

# Living for the Unity of the Body (Eph 4:1)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

## INTRODUCTION

It is clear that Paul places a high priority on a Christian's lifestyle and how it must be anchored to what God is doing in Christ as a community. Christians are not to think in terms of individuality, but in what God is doing uniting the body of Christ. We must live worthy of this work in Christ.

- I. MAIN POINT #1: Christian Living is an Urgent Issue
  - A. Paul is constrained by his own conviction (a prisoner of/for/with the Lord)
    1. "I myself, a prisoner of/for the Lord, therefore urge you" (AT)
    2. Sometimes its *hard to transfer* your hard earned conviction
    3. Sometimes its *hard to face the grit* that comes from conviction
    4. We need to face the reality that our lives do not always line up with the message—we've given ourselves enough excuses.
      - a) Leaders/Servants—you must continue to urge by your example of going through the grit of your convictions
      - b) Leaders/Servants—you must give into a life of conviction that Jesus is Lord, and what you do, it is due to your relationship with Jesus.
    5. We must disabuse ourselves of the lie that Christian living is something that will come to us later.
  - B. Paul is seeking to constrain the Ephesians by his personal exhortation
    1. The very nature of his exhortation is relational: "I myself, a prisoner of/for the Lord" (AT)
    2. Paul is not speaking to the Ephesians from a position of the misguided and undecided.
    3. Paul is already in the arena of faith, being very literally "a prisoner of/for the Lord."

4. For all of us this exhortation should have bite:
  - a) It should make us think about what we have given up or not given up for our convictions
  - b) It should force us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves if we are in the arena of life and faith, or if we are merely the bench warmer, or worse, the water boy / girl.
  - c) Most importantly, we should be asking these questions not simply at the individual Christian's level, but in terms of the community of the church.
5. The exhortation is for all of us, and that means, not a single one of us can ignore Paul's words hoping that someone else, at another time, will arise to take on the burden of the work of the church. It falls to us all.
6. This "urging" (*parakalō*) is what the Spirit is (John 14), what Jesus does (1 John 2), and *now* is what the apostle Paul does.

## II. MAIN POINT #2: The Church must Examine the Consistency of our Lifestyle

- A. "I exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling by which you have been called..." (AT)
- B. The Exhortation is not an empty Request
  1. Our lifestyle should not be defined or shaped by the standards outside of the calling of God.
  2. We often get confused with what it means to be a "good person," a "good citizen," a "religious person."
    - a) Aren't I a good person when I say, "Black Lives Matter" / "All Lives Matter"?
    - b) Aren't I a good citizen when I wear a mask to prevent COVID19/ fight for my freedoms by ignoring government mandates? I bend a knee to bring awareness to police brutality, or I wear a yellow ribbon to support our troops?
    - c) Aren't I a religious person because I go to all the services of the saints/ make sure I say all my prayers every day?
  3. Jesus teaches there is no one good except God (Mark 10:18), we all have temptations and shortcomings that slowly help us veer or lose steam.
- C. The Exhortation Points us to the Challenge of Constant Renewal.

### III. MAIN POINT #3: The Exhortation to Check the Consistency of our Convictions is Fueled by the Reality of the Gospel

- A. "I exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling by which you have been called..." (AT)
  
- B. One of the Biggest Difficulties of a Disciple's life is the Reality Check of the Gospel.
  1. I have a few fears I want to share about the need of a reality Check
    - a) I fear many of us think because we have successful lives that it is the overflowing blessings of God, therefore, our reality is wealth —from God.
    - b) I fear many of us think because our life pathway has been riddled with hardships and many years of famine, that our reality is to hold on —to prove God I'm faithful.
    - c) I fear that for many of us that we have confused having the proper name on our building, the correct form of worship, the right answer to salvation questions, then our reality is that assured— we are the NT church.
  2. The reality check I am persuaded by Ephesians 4:1-3ff, is not really about these issues, but instead about our commitment to be a community of disciples of Jesus that are convicted in the reality that God raised Jesus from the dead,
  3. and that it is through him that God will unite all humanity if we let him has his way with our passions, our actions, and our conviction.
  
- C. Paul is imprisoned somewhere (we don't know if it was Rome or not), and the Ephesians must come together on their convictions about God, the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the binding power of the death of Christ to make us sanctified to carry out God's works.

