

Walk Worthy
Ephesians 4:1-16

DT- Good people make good churches and good churches make good people.

Today we step into the application part of Ephesians. Now that Paul has discussed what God has done for us, he wants to discuss what we should be doing for God. He begins chapter 4 with a reminder to walk worthy. Let's pray and then we will dive into the text.

PRAY

Good people make good churches and good churches make good people. I will fully admit that is not an original thought from me. I have heard several different people use that line. I'm not really sure who to attribute it to, but it describes our text today incredibly well. The first part of Ephesians 4 is all about how we should operate as the body of Christ, and the dominant thought of these 16 verses seems to point out that when you have good followers of Christ, when you have good people, you will have good churches. If you have good churches then those churches should be producing good people.

These 16 verses are packed with information about how to walk worthy and be that good person who helps produce good churches. Although we won't be able to dive deep into every single portion of this text, we can draw from it the traits of a good person and the characteristics of a good church. Let's start with good people.

1. Good people.

What are the traits of good people in this text? How does Paul describe these good people who make good churches. He lays that out for us in the first 2 verses of chapter 4. Ephesians 4:1-2 says, "Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love."

We see the plea to walk worthy of the calling God has put on our lives. Then he tells us how to do that. 4 things, 4 traits of good people. First, is the instruction to be humble.

- Humble.

Humility is one of those traits that if you know you have it, you've probably lost it. If you have to tell people you're humble, you're not humble. Humility in the context of unity is vital, because without humility real unity in the church, in the workplace, in the home can never truly happen.

In the ancient world humility was not a well-respected trait, but Jesus and his followers were the ones who began to change that view. Jesus demonstrated humility when he washed the disciple's feet. Right after he does that he says this in John 13:13-15, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."

Jesus set the example for humility, and a humble heart is what good godly people have. The next trait that Paul mentions here in Ephesians 4 is that good people are gentle.

- Gentle.

Some versions will say meek. I've said this many times, but it is always worth repeating that meekness is not weakness. Meekness could be described as strength under control. Humility is the attitude we should have, and gentleness is the action resulting from that humility. Gentle people don't try to get the best seat at the table. In fact, they may let others sit while they stand. Gentle people are considerate of others. If everyone in the church was humble and gentle, most of, if not all our conflicts would disappear.

Philippians 4:5 (NIV) says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all."

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare."

Humility and Gentleness go hand in hand. Both work together to promote unity, and both are traits of good people. The third instruction Paul gives in this picture of good people is to be patient.

- Patient.

Specifically, we are to be patient with one another. Some translations may even use the phrase long-suffering or long tempered. It's the ability to endure discomfort without fighting back. Which let's be honest is really hard. Yet Paul says we need to be patient with one another despite our faults.

God is patient with us. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."

One of the best ways to be patient with others is to remember how much God has been patient with us, and how much he has forgiven us. George Herbert once said, "He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself."

The last trait of good people that Paul mentions is this word forbearance.

- Forbearance

It's not a word we typically use in our day-to-day language. I don't tell Landon, "I wish you would exercise more forbearance with your brothers." Although we don't use it as much as we might use these other 3 words, it's a valuable trait to God. Forbearance is the ability to bear with or put up with one another in love. That last part is what makes it work, love. If there is no love, there can be no forbearance, or patience, or gentleness, or real humility.

Paul asking us to bear with one another means that he knows, as we all do, that at times we will clash over things. Loving others will be a burden sometimes. The only way to acquire and live out these traits is through the Spirit. If you walk with and in the Spirit you can do these things when their easy and when it's really hard. Galatians 5:16 says, "So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves."

The sinful nature does not crave these 4 things, but the Spirit does. To be good people with these good traits we must be in step with the Spirit. If you live by the Spirit it will produce all kinds of good fruit. Good people make good churches and good churches make good people. Paul has talked about the good people in this text and what traits we must have to walk worthy and be unified; what about good churches. What do good churches need for unity to be a possibility. Paul seems to point towards 4 things that good churches will do or have as they walk worthy together towards this elusive thing we call unity.

First, good churches will make every effort to maintain unity.

2. Good Churches

- Make every effort to maintain unity.

I used the word maintain for a specific reason. You can't achieve unity. Not in a church, not in a marriage, not in any place where people exist. Unity must always be maintained; an effort must constantly and consistently be made for any group of people to be unified. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."

You could also translate this by saying, "Be eager to maintain or guard that unity." Although we must make every effort to maintain unity in the church, the Spirit leads us in that. It is in and through the Spirit that we find our unity. We can't find true unity without the Spirit working in our lives. However, we don't just sit back while the Spirit does all the work either. 2 Peter 1:10 says, "So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away."

We must work hard at this unity thing. Every effort has to be made. There are so many things that divide us today. Doctrinal beliefs, political affiliation, music preference, sports teams, languages, clothing choices. Although there is a list of things that can divide us, as Christians we got a pretty good list of things that unite us too. Ephesians 4:4-6 says, "For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all."

There's more that unites us than divides us. That should be our focus. Unity is like a fire, if you don't maintain it, if you don't regularly check on it; it will die. Good churches make every effort to maintain unity. Good churches also have gifted leaders.

- Have gifted Leaders.

When I say gifted your initial thought may be academically gifted. That could be the case but it's not what Paul is talking about here. Paul says in verse 7 that each one of us has been given a gift, but his list in Ephesians 4:11 only mentions individuals who have certain gifts; here's what he says, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers."

