

The Walk and Work of Unity Ephesians 4:1-16

One of the pleasures of growing up at camp was having a lake outside our back door. I spent a lot of time swimming and fishing and canoeing. In the summer they offered Red Cross swimming and canoeing lessons so naturally I joined in. In two summers, I passed advanced beginners, intermediate and the swimmer levels. In 9th grade I was working as a lifeguard and completed my Jr. Life Saving class and a year later took my Sr. Life Saving certification.

Our high school science teacher, Mrs. Sieland, along with one of the women's coaches from Mio taught swimming lessons in a two-week community program. Two instructors couldn't teach four classes so I was asked to help teach lessons with them. In all, there were 4 or 5 students from the two schools who helped out. I did that for three years. One year I taught the beginner class without their assistance, although they were there to oversee it. I had young students and even a young mom who was really afraid of the water, but wanted to learn to swim so she could enjoy the water with her children. She learned like all the other kids to put her face in the water and blow bubbles and then to float on her stomach and then on her back. It was rewarding to see how far they had come by the end of the two weeks advancing them to the next class.

In order to hold lessons at least one person had to have a WSI or Water Safety Instructor certification. They guided the progress not only of the students in each class, but also those of us who were assisting.

In **Ephesians 4** Paul talks about other types of instructors giving lessons in Christian living that they might advance in spiritual maturity and Christian service. **Verses 1-16** are about unity in the body of Christ, what it looks like and how it is achieved. They are godly skills needed to develop believers if they are to advance toward the goal of achieving unity in their local assembly of believers. In these verses Paul cites how this unity is evident in both their walk and in their work, all of which is done through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

In **chapters 1-3**, Paul reminds the believers of the precious and gracious grace that we have in Christ along with the community of believers that we now belong to. In those chapters he lays a foundation of doctrinal truth that is important to help understand the faith by which we live. It is all about Christ and what He has done for us. Paul then takes these foundational truths and teaches the application of those truths taking it from the head to the heart and hands. Living out one's faith is just as important in refuting heresy as is knowing what the Bible says. Accumulated knowledge won't convince someone of the truth without a lifestyle that backs it up.

Beginning with **chapter 4**, Paul will speak about the responsibility that each believer has to the body of Christ. But this responsibility isn't solely the work of the individual believer. We have been given the Holy Spirit as our teacher to shape us in the image of Christ. In addition, others have been given to the church to help in the development of believers not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole church with the goal of producing unity in the body.

Notice with me, from **verses 1-6** how we are to be united in our walk through the Spirit.

I. BE UNITED IN OUR WALK THROUGH THE SPIRIT – vv. 1-6

As Paul begins this section, he reminds them of a very important truth, it's a truth that we must all come to realize and embrace. Paul is sitting in prison as he writes this letter. He isn't bemoaning his plight of incarceration or the unjust or unfair reasons by which he has come to be placed under the hospitality of the Roman penal system as he waits for his trial. He isn't asking the readers to pray for his release or to go out and picket the jail where he is being held in order to get some media attention in the hopes of shedding light on the ill-treatment of prisoners or bring a vote of sympathy among the masses who might persuade the government for his release.

Instead, he draws attention to another and more important issue, one that has eternal ramifications. He has seized the opportunity to draw attention to

who he is really bound to – Jesus Christ. He is an unwilling captive of the Roman government, but he is a willing prisoner of the Lord. The bonds that held him in the cell were temporary. The bonds that held him to Christ were eternal. He gladly and publicly proclaimed that he was a prisoner of Christ. He once thought he was free, but he was bound by sin. But on the road to Damascus his encounter with the living Christ really set him free as he became bound as a prisoner to Christ with the desire to serve him.

Mentioning that he is a prisoner of Christ reminds his audience of the cost that may come for following Christ. But in spite of the cost, he encourages them to keep pressing on in godliness. He is not asking them to do or live in a way that he is not practicing himself. His message is not ‘do as I say not as he do.’ As a prisoner of Christ, everything he did was weighed out through that relationship.

In **verses 1-3**, we see how our walk with the Spirit is displayed.

A. How Our Walk with the Spirit is Displayed – vv. 1-3

Through faith in Christ, we too, are His prisoners. And as such, we are to live a life worthy of the gospel. The dictionary defines worthy as having worth or value; estimable honor, admirable; having great respect. In the Greek it’s a word that means weight or worth and is used in reference to a person’s deeds, how he lived, of being commendable.

Paul is telling us that we are to live in a such a way that reflects our relationship with Christ. To put it another way: make sure your practical living matches your spiritual position. We are to remember who we belong to and conduct our lives in such a way that we bring honor to Him.

Now what Paul is going to say in these verses is that our conduct as a Christian should be in balance with our calling. Calling here is not speaking of our salvation, but rather about our relationship to the body of Christ, the church. Our conduct concerns not only ourself but also our responsibility to other believers.

