



## **Ephesians 4:1-6** **The Basis For Christian Unity**

We're continuing our study of the book of Ephesians this morning, but we're entering a new division in the book. Things are going to start getting real up close and personal in our daily lives. But never forget that all of this is happening in light of what we've been learning about God in chapters 1-3: He has chosen us, He has prepared specific things for us, and the power that raised Christ from the dead is now in us.

So keeping that in mind, let's begin with

**Eph 4:1** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

If you've been around churches for a while that first part might be something you've heard before, it rings a bell, perhaps you've even heard it aimed at you – encouraging you to “walk worthy of your calling.” It's a common exhortation, especially for conferences or retreats.

But here's what stood out to me in my study this week – when we hear this verse it's often in isolation – we hear it as though it applies to you, directly, personally: *you* do this, *you* walk worthy.

But when you read the passage in context you notice the commands actually involve relationships with other people. We're encouraged to live a life characterized by **lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

“Walking worthy of our calling” is admirable, but the call is to walk in community. And that's FAR more difficult than just trying to cultivate a well-manicured spiritual life on our own. If we take what the Scripture is saying here the way it's meant to be read, it means a life worthy of our calling will reflect humility, gentleness, patience, and making allowance for the faults of others, being diligent about keeping unity with others in Christ.

Because, after all,

**Eph 4:4** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

In other words, we're in this together as one big Christian family. And we need to live together in daily life without fussing, fighting, or withdrawing.

So what should our walk look like? We should accept a life marked by at least things: humility, love, and unity. Let's take a look at each of those in turn.

First, humility. We're told in verse 2 we should walk **with all lowliness and gentleness**. That makes sense to us. Today we talk about servant leadership and we praise humble leaders.

But you need to understand this reads differently to us than it did to the original audience in first century Ephesus. Humility was not a virtue in Paul's day. If you go back and read Greek literature or philosophy you discover they never used their word for humility in a positive or commendable way. They always meant something servile, subservient, the way a poorly treated servant cowers in the corner fearful of the next lash from his master. No self-respecting man or woman wanted to be thought of as humble.

When Jesus came on the scene He turned things upside down in more ways than one and gave people a new way of thinking because rather than be humiliated by others, Jesus actually humbled Himself. He intentionally set aside His divine prerogatives and took on the nature of a servant for the sake of helping those who could not help themselves.

Now, again, this seems like a common idea today, one we take for granted, but you can go and search the records of history and you discover this is absolutely unique. Men, and women, leaders of all stripes have traditionally made a reputation by gathering power to themselves.

Meanwhile the Scriptures bring us this challenging exhortation, keep a finger here and turn with me a page or two toward the back of your Bible and find:

**Phil 2:3** *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* (There's a verse worth memorizing!)

**5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**

When we are called to Christian humility, to meekness, to lowliness, we are being called to take on the image of our Lord. And remember, He went first. We are simply called to follow. See the example and follow suit. There should be no such thing as an arrogant Christian, a Christian bully, a boasting Christian. It happens, we see it. We too easily fall

back in love with ourselves and seek out a little affirmation. But the mature Christian, the growing Christian, the healthy Christian is willing to prefer others for the sake of Christ.

And not just because you're subservient, or have this low-estimation of self. Not because you're self-effacing or what ever else you want to call your psychological need. No. It's because you have such a great love for others. You want to see them excel. You want to see them helped. You want to see them encouraged and provided for. And so you would gladly take less for yourself so they could have some. You would gladly humble yourself.

But, would you gladly do it again? And again? And again? And again? Seventy times seven?

You see, the next component of a healthy, mature, Christian walk is being **longsuffering**, [or, we could say being patient with others] **bearing with one another in love**. As one translation puts it: making allowance for another because you love one another.

The Bible gives us several definitions of what love is, what it looks like, what it does, and one of the most famous is in 1 Corinthians 13 which says, among other things:

#### **1 Cor 13:4 love suffers long and is kind**

Really? Does your love do that? Does your love suffer long? Is it also, simultaneously kind? Most of us have enough social skills and decorum to be gracious once, to be generous, to be understanding. But the Scripture calls us to keep on being gracious, to keep on loving, to suffer long. To be long suffering. To bear with one another in love.

And look, that all sounds really great in a Hallmark card. It sounds really great in sermon, but this is supposed to be up close and personal in you life. Think about the flip side of what this is saying, move from the theoretical to the practical. You can't actually bear with one another in love unless the other person is being unbearable! How can I bear with you in love if you're never a bother or irritant to me? How can I be longsuffering if we never disagree and I always love every single thing about you?

Friends, fellow followers or Christ – if you find it hard to love someone in your life, that's OK. If you feel like this relationship is full of suffering for you or is unbearable at times, be encouraged – it gives the chance to grow in Christ who loves us and perfectly fulfills all of these things toward us.

We could say so much more here, but we need to move on to the third characteristic of the maturing, healthy, Christian walk – unity.

#### **Eph 4:3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Another translation has this: Diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit.

