

# Ephesians 4:1–6

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[ 0 : 00 ] I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, good morning.

Good morning. So glad that you've come and are joining us, the church family. Such exciting days we're in the midst of.

And I feel like we're learning week by week what God has for us. Watching a new church get underway is a bit like following the first year or so of a newborn's life.

[ 1 : 27 ] When one is birthed, one begins to imagine all the plans and purposes that God may have for their life.

They're all unknown at that moment. But over the course of the first year, one begins to see patterns emerging, and one even considers what this individual will retain as a priority and way of life.

And then suddenly they're on their feet and they're walking. And believe me, while every day might seem like an eternity, it's just a season and then they're grown and some of them gone.

As we've been reading the letter of Ephesians, it feels to me as though chapters one to three, we've seen Paul's birth narrative of the church.

He's considered both God's plans and purposes for the church in Christ. He's outlined his own pattern of life in regard to his understanding.

[ 3 : 00 ] He's instilled within the readers the priorities that ought to mark their behavior. And then with chapter four and verse one, it is as though the video camera is rolling and the church is now on its feet and ready to take its first steps.

And he captures it there, verse one, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Where we see today the church taking her first steps. In other words, knowing the plans and purposes of God in Christ.

observing the pattern of life that we have seen in Paul. Grabbing the priorities of the ministry of proclamation and prayer.

We now see the church's full participation. They take their first step.

[ 4 : 20 ] And it's an important step. What is the first step we are to take as a newly formed church in this community?

Simply this. To guard our unity. It's fascinating to me.

The weight of verse one finds its footfall in verse three. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called means that you will be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

That having been made one, our first step is to remain one.

Having been given life, we guard the Spirit. The Spirit. I want to talk today about our unity.

[ 5 : 45 ] It is the central emphasis of the text. Christ Church Chicago, in fulfilling her vision, must maintain the unity that Christ has accomplished in us.

Before we go to the ends of the earth, it will mean little if we are not unified in spirit.

Why bring our fractured self to those around us? To get a sense of the urgency of that word maintaining or maintain in verse three, it's used in Acts 16.23 in reference to a directive given to the jailer who was supposed to keep Paul and Silas in safekeeping in their imprisonment.

And this is what we hear when the jailer is told maintain these two in safety. We read this. Having received this order, he put them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks.

That maintaining them wasn't something that was casually undertaken. He was going to secure them, to keep them, to guard them.

[ 7 : 17 ] In fact, he guarded them by making sure they were in the innermost pot in the penitentiary. And not only being in the innermost pot, that they were then in stocks so as to not even be able to move to the outer court.

Paul is saying, now that you're on your feet, I urge you to walk in a way that guards, that protects, that seals, that does not let the unity of the Spirit escape from this place.

Good words for our day. It's the same word that Jesus uses when He talks to the Father and says, I kept them, I guarded them, and may they be one as you and I are one, and may they be one having been made one, we are to walk as one.

That's going to take some work. Let's just be honest. That's going to take some work. You might say, oh, it doesn't take any work at all.

This is what God did. God made us one. Yeah, okay. You can have that naivete until you get on down to verse 13, and Paul does say, until we attain that unity.

[ 9 : 01 ] He made us one, but believe me, we are not one in any natural sense of the word. And so, that which He has secured, we must preserve, we must give ourselves wholly to it.

It won't happen without hard work. Now, let me say this by way of qualification. While we give ourselves to maintaining unity, unity does not mean that you are going to be relegated at Christ's church to some form of unanimity or conformity or less than who you really are.

I want to say this because the word unity is actually related lexically to the idea of harmony. And harmony is not unithin.

Harmony is a variety of parts that in their own voice contribute to the symphony on the glories of the grace that we find in Christ.

So, this unity that we seek does not come at the expense of our individuality. Let me just put it this way.

[ 10 : 29 ] We don't all sing the same. I'm going to come back to that later. We don't all sing the same. One writer put it this way though.

Unity in God constitutes the freedom of the individual just as he is. It is the unity that we have in God that constitutes the freedom for me to be who I am.

Now, that's important. Lest we require distinct multi-ethnic membership membership within this church.

Men and women who come from a wide range of cultural differences would somehow be forced to conform to a particular cultural preference in order to feel at home in this place.

And believe me, that is going to take some work. I'll say it, primarily from the majority culture.

[ 11 : 36 ] Well, some of you might not be with me. But we are a church comprised of very different kinds of people.

And this is what he says. Now that you're on your feet, having been made one, walk as one. And give yourself to maintaining the unity that God has accomplished for you in Christ.

the question is how? How? Well, we're not left without an answer in verse 3. We're eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Here it is. Here's the means by which it is maintained in the bond of peace. This word bond is interesting because it's used in a variety of ways primarily in a structural architectural way of something that bonds some surface to another.