#### APPLICATION

1. Churches and members, we must constantly put our convictions to the test. What do we really believe and stand for? We need to keep active and take the challenges that come to us face first.
2. Some of us feel the tension that we are not living up to the potential we know that exists in Christ, we need to listen to that call to live up to our convictions. It just may be the gnawing presence of the Spirit of God working through his word, churning in our collective souls to do the works he has prepared us to do.
3. The Church is to be busy with good deeds. Too many times we comfortable with a lazy and comfortable faith. We do not dare to do things greatly, we instead dare to not be anything great. It is not the work of the one, but of the all.



# The Three Attitudes of Unity (Eph 4:2)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

## INTRODUCTION

We must develop the attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience if we are going to contribute to the greater fullness of the unity found in Christ. We must (1) realize that in Christ, our egos have gone to die, (2) learn to embrace our shared need for acceptance, and (3) learn to take the longview of God’s grace applied to all members of the body of Christ.

The *means* of how to walk worthily of our calling is negatively framed by the phrase, “bearing with one another in love.”<sup>1</sup> The attitudes to accomplish this are threefold. We also see the Apostle uses these three words together in the parallel passage of Colossians 3:12–13:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility* [ταπεινοφροσύνην], *meekness* [πραΰτητα], and *patience* [μακροθυμίαν], <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another [ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων] and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (ESV).

As F. F. Bruce observes, Paul uses this language for Christians who “should cultivate and manifest the qualities which are characteristic of him.”<sup>2</sup> To the list in Ephesians, Colossians adds “compassionate hearts” and “kindness” along with the goal to establish and maintain a community of mutual forgiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 652.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 152.

Indeed, one more line from Bruce is relevant: “mutual relations among members of the society [= the church] are uppermost in the writer’s mind.”<sup>3</sup>

I. MAIN POINT #1: To realize Unity, Our Ego Has to Die!

A. Attitude One: “All Humility” (πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης) 7x in NT

B. This word is on the lips of Paul in Acts 20:19 addressing the Ephesian elders: “serving the Lord with all humility [πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης] and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews” (ESV).

C. Peter speaks of the place for mutual humility among God’s people: “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

D. This showcases that the dynamic of humility is an attitude, and attitude that shows us how to bear with one another as a family.

1. It takes each of us to build this community we want to see.
2. A community is not the work of the individual.
3. The culture of the church is the work of all of us, so is the work of unity.
4. To accomplish this, *our egos must die*.

II. MAIN POINT #2: To Realize Unity, We must showcase *a disciplined kindness*

A. Attitude Two: Gentleness/Meekness (πραΰτητος) 11x

B. The instances of this word is telling:

1. In the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:23; 6:1)
  - a) “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (6:1).
2. In how to treat others:
  - a) Titus 3:1–2: “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”
  - b) 2 Timothy 2:24–26: And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce, *Colossians*, 334.

leading to a knowledge of the truth,<sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

### C. The Gentleness of Jesus is one of his most charming qualities

1. When Matthew describes him (12:20), he echoes the words of Isaiah (42:3):
  - a) Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup>He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup>a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup>He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.
  - b) Go and sin no more...
2. The Miracles of Jesus
  - a) Wayne Jackson writes about the feeding of the crowds in the Gospels, “This miracle was generated both by their physical and spiritual needs. The Lord ‘had compassion’ on the crowd (Mt. 15:32; Mk. 8:2). The compassion was in their physical interest; they had not eaten in three days...In addition to the apologetic purpose behind his miracles, it also was compassion for the emaciated spiritual devastation of humanity that cause the Savior to heal the sick... cast out demons... and raise the dead.”<sup>4</sup>

### D. The Gentleness of the Body of Christ<sup>5</sup>

1. To be gentle, we must learn to show restraint!
2. To be gentle, we must learn to be thoughtful!
3. To be gentle, we must learn to be willing to rebuild trust!
4. Imagine if you failed and were overcome with a sin... what would you hope would the church’s response? Compassion without compromise... restraint, thoughtful, and trust building (i.e., a safe place).

## III. MAIN POINT #3: To Realize Unity, We must practice redemptive patience

### A. Attitude Three: Patience (μακροθυμία) 14x

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Jackson, *Jesus Christ: The Master Teacher* (Stockton: Christian Courier, 2013), 85–86.

<sup>5</sup> The tips are taken from <https://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Gentle-Person>.

- B. This is another fruit of the Spirit: <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)
- C. Much like gentleness before it in this list, we are called to embrace what we love about God —His *patience*.
1. Romans 2:2–4: We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup> Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and *patience*, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?
  2. 2 Peter 3:11–16: <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. <sup>15</sup> And count the *patience* of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.
- D. The Patience in the Body of Christ
1. Here, people will fail. How patient are we?
  2. Here, brothers will sin. How patient are we?
  3. Here, we will misunderstand each other. How patient are we?
  4. Here, we learn to reserve our energies for the long view!





