



Date: 08-16-2026

Walking Worthy

Text: Ephesians 4:1-10 NLT

Introduction

Two themes

1. Spiritual unity is shared through shared doctrine (one statements)
2. diversity is celebrated with individual gifts.

1.Walk _____ of the Calling.

Ephesians 4:1-3 NLT

1 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. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Notes:

2. Living as _____.

Ephesians 4:4-6 NLT

4 For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. 5 There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

Notes:

One Body:

One Spirit:

One Hope:

One Lord:

One Faith:

One baptism:

One Father:

3. All Christians have been given a _____.

Ephesians 4:7-10 NLT

7 However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. 8 That is why the Scriptures say, "When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people." 9 Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10 And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

Notes:

Three Things to Do in Response

1. Walk like someone who has been called.

Ask yourself: Does the way I live match the gospel I say I believe?

Choose humility over pride, gentleness over harshness, patience over frustration, and love over selfishness. Your conduct should reflect your calling.

2. Protect the unity Christ has given us.

Unity does not mean we agree on everything. It means we refuse to let secondary issues divide people who share one Lord, one faith, one Spirit, and one Father.

Ask yourself: Am I helping preserve unity, or am I contributing to division?

Make peace where you can. Forgive quickly. Refuse gossip. Give people room to grow.

3. Use the gift Christ has given you.

You were not saved simply to attend church; you were saved into a body where you have something to contribute. Christ has graciously given every believer a role in His church.

Ask yourself: Where am I contributing to the health and mission of the body?

Find a place to serve. Use what God has given you. Stop seeing yourself as only a consumer and begin functioning as a contributor.

The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8

Paul quotes a version of Psa 68:18 in Eph 4:8. In its original context, Psa 68 is a praise psalm that begins by describing God's victory over Israel's enemies (Psa 68:1–3). The psalm's announcement of victory (Psa 68:11–13), along with references to a procession (Psa 68:16–17, 24–27), may indicate that it was sung as the ark was brought back to Jerusalem after a victorious battle (compare also the “Song of the Ark” performed when the ark was going out to battle in Num 10:35–36). Paul offers a Christological interpretation of this psalm by applying it to Christ's victory over the principalities and powers of Eph 1:20–21 (see “Evil Powers”) or death itself (1 Cor 15:54–57).

It is unclear which version of Psa 68:18 Paul is citing. His text does not match either the mt or the lxx. Paul may have been citing another existing textual tradition or adapting the text to fit his purpose (see Thielman 2007, 821–823). In addition to the textual issue, two primary questions have plagued interpreters: 1) to whom or what does the phrase *ēchmalōteusen aichmalōsian* (“he led captivity captive” or “he led a host of captives”) refer; and 2) why does Paul make the subject of this psalm *give* gifts rather than *receive* them (compare Psa 68:18 “You have received gifts” with Eph 4:8 “he gave gifts”)?

Arnold identifies the “captives” as the principalities, powers, and authorities in Eph 1:20–22—the primary enemies of Christ and His new humanity. He also claims that Paul is citing an existing textual tradition current in his day rather than intentionally altering the Masoretic Text. Arnold notes the following translations that read “You/He gave gifts”: the Aramaic Targum of Psa 68:18, the Syriac translation of the Psalms, Coptic manuscripts of the Bohairic and Sahidic dialects, and one Old Latin manuscript. He also includes a lengthy excursus on Psa 68 that, he argues, may serve as the background to the entire epistle.

“In Depth: Psalm 68 as a Prayer That God Would Defeat His Enemies”
ZECNT: Ephesians

As with Arnold, Barth identifies the “captives” with the spiritual powers subjected to Christ following His resurrection (Eph 1:20–22). Concerning Psalm 68, he too cites the variant textual traditions current in Paul’s day. He concludes that the author of Ephesians was likely familiar with the divergent Aramaic Targum on Psa 68. Barth includes an interesting discussion of Paul’s description of Christ in terms formerly reserved for God or a kingly messiah figure: “When Paul takes Psa 68 to describe Jesus Christ’s rulership, he simply extends a pattern already prepared in the hymns used at enthronement festivals of God or of a descendant of David” (1974, 474). His lengthy excursus provides a thorough discussion of the questions and exegetical concerns in these verses, including a helpful overview of Paul’s hermeneutics.

“Ephesians 4:1–16, The Interpretation of Psalm 68” AYBC: Ephesians 4–6

Best summarizes the interpretive options concerning the “captives” but reaches no conclusion himself. He also overviews the interpretive options concerning the Psa 68 quotation or allusion. He concludes that the author of Ephesians wasn’t quoting Scripture, but cautiously proposes the Aramaic Targum on Psa 68 or an early Christian hymn as a possible source. He also gives a thorough treatment of other Jewish background materials that may have contributed to Paul’s formation of this statement.

“Ephesians 4:8” ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians

Boles cites Colossians 2:15 to support the view that the “captives” are the principalities and powers Jesus defeated with His death, resurrection, and

ascension. Regarding Paul's change from "received gifts" to "gave gifts," Boles argues that since the overall context of Psa 68 is a picture of God giving, Paul is not citing Psa 68:18 out of context.

"Ephesians 4:8" The College Press NIV Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians

Hoehner believes the "captives" refer to people who were previously "captives of Satan, sin, and death that were taken captive by Christ through His redemption and are now His followers." He believes Paul is not citing a specific version of Psa 68 but is rather summarizing the psalm. Understood this way, Paul is applying Psa 68 to the Church, where Christ has achieved victory over sin and death and given the gifts of the Spirit.

