

Walking In Unity

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- [0:00] Therefore, I, therefore, it is the great turning point in the Apostle Paul's carefully and exquisitely crafted letter to the believers in the first century city of Ephesus.
- Therefore, I, therefore, exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. The fact is, this therefore has actually been there implicitly right from the beginning of the letter.
- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Therefore, chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined to adoption.
- Therefore, we have redemption in His blood. We have the forgiveness of our trespasses. Therefore, He made known to us the mystery of His will.
- Therefore, we've obtained an inheritance. Therefore, we've been sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of promise, who is a pledge of our inheritance. Therefore, God has made known to us His power, directing toward us believers.
- [1:20] Power that He exercised in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. Therefore, you who were dead in your sin and trespasses, He is made alive together with Christ.
- Therefore, He has raised you up with Christ. Therefore, He has seated you with Christ. Therefore, Christ, who is our peace, has made both groups, Jews and Gentiles, into one.
- He has made the two into one new human. Therefore, through Christ, we both have access in the Spirit to the Father. Therefore, we are growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom we are being built together as a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.
- Therefore, we are being strengthened with power in the inner person through the Spirit. Therefore, Christ has come to dwell in our hearts. Therefore, we have been made strong to comprehend with the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God in Jesus Christ.
- Therefore, we are being filled up to all the fullness of God. Therefore, God is able to do far more exceedingly abundantly beyond all we ask or imagine. I, therefore, exhort you.
- [2:38] Paul's letter to the Ephesians is written in two halves. And these two halves are almost equal in length. Chapters 1 to 3 and chapters 4 to 6.
- In chapters 1 to 3, some of which I just recited, Paul develops the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then in chapters 4 to 6, Paul develops the everyday implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- In chapters 1 to 3, Paul takes us into an alternative reading of reality. And then in chapters 4 to 6, he helps us understand some of the everyday dynamics of this alternative reading.
- And Paul ends the first half of his letter with, Amen. Amen indeed. And he begins the second half of his letter, Therefore. Amen.
- Therefore. I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

[3 : 40] Chapters 1 to 3, the calling. Chapters 4 to 6, walking worthy of the calling. Now, I have entitled our journey through the letter to the Ephesians, Navigating an Alternative Reading of Reality.

Navigating an Alternative Reading of Reality. And I chose this verb, navigating, very intentionally. I partly chose it because it expresses the fact that we are into an adventure.

Like going sailing. We're going to navigate. But I chose it mostly in order to avoid a verb many people will start to use at this halfway point in Paul's letter.

I chose navigate to avoid the verb apply. Many commentators on Ephesians come to chapter 4, verse 1.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk. And they write something like this. Now Paul is going to apply the gospel to our lives.

[4 : 51] Maybe you've seen that before. Now he's going to apply the gospel to our lives. And that phrase, apply the gospel, troubles me. It troubles me because it suggests that what Paul develops in chapters 1 to 3, this great vision shaped by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, it implies that this great vision has no application to our lives.

That it wasn't applying as he went along. The phrase troubles me because it now puts the spotlight in the wrong place. And it puts a weight on us to make something happen.

Apply the gospel to our lives. It implies that we will now make the gospel relevant. It implies that we will now make the gospel real in the world.

And this phrase troubles me because it now makes our lives the issue. In chapters 1 to 3, Paul has been making the living God the issue.

He's been working hard to show us what the living God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus for the world. And to say that chapters 4 to 6 now apply the gospel to our lives makes our lives the issue.

[6 : 14] For three chapters, Paul has been helping us see that things have changed in the universe. Because of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, things have changed.

We are now living in an alternative reading of reality. Indeed, we are now living in this alternative reality itself. And the point of the therefore is not to now apply this new reality to our lives.

The point of the therefore is to now live in the new reality. Paul is saying, realize what has taken place.

Realize that you are now living in a new space. You are living in a new reality. A reality that changes your old reality. Enter in.

Get with the program. We now have a new address. In Christ, in the heavenlies. We now live in a new neighborhood.

[7 : 19] Adopted into the family of God. Where redemption and forgiveness reign. We now live in a new country. Where the dead in Christ. Dead in sin.

Are made alive with Christ. And raised up with Christ. And seated with Christ. We now live in a new universe. Where the Holy Spirit is at work. Deep in our inner beings.