# The Two Behaviors of Unity (Eph 4:3)

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

(Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

## INTRODUCTION

Actions manifest our attitudes. We speak with actions. *Unity is clearly felt and communicated when Christians learn to endure through the challenges of life in the body.* We are all prickly in our own way, we must demonstrate love for each other by taking the longview with each other rather than always getting relationships down the first time. This, then feeds naturally into another behavior which is to trust God’s Spirit to bind us rather than some naïve belief that it will just all work out. Paul calls us to participate in what God is doing. In fact, *God’s organic work of unity is our goal to bring all nations together into the family of God.* (2:11–22)

In verse two, we observed that the *means* of how to walk worthily of our calling is *negatively* framed by the phrase, “bearing with one another in love.”<sup>6</sup> The attitudes to accomplish this were humility, gentleness and patience. Now we observe the *positive* means to walk worthily of our calling “being eager ones to protect the Spirit’s oneness which is fastened by peace [*lit.* to protect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace]” (AT).

- I. MAIN POINT #1: *The goal is to create a culture of Spirit-bonded harmony among us.*
  - A. Peace is a key theme in Ephesians and it is accomplished by the work of God through Jesus on the Cross (2:11–17).
  - B. This peace (8x in Ephesians) between all humanity is:
    1. is Jesus himself (2:14)
    2. the consequence of the cross (2:15)
    3. the quality of the gospel message (2:17)
    4. the consequence of the gospel message (2:17)

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 652.

5. This peace in Jesus provides access the Father (2:18)
- C. We are thus blessed to have this access to the Father *through the one Spirit* (2:18).
  - D. What God has accomplish in Christ with Jew and Gentile is to provide us with a vision of the ideal culture for our people: a Spirit-bonded *harmony* (*unity*).
    1. We need to *face the reality* that out there we are encouraged to be divided
      - a) This does this mean we ignore our cultural differences? No.
      - b) Are we a flat culture? No.
      - c) We must *align* ourselves to God's vision of harmony / unity.
    2. We must therefore focus on on *doable strategies that are anchored to harmony*.
  - E. Peace is what fastens the work of the Spirit in the community of the church. It is an activity of God that continues today.
- II. MAIN POINT #2: *Harmony is the endpoint of our energy (behavior 1: eagerness).*
- A. Peace/Harmony is complex, because we know when we see it, and long when we miss it, but often are at pains to describe it.
  - B. It is not that we have everything going in perfect synchronization (swimmers).
  - C. But it means that we learn to work together to accomplish our goals
    1. This means of course that we must have the goal in mind
    2. This means of course that we must be working together
    3. This means we must never be complacent with our goal and our togetherness
  - D. Paul did not have doctrinal unity *primarily* in mind, he had to communal expression of unity found in Christ playing out in the life of the church. It is the doctrine playing out correctly and consequentially.
- III. MAIN POINT #3: *Our activities are to continue this Spirit-bondedness (behavior 2: protect/maintain).*
- A. The verb is very clear that our responsibility is to maintain, or to continue (L&N 13:32), the unity of the Spirit.
  - B. We have said very clearly, because Paul was very clear, we are called to complete the foundation work of God to contain, or bound (like a book), or lock (like trap).
  - C. So, the work of being a Christian is working towards something. We have long slept on this notion. That means:

1. We care about social problems because they will affect our work of Spirit-bound-harmony.
2. We care about racial problems because it inherently undermines the racial/cultural unity found in Christ.
3. We care about injustices because they manifest in the scars and wounds of people who come into the kingdom.
4. I could add more, but this list is sufficient

# The Word at the Heart of Unity (Eph 4:11-16; John 17:14-21)

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> *to equip* the saints *for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*, <sup>13</sup> **until** we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> **so that** we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

(Ephesians 4:11–16 ESV)

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples so that it would reflect the intimate unity of the Father-Son relationship (John 17:20–21).

Paul affirms that God gave various teaching and leadership roles *that are anchored in the word*, so that the body of Christ may mature in spirituality and togetherness. The church needs both those that embrace the responsibility of the ministry of the Word (apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching-shepherds), and those that will support the centrality of God's Word as the theatre of His revelation by fulfilling the ministry (the saints).

