



# Walk Worthy

## Kicking It Off

Think of someone you know who seems genuinely gentle under pressure, not weak or passive, but calm and composed. What is it about them that stands out, and what do you think is behind it?

## Read

Ephesians 4:1-6

## Summary

The world's case for powering up is not stupid. Fight for yourself, protect your own, find people who look and think like you and call them your community. The logic has been around long before social media started amplifying it, and it has real internal coherence. The question the church faces is not whether the world's logic makes sense. It does. The question is whether the church is called to a different logic altogether.

Paul writes from prison, and the first thing he does when he turns to the practical life of the church in Ephesians 4 is name himself a prisoner for the Lord. His chains belong to Christ. From that position, he urges the church to walk in a manner worthy of its calling, with humility and gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love.

Each of those four words cuts against the posture the world calls strength. Humility was a slave's disposition in the ancient world, not a virtue. Gentleness was what ancient writers used to describe a warhorse brought under the rider's command, all of its strength still present, none of it spent in self-direction. The warhorse does not have a sword. Its job is to carry the one who does. Patience refuses the short fuse and trusts God on God's timeline. And bearing with one another assumes the weight will come, and that the love of Christ is what makes the holding possible.

The unity all of this is meant to preserve is not something the church builds. It is something God has already made. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Those seven "ones" are not a program. They are the present-tense reality the Spirit established. The church's task is not to manufacture unity. The task is to walk in the unity God has already given, as humbly and gently and patiently as the lamb we follow.

## Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul could have opened the practical section of Ephesians with apostolic authority, but instead he introduced himself as a prisoner for the Lord. What circumstance in your life right now feels like a chain, and what would it change to see that chain as belonging to the Lord rather than to whatever is holding you?
3. The sermon described gentleness (prautes) as the posture of a warhorse under the rider's command: all of its strength present, none of it spent in panic or self-direction. In a situation where you feel most tempted to power up or prove yourself, what would it look like to bring your full strength while keeping it submitted to the Lord's direction?
4. Paul says the church's task is not to create unity but to guard what the Spirit has already made. In your relationships at home, at work, or in this church, where are you more often trying to build unity from scratch rather than protecting what God has already given?
5. The sermon contrasted the wolf pack (find your tribe, expel the weak, protect your own) with the church's call to bear one another's burdens. Who is the hardest person in your life to bear with right now, and what would it look like to bring them patience rather than a verdict?
6. The sermon ended with the image of Jesus as a lamb who gave Himself to His enemies rather than powering up. Where is the Lord calling you specifically to respond to opposition with that kind of gentleness this week, and what is making that hard?

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

"If it's for the Lord, even your failures are success."

"God can do far more abundantly with his beloved son or daughter with a leash on than you could do by yourself running free."

"We have been made one, not by humans. We have been made one by the one who calls us."

"Jesus wasn't a wolf. Thank God he wasn't a wolf. He was a lamb. A sacrificial lamb. And as he had enemies, he said, 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.'"

## Sermon Notes

### *Ephesians 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, 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. 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.*

## Outline

1. A Prisoner Tells Us How to Walk (Eph. 4:1)
  - a. Paul could have led with apostolic authority. He leads with chains. "I, a prisoner for the Lord" is an identity claim, not just a circumstance.
  - b. The "therefore" carries the full weight of chapters 1-3. The imperative walk rests on the indicative work of God: resurrection from death, new humanity from Jew and Gentile, the prayer for fullness.
  - c. The calling (klesis) is God's effective call from death to life. The walk is supposed to weigh the same as that calling. A church pulled from the grave cannot walk like a tribe defending its territory.
2. The Shape of the Worthy Walk (Eph. 4:2-3)
  - a. Humility (tapeinophrosyne): a word the ancient world despised, reserved for slaves. Paul puts it first on the Christian list because the Lord who calls us came in exactly this posture.
  - b. Gentleness (prautes): not weakness. Ancient writers used it for a warhorse under the rider's command. All the strength is present; none of it is spent on self-direction. The warhorse does not have the sword. Its job is to carry the one who does.
  - c. Patience (makrothymia): literally a long temper. Trusting God to be God on God's timeline, even with the brother or sister who is testing you.
  - d. Bearing with one another in love: assumes weight will come. The love of Christ makes the holding possible.
  - e. "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3): the verb is terein, to guard and keep. The unity is not to be created. It is to be protected. The Spirit made it. The church's job is preservation.
3. One God Has Already Made Us One (Eph. 4:4-6)
  - a. Seven "ones" that are not aspirations but present-tense realities: one body, one Spirit, one hope (clustered around the Spirit); one Lord, one faith, one baptism (clustered around Christ); one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
  - b. The unity of the church is not manufactured by humans. It is based on what God has done. The church cannot create what only the Spirit produces, but it can damage what the Spirit has already made.

- c. The question in any moment of conflict is not "how do we build unity?" The better question is "what unity has the Spirit already given that we are failing to honor?"