But it's also used in a body imagery way. It's almost literally or woodenly the word ligament. you maintain unity in the bond of peace, in the ligament of peace, in the connective tissue that actually brings two distinct but different bones in relationship to one another.

[ 13 : 12 ] Think about it this way. You might be the femur in the body and someone else might be the tibia. I'm hoping that's below the knee.

And the bond of peace, you're going to say, well, there's the knee and all the rest of it, Dave. Well, okay, but come on, stay with me. The ligament, the connective tissue between the largest bone in your body and then the tibia, that is what has to be maintained.

And what Paul is saying is that in the gospel, he has made us one man out of two, Jew and Gentile. And I'll say it in this room, if Jew and Gentile, femur and tibia, are connected through the connective

tissue and ligament of Christ, then are not the various parts of a tibia within the Gentile world to be retained in all of their oneness and all of that bone marrow-ness and all of that life of the spirit that dwells within us, that's what he's saying.

You maintain unity as you protect the connective tissue that is Christ in you. You and I injure this body, well, no, no, you injure, when you injure Christ in you, you injure this body.

And it is only Christ in us that will sustain us. It's the bond of peace, it says.

[14:56] This peace we've already seen is both vertical and horizontal. In chapter 1, we see this peace where it is he himself is our peace.

peace. In chapter 6, it's the gospel of peace. The peace, the bond of peace is nothing less than Jesus Christ. It's nothing less than the gospel.

You will and I will, we will, be the church where to be all full, grown up and walking through this neighborhood as we are. As we guard our unity through elevating, caring for, protecting that ligament, that connective tissue, which is Christ in us.

You know, there are over, I just googled this this morning, I'm like, how many ligaments are there? Okay, a lot of science people, you probably tell me, wow, this is wrong, don't take all your information from Google, but nevertheless, I have read that there are over 900 ligaments in the human body.

And if that's the case, then we need the peace of Christ everywhere within us. Everywhere. We walk on together as one on the strength of the ligament that connects us to one another as one and that ligament, that bond, that seal, connective tissue, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:38] And as soon as He is no longer center stage in this place, I guarantee you, we're going to be walking around with a torn ACL.

We're going to be limping through the city. crow crow crow So we have to tune ourselves to Christ. How are you going to know if you're making any progress in that? Not only are we given here what we're to do and how we go about it, but you're actually given in this text measurements by which you will know if we're making progress in it.

That's what verse 2 is doing. See, the sentence really reads like this. I therefore, prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, namely, maintaining the unity of the Spirit and the bonds of peace.

And how do you know if you're making progress? Verse 2, if you're doing it with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another, in love. Just look those words in the eye.

[17:59] And ask yourself, are they reflective of me? They are the measurements by which our stature will be known.

These four graces must characterize our life. If these graces do not characterize our life, then we will be falling short.

We will actually be tearing apart the work that God is trying to accomplish in us. Now let me just say something about myself. When I was young in Christ, an infant, I was told I had particular gifts.

One of them was the gift of annihilation. I could take about anybody out. In Jesus' name.

And this isn't unique to me. I have seen, over now 35 years of ordained ministry, many Christians, myself included, at times, attempt to excuse our behavior in the church by telling people up front that that's just the way I am.

[19:19] As though the statement of my own meanness provides me the allowance to act so unbecomingly. That's a dangerous game.

Telling one another that we are not like these four characteristics does not give us an excuse to act out in ways that are contrary to these characteristics. telling me that you're prideful and not humble does not make you able to be prideful in my presence.

Telling me that you are direct and hard does not make you excusable for not being gentle. Telling me that you just have a hard time bearing with anybody does not give you an excuse to not bear with me or me with you.

And so this increase of humility, this increase of gentleness, this increase of patience, this increase of love are the indicators of our progress.

They are indeed self-evaluative tools on my progress from infancy to being a toddler to being a full-grown man.

[20:33] Can I put it this way? Dorothy in Wizard of Oz comes across the tin man and she sees him and he's like he's got his arms way up here with that axe in the air.

I think Scarecrow's already with her. I'm not sure. But she says something to the effect of why I see a man. A man made out of tin.

In which he squeaks away oil, oil. Until he gets oil on those ligaments he can't really be the man he's supposed to be and even when he does get vertical to speak they bang on him and he goes I really need a heart.

I'm walking but I need a heart. Well in the Christian life what Jesus did for you for the person perhaps next to you what he did for this church is he made you alive in Christ.

Gave you a new heart put the spirit within you that oil can of lubricant that actually connects you to somebody so unlike you and now you must guard that if you're going to walk well.

