

Ephesians 4:1-6
Unity and the Worthy Walk
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What would you think of a tailor who wore ill fitting suits, or a mechanic whose car burned oil, or a barber with a bad hair cut? You might give the barber with a bad hair cut a pass because he probably didn't cut his own hair. But as for the tailor and the mechanic, you would probably conclude that the quality of their work is not up to the standards of their vocation. Or, to use the language in our passage for today, their walk is not worthy of their calling. Our passage for today is about the walk or the lifestyle that is worthy of the Christian's calling as a Christian.

Paul exhorts us in our text for today to walk worthy of our calling. What is our calling? Well, we were people who were dead in trespasses and sins, people with no moral ability to do anything to please God. Now we have been made alive together with Christ. Now we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. This is our calling, and we should walk worthy of it. We should not live our lives as those who are still dead in trespasses and sins. We should live our lives as those who have been made alive in Christ Jesus.

We also were once people who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. We were once far away, without hope and without God in the world. Now in Christ Jesus we who were once far off

have been brought near by the blood of Christ. We are no longer strangers and foreigners but are instead fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. This is our calling, and we should walk worthy of it. We should not live our lives as those who are still part of the world system that is in rebellion against God. We should live our lives as what we now are, the people of God.

Of course, there are many ways in which we should walk worthy of our Christian calling. Today we are going to look at one such way. Today we are going to look at the unity in love which we should have as Christians. When a group of people walk in unity, we call it a march. With that in mind, I am going to use the following four headings for my sermon: the march of unity, its means, its manner, and its motivation.

First, the march of unity. Paul says that we have a responsibility as Christians to walk in unity. We learn how important Christian unity is in Jesus' high priestly prayer recorded for us in John 17. As a part of that prayer, Jesus prayed this:

John 17:20-21

- 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;
- 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

This is awesome. There is a very special unity between Jesus and His Father, a very special unity between God the Father and

God the Son incarnate. Jesus is here praying that all Christians may likewise have a special unity among themselves based on the common union which each Christian has with both Jesus and Jesus' heavenly Father. Jesus then goes on to pray that God will use the testimony of this supernaturally enabled unity among Christians to enable the world to believe that God the Father really did send God the Son into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. That is how important this Christian unity which Paul is here talking about, is. This Christian unity gives us credibility in the eyes of the world. This Christian unity tells the world that we have something real, something worth having.

In the world of New Testament times, there was a special hatred between Jew and Gentile. The antagonism between Jew and Gentile in that age and culture was so bitter and strong that the unity of love which existed between a Jew such as the Apostle Paul and a Gentile such as Luke the Physician was a miracle on a level with a lion lying down with a lamb in peace. Consider the testimony to the power of the gospel when Paul took up an offering among the Gentile churches to give aid to the Jewish church in Jerusalem during a time of famine.

We are able to have such unity because we are bound together with the bond of peace. Through the work of Christ, we who were once at enmity with God are now at peace with God. When two people are each at peace with God, they are naturally at peace with each other. Two people who are each at peace with God are naturally allies in life. They are serving the same master. They are on the same team. They are marching to the beat of the same drum.

When the church instead fragments into warring factions and feuding tribes divided by hatred, some will use this as their excuse for rejecting the message of Jesus. Such an excuse does not at all excuse their unbelief. Nevertheless, we should try to avoid giving anyone even the appearance of a pretext for disobeying the gospel command. The church's responsibility is to exhibit a supernatural unity that is so amazing that it shouts to the world that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that His gospel message is genuinely true and effectively powerful.

Let's now go on to our second point. The first point is the march of unity. The second point is its means; that is, how we do it, how do we march the march of unity. We read about the means at the end of verse 2 where we read, "bearing with one another in love." Let's be honest. We do have to bear with one another at times. Each of us still has indwelling sin. As Christians we are not dominated by sin or characterized by sin, but we still have a sin tendency which morally taints all that we think, say and do. The degree to which indwelling sin affects us in this life varies as our faith in Christ strengthens or weakens. Christians can also backslide temporarily in some area of life and harm both themselves and others. Some Christians, especially new believers, can also be spiritually immature. Apart from the power of Christ, any of these shortcomings can disrupt our fellowship and change our compatible diversities into irritating differences and bring about conflict and division. Yet Christians are able to overcome these problems through the power of Christ which is theirs through faith in Him. Through the power of Christ that is ours through faith, we are able to bear with one

another in Christian love. When there is some minor offense, the Christian should glory in the opportunity to overlook it in love and to turn the other cheek. Instead of lashing out, the Christian should bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, longsuffering, self-control. When someone in the church is overtaken by a trespass and commits a major offense which cannot be overlooked, the more mature Christians in the church should seek to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. We should thus bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus said,

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We are to love our fellow Christians just as surely as Jesus loves us. Jesus said that this is the distinguishing mark of true Christians. If Jesus died for my fellow Christian, then I should be able to bear with him in love.

The means of our march of Christian unity is bearing with one another in love. That is how we do it. The manner of our march is found in the first half of verse two: "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering." That should be our attitude and demeanor and disposition while we are bearing with one another and marching the march of Christian unity.

The unity that Paul is here describing simply would not be possible among haughty people, proud people who view themselves as little gods, who think that everyone else should show them deference and submit to their every whim. Paul says that Christians, through the transforming power of Christ, have the virtue of lowliness or humility. Christians should recognize that God has given them everything that they have through creation or providence or redemption. Do we have some particular gift or ability or possession or status? God gave it to us. If that is the case, then what do we have to boast about? And when the Christian takes into account salvation by grace, he should be totally humbled. After all, we were a part of the common lump of sinful humanity. We too were dead in trespasses and sins. We too were taken captive by Satan to do his will. What delivered us was not any goodness in us that set us apart from others but the undeserved grace of God. That is a very humbling thought. Humility enables us to think highly of others and to value fellow Christians as people for whom Christ died. When we are low with humility, we can look up to others, and that promotes unity. When we are high with haughtiness, we can only look down upon others, and that destroys unity.