## Notes

The world is good at making its case. The argument for powering up, for protecting your own and expelling the weak, has real internal logic. You can follow it without noticing where it leads. And it leads somewhere the kingdom was never meant to go.

Paul is writing from prison. He is not writing from success. He is writing from chains, and the first thing he does when he pivots from three chapters of theological foundation to the practical life of the church is name himself a prisoner for the Lord. He could have opened with apostolic authority, the weight of his credentials, the number of churches he planted and letters he wrote. He does not. He opens with chains. And from that position, he urges the church to walk.

The word "therefore" at Ephesians 4:1 carries everything from the first three chapters on its back. The resurrection from death in trespasses, the new humanity made from Jew and Gentile, the prayer for fullness, all of it lands on that one word. Because of all that, now walk. The walk is not a new assignment. It is the fitting response to what God has already done.

Paul's word for calling here is *klesis*, the effective call of God by which the dead are made alive and the far-off are brought near. The walk is supposed to be worthy of that, weighed on the same scale. A church that has been called into resurrection life cannot walk like a tribe defending its territory.

So what does the walk look like? Four things: humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. These are not four separate items on a list. They are one posture in four faces.

Humility (*tapeinophrosyne*) was not a virtue in the ancient world. It was a slave's disposition, the posture of the defeated. Paul picked it up and put it at the top of the Christian list because the Lord who calls us came in exactly that posture. He emptied Himself and was found in the form of a servant. The Christian who is fighting for status has not yet begun to walk worthy.

Gentleness (*prautes*) is worth sitting with, because the world misreads it as weakness. Ancient writers used the word to describe a warhorse brought under the rider's command. All of the horse's power is still there. None of it is spent in panic or self-direction. The horse goes where the rider calls. That is gentleness. Not the absence of strength, but strength yielded to a higher will. Jesus uses this word of Himself in Matthew 11:29. The meekest man on earth is not the man with nothing to offer. He is the man who has placed everything he has under the Lord's direction. And one more thing about the warhorse: it does not have a sword. The rider has the sword. The horse's job is to carry the rider to exactly where he needs to go.

Patience (*makrothymia*) is literally a long temper. The opposite is the quick takedown, the impulse to settle the score before the day is out. Patience trusts that God is God on God's timeline, even when the world tells you to move now. And bearing with one another in love assumes the weight will come. There will be things you need to hold up on behalf of your brother or sister. The love of Christ makes the holding possible.

The church lives in a cultural moment that is aggressively wolf-shaped. Power up. Protect your own. Find community with those who look and act and vote like you, and treat everyone else as the enemy. This logic is coherent. The wolf pack survives. The weak get expelled. The strong lead. And I hear this directed at people of every age, every background, every fear.

But the warhorse knows something the wolf does not. The warhorse does not have a sword. Its job is not to fight. Its job is to carry the one who does. You and I are not the ones who defeat the principalities and powers. We are the ones who carry the one who does. Our job is to walk, humbly and gently and patiently, in the direction He calls us.

Now here is what I want you to really hear about unity. Paul is not asking the church to build it. He is asking the church to maintain what God has already built. The verb he uses is *terein*, to guard, to protect something already made. "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The Spirit is the source. The church is the guardian. We cannot manufacture what only the Spirit can produce, but we can certainly damage what the Spirit has already made.

So many times we think about church unity in terms of programs. What events will bring people together? What initiatives will get everyone on the same page? Paul short-circuits that whole conversation. God has already done the work. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Those seven "ones" are not aspirations. They are present-tense realities that God Himself established. The question is not "how do we create unity?" It is "what unity has the Spirit already given that we are failing to honor?"

The unity of the church is not based on shared demographics, shared opinions, or shared politics. It is not based on everyone looking the same or coming from the same background. It is based on the cross. One Lord died, and all who receive that invitation are one. That is not a unity we manufacture. It is a unity we walk into. I do not have the power to kick you out of the body of Christ. The only one who has that authority is Jesus, and I believe in a Jesus who is far more gracious than I am on any given day.

The church will be hated for standing on the cross and the word. What Paul tells us to do with that hatred is: respond with humility and gentleness and patience. Bear the burden. Listen. The instinct to respond to a wolf with a wolf, to turn the congregation into a pack, is understandable. But look at what we follow. Jesus did not power up. He gave

Himself to His enemies and said, "Father, forgive them." He was not a wolf. He was a lamb. A sacrificial lamb.

That is the walk. Humbly, gently, patiently, together, carrying the one who carries the sword, going where He calls us to go.

## Blog

Many of us are being shaped, quietly and steadily, by a media diet that treats fear as the default posture for Christian engagement. Another piece of legislation that supposedly threatens the church. A headline insisting the country is one election away from outlawing the gospel. The cumulative effect is a low-grade bracing, a chronic readiness to be attacked, and it leaks into everything else, into how we read a message from a friend, how we listen to a coworker who voted differently, how we walk into our own small group with the tension already in our shoulders. The loudest voices in our orbit tell us that our religious freedoms are slipping away, and that the right Christian response is to clench, to defend, to power up.

