able to see the unity that we have in Christ which is far more significant than our disagreements and differences.

And this leads directly into the next two Characteristics that the Apostle Paul lays out for us. Christians must be patient and we must bear with one another in Love. Now there is a lot of overlap between these two concepts so we will tackle them together.

Patience is a term that we are all familiar with. But it is helpful here to know that the word used in here in the Greek is the often used to describe God's patience with Humanity.⁷ Remember how God describes himself to Moses in Exodus 34 "The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," (Exodus 34:6 ESV)

This is what Paul is talking about. We are to be slow to anger and abounding in Steadfast love. We are the people who turn the other cheek. Who love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We are those who would rather be wronged as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. We are not the people who take revenge, who lash out in anger and frustration, we are not the people who Get our just desserts.

⁷ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 116.

The Lord says that Vengeance is his. We trust in that and in his Justice and that enables us to live the Christian walk with patience and grace. You see, this attitude, this demeanor, this heart of patience and long suffering is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. If you're life is characterized by bitterness and anger, if you are someone who is constantly holding grudges against others than I am not sure that you have fully grasped the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am not sure that you are truly a Christian because the Christian walk with God INEVITABLY RESULTS in a heart that is able to forgive others and move on.

Now I am not saying that if you ever held a grudge in your life that you are not saved. I know that there are those who have been sinned against in truly horrific ways and that it can be hard to forgive at times. I am simply saying that if you are known as a grumpy, bitter, grudge holding person than I am not sure you have truly grasped the depth of your own sin and the forgiveness that is yours in Christ Jesus because those who are forgiven much also forgive much.

And this is all wrapped up in what Paul means when he talks about bearing with one another in Love. I love the way John Stott describes this concept. He defines it as “that mutual tolerance without which no group of human beings can live together in peace”⁸

Isn't that good? Let me repeat that.

“that mutual tolerance without which no group of human beings can live together in peace”

If you want to live together in peace. If you want the unity that you have in Christ to be here in this Church, visible and tangible then you need to bear with one another in love. You need this mutual tolerance.

⁸ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 116. Quoting John Stott.

Because there is guaranteed to be things about the brothers and sisters that are sitting next to you in Church that rub you the wrong way. There are going to be things that annoy you or bother you about one another. It is inevitable. Human beings are remarkably unique individuals. We all have our own personalities, our own tastes, and our own preferences and with a group of people as diverse as the Church there is guaranteed to be some personalities and preferences that clash. Yet being able to look past the things that annoy us about someone else goes a LONG LONG way to maintaining unity in the Church.

Honestly friends, I cannot overstate the impact that this mutual tolerance will have on your ability to realize the unity that you have together in Christ. SO MUCH of our disunity comes down to our inability to tolerate that which we don't like.

But It's not easy.

It takes work, it takes time, it takes continual conscience decisions to look past these things that bother us.

But if you do put in the work and the time, it does get easier. These things that we are consciously choosing to look past again and again begin to not bother us so much. It becomes easier and easier to not be annoyed. If we decide to love our brothers and sisters in Christ despite their foibles and flaws and we continue to decide to love them and act lovingly toward them then it becomes easier and easier to do so by God's grace.

These things are integral parts of what it means to be a Christian. They are CORE CHARACTERISTICS of the Christian walk. This is who Christians are. This is what people who have turned from their sin and put their Faith in Jesus do. They are humble and gentle, they are patient, and they bear with one another in love.

And they do this because of what they have received in Christ. They know that they were given an unbelievable gift of Grace that they could never deserve. They know they were saved from an unimaginable burden of guilt that Jesus took upon himself. They know that they are no longer their own but that they were bought with the precious blood of Christ.

So, we who have put our faith in Christ no longer live for ourselves. We live for Christ. And we do so by walking humbly, gently, patiently, bearing with one another in love SO THAT we might make manifest the amazing unity that we have in Christ. So that the Spirit that unites us across all generational differences, all demographic boundaries, all cultures, tribes, nations, and tongues; so that THAT LIFE CHANGING UNITY that we ALREADY HAVE might be made visible to the World around us for the Glory of God.

Thanks be to God. Let's Pray together.