To make it possible for Christ to live there. Where the love of God is active and present in every dimension of our existence. Where we are being filled so full.

That the fullness can only be measured by all that makes God be God. Therefore, enter in. Start to move around in the new reality.

Walk, he exhorts us. Walk into this new world. Into which the Trinity is inviting you. We've been living in a world shaped by our own ego and our own drives.

- [8 : 17] We've been living in a world shaped by our cultures. Another world shaped by the gospel is invading and overcoming all those old worlds.
- Not that the old worlds are wrong. Not that at all. It's just that these old worlds don't know the gospel. Come, to paraphrase Paul. Come now and live in the world brought into being by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- And I will help you navigate your way through this new world. Walk. Move. Out of our lives.
- That's the implication. If we still want to use the word apply the gospel to our lives. The application of the gospel to our lives is to move out of our lives.
- And into the life of the triune God. Somehow, somehow we got the idea that we can be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.
- [9 : 24] That we can be made alive with Christ. Raised up with Christ. Seated with Christ. That we can be filled up with all the fullness of God. And keep on living life as we knew it before.
- It's not possible. How can that possibly be the case? Walk a new walk. Realize this new reality into which you have been called.
- And move in it. I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, exhort you, entreat you, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.
- Walk worthy. Walk worthy. This phrase could actually be the title of the rest of the letter to the Ephesians. Chapters 1 to 3, the calling. Chapters 4 to 6, walk worthy of the calling.
- Now, here's where we need to be very careful. Worthy. Walk worthy. How do you respond to that word worthy?
- [10 : 28] Many of us hear the word worthy and we feel weighed down. Right? We hang our heads. Worthy. Oh, my goodness. Who can ever be worthy?
- I walk worthy. I'll never be worthy. I'll never measure up. And we begin to respond to the word worthy in that way because we misunderstand Paul's word.
- The word worthy is not about measuring up. The word worthy is not about achieving any spiritual capacity.
- The word worthy simply means bringing up the other beam of the scales. That's what it literally means. It means to bring into equilibrium. It's all about balance.
- Or better yet, it's all about suitability. Something is worthy because it fits. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling means walk in a way that fits the calling.
- [11 : 29] Walk in a way that is congruous with the calling. Walk in equilibrium with. Walk in balance with the calling. Worthy is not about measuring up.
- Worthy is about fitting in. Chapters 1 to 3. The new configuration of reality brought into being by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Chapters 4 to 6. The way of life that is inherent to this new configuration of life. We do not have to measure up to this new configuration.
- We need only wake up, realize what has happened, and walk in equilibrium with it all. I just freed you from a horrible burden.
- Worthy isn't about measuring up. It's not about being good Christians. Worthy is about stepping into a reality that's already been created and learn how to walk.
- [12 : 41] And the first worthy of the call Paul calls us to is unity. I hope you heard and saw that as Fred read the text earlier.
- Verses 4 to 6. One body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Then verse 13. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

And then verse 3. Verse 3. Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To walk worthy, congruous with, in balance with the new reality is to walk in unity.

But of course, of course, Ephesians chapters 1 to 3 are all about God uniting creation.

God uniting humanity. God uniting the church in and around Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 verse 9. That chapter 1 verse 9 could actually be the theme verse for the whole letter.

[13:50] Chapter 1 verse 9. God has made known to us the mystery of His will. Namely, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

Summing up all things in Christ. What an amazing claim. And as I pointed out before, the word Paul uses that's translated sum up is the word recapitulate.

It means to put the head back on. Recaput. The cosmos and humanity within the cosmos has been running around with its head off.

Do I need to illustrate that? God wants to put the head back on. Praise His name. And the head of all things is Jesus of Nazareth who gave His life for the life of the world.

Summing up all things in Jesus the head. Then in chapter 2, Paul develops this mystery further in what he calls the mystery of Christ. The first installment of God's great plan is bringing Jews and Gentiles together as the one new people of God.

[15:00] Breaking down all the barriers that used to divide. Overcoming all the enmity. Making one new humanity that constitutes one new society that constitutes God's new dwelling place in the world.

So, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Being diligent.

It's way too mild a translation of Paul's verb. Be eager is better. Be zealous is better yet. The new reality is all about uniting everything around and in Jesus of Nazareth.

