

Walk Worthy In Unity
Ephesians 4:1-3

Today begins the official start to our 2017-2018 ministry year. We're taking a break today from our study of Matthew's gospel to focus on a ministry theme we'll be developing throughout this ministry year. The theme for this ministry year is unity, and our key verse is Ephesians 4:3, "... *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Over the last year I've been asking you all, and have been praying myself, for us to have unity as a church. I've been coupling that prayer for a prayer of revival in our church as well; that the Spirit of God might move in a fresh way among us as we look to the future God has for us. Unity among the people of God is an important subject in the Bible. Psalm 133:1 says, "*Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*" And that Psalm talks about the refreshing, the cleansing, the renewal that comes to God's people when unity is built among them. The Lord Jesus Christ also saw the unity of His people as an important essential among them. As Jesus prepares to go to the cross, in John 17:20 He prays, "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.*" Don't miss what Jesus just said, unity among disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, unity as a church is a means of evangelism to the world, *so that the world may believe that you sent me.* Unity as the body of Christ is a critical means of demonstrating to the world the transformative power of the gospel.

But there is a difference, an important difference between unity and uniformity. **Unity is when we are one, in harmony; yet remain unique individuals.** For example, in Ephesians 4:4-6, which we will look at in a few weeks when we come back to this theme, we learn that **in Christian unity we have one Spirit, purpose, mission, and goal.** The one Spirit is the triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our one purpose as Christians is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our one mission as Christians is to make disciples of Jesus and equip the saints for the work of ministry. And our one goal is to see the name of Jesus lifted high and to live our lives for Him and His kingdom.

Now we need to contrast this to uniformity. **Uniformity is when we look the same, and do the same thing; uniformity is a pseudo-unity.** And if we're honest uniformity is typically what we are talking about when talk about unity. We want people to look like us, eat the food we like, listen to the music we listen to agree with the statements we make, and so on. But that's not unity, that's uniformity. You see, in the church, the truth is, **uniformity can be done without grace or Jesus, because uniformity is mainly external.** Let me give an example. Our orchards of peaches, or plums, or nectarines, or almonds, or oranges, or whatever are uniformity. We sculpt them to look the same, to function the same, to produce the same over and over and over. In contrast, unity, is Sequoia National Forest. They're all trees, but one is uniformly manipulated to an exacting standard that cannot and should not be deviated from, while the other is allowed its individual expression. **Biblical unity requires grace, and is a relational issue from the inside out.** Uniformity is about control, and Jesus has called us as His disciples and followers, as Christians to unity.

Look with me at Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul, knowing the importance of unity within the church says in 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*". Verse 1 causes us to ask a few questions, why do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling, how do we do this, and what is the purpose of doing so? Before we look at these questions, we have to answer another so we understand the force and substance of Paul's and Jesus' plea for unity in the church. What is the call Paul is speaking about? What is the call to which we have been called that we are to walk worthy of? In short, Paul is speaking about the gospel. Walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, in a manner worthy of the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected, that you have been called. The worthy call we are to walk in is the call to faith, the call to the repent and believe the good news, the call to the gospel. So back to our other questions.

Why do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling, in a manner worthy of the gospel? To answer this we have to look briefly at what Paul has been saying in the first three chapters of this powerful letter. In the first three chapters, Paul gives at least four major reasons we need to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. First, **in the gospel, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ**. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*”. We have been **chosen**, verse 4, “... *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*”. We have been **adopted**, verse 5, “... *he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ*”. We have been **redeemed and forgiven**, verse 7, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*”. We have an **inheritance, we are sons and daughters of the King**, verse 11, “*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*”. And we have the spiritual blessing of having been **sealed with the Holy Spirit**, verse 13, “*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were 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*.” And these blessings were given, verse 10, “...*to unite all thing in him, things in heaven and things on earth*”. God has given us our glorious salvation in Jesus so that we will be united, in unity as God’s people, in Jesus. We walk in manner worthy of the calling because of the tremendous spiritual blessings salvation in Jesus Christ affords.

A second reason we walk in a manner worthy of the calling is because our salvation has been **gifted to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone**. Ephesians 2:8-9 say, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” Walk in a manner worthy of the gracious, free, unearned gift of grace you have been given in Christ.

Third, Paul tells us, we walk in a manner worthy of our calling because we, as the church, **are being made into a new people of God in Christ**. Jew and Gentile, which is a shorthand way of saying, every tribe, tongue, and nation, no one is excluded from hearing the gospel or responding to the gospel, the elect from all humanity will be made one in Christ. Ephesians 2:22 summarizes saying, “*In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*”

Why do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling, worthy of the gospel? Paul’s fourth answer is that **God’s vehicle for proclamation of the gospel is His church**. Paul says in 3:10, “... *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” A church united to Christ, is a church able to faithfully proclaim and walk out the gospel to others.