Proverbs tells us that God hates those who cause division among the brethren. Paul told the Romans to mark those who caused divisions among them and told the Corinthians that

division was a mark of carnality – proof of the fact that you’re spiritually immature, walking according to the desires of your flesh instead of the Holy Spirit.

So let’s ask the question: are you earnest about keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? In your own home, among your own family? We so quickly forget that the family is the basic theological unit. The very first place we’re supposed to work out everything we learn in the sanctuary is in our homes with the people we are closest to, and the people who can be the hardest to love at times.

And then, we’re also supposed to work at these things in the church. Home and church – these are the two main areas where you encounter other Christians and this passage is talking about Christians. Do you realize that? We don’t maintain unity with non-believers, we don’t have unity with non-believers. This is talking about the people we have conflicts with whom we also share a place in the body of Christ with.

And that is related to the very basis of what Paul is saying. We should be at peace with one another BECAUSE we are all in the body of Christ together.

**Eph 4:4** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Arms don’t fight against knees. Healthy hands don’t gouge their own eyes. The parts of the body work together for the common good. So Paul goes on to show us seven things that all Christians have in common, seven points of unity and that should grab the attention of some of you Bible students – seven is an important number in the Bible, isn’t it?

The first thing he points out is that there is only one body of Christ and if you are a Christian, you belong to it. As soon as you are saved you immediately become part of the collective body of Christ, you join with the church through the ages, but are you also joined to, committed to, one local body of Christ?

Accountability is a huge thing in the military – you don’t have a bunch of soldiers who are in the Army, but not assigned to any particular unit, just running around on their own program. No, they all belong to different units; they’re part of the larger Army, but also part of a smaller, local unit. They may move around over the course of their career and be reassigned to different units but they always have both attachments – to the Big Army first, and then to the local unit second.

Christian, it should be the same with us, we shouldn’t be just a random Christian floating around on our own program. We should belong somewhere, we should have a church home. We should be connected to the one body of Christ through a particular fellowship of believers.

I know, it’s easier to slip in and slip out and play solo Christian. But that’s not what we’re called to. Even if you’re only in town for a while. You still need to get plugged in, some how,

some way. And know that effort goes both ways, you have to be friendly and not just expect people to be friendly to you. On any given Sunday we have to make a choice to go deeper with the people we know or wider by meeting people we don't know. Both are good, both are necessary because both help us connect, or connect more deeply with the local expression of the body of Christ.

Number two, the second thing all Christians have in common, is that there is One Spirit. We spoke about this last week - there's this glorious mystery of the fact that God dwells within every individual Christian. You either have the Spirit of God in you or you do not. And if not, then you are not a Christian. But if so, then you have the same Spirit in you that is in every other Christian. We were all called to the same thing; we should all be headed in the same Heavenward direction so we shouldn't be bumping into each other too much. And how can the Spirit that is in you look down on or be distant from or harbor anything against that same Spirit in another believer? If the same Spirit is in you and me, it should be the foundation of unity among us.

Number three - one hope of your calling - this is a reference to the hope Christians have of being called to Heaven. We live with the glorious expectation of our final destination. So again, consider the impact this has on unity - it means we're all headed to the same place.

You know what's awkward? Cutting someone else off only to realize you're both headed to the same destination. You go pulling into the parking lot and they pull in right behind you. And in your head you're trying to figure out how you can be stealthy about where you park so they don't see you get out of your car - you don't want them to actually see your face getting out of the car that they know just cut them off. Well, if we're all looking forward to the same hope of our calling to Heaven, if we're all going to see each other there, shouldn't that affect the way we treat each other here? Of course it should.

We also have, number four, One Lord. Now, here's a title that has lost its meaning for most of us today, but it means that we see Jesus not just as our buddy but also as our superior. As our sovereign and supreme Master. One of the things we have in common with other Christians is that we all take our orders from the same God, we're all serving the same Lord and if that's true, He's going to be calling us to serve and act in ways that are complementary to each other not causing conflict with one another.

If I follow the Lord and you follow the Lord, we're like two aircraft directed by one air traffic controller - we're not going to have any collisions, we're going to be choreographed together. If you're experiencing conflict with another Christian, can I ask - are you both following the same Lord? Or, have one or both of you begun to listen to another controller? I'll leave that for you to think on.

Number five, we share One faith. There is a core to what Christians believe.

Jude is a very short little letter you'll find in your Bible right before the book of Revelation, and he tells us the reason he wrote it:

**Jude 3** Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Paul also gave that famous encouragement to young Timothy:

**2 Tim 2:2** And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

There is a core set of beliefs that define us as Christians. Things that we have in common that need to be passed on. Baptists have a distinct idea about how and when baptism should be done. Methodists were formed when John Wesley, who was an Anglican at the time, began to advocate a certain method for pursuing personal holiness through devotional times, prayer, and small group Bible Study. Presbyterians believe in a particular form of elder-led church government by the *Presbuteros*, the Greek word for elders. These different denominations put a different emphasis on some part of the Christian faith, but the things they emphasize are not the things that will get you into or keep you out of heaven. Those things, the truly important things, the life or death things, are things that all Christians MUST agree on, they are the core of our One Faith.