It's interesting that Paul chose to describe it that way. In 1 Corinthians 12 he gives us a list of gifts like, the ability to give wise advice; the ability to have great faith; the ability to heal; the ability to discern. Here, it's not a list of abilities but a list of people. Specifically, leaders in the church. God gives the church leaders who should be using their gifts to pursue unity. A good church will have good leaders. The early church had great leaders. They had apostles. The original 12 disciples, subtract Judas and add Matthias. There are no more apostles like that who quite literally walked with Jesus during his ministry. He also gave us prophets. Certainly we see that in the OT. Too often we view prophets as people who just know the future and predict it. However, even the prophets from scripture spent more time proclaiming God's truth than they did predicting what God would do in the future. Prophets were vital in the OT and the NT, but once we had the scriptures, prophets became less necessary and that brought less prediction and instead more proclamation.

Some gifted leaders are evangelists. An evangelist didn't have the authority of an apostle, or the inspiration of a prophet, but he had a heart for the lost. These are like our missionaries of today.

The last leader Paul mentions are the preachers and teachers. I believe those 2 things go together in this text. Mostly because pastor means elder and one of the qualifications for elder is to be able to teach. We don't have apostles anymore. We don't really have prophets anymore. Which means our gifted leaders are either evangelists, or preachers, pastors, elders, or teachers.

A good church will make every effort to maintain unity and the people leading that charge ought to be the gifted leaders in the church. The best way for us to respond to this text up to this point is to ask the question "Am I a gifted leader." If you are one be one. If you're not one, support one. By the way you can't declare yourself a gifted leader, that has to come from the people around you.

The next thing a unified good church will do is know their purpose.

- Know their purpose.

Or you could say that a good church knows its vision. Our vision at TCC is to honor God, invest in people, and make a difference. That's our vision for how we accomplish what Paul says in Ephesians 4:12 where he writes, "Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ."

A good church will equip God's people to do his work while they build up the body of Christ. When we honor Jesus, invest in people, and make a difference we are equipping one another to do his work, to build up the church. A good church knows their purpose, knows their vision and chases after it strategically. Proverbs 21:5 says, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."

You can't take shortcuts when it comes to your purpose. The wonderful thing about the local church is that we can have unity in the midst of diversity. Each of us has a role to play within the church, and that individual function doesn't destroy unity, it enhance the unity we have and allows us to achieve our purpose.

Our men's group on Wednesday night just finished up a section on purpose. We talked about how our purpose is to glorify God, our purpose is to work, our purpose is to be the spiritual leader of the home, our purpose is to make disciples, and our purpose is to serve. Good churches with good people know what their purpose is.

The last thing Paul mentions when it comes to this picture of a good church is that a good church will teach and preach a sound doctrine.

- Teach and preach a sound doctrine.

One of the things I love about our children's ministry and our youth ministry here at TCC is that our leaders and volunteers come alongside parents to help teach them sound doctrine. If your kid comes consistently from birth to graduation they will have an incredible start to their spiritual life. That's a testament to April and Mitch and all of you who help shepherd those kids.

What we are giving them is that spiritual depth we talked about last week, and a spiritual maturity that prepares them for adulthood. The result of that is Ephesians 4:14-15 where it says, "Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."

This is why we push for you to be in some sort of class here at TCC. Steve always puts together a great grouping of classes on Wednesdays, Sundays, Tuesday afternoons, and now we have BSF for men and women. We are working hard to teach a sound doctrine. Myself, along with Steve and Mitch work hard to plan out our sermon series so that we can preach a mixture of OT and NT, letters like Ephesians, and narratives like Jeremiah. 3 years ago now we preached through the book of Revelation.

The whole reason we think through that from our infants to our oldest adults is because a sound doctrine protects the church and builds unity. This point is especially crucial for anyone in leadership. Paul told Timothy this in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

You must watch how you live and what you teach. Watch your life and doctrine church because doing so will help the whole body maintain unity.

I know I threw a lot at you today, because Paul threw a lot at us in this text, but just remember that good people make good churches and good churches make good people. Look at these traits of good people and evaluate yourself against what Paul describes as a worthy walk. Are you humble and gentle with others in the church. Are you patient with one another. Is forbearance something you possess or do you tend to snap and react too quickly.

Leaders, Elders, Deacons, Staff; we must evaluate ourselves as well. Looking at his description of a good church. Do we make every effort for unity, or do we sometimes give a half-hearted effort? Are we utilizing all the gifted leaders God has put in this church? Do we understand our purpose? Are we watching our life and doctrine closely?

The results of doing these things well is what Paul describes at the end of this passage in Ephesians 4:16 where it says, "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."

The key to good people making good churches and good churches making good people is for every part of the body to function well together. Honestly this reminds me of a meditation that Dale Walker did for us a year or two ago. Coming from that physical therapy background he talked about the functionality of the body and how each part works with other and how one overcompensation can affect other parts of the body. The same is true in the body of Christ.

Christ is the head of the church. Not me, not the elders, Christ is the head. The leadership can't do all the ministries though, not well at least. There really should be no members in a church body who just observe, who just take, without also giving. If we all do our part, using the gifts God has given us, we can have a great impact for the kingdom. So walk worthy of your calling church.

Spiritual unity is not something we can manufacture; we already have it through Christ and in the Spirit. Our job is to protect and maintain it. Truth unifies, lies divide. Love unites, selfishness divides. So, Paul tells us to speak the truth in love. If we all work together to be good people who make this a good church the result will be a good church that makes good people, and ultimately we all grow up to be more and more like Christ.