- I. MAIN POINT #1: Christian groups *must* grow spiritually mature and harmonious
  - A. The language of verses 11–16 show that *our growth has a goal*:
    1. We all attain the unity of the faith
    2. We all attain... the knowledge of the Son of God
    3. We all attain... mature manhood
  - B. The *catalyst* for this development is the ministry of the word
    1. God has *benefacted* the church with various gifted roles
    2. These gifts/ graces have a purpose that we must realize

3. These gifts/graces will stabilize us as a people
  - a) We have these inspired offices and their labors
  - b) We have their inspired teachings

C. I must wonder why church feels so stagnant when we have language that is so vibrant in its description of what we're our lives are supposed to be experiencing.

1. Is it that we are not overwhelmed that God has gifted us with so much responsibility and talent?
  - a) Spiderman's "with great power comes great responsibility"
  - b) Or, Jessica Jones' "with great power comes great mental illness."
2. Why does it often feel like we are missing the adventure of scripture?
3. Or are we still preferring the chaos of instability? immaturity? —in our mother tongue, we still prefer our dirty and messy room over doing the hard work of maturity (The Harris brothers in *Do Hard Things*).
4. This is not the experience God has promised us.
  - a) Our church culture needs a relaunch with God's vision and his intended culture as our target.
  - b) The problem is it takes those willing to cultivate it by fulfilling the ministry of the Word AND supporting the centrality of the Word to *what* we do and *how* we do it.
  - c) We need to have that sense that we belong to the changing power of God's kingdom.

## II. MAIN POINT #2: Fulfilling the Ministry of the Word

- A. This passage is filled with gifted roles that are focused on providing God's word to his people for "equipping" them to achieve God's purposes.
- B. Today the ministry of the Word is alive and well. And yet it undervalued, ill-developed, and subject to pop-theology, and the latest theological trends and authors.
  1. In many places, the hard work of properly understanding the Scriptures in their context is traded in for a "Youtube-Do-it-Yourself" Culture work ethic.
  2. To revise the words of Chef Gusteau in the Disney movie *Ratatouille* (2007), "anyone can cook," we have gone against the words of James 3:1 affirming that "anyone can *teach*." There is a heavy burden to the responsibility of teaching God's word.
  3. I firmly believe that biblically sound teaching may come from anyone, I am reluctant to affirm, and am quite more inclined to deny, that anyone can teach.

4. I am being sharp here for a reason, we are teaching God's word, and we must give it the respect it deserves and give in to the demands to properly understand and teach it (Ezra 7:10).
- C. We see in scripture that teaching God's word is the responsibility of men and women.
1. Consequently, we need those with the passion and gift to teach to prepare themselves by study and training.
    - a) Being gifted can be wasted.
    - b) Working hard to be skilled can be attained.
  2. Perhaps we should reframe what it is we are doing in our Bible study programs at church—i.e., *the church building should be a training center for evangelism in our community, not simply a worship center.*
- D. There are two functions of the ministry of the word in the congregation (4:12):
1. *equip the saints*
    - a) *The idea is to complete, furnish, in some sense: a qualification/preparation has been met for completeness.*
  2. *build up the body of Christ*
    - a) *for a built up body of Christ (lit trans?)*
    - b) *There is our two goals*
- E. So how to we support the ministry of the word?
1. Create trainings settings for all interested (everyone can experience better training in the Word)
  2. Support those interested in going through training
- III. MAIN POINT #3: Supporting the Centrality of God's Word
- A. But notice that teachers need those who will study. Teachers without students are talking to themselves and to God.
- B. I'm reminded of a story related by Walt Russell about the time he was explaining the first three chapters of Revelation to his teenage son.<sup>7</sup>
1. He used his graduate school training to explain the text, hoping to get him excited with all this relevant and contextual information.
  2. His son responded by saying, "reading the Bible sure is a lot of work... is like being in school."

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<sup>7</sup> Walt Russel, *Playing with Fire: How the Bible Ignites Change in Your Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000), 20–21.

3. When we are exhausted before we've done the hard work to understand the Bible, we will not support the Word properly as central to all we do. For the teacher, Russell reflects, there doesn't seem to be any offsetting payoff.
- C. Again, I wonder why we do not experience the culture promised us in the Scriptures at times. A part of the reason/explanation is that we are not supporting the word of God as the central vehicle for understanding God's plan.
1. Are we waiting for Superman?
  2. Are we waiting for an experiential faith?
  3. Are we settling for the lame duck culture we've assumed its the way its suppose to be?
- D. So how to we support the ministry of the word?
1. Participate in every teaching opportunity of the church
  2. Practice the principles that are taught