Think of yourselves as a sponge. You put a sponge in

water, and it soaks up the water. But leave it just sitting there and eventually it will dry out. When the sponge soaks up soapy water and is squeezed out onto a dirty surface, that surface gets cleaned up.

If we just soak up the Word, eventually we’ll just dry out. We need to let the Word we have soaked up spill out through changed character that will help others grow in their faith.

Here’s how the Amplified reads: **“Walk (lead a life) worthy of the [divine] calling to which you have been called [with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God’s service]”**

Paul says in **II Corinthians 5:20** that we are ambassadors or representatives of Christ. With that in mind, **is your walk worthy of your high calling in Christ?**

What does that worthy walk look like, keeping in mind that Paul often uses the term walk to speak of conduct and character? Paul lists five ways in which our conduct is on display, with a reminder that this walk is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

The first characteristic of a Christian’s worthy walk is to have a walk of humility.

1. Have a walk of humility

Paul uses an adjective to describe the kind of humility we are to have. In the KJV and ESV it’s the word ‘all.’ In the NIV and Amplified it’s the word ‘completely.’

You know one of my favorite sayings is **“all means all that’s all all means.”**

Humility means low lying. It is a willingness to submit to someone else. In other words, you put your own agenda aside in order to serve the other person. It is not a lack of confidence or self-worth, but a lowly nature that values others above oneself and submits to God's will.

Humility has also been defined as lowliness of mind as Paul uses it in **Philippians 2:3-4**. In that sense, it is not merely an outward demeanor, it begins as an attitude of the heart. I can give an appearance of humility, which is nothing more than pride. In time

false humility will become evident because it's not from the heart. Paul continues in **Philippians 2** to describe how the humility of Jesus in heart toward the will of the Father was displayed in His actions of coming to earth to be our sacrifice for sin. Think for a moment about some great men in the Bible and yet I would say their greatness was the result of humility. There were men like Abraham, Moses, David, Hezekiah, Peter and Paul. They each had their moments when measures of pride surfaced, but humility is what changed their pride when they realized who they were because of God, who they were in comparison to God.

For example, Peter learned humility, but only after his braggadocios claim that he would never abandon Christ but defend him to the end only to see him run away in bitterness of soul for having denied Christ. From that time until His encounter with the resurrected Christ, his broken spirit was mended by the Lord through genuine humility. Peter could not go on to do mighty things for Christ without humility.

I would even go so far as to say that anyone who would be used mightily by God, must have a humble spirit. They must lay aside any notion of their own greatness in order to do the will of God. Otherwise, they learn the hard way that God resists the proud, but He exalts the truly humble. Two examples come to mind: Nebuchadnezzar and Uzziah were leaders who thought they were all that and a bag of chips, but God humbled them.

If unity is to ensue in the body of Christ, we must have a heart of complete or total humility. We cannot serve others if we are not completely humble. We need to have a walk of humility, putting others first.

Paul gives a second characteristic attitude that must be practiced if we are to walk as a body in unity.

2. Have a walk of gentleness

I was watching *The Lord of the Rings* the other day. Gandalf was having a conversation with Elrond the Elf describing Hobbits as very gentle people. The KJV uses the word meekness in **verse 2**.

Like humility, meekness was not a trait the Greeks

found favorable. Meekness to them was weakness. But from a Biblical perspective it is just the opposite. True Biblical meekness is strength under control, the ability to keep one's emotions under control.

We have all seen the results of someone who has lost their cool, given into their temper, let their emotions get the best of them. They lose control either of their emotions or their actions or both. In that moment, bad things happen. Words are said that can't be taken back. Actions result that can be damaging to property or harmful to someone who is the target of that rage. Their power is not under control.

Some of you have heard this illustration before, but for a reminder to you or for those who have not heard it, let me give you a picture of what Paul is talking about. The word was sometimes used to describe a horse that had been tamed. Think about the power that a horse poses. When I served as chaplain with hospice there was a nurse who also boarded horses. One was a racehorse. Something had happened to the horse where it could no longer race, but it could still be used to breed.

I'm guessing most if not all of you have seen the Kentucky Derby. The horses prance out to the gate where they are all lined up ready for the gate to drop. At that moment there is an explosion within their body of every muscle springing to life as they explode out of the starting gate like an eruption from a volcano.

My friend would occasionally take that horse for a ride to let him stretch his muscles. She said she could feel the muscles want to just explode but would withhold his power from bursting in a full gallop. Power under control.

Jesus describes Himself in **Matthew 11:29** as both gentle and humble, and we see that attitude in how He cared for so many people during His ministry years. It's even evident in how He treated Peter after his denial. Yet in the week before His crucifixion, we see Him taking a whip and cleansing the Temple of those selling animals for sordid gain. Think about the power He had in creating the universe and yet He withheld that power when cruelly beaten.