[ 21 : 55 ] And that's it we're on our way to Oz but I've already seen the king and we have to guard this with one another.

I'm reading right now well no I'm not reading the whole thing it's too long 600 pages I'm glancing my way through a book that meant a lot to me a few decades ago called The Christian Incomplete Armor It's on Ephesians 6 yet to come written by a guy named William Gurnell he was a relatively unknown pastor in Leavenham England in the 17th century a time period which you could care less about but at any rate he does this thing and he lives this life and he serves this church and he dies and they have the transcript of the funeral message that was preached the oration on the day of his coronation and they talk about his character can I read this to you from his sermon the preacher said of Gurnell that he had an unbounded love to all

Christians though they differed in their sentiments from him he loved Christians for their Christianity and then he says to the congregation follow him in the impartial exercise of this grace and for your help therein remember what he taught you from Ephesians that you are to walk in love as Christ also have loved us and then he says take heed that a spirit of division now crowd not in among you here it is your unity is your strength as well as your beauty oh your unity is your strength as well as your beauty that it says something to the world when different cultural preferences live well together in Christ now let me apply it because we live in a day when the world well let's not talk about the world we live in a day when the church is torn!

They have torn Christ from our own midst we have not protected the ligaments we have grieved the spirit we have hindered the work of Christ we have demanded our own cultural preference we're walking around with a torn ACL and we walk with a limp if we walk at all so for our future we will need to work hard at this the times when our cultural preferences our political allegiances our personal likes and dislikes will get the better of us and it's always on the most trivial of matters it comes down to three things music masks and me doggone it

I'm telling you it's coming you're going to get up front you all clap this morning there'll be a day when you're not clapping believe me you heard it here first somebody said man the music is too loud can't do this stylistically something changed I'm gone no can't do that it's going to happen there's just going to be a sign we're still crawling or limping rather than walking so if the text calls us to maintain unity unity how would Paul persuade us to give ourselves to that unity three things did you notice the calling that he opened with

[ 26 : 43 ] I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called what is that calling back to chapter 1 to the hope to which he has called you verse 18 namely the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and as pastor knee told us the meaning of the verse is not the riches that you're going to get by way of an inheritance in heaven it's that you and I as the church are the riches of the inheritance that he's giving to Jesus that you are going to be given to him you are his glory and if that's not enough persuasive help to us I'm not quite sure but Paul's evidently clear that it's not going to be persuasive enough that for you to consider we're going to be given to Jesus we are his trophy therefore

I've protected this he goes beyond it he gives you another rhetorical move in the text to persuade you to unity right there again in verse 1 I therefore quietly subtly a prisoner for the Lord now this is interesting what Paul is trying to say is I have restricted all my personal rights so that you could be formed in Christ don't talk to me about your cultural preferences unless you actually understand that I'm in jail because I'm protecting varieties of cultural preferences and I won't have it that only one preference rules my church and so he had religious opposition so this little phrase here that's just quietly sitting in the text I Paul a prisoner is persuasively arguing that for

Paul I'm all things to all men that by all means I win some that while I could take a wife I didn't that while I could take your money I won't that everything to me you're a Jew I become as a Jew a

Gentile you're strong I'm strong you're weak I want you to know Christ he takes out every personal preference restricts himself to a jail cell if that doesn't persuade you he's got one more that's what I call the from the preaching school of Gamaliel his Jewish instructor look at verses 4 to 6 this is persuasive material there is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call one Lord one faith one baptism one God and father of all who is over all and through all and in all this is persuasion by piling on you've got to give yourself to unity to oneness why because I can do oneness and notice he starts with one body and he does oneness seven times he's just piling on give yourself to it give yourself to one because there is one only one one Lord one faith one baptism one God one spirit one body one hope

I mean this you know in the black church this is a run I didn't know Paul went to seminary and learned under African American preaching in this country but evidently he did this is a run this is a you got to give yourself to unity to oneness let me talk about one seven times over I love it this is persuasive punch this is rhythmic repetition this is a certain cadence in its call this is rhetorical playfulness in its reasoning this is staccato like sense to its sound this is sitting downness to all of its sensory elements this is elongating something to emphasize it this is oneness for all its repeated and if you didn't catch it I just did it seven times all he's trying to do in those verses is to persuade you you have plenty of reasons to lay yourself down at the feet of your brothers and sisters your calling will one day be to stand before him as one family his prisoner ness of life ought to lead you to any restriction if someone else will come to know his run ought to captivate your mind we are to walk together as one in the name of

Christ that is our first step get the first step wrong we're going to limp for a long time our heavenly father we pray that we would guide ourselves and be given the mindset of Christ you've given us a great work to accomplish may we walk worthily of it in Jesus name amen to to do to