

ONE

Ephesians 4:1-6 (No. 21)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Eph 4:1-6:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There are few things more disappointing in church life than disunity within the church. From time to time, we hear of churches splitting. We hear of church members fighting with one another. Perhaps it's over worship styles or preaching styles or leadership of programs or hiring staff. We hear of factions within churches—groups formed and organized to lead change with the threat of leaving (and taking their money). Disunity within Christ's followers has always been a disturbing problem. The 12 disciples of Jesus fought over who was the greatest.

Paul warned the Corinthian church not to divide over who they claimed as their spiritual father—whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or even Jesus. The letter to the Philippians is written largely so that Euodia and Syntyche would agree in the Lord (4:2). And there are other examples.

There are certainly times where it is appropriate to divide—to separate from one another. We don't have time this morning to tease that out. But Paul's stark words in 1 Cor. 5:13: "Purge the evil person from among you" is a kind of rightful division. But we know there is a kind of disunity that is wrong and is dangerous in the church.

So much of disunity is fundamentally a breakdown in love for one another. Jesus said in Jn 13:35: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The world is to identify believers by our unique love for one another, not by our unique ability to invent things to fight over. We've enjoyed at Treasuring Christ Church a remarkable season of unity. Since we started services in March, there has been a unity of purpose and a love for one another.

We're now entering perhaps a new season in the life of our church. We've been growing. Some people have been here from the start, some people have come recently. We've added more gatherings and opportunities for the fall. Most of these are new and will have us interact with each other in ways that we haven't before. We've begun to form a culture here—a culture or expectation about the kind of teaching, how we worship, a culture of hospitality. But because the church is made up of people, there's always the potential for conflict. We've been a happy church, I think. So thankfully, we can come to a passage like the one today and let it be an encouragement to improve our love for one another rather than become a rebuke. Happy churches are unified. Healthy churches are unified.

Connect with Text

As you may have noticed when we read vv. 1-6, the theme is unity. Unity has been a major theme already in chapters 1-3:

1:10: God's plan throughout salvation's history is "to unite all things in [him=Christ], things in heaven and on earth"

One of the principle ways of uniting all things in Christ is through the church.

2:15: Christ's death on the cross created "one new man in place of two, so making peace"

Jesus' death on the cross did what nothing else could—achieve peace with God (which is a kind of unity with God). The church is the unified gathering of all who trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior. And on that basis we have peace with each other in the church—notably between Jews and Gentiles (who didn't like each other in those days). And Paul says that the work of creating a unified church isn't done, but is ongoing:

2:21-22: in [Christ] the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Now the word "therefore" (4:11) signals a shift in Paul's letter. Paul has been teaching doctrines of Christ's church. And so far there have been virtually no exhortations. But beginning in chapter 4 we move from principles to practice. From doctrines to duties. Unity in the church is evidently at the forefront of Paul's mind, so he returns to that theme with an exhortation to begin chapter 4. In verse 1-6, Paul exhorts us by reminding us how we're unified as Christians. We'll see that we are united by our calling; we're united by our conduct; and we're united by our confession. First, Paul reminds us that. . .

I. WE ARE UNITED BY OUR CALLING

v. 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,

The word "therefore" points us back to chapters 1-3. In light of all the rich blessings of God that we've been given in Christ, how then should we live? The way we should live is "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we've] been called." Paul "urges" us to live this way. "Urge" is the Gk word *parakalw/*. It's a term Paul used when he was exhorting a friend.

Around the same time that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from prison, he also wrote a letter to his friend and co-worker, Philemon. In that letter, Paul urges Philemon to forgive Onesimus. And in Paul's appeal to Philemon he uses this same word (*parakalw/*).

Phm 8-10: Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal (*parakalw/*) to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—I appeal (*parakalw/*) to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

So, the exhortation Paul is giving here, comes from the heart of a spiritual father.

He writes to the Ephesians as an earnest friend, “I urge you to walk in a worthy manner. . .” The “urging” is not a condemnation, but comes in the context of friendship. And it’s an earnest appeal. He once again refers to himself as “a prisoner for the Lord” just as he did when he wrote Philemon, and just as he did in 3:1, when he demonstrated how he poured out his heart in prayer to God on behalf of the Ephesians. “I’m a prisoner for the Lord.” That is, “Here’s how earnest I am in teaching you—I suffer for the truths I teach.”