Just as pride promotes disunity, a person who is assertive and rude and harsh instead of being gentle can also create disunity. We must exhibit in our character a spirit of gentleness.

Paul continues with a third characteristic.

3. Have a walk of patience

You have no doubt heard about the guy who prayed “Lord, give me patience and give it to me now.”

We find out how much patience we have when we are sitting in a doctor’s office or when we’re on the highway and it narrows down to one lane due to construction, especially when you have merged over and cars continue to zip by trying to get ahead of all the traffic.

We find out how patient we are when we’re waiting on someone else.

I’m reminded of the story about a family leaving a Christmas party with their kids. The wife told the husband it was his turn to help their four kids put on hats, gloves and boots while she sat in the car and honked the horn.

From a Biblical perspective, someone has described patience this way: It is the ability to endure difficult people and situations without giving into anger or giving up hope. It involves waiting, enduring, trusting, persevering, and hoping in God’s purposes and promises. **Does that describe you?**

I think it’s safe to say that many of us aren’t patient when we pray. We ask God to answer right away, but we don’t like it when He makes us wait.

We don’t like it when we ask someone to do something, and they don’t do it in the time we had in mind. And yet, Paul says that patience is a characteristic we need to exhibit with others in the body of Christ to build and maintain unity. A good reminder of our need for patience comes from **Hebrews 12:1** where we are told to run with patience the race that is set before us. The Christian life isn’t a sprint to the finish, it’s a marathon, a race of endurance.

God is our example of patience who shows it when we sin and disobey Him. According to **II Peter 3:9**,

He exhibits patience for people to be saved.

Being patient when everything is going well is nothing. Real patience is learned and exhibited when we are facing challenges in circumstances or with people. **Would people describe you as patient?** I think we tend to believe we are more patient than we really are. Paul says it’s a trait of someone who wants to build unity in the body. Impatience can be a sledgehammer to unity. But when we allow the work of the Holy Spirit to take control, He develops that characteristic in us. It is one of those attitudes that builds unity in the body.

A fourth characteristic necessary for unity is to have a walk of forbearance but notice that it is to be accompanied with love.

4. Have a walk of forbearance in love

Colossians 3:13: “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.”

In that passage, forbearance is among other godly traits that we are supposed to put on as a demonstration of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit after our salvation. And notice too, that it is accompanied in Colossians with forgiveness.

To forbear means to abstain or hold back. It’s best seen in God’s withholding His wrath from what we would otherwise deserve. **Why does He do it?** **Romans 5:8** says it’s because of His love for us, even when we were His enemies.

When it comes to our bearing with others, it is always to be done out of love. Paul tells us in **I Corinthians 13** that love is the motivating factor in how we treat others when it comes to patience, kindness and forgiveness. If we do not have the kind of love the Bible says we should have, love that is unlimited and unconditional, we cannot possibly hope to experience the kind of unity Jesus prayed for and that Paul exhorts us to exhibit in the body of Christ. We are commanded to love one another and when we love others as we should there will be unity.

From what Paul tells us in **Galatians 5:22**, this kind of love is not produced in our own effort but only by the work of God’s Spirit in those who yield to His control.

Without forbearing in love, the result will be a wrecking ball to unity in the body.

If we have a walk of humility, a walk of gentleness, a walk of patience, and a walk of forbearance in love, the result will be to have a walk of peace.

5. Have a walk of peace

Peace is what everyone wants, but few seem to find. Rome offered peace through power, peace at any cost, peace that came from without. The kind of peace the Bible is talking about is peace with God which is harmony in calmness of body, mind, and spirit that surpasses earthly circumstances we may encounter.

The Bible says we can have peace with God and the peace of God. This peace is available only through Christ (**Romans 5:1**). His peace settles our anxious hearts and troubled minds (**Philippians 4:6-7**). In the Old Testament, peace referred to relationships with others. **Romans 14:19** commands us to make every effort to do what it takes to make peace with others. **Colossians 3:15** tells us to let the peace of Christ rule in our heart and we do that when we once again yield to the work of God's Spirit in us (**Galatians 5:22**). When we do that, the result will be unity in the body of Christ.

Walvoord and Zuck say that **"concern for peace will mean Christians will lovingly tolerate each other, even when they have differences."**

Without these characteristics, there cannot be unity. I believe this church has a genuine spirit of unity, but there is always room to grow as new people are welcomed into the body. Peace in the body of Christ displays your walk with the Spirit.

Let me just mention how our walk with the Spirit is defined.