There can also be no real unity among domineering people who try to lord it over others. Paul says that Christians, through the transforming power of Christ, have the virtue of meekness or gentleness. The meek person has such confidence in God that he can afford to be gentle with others. The person who is intimidated by others tries to control others through power plays and political moves. The meek person is concerned with doing what is right in God's sight, and he is content to leave the results

to God. The meek person's prayer to God is, "May Your will be done, not mine." He is able to pray that prayer with sincerity because the meek person's deepest desire is for God's will to be done, for God's sovereign plans to be fulfilled and for God's revealed will to be obeyed. In that sense, God's will has become his will. Instead of looking for ways to impose his own personal will on others, the meek person is looking for ways to serve others even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. Because He is confident in God, the meek person is able to be patient with others and to speak the soft word which turns away wrath.

There can also be no real unity among quick tempered people, people with thin skins who easily take offense and quickly lash out at others. Paul says that Christians, through the transforming power of Christ, have the virtue of longsuffering. They are quick to hear but slow to wrath and slow to speak. They don't immediately assume the worst about others or interpret what others do and say in the worst possible light.

We have looked at the march of unity, its means and its manner. Our last point is the motivation of the march of unity. The motivation is our knowledge of what God has given to us in our common salvation which enables and promotes our unity as Christians.

In describing the unifying benefits of salvation in verses 4, 5 and 6 of our text, Paul again stresses the trinity, just as he did in his psalm of praise to God in Ephesians chapter one. We become like the one we worship, and the living and true God

has personal distinctions within personal unity. God is one and yet God is three. God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are distinct persons, yet they have a perfect unity within the oneness of their common divine nature and being. Paul here reminds us that each member of the trinity works in our common salvation to make us like the triune God who has unity with diversity. This example of the unified working of the three members of the Godhead is part of our motivation to march the march of Christian unity.

Paul reminds us of the work of each member of the Godhead in the one salvation in Christ that we all have in common. First Paul talks about God the Spirit:

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

Paul is here probably thinking about the analogy between the body of Christ and the human body. Each human body is controlled by one human spirit, not by two or three competing human personalities. And so it is with the body of Christ. We should have a unity in the church because there is one Holy Spirit working in us all. Also, the Holy Spirit has called each of us to a common hope. We all want and anticipate the same thing. Our ultimate hope is God's glory and Christ's victory. We all are all together looking for the advancement of the kingdom of grace, the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and the hastening of the kingdom of glory. We have one body, one Spirit, one hope. We have a unity based on the work of the Holy Spirit within us and among us.

Then Paul discusses the saving work of God the Son:

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

This passage is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. We all have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism. We have all alike trusted Jesus for salvation and have accepted His teaching as ultimate truth; we have a common object of faith and a common content to our faith. We have all alike identified with Jesus publicly through a common ritual, through the waters of baptism. This points to the unity we have through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Finally Paul discusses the unifying work of God the Father:

6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This verse is talking about God the Father. Through the grace of redemption, He is the Father of all Christians regardless of their background. By redemption in Christ Jesus, He is the Father of a people from every nation, tribe and tongue, all of whom He chose to save in Christ before the foundation of the world. This diverse people are all sons of God by both adoption and regeneration, and are therefore all joint heirs with Christ. Our passage says that God the Father is over all. He is the transcendent sovereign who reigns and rules over the whole creation. He is through all. He is not an indifferent God who keeps aloof from His creation. He is intimately involved in the historical process and is working all things for His own glory

and for the good of those who love Him. God is somehow working through everything that happens to us. In Him we live and move and have our being. This is certainly an encouraging truth when we are going through difficult times that we don't understand. He is not only in all that happens to us, He is also in us as well. He is in us through the Holy Spirit who indwells our hearts. This ties the work of the Father in our salvation back to the work of the Spirit with which Paul began back in verse 4, reminding us that the work of salvation is the work of one God.

We have a salvation that is through the saving work of one Spirit, one Lord and one Father, who are together one God. We all as the people of God share this one common salvation. We are not saved by different ways or in different ways. We are all saved through our union with Christ, and we are all being transformed into His image.

Paul uses the word "one" seven times in this passage, and seven is the number of qualitative perfection. The three members of the Godhead have worked together to give us a growing unity in Christ Jesus which will eventually be perfect.

In Christ, we have a supernatural unity. It is not the unity of an ant colony or a bee hive. It is not a unity based on a rigid social structure. It is not a cookie cutter unity based on absolute conformity. It is a unity patterned after the unity of love found within the mystery of the Godhead. It is a unity in which we maintain our personal identities and yet we also find a strong and meaningful oneness with others. When we enter into strong personal relationships of love within the body of Christ, we find

ourselves and fulfill ourselves and realize ourselves through these relationships. In our heart of hearts, we all long for such unity, for such belonging. We don't want to be isolated, solitary individuals. I tell you, you can find this unity in Christ Jesus.

Look to Jesus in faith as the one who gives all His people a new heart. Through this new heart, you will find a new oneness with others in the body of Christ. You will become a part of the new humanity in Christ Jesus. In this new humanity, the image of God is being restored and bonds of genuine love are being established. Come to Christ and be reconciled with God, with yourself and with others. Come to Christ and you will become a fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God. Come to Christ and you will fulfill your unique individuality while finding community in the family of faith.