Then in Ephesians 4, Paul wrote these verses from inside a Roman cell. He had spent three chapters telling the church what God has done for us in Christ, the blessings, the resurrection from death in trespasses, the new humanity made from Jew and Gentile, the prayer that we would be filled with God's fullness. When he finally turns to call the church into a life that matches all of that, the first thing he does is remind us that he is a prisoner. As an identity. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you" (4:1). He calls himself a prisoner "in the Lord," so bound to Christ that even his Roman chains have been reframed as belonging to God. He could have led with apostolic authority. He led with his chains instead.

What he asks for, when he finally asks, is not a war. It is a walk. "To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1). The picture Paul gives us is that of a balanced scale. The calling sits on one side, already set in place by God. Our daily life is supposed to come into balance with it, one foot in front of the other. And the walk Paul names does not look like the kind of strength I am tempted to chase when I close that feed. He lists humility first. The word he uses (*tapeinophrosyne*) was a slave's word in the Greek world, the disposition respectable people refused to claim. The cross turned it into the marker of Christlikeness, because the Lord who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant is the One who redefined the word. He names gentleness next, which is regularly misread as weakness. It is not. It is the word ancient writers used for a war horse broken to the rein, all of its strength still present, none of it spent on panic. Then patience, a "long temper," the opposite of the short fuse, the same word used of God's patience toward sinners. Then "bearing with one another in love," which assumes that life together will involve weights we have to carry on each other's behalf. And then the fifth, the one that gathers up the other four, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). The verb for "maintain" means to guard, to keep, to protect. The unity is not something we build. It is something we are asked to guard.

That single distinction reorganizes a lot of how I think about life inside the church. I have spent more time than I would like trying to construct a unity that I assumed did not yet exist, as if compatibility were the project and personality differences were the obstacle. Paul flips it. The unity is "of the Spirit." The Spirit has already made it. The brother and sister sitting next to me on Sunday already belong to the same body, breathe by the same Spirit, lean into the same hope, confess the same Lord, hold the same faith, wear the same baptism, and have been adopted by the same Father. Seven "ones" stacked into three verses (4:4-6), arranged in a Trinitarian shape, and not one of them is up for us to invent. The person across the aisle whose politics make my chest tighten, the small group member whose tone last Tuesday made me consider leaving the room, the friend whose theology drifted somewhere I would not go, every one of them, if they confess Jesus, has been bound to me by every one of those seven. The right question, when I am tempted to write someone off, is not "How do I build unity with this person?" but "What unity has the Spirit already given that I am about to grieve?"

This is the place I keep tripping. Most of the time when I want to go to war with another Christian, I have a case. I can defend it. They were wrong. They were unkind. They drifted on a doctrine that mattered to me. I could line up the argument for why I am right and they are not, and I could win the argument. The trouble is that winning the argument has never once produced what the gospel actually asks for, and most of the time the very act of preparing my case has hardened me against the person I was supposed to love. The Holy Spirit has already joined me to them. The same Lord I confess they confess. The same baptism they received I received. Going on offense against them does not advance the kingdom, it grieves the One who made the unity in the first place. Sometimes the call is not to win, it is to love. Humility does not rejoice in evil, and gentleness does not surrender to truth, but the worthy walk refuses to make the kingdom about being right.

There are two postures the church is being tempted into right now, and they are mirror images of each other. The first is the aggressive one, the one that believes the kingdom advances by attacking, by hardening, by being right at every cost. The second is the fearful one, the one that believes our religious freedoms are slipping away and the answer is to clench, to defend, to power up. They sound very different on the outside. They are the same mistake on the inside. Both assume the kingdom rests on what we do under threat. Paul, threatened with execution, says the kingdom rests on what God has already done. Our task is not to defend the kingdom from a Roman cell. Our task is to walk like the people God has already made us to be.

Consider Paul at the writing desk, chained at the wrist, putting down some of the most exalted ecclesiology in the New Testament, and telling the church that the first

thing it needs to do is walk humbly. He did not write a defense of his rights. He did not draft a strategy to retake his freedom. He wrote a pastoral letter, and the application section opened with a quiet identification of himself as a prisoner. The Lord he served was led to a cross. The walk Paul calls for has always looked strange to a watching world. It will look like patience where the world expects fury. It will look like bearing with one another where the world expects cancellation. It will look like an eagerness to preserve unity where the world rewards the loudest division. And the engine of that strange walk is not our effort. The engine is one Spirit, one Lord, one God, who has already made us one, and who is calling us this week to walk like it.

When the next news cycle comes for us, and it will, I want to remember Paul at that writing desk. He was in chains when he wrote it, and the chains did not panic him into a strategy. They settled him into a posture. The first move he asked the church to make was not to clench. It was to walk. May the Lord give us the grace to walk like Him this week, slowly, humbly, together, while the world keeps insisting we run.