B. How Our Walk With The Spirit Is Defined – vv. 4-6

Elsewhere, Paul reminds us that the body of Christ is one, there is no division or separation. There is not male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile. We have all been brought into the same body

through Christ. joined together by the Holy Spirit. But Satan doesn't want this unity. Instead of humility, he wants us to be proud. Instead of gentleness, he wants us to be rash and abrasive. Instead of patient, he wants us to be impatient. Instead of bearing with others in love, he wants us to be intolerant and hateful. Instead of peace, he wants divisiveness.

For there to be unity in the body, we must remember that we are all one in Christ through the Spirit. A walk in the Spirit does not come automatically, but by our yielding to His work in our lives to develop each of those characteristics that enable unity to flourish. Strive to be united in your walk with the Spirit.

Then in **verses 7-16** we notice that when there is unity in our walk with the Spirit, there will be unity in our work through the Spirit.

II. BE UNITED IN OUR WORK THROUGH THE SPIRIT – vv. 7-16

This unity is first of all, a work that begins with grace.

A. Unity Is A Work That Begins With Grace – vv. 7-10

The word grace singly describes the gospel. Grace is all about God. Our salvation, sanctification, and glorification are all God's doing. We don't earn it, we don't deserve it, yet in grace God loves us to provide it for us free of charge to us, but at great expense to Him. Grace has been defined as God's riches at Christ's expense.

It is His grace in us that enables us to then work toward the unity He desires in the body. If we were honest, it is only through grace that we can extend grace to others. Some people are hard to love. Some people are hard to forgive. Some people find it hard to show patience. Some people are hard to be kind and gentle toward and so the work of unity begins with His grace at work first in us, then to others.

Grace is also how we have each received spiritual gifts to be used in the body. We need that grace in exercising our gifts in the body. Without grace, we will be selective in how we use our gifts or with

whom. Without grace we will be harsh and abrasive. Without grace we will develop pride around our gift. Without grace, there will be friction. And Paul says gifts given with the measure of grace needed. Unity is therefore, a work that begins with grace.

Second, notice that unity is a work that broadens through gifts.

B. Unity Is A Work That Broadens Through Gifts – vv. 11-13

We just spoke about the necessity of grace in gifts. Here Paul expands that to say that certain gifts have been given to help the church develop. In **Romans 12** and **I Corinthians 12** Paul outlines a number of gifts that have been given to each individual believer in the body of Christ. Everyone of you has a spiritual gift of some kind the purpose of which is for the benefit of every believer in the body (**I Cor. 12:7**). But here Paul lists four gifts that are for the benefit of the church. They are the leadership whose role is to build the church in unity. They are to do three things:

- 1. They are to equip the church**
- 2. They are to serve the church**
- 3. They are to edify the church**

Two of these offices are no longer needed – the Apostles and prophets. They had three primary responsibilities.

- a. They were to lay the foundation of the church – Ephesians 2:20**
- b. They were to receive and proclaim God's Word – Ephesians 3:5**
- c. They were to affirm the Word of God through signs and wonders – Hebrews 2:3-4**

A building only needs one foundation. The same with the church.

The other two groups were evangelists and pastor-teacher. The first would be our missionaries and the second are the men whose task is to shepherd and teach those in the local church. **Why?** To **“prepare God's people for the works of service.”** In other words, to prepare you to serve each other so that the body will be built up in unity. They are to provide doctrinal stability and growth so you can serve. So if you aren't growing or serving, then either I

haven't done my job or you're not doing yours.

The evangelist and pastor/teacher is to help you grow up in Christ, to use your spiritual growth and giftedness to help others in the body to serve and grow.

John MacArthur writes **“the first concern of leadership of the church should be for the filled seats, not the empty ones.”** In other words, our commitment needs to be to equip you to serve each other. Pastor Don used to say that if he wanted to, he could fill all the seats. Just put \$5 on every seat. With today's inflation it might have to be \$10. Leadership is to equip you.

That equipping is also to help you grow and to serve others when they have a need. Leadership can't meet all the needs of a congregation. The whole church should be involved. In the beginning, the Apostles were trying to do that. They were trying to teach and to meet the tangible needs of the church. Finally it got to be too much and they asked the church to select godly men who could serve so they could devote themselves to study and prayer. Leadership isn't selected to do the work. It's to guide the church to help with the needs.

It's also to help the body be built up spiritually. If you notice in Adult Impact all the leaders help with facilitation. We want you to grow in your faith, to have a knowledge of Christ that develops spiritual maturity and strengthens unity that leads to service.

When leadership is doing what it should, the evidence will be seen in a work that builds through growth.

C. Unity Is A Work That Builds Through Growth – vv. 14-16

Sound doctrine keeps the body from being deceived by teaching what is false. You will be able to speak the truth in love to maintain unity in the body. In that way you will become mature, held together by Christ through the Spirit at work in each one of you. As you venture into the next chapter of this church's history, remember that unity is something Christ prayed would take place in the church and comes when you let the Holy Spirit work in you.