And this begs the question, then how do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling, how do walk worthy of the gospel? Let’s go back to Ephesians 4. Now that we understand the why, we can move to the how. How do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling, worthy of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Ephesians 4:1-2, “*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love*”. Paul gives four graces, four ways we can walk in a manner worthy of our calling, and be people who are walking in unity, not uniformity, but unity as the people of God. We walk in **humility**. This means **viewing myself properly, and being not self-centered**. Humility is that virtue of putting others needs ahead of my own, or viewing myself as someone who is also broken, a sinner, in need of God’s grace and mercy.

We walk worthy of the calling, worthy of the gospel when we walk in **gentleness, in quiet strength, not in violence or harshness**. Jesus, as He calls others to repentance and faith and the life of discipleship says of Himself that we are to come to Him all who are weary and heavy burdened and he will give us rest. We are to take His yoke upon us, and learn from Him for He is gentle and lowly of heart – not weak, not a door mat to be walked all over, gentle, possessing a quiet, reserved strength; lowly not violently or harshly demanding. Gentleness nurtures people, it respects people, to walk in gentleness it to allow someone to let their defenses down so we can deal more objectively with them.

We walk worthy of the calling, worthy of the gospel in humility, in gentleness, and in **patience**. As Christians, as disciples and followers of Christ, we of all people should be patient, meaning **we make allowances for others, we**

endure the short comings of others? Why, because this is exactly what God has done, and continues to do for us as we grow in our commitment to Christ. Who of you is perfect in every way? If you have not reached to the level of perfection, and not one person here today has or will in this life – then you are in need of patience. Patience is a largeness of soul, patience is willing to give people enough room and time to fail, learn, and develop. We do need at times to prod people forward, but we need to balance that with the patience that allows people to move at a pace they have, or even more a pace God may be working them through.

Finally, answering the how, Paul says, we walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called when we walk in **loving forbearance with one another**. Now that deals with the words we have in the text, but it's a little archaic and hard to understand, so let me make it plain, to bear with one another in love is really simply – **put up with one another**. The Christian life is a putting up with other people, which is motivated by love. See love is not a feeling or emotion, biblical love, agape love is an act of the will. It exists in relation to specific people, and it's always costly. The love spoken of here does not find its source in human motivation. It is a choice made because of God's love for us. 1 John 4:10 reminds us, "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*".

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Why, because of the great salvation God has freely and graciously offered to us by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, making us a new people as the church, and sending out His church to proclaim this gospel to others. How do we walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called? We walk, we live and breath humility, gentleness, patience, and lovingly put up with one another for the sake of the gospel and in response to the gospel.

For what purpose? What is the purpose of walking in a manner worthy of the calling, worthy of the gospel? Ephesians 4:3 we are to be "... *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*". Four key concepts to see as we draw our time this morning to a close.

We are to be **eager, there is a sense of haste, urgency, crisis; we need to get this done now!** Paul is saying. Working towards unity within the body of Christ is not something we need to put on our list to get around to, it's something we need to be actively engaged in now, working on now, why – because the health of our church is at stake. The effectiveness of our gospel proclamation is on the line. Are you eager for unity at Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church? The time is now for us to pursue and work hard for unity.

We are to be eager, eager to **maintain this unity**. This speaks to the **value and care** we are to have for our unity as the people of God at Reedley MB. And if we are maintain this unity as a church, this is going to be **outwardly demonstrated**. We will be able to see it in one another, and others, primarily those outside our church, will see how we treat one another, how we are humble with one another, gentle towards one another, patient with one another, and lovingly put up with one another. We are being asked to value unity, to invest in it, to be attentive to it so that it is not threatened.

The purpose of walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, worthy of the gospel we have received in Christ is to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. **There is a oneness that comes from being united to Christ**. It's important to notice that the unity of the spirit is not generic, Spirit is capitalized, the unity of the Spirit is the unity of Spirit because we are joined to God by faith in Christ, indwelled by the Holy Spirit, and children of God the Father. Unity is something given to us by the Holy Spirit, it is not something we create. It is based on the oneness of God and the oneness of the gospel which works the same for all people. Unity is the basis from which we start as Christians and the goal we are striving for; one with God, one with one another.

Unity is held together in the bond of peace. We are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **Peace, the shalom of the Old Testament, the settled-ness of soul is the glue that holds us together as one**. The unity we share in God's Spirit is based on that peacemaking act of Christ, which has created one new being and links Christians together.