

## Lesson 10

# Keeping the Unity of the Spirit

## *Ephesians 4.1-3*

### Overview

The Christian life should be characterized by selfless love for others, just as Christ demonstrated while on earth. In these verses Paul commands Christians to live the life. He then explains how to live the life, going into detail about the basic attitudes that govern the way we treat our brothers and sisters. These lead us to practice unity through working toward peace inside the body.

### The Bigger Picture

Many Christians equate unity to external practices which leads to the idea of unity via uniformity. This viewpoint will always lead to failure. Instead, unity occurs inside the environment Christ and the Spirit have created and is kept and sustained through the desire for peace.

### The Text

#### NLT

Ephesians 4:1–3 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>2</sup>Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

#### CSB

Ephesians 4:1–3 (CSB)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received,

<sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

<sup>3</sup>making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

### Explore the Text

1. What does “walking” mean in Paul’s writing? Where are some other places in the New Testament where he uses the work “walk” or “walking”?

2. What is the “calling” we have received?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How are the four qualities of verse 2 progressive and interconnected? Can you have one without the other?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Do we create unity or maintain it? If we don’t create it, who gave it to us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How do we keep the unity we have been given?

## About the Text

The first three chapters contain Paul’s doctrinal instruction as he exhorts Christians to embrace their identity in Christ, rest in the salvation they have received by grace, and trust in the unity with other believers from different cultures and backgrounds made possible by Jesus. Now, the last three chapters demonstrate the appropriate response to his instructions. Paul says that Christians are to *walk worthy of the calling they have received*. In other words, Christians are to match their life to the character of Jesus Christ. He has changed our life. Now we exercise the good behavior that comes from it.

The theme of the last three chapters is “walking.” Christians walk in unity, 4.1-16. Christians walk in uniqueness, 4.17-32. Christians walk in love, 5.1. They walk in light, 5.8. Christians walk in wisdom, 5.15. They also walk in the Spirit, 5.18. And they walk in warfare, 6.10-13.

### I. 4.1: Walk Worthily

- A. “Worthy” carries the meaning of counterbalancing. In other words, there should be a growing harmony between who you are and how you live. Your life pattern should match your identity. Honoring Christ is part of daily life.
- B. “Calling” is the transformed way of life and walk with God that comes through salvation in Christ.
  - i. It is a *high calling*, Philippians 3.14 ASV.
  - ii. It is a *holy calling*, 2 Timothy 1.9.
  - iii. It is a *heavenly calling*, Hebrews 3.1.
  - iv. Such a calling demands a proper response.

**II. 4.2: How to Walk**

- A. Notice how Paul first discusses the cultivation of what is within. Attitude first. *Then* doctrine and practice. Jesus is after who we are ... which will lead to correct action and practice.
- B. 4.2: Four basic attitudes:
  - i. Humility. Older translations use *lowliness* here. Humility involves seeing yourself for who you really are, in light of Christ, and in comparison, with the Father.
  - ii. Gentleness. This is a mild disposition that is not prone to retaliation. It is the opposite of being hard, rough, or violent. In some places the word is used to picture a gentle breeze, as in something that would cool a person down on a warm day. It describes the human spirit that has been tamed and is now under control of Christ.
  - iii. Patience. Think “long-suffering.” There are many different circumstances where we may have to exercise patience:
    - 1. In negative circumstances
    - 2. With people
    - 3. In accepting God’s plan for our life
  - iv. Forbearing love. To forbear means to suppress with silence. It conveys the idea of throwing a blanket over sin. (See 1 Peter 4.8 and Proverbs 10.12.)
    - 1. It is the type of love that has room for failures.
    - 2. It is the fulfillment of Matthew 6.14-15; Luke 6.28-29.
- C. Each of these are progressive.
  - i. Humility leads to gentleness.
  - ii. Gentleness leads to patience.
  - iii. Patience leads to forbearing love.

**III. 4.3: This results in unity.**

- A. We are to *make every effort* to keep unity. Full time task. Total effort. It is learning in humility how to love each other.
- B. We *keep* the unity of the Spirit.
  - i. We don’t make, produce, or build it. The Holy Spirit created it when He made us one, 1 Corinthians 12.13.
  - ii. It is personal and spiritual.
- C. Unity is held together by *peace*.
  - i. Paul uses the imagery of a belt.
  - ii. Peace pulls everything together.

**Reaction**

1. Describe the calling of verse 1. How is it special? Why should we treat it as such?

2. Why is it important to see as Paul describes how to walk that he does not begin with externals? Will the things we do in the Lord's name be effective if we have an improper attitude? Explain.
3. What can we connect from the beatitudes with walking in humility?
4. How do you know if you are a gentle person?
5. How is Jesus the perfect example in demonstrating patience? In bad circumstances? With people? In accepting God's plan? What can we learn from His example?
6. What type of view toward oneself must occur before we can effectively practice forbearing love?
7. What are some things you can do to promote peace within the local body?

## For Today's Christian

**If self is at the center, we will never know unity.** When we dwell upon our feelings, our prestige, our rights, and our place, unity will never happen. Everything Paul speaks about in these verses involves the doing away of self. There is not any other option.

**Unity is a gift, not a product.** If we look primarily at externals, form, and practice, we will begin to believe unity is achieved by uniformity . . . that we are the ones actually practicing it through compliance. This is not the Biblical model. Remember, when Jesus looks at the church, He sees blood-bought believers that He justified Himself. See Romans 8.30. He looks at us as those who He is presently working in for the purpose of ongoing sanctification. Ultimately, He looks at us as the people He is

leading to be glorified for all eternity. May we all come to see each other through the eyes of Jesus, not with our human preferences and preferred ways of doing things.

**Unity takes the first step.** Someone once said, *unity occurs as naturally as a two-year-old who shares*. This is why Paul says we need to make every effort to keep it. We are called to love others first and to celebrate the good God is doing in them, rather than waiting for them to come to us when they have figured out where we stand theologically or philosophically. Christians need to be the ones who make every effort to engage others and build bridges . . . not putting up walls and burning bridges. God has called on us to do this. Will we have the faith to follow?

## Journal

What can you do this week to promote unity within the congregation? Is there someone in the congregation you need to make peace with? What measures can you take beginning this week to build a bridge to restore the relationship?

## For Further Study

Another passage to consider in tandem with this lesson is Paul's writing in Colossians 3.11-17. Take a few moments to read through that passage and note the progression: We are to put off the old person and put on the new. We do so by understanding our identity as God's beloved. God's holy person is characterized by loving attitudes. We submit to the rule and authority of Christ and are committed to doing everything in His name.