"Note on Ephesians 4:8" Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 16: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philemon

"Commentary on Ephesians 4:7–16" Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 16: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philemon

Lincoln identifies the captives with the various powers mentioned in Eph 1:21–22. He also argues that the change in wording from Psa 68 is a modification of the Septuagint text with possible early rabbinic influences. Additionally, he discusses the possibility that the change is a variant from the Hebrew of Psa 68:18. He provides further insight with a discussion of both Jewish and Greek sources. His lengthy paragraph on a possible connection between Psa 68 and the Feast of Pentecost gives additional food for thought.

“Ephesians 4:8” WBC: Ephesians

O’Brien discusses the background of Psa 68 and defers to Arnold, whom he quotes, on the identification of the “captives.” He then lists five possible interpretive options for understanding the Psa 68 quotation or allusion, but he ultimately takes no side. His thorough treatment of the issues involved allows readers to analyze the options and arrive at their own conclusion.

“Ephesians 4:8” PNTC: The Letter to the Ephesians

Thielman provides a helpful overview of the issues involved in Eph 4:8 and illustrates them with a chart. He thoroughly and clearly explains the Jewish background of the passage (possibly the Aramaic Targum on Psa 68) as well as a possible Christian tradition. But he discounts the use of the Targum, noting that the Jews to whom Paul wrote were in Asia Minor and, other than Hebrew, would have spoken Greek. The same is true for his Gentile audience. However, he leaves open the possibility that a targumic tradition might lie behind Paul’s statement. He ultimately concludes that Paul deliberately changed the text of Psa 68 to fit his argument—something not uncommon in Paul’s argumentation in his other letters.

“Ephesians 4:8” BECNT: Ephesians

Ascended, Descended, and the Lower Parts of the Earth

In addition to the two questions in the preceding section, a third problem in Eph 4:8–10 has troubled interpreters: What does Paul mean when he says that Christ “ascended” and “descended” (Eph 4:9)? The particular problem lies in understanding the phrase “the lower parts of the earth” (Eph 4:9). There are four possible interpretations of this phrase: 1) Christ’s descent into Hades (the Underworld or netherworld); 2) His descent to earth at His incarnation; 3) His burial following His crucifixion; and 4) the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Arnold lists and discusses the four possible interpretations of “the lower parts of the earth.” He concludes that the phrase refers to a descent into Hades and cites the prevalence of underworld themes and worship at Ephesus. He is quick to note that this does not refer to the popular idea of Christ making proclamation to departed saints regarding their secured salvation following His work on the cross. Rather, he sees this as a proclamation of victory to evil spiritual powers.

“Ephesians 4:9” ZECNT: Ephesians

“Ephesians 4:9” ZIBBCNT: Romans to Philemon

Barth argues convincingly against Arnold’s position and asserts that “the descent of Christ mentioned in 4:9 denotes his incarnation and, most likely, his crucifixion.” He lists six arguments to support his conclusion. For example, Barth notes that evil spirits are located in the heavenly places in Ephesians, not under the earth (see Eph 2:2; 6:12). He also argues that the phrase “lower parts of the earth” is equivalent to “the low region of the earth.”

“Ephesians 4:9” AYBC: Ephesians 4–6

Best presents detailed arguments against the views that the descent refers to Pentecost or to Christ's descent into Hades. He concludes that Christ's descent in Eph 4:9 must refer to His incarnation. Best acknowledges that the verb *katabainō* ("to descend") is not usually used in reference to Christ's incarnation but points out that Paul does not often describe Christ's incarnation.

"Ephesians 4:9" ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians

Bruce argues that the language here is paralleled in John 3:13; 6:38, 62, which contrasts Christ's ascension into heaven with His descent from heaven. Consequently, he argues that Eph 4:10 refers to Christ's incarnation. He interprets the phrase "the lower regions of the earth" to mean "the earth below."

"Ephesians 4:9" NICNT: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians

Harris examines the issues raised in Eph 4:9–10, including textual issues and the issue of Christ's descent. He cites Jewish tradition that associated Psa 68:19 with Moses' ascension on Mount Sinai to obtain the law and notes that the psalm became associated with the feast of Pentecost. In Harris' view, this strengthens the argument that Paul intends the "descent" of Eph 4:9–10 to refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He argues that this view also makes the most sense in the context of the letter.

"The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9–10" Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 151

Lincoln provides a thorough survey of the positions. Although he doesn't explicitly choose a side, he tends to favor the interpretation of "descent" as a reference to the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. However, he rightly

emphasizes that Paul's focus in this passage is not on Christ's descent, but on His ascent.

"Ephesians 4:9, 10" WBC: Ephesians

O'Brien agrees with Lincoln and likewise stresses the primacy of Christ's ascent in Paul's argument. Like the others, he gives a helpful overview of the competing positions. He concludes that understanding descent in Eph 4:9–10 as a reference to the Spirit descending on Pentecost makes more sense of the context and fits with the focus on Christ's ascension and giving of gifts.

"Ephesians 4:9–10" PNTC: The Letter to the Ephesians

Snodgrass understands this passage as a reference to the incarnation: "The one who descended in the Incarnation is the same one who has ascended and is now exalted over all things" (1996, 202). He argues that this would be an odd way for Paul to refer to coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and dismisses the descent into Hades view since the conflict between spiritual forces occurs in the heavenly realms in Ephesians (Eph 1:20–23; 6:10).

"Parenthetical Comment on the Ascension (Ephesians 4:9–10)" NIVAC: Ephesians

In agreement with Arnold, Thielman understands Christ's descent as a trip to the Underworld. However, he doesn't view this descent as an actual event. Rather, he understands it as an expression of the totality of Christ's victory: At His resurrection, He ascended triumphantly, defeating the evil powers above (Eph 1:20–21; 2:2; 6:12) and below.

"Ephesians 4:9" BECNT: Ephesians