And walking worthy of this new reality means being zealous to live in this unity. Unity. Now, here is where we also need to be careful.

Paul's therefore is not, therefore create the unity. For one thing, we cannot create unity.

[16:10] We are all too self-preoccupied. And for another, we do not need to create the unity. The unity has already been created.

It is a given. The unity of the Spirit, says Paul. The unity the Holy Spirit has already created. Be diligent to maintain it. Be zealous to maintain what the Spirit has already created.

Makes sense, does it not? Verses 4 to 6 again. There is one body with one spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all and through all and in all. Can you find a more comprehensive summary of the unity that already exists?

Some people think that what we have in those verses is an early Christian creed or hymn that Paul is quoting. One body. The church.

[17:17] One church. One church of Jesus Christ. There is only one body. One church. Oh, there are many expressions of church.

But the reality is that there is finally only one body of Christ. All who belong to Jesus Christ constitute this one body.

We may not agree with everyone in the body. We might not like everyone in the body. It doesn't matter. The reality is Christ has only one body.

And to walk worthy of being included in his body means being zealous to do everything you can to maintain the unity of that one body.

Which explains why Paul refers to all humility, gentleness, patience, showing forbearance to one another in love. I mean, it takes great humility. It takes much gentleness.

[18:22] It takes lots of patience and it takes long, long, long suffering to live the unity that is already created.

What helps is the one spirit. The spirit of God. The Holy Spirit. Whose great passion is that people find and love Jesus Christ.

One hope. The hope that Paul is describing in chapters 1 to 3. The hope that the choir sang of. That's our hope. One Lord. As I've pointed out many times, the word that Paul uses here for Lord is kurios.

It's a loaded term. In the Greek and Roman world, kurios referred to sovereign. All the citizens of the empire had to swear allegiance to Caesar as kurios.

Caesar as sovereign. He is Lord. In the Jewish world, kurios was the equivalent for the sacred name Yahweh. One Lord, says Paul. Only one sovereign.

[19:18] Yahweh to the rescue. Yeshua. Jesus of Nazareth. Which is why he gets to sum up everything in himself. Who else can be the head?

One faith. Just one faith. Paul could be referring to the one faith. All who belong to the one Lord affirmed. He could be referring to the content of the faith.

To the great story that is told. Jude uses the phrase, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Or Paul could be referring to the fact that faith is faith in the one Lord.

One faith because there's only one Lord to have faith in. But I want to suggest that the one faith is the faith of the one Lord.

The one faith is the faith of Jesus the Lord. In chapter 14, chapter 13, sorry, of Ephesians 4, which we'll look at next week.

[20:17] Paul says we are to be built up until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. We are to grow up into the faith the Son of God has.

Yes, we're to grow up into faith in the Son of God. But what Paul emphasizes is growing up into the faith the Son of God has in his Father.

That, I think, is the one faith that binds us together. Jesus is the one great believer. In fact, he's the only one who believes consistently. Second chapter of Hebrews.

The author has Jesus the Son say to the Father, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. Jesus is the one great preacher. And it goes on, I will sing your praise in the great company.

Jesus is the one great worshiper. And then, I will put my trust in him. Jesus is the one great believer who believes for all of us. The one faith is the faith of Jesus has in his Father.

[21:21] That's the faith that binds us. Not my faith, not your faith, not all of our faith combined. What binds us is the one faith of the one Lord. One baptism.

Paul could be referring to our baptism into the one Lord, the one Spirit, the one Father. I suggest, however, following what I just said about the one faith, that the one baptism is Jesus' baptism.

His own baptism. The baptism of the one Lord. Both his baptism in the Jordan River and his baptizing us in and with the Holy Spirit.

That's the one baptism that really matters. At the Jordan River, John the Baptist takes Jesus through the waters of baptism. That was the public event when Jesus of Nazareth declared his solidarity with the human race.

He, as the eternal Son of God, had become fully human. So fully human that he became sinful humanity. And then, as us, as sinful humanity, he goes into the water and he repents for us and he believes for us.

[22 : 28] And then, as John the Baptist says, Jesus baptizes us. He baptizes us in and with the Holy Spirit. He inundates us with. He immerses us in his very life.