Number six, we all share in One Baptism.

**1 Cor 12:13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (ESV)

As soon as we are converted the Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ – it's an invisible reality. But we recognize what God has done in the Spirit by making it public in the flesh – and so we are baptized by the church as an outward response to the inner change.

It's an important step for all Christians to take. The big reason most people give to avoid it is that they don't want the attention or they feel it's embarrassing. Well, brother or sister in Christ if you are avoiding baptism – may I ask, *are you really a brother or sister in Christ?*

Do you understand that you are professing a faith that has led to the death of its adherents? Do you understand that people have felt so strongly about this about and have been changed so radically, impacted so profoundly, that they were willing to suffer and die for the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Do you understand that Paul is writing as a prisoner and he rejoices because he's able to suffer in some measure for the Lord who suffered so much for him? Do you have this same faith? Or is it possible that you have a cheap plastic imitation?

Is Jesus this real to you? Has He really impacted your life? Have you truly been born again? Can you point to the fruit in your life as evidence? Can you point to transformation that has occurred? Can you testify to a reliance on God and a knowledge of God? If the answer is

yes, I don't think you'll struggle to come forward and be baptized. I think you'll rush forward and ask the church, what must I do to be able to take this step and to identify with my Lord? And if you are ready to do that, or have questions about that, please contact one of the pastors and we would love to discuss it with you.

But first, let's note number seven – all Christians share One God and Father. And remember the reason we're stressing *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father is because these things should be the basis for our unity among Christians.

Parents, let me ask – how much does it frustrate you or pain you to see your children fighting? My wife and I ask the kids – do you ever hear mom and dad talk to each other the way you talk to each other? Does mom ever do that to your dad? Does dad ever say that to your mom?

You might say, well, that's not fair because you and Madeleine chose to be together and the kids have to deal with the family they were born into. Fair enough, they're all different, they all have different personalities, but isn't there still this innate expectation that being family means something? That *because* they have a common father and mother there's this greater expectation that they should be able to get along.

Well, we as Christians all have one God and Father as well, and we should be able to find ways to get along, even if we have different personalities, different preferences, etc. The Lord's prayer begins by saying *Our* Father in Heaven, not *My* Father. Christianity is, at its essential core, a communal faith. It's always individual, very personal, but it's also very, very communal. Remember we said last week that God is inside each individual believer, but that all of us, as believers, are being piled up together – my life touching yours, your life touching mine, to create a temple, (Eph 2:22) "[a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.](#)" God is bringing us into close contact with one another and Jesus said they will know we are His disciples by our love for one another.

But it's not easy, is it? You understand why Paul is beseeching the Ephesians, begging them, pleading with them to walk worthy of their calling?

Friends, we need to change. It's easy to get set in our ways. It's easy to hold on to the grudges, the disappointments, the bitter disagreements that separate us, the prejudice I have against you. But God won't tolerate it. It's got to go. He has forgiven us. He loves us. And now He wants our lives to be marked by that same love and forgiveness for others.

After all,

[4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.](#)

As we prepare to close, let me point out one last thing here, and that is Paul's pastoral progression. As we move through the letter we find him praying for the Ephesians – twice,

in chapters one and three. But that praying occurs before he ever writes this letter. In other words, He talks to God about people before talking to people about God or before talking to people about themselves.

Then he informs the people. He picks up his pen and tells them who God is, he tells them the implications of all this. But he's been praying for their hearts first, praying that they would be able to understand what he's about to say. And then finally, when we come to chapter four, after he's been praying for them, and informing them, now he begins to beseech them.

He begs them, he urges them, he pleads with them, or implores them to take specific action.

Let me ask - do you think Paul cared about these people? It's kind of obvious, right? And he proves it by praying, then talking, and finally urging them to change.

Friends, parents, Bible teachers, *wives*, can I encourage you to follow that same pattern? Pray, pray, pray, to God, for people and situations you want to see change. *Then* share the truth about God, and finally, after all of that, urge people to change.

Too often we jump right to the final step and try to nag people into changing without praying for the spiritual dynamics involved and helping them see the spiritual strength that is available. Because, if we're honest, all that spiritual stuff is great, but what we really want is just to see the outward behavior we're looking for as quickly as possible.

So, let's slow down, let's talk to God about people before we talk to people about themselves or about God, let's do the heavy lifting in the heavenly realms, and then see what God wants to do here on earth. And if you're wondering what exactly to pray, remember to go back to chapter one and chapter three and begin praying those exact things and then let God lead you from there.

If you need to see the change in yourself, follow the same outline. Pray to God, pray the content of these Ephesian prayers. Then remind yourself of who God is and what He has done. And then when you realize the power to change, the power to transform, the power to become what you're not naturally comes supernaturally, seek the change diligently.

Let's pray.