As I showed you several weeks ago, he sits in prison because of what he wrote in chapter 2—that Jews and Gentile are one in the church. He is no theologian who sits in his study and never breaks a sweat. He’s a pastor-theologian who suffers for what he teaches. He practices what he preaches. And the appeal is to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling.” “Walk” is used in the NT to describe your daily conduct. So before salvation, (2:2) we “were dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked.” Trespasses and sins marked out our daily conduct. That’s what we were known for before God. After salvation, (2:10) “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Later in this letter, Paul will say:

- 4:17: “you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds”
- 5:2: “walk in love”
- 5:8: “walk as children of the light”
- 5:15: “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise”

So “to walk in a manner worthy of our calling” means that the daily conduct of our life should live up to the great calling to which we’ve been called. What have we been called to? What he has called us to is our salvation.

Eph 1:18: having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

So we are to live in a worthy manner of our great salvation.

Illustration: We sometimes hear of high-ranking politicians who fall into disgrace because of sexual misconduct, or bribery, or lying, or something like that—and we often say “they are not worthy of the office of ____ (president/judgeship/senator).”

What we mean is that there is a value to the office itself. And we’re saying that honor of that high-ranking position should have been worth so much to him, he would never want to bring it into disrepute. I think it was Ronald Regan who always wore a suit coat in the Oval Office and required everyone else to do the same because he felt that that particular room deserved a special place of honor.

So Paul is saying that the greatness of our calling should make us want to live a life that accords with the greatness of our salvation. That we have received so much grace should cause us to want to live a certain way—not as a way of earning God’s favor (his favor has already been given to us as a gift), but as a way of honoring what God has done in us and for us. Christians are people who are united in a common calling because of our common Savior who died for us. We have a high calling.

Heb 3:1: “heavenly calling”

2 Tim 1:9: “a holy calling”

So live in step with that high calling. You’ve been given a call greater than that of President of the United States. You’ve been made an ambassador of the King of Kings. You don’t want to bring disrepute on your Savior. So search your life. Are you living out of step with the truth? Are you living in a way unbecoming of the King’s representative? We—collectively—as a church—will be known by whether we live in a worthy manner of this calling.

And therefore we’re united together in this calling. So how? What does it look like to walk in a manner worthy of our calling? Paul tells us in the next two verses and shows us. . .

II. WE ARE UNITED BY OUR CONDUCT

v. 2-3: with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

You can group the attitudes of worthy conduct in different ways. But I see four attitudes of a Christian walking in a worthy manner of his calling. These are four attitudes we must have to walk worthily of the position in Christ we’ve been placed. We walk in a worth manner when we walk in. . .

A. HUMILITY AND GENTLENESS

v.2: “with all humility and gentleness”

Humility is the opposite of exalting oneself. It means to be lowly. The lowly are those who have no resources of their own and so need to lean on the Lord for help. So it is a fitting description of who Christians are to be. You can’t come away from the first half of this letter with an exalted view of yourself. You can’t read this letter and believe that you don’t need the Lord for spiritual help.

The Greeks despised humility and Christians were ridiculed for pursuing humility. But humility—having a proper view of ourselves—is the mark of a Christian. We have a low view of ourselves because we know our rebellion against God and our indwelling sin. But we have a high view of Christ and who are in Christ. All of this you get from chapters 1-2.

Gentleness (prau;thj) is sometimes translated meekness. Gentleness is a good translation if you understand what Paul means, but it could be misleading, if it isn’t clarified. If you do a word study on this word, what you find is that meekness/gentleness is an attitude that when the meek person suffers offense, he doesn’t retaliate, doesn’t feel the need to defensive, doesn’t take revenge, and instead exercises self-control because he trusts the Lord.

A person who is humble—who doesn’t have a high view of himself—will find it easier to not get defensive when attacked. So humility and gentleness/meekness go together. And you realize that these are great attitudes to have to keep peace with the church. To be able to roll with the punches. You don’t get easily offended. You don’t take everything as a slight. Even if someone

was deliberately offensive, a humble person, a meek person will trust the Lord because the Lord knows the truth anyway. The second attitude of walking in a worthy manner is. . .

B. PATIENCE

v. 2: “walk in a worthy manner. . . with patience”

Patience is a persistence in your convictions even when circumstances make it difficult. The attitude of bearing up when you are provoked. God is your vindicator. You stay strong, even as you wait for justice to be done. Third, we walk in a worthy manner when we are. . .

C. BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

v.2: “bearing with one another in love”

“Bearing” = to endure even when harmed.

1 Co 4:12: we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;

2 Th 1:4: Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

The idea is that we should endure one another in the church—even if we have a valid complaint another:

Col 3:13: bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Love covers a multitude of sins. So in love we are longsuffering. We don’t wait in attack mode. We aren’t eager to destroy friendships. We are quick to forgive. We seek reconciliation. In matters of preference, we aren’t always trying to be right all the time. The final attitude Paul lists is . . .

D. EAGERNESS TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

v.3: “walk in a worthy manner. . . eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

This attitude is climactic. This attitude is the goal that the others are moving towards. Notice: we don’t create unity; we maintain it. In one sense, we already have unity in the church because of the fact that we are united in Christ (see rest of the letter and vv. 4-6). But in another sense, we need to live in light of that fact. We should be eager for unity among us. If you’re a Christian and I’m a Christian then the same Spirit that lives in me, lives in you. So we should be eager that nothing comes between us. What binds us together should be peace. We can face anything “out there” if we have peace “in here”—between us. Unity is preserved through the “bond of peace.”

“Bond” is a word that means fastener. Used to describe something that holds clothes together. We often speak of a common bond we have with something. The Greeks would speak of the

bond that unites the city (not unlike Georgia football bonds the city together). Peace is the thing that binds us together. When there is peace between us—there is unity. So we are united by our calling, we are united by our conduct. Finally. . .

III. WE ARE UNITED BY OUR CONFESSION

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

There are several things notable about these verses. The first thing is the repetition of the word “one.” Repeated 7 times. Obviously, Paul is trying to stress the unity of the church. The second thing notable is that even while he stresses unity, he also highlights diversity within the unity. And he does this in two ways. First, we see the diversity of the church in the way the unity finds expression: “One body. . . one hope. . . one faith. . . one baptism. . .” Second, we see the diversity within the one God. “One Spirit. . . one Lord. . . one God and Father.” And it’s the diversity of the Godhead that these verses are divided up. First. . . there is

A. UNITY IN THE SPIRIT

v.4: “there is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call”

The body is the church. The body is composed of all people who have or ever will trust Christ as their Lord and Savior. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in a person. Therefore the Spirit is the inner unifying force of the church. We’ve seen (Eph 1:13-14) that believers are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” His presence in us is our assurance that we will be with God forever. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to fulfill our “one calling.” Our calling as we await our inheritance in the future is (Rom 8:29) “to become conformed to the image of His Son.”

Then, there is our unity in the Lord = Jesus (v. 5).

B. UNITY IN THE LORD

v. 5: one Lord, one faith, one baptism

We know that salvation is found in no one else.

Ac 4:12: And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

And Jesus said in Jn 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

And therefore, there can be only “one faith”—one means of salvation.

But Paul probably has in mind here not the act of saving faith or the continuing of a believer walking in faith, but rather what Jude refers to when he says,

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

“The faith” there is the content of the Scriptures—the teachings of the Scriptures.

And there is “one baptism.” Baptize means to immerse and it can either refer to a spiritual baptism or a water baptism. In 1 Cor. 12, Paul says that in a spiritual sense we are baptized into one body—the body of Christ. That is, at salvation, we are immersed into the body of Christ—made part of him—we become “in Christ” (as Paul has said in Ephesians). Water baptism is expected of every believer and comes after salvation. Water baptism is a picture of that spiritual baptism and is the way we publicly identify with the Lord.

And then finally, there is. . .

C. UNITY IN THE FATHER

v. 6: “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

He is “the one God and Father of all.” One of the things that separated the Jews from the surrounding nations was what God revealed to them in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” We know more than the Jews did about God. We know he is One God in Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our Father is “over all and through all and in all.” That’s a way of saying that God is sovereign (over all), omnipotent ([works] through all) and omnipresent (in all)—he is present everywhere. Which means that believers can be unified wherever they are around the world because their common Father is everywhere in the world.

So, on the basis of our common confession of who God is and what he’s done, we can be unified in the church. And unity always must be based on truth—never falsehood.

CONCLUSION

So we’ve seen the unity of our calling, the unity of our conduct, and the unity of our confession. So my simple exhortation to you is this: let’s walk in a manner worthy of this great calling.