That is the one baptism that matters. That's the one baptism that unites us. And then, one God and Father. The God who comes to us as Jesus Christ.

The Father Jesus knows and loves and trusts. The one God and Father, whom the one Spirit of the one Lord helps us know and love and call Abba. Over all, sovereign over everyone.

Through all, active in everyone. In all, seeking intimacy with everyone. I like how Eugene Peterson renders this verse in the message. One God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all.

That is the unity that already exists. Which those who are alive in the new reality are zealous to maintain.

[23 : 29] One body. One spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of us all. One God and Father of us all. Now, the wonder of this comprehensive unity came home to me in very practical terms in Manila, the Philippines.

As I've shared with you, I had the privilege of serving as the pastor of Union Church of Manila from 1985 to 1989. Union Church was formed in 1914 to serve the then influx of foreigners.

I know what it means to be a foreigner. And it began as a union of Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and some Baptists. How about that?

When I became the pastor of the church in 1985, there were people from 36 different countries of the world and 31 different denominations.

31. Which is why I've said to many of you that I was regularly in trouble with someone. I regularly didn't do it right.

[24 : 38] I've gotten used to that. I just didn't do it right for everybody. Talk about the need for the gospel virtues of gentleness and patience and long-suffering.

Let me give you an example of what life was like in Union Church. I had to make sure that the Lord's Supper was served in such a way that it accommodated all the practices of all the 31 denominations.

So, we served there as we do here by bringing the trays to the pews. But I had to make sure that in each of those trays with the cups, there was both wine and grape juice.

So, the first two rings were wine and the second two rings were grape juice. I had to make sure that there were two stations up front for those who wanted to get out of their pew, come forward, break off a piece of bread, and dip it in the cup using tincture.

I had to make sure that one of the pastors was standing there with little wafers ready to put on the tongues of those who took communion that way. And it worked.

[25 : 45] It worked. A wonderful diversity within a wonderful unity. And it was in Manila that I came to feel in my guts, what you're feeling in me right now, feel in my guts, that what binds us together in the new reality is infinitely greater than anything that threatens to divide us.

We have Jesus Christ in common. And if you have Jesus Christ in common, what in the world is so important that it would separate us?

Name it. What's more important than having Jesus Christ in common? You see, the problem is that churches, branches of the one body, tend to major on the minors and minor on the majors.

At Union Church, we had no choice. We had to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Had we majored on the way to serve communion?

Oh, mercy. Had we majored on styles of worship and which songs to sing? Oh, mercy. Had we majored on structures of governance?

[27 : 10] Oh, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy. The church would have died. We were forced in that context to major on the majors and minor on the minors. For the majors that bind us are infinitely greater than any of the minors that could divide us.

On my way to the office one day, it dawned on me. It dawned on me that none of the minors people got worked up about, none of the minors would have ever won us to Jesus Christ in the first place.

None of the minors would have ever won anyone to Christ.

What a tragic irony. None of the issues that separate the visible church would have ever won anyone to the Savior. Whoever found the saving love of Jesus Christ in a debate about the structure of ministry.

Whoever received the fullness of the Holy Spirit with people arguing about what songs to sing. What won us was love. The love of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 25] Jesus Christ himself. And if we have him in common, what else finally matters? Am I right? Am I right? Am I right? A Canuck fan who loves Jesus Christ.

And a Bruins fan who loves Jesus Christ. Have infinitely more in common than any two Canucks or any two Bruins who do not know Jesus Christ. I'm just applying the gospel here. A conservative who loves Jesus Christ.

And a new Democrat who loves Jesus Christ. Have infinitely more in common than any two conservatives or any two Democrats who do not yet know Christ. And a Canadian who loves Jesus Christ.

And an American who loves Jesus Christ. Have infinitely more in common than any two Canadians or any two Americans who have not yet met Jesus Christ. On and on it could go.

A Baptist. Who loves Jesus Christ. And a Pentecostal. Who loves Jesus Christ.

[29 : 35] And a Roman Catholic. Who loves Jesus Christ. Have infinitely more in common than all that could separate them.

One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One hope. One spirit. One God and Father of us all. Therefore. Therefore. Walk.

Walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Walk in unity. Paul could have added one more one.

I think he could have added one meal. One meal. Oh. My goodness. Here's where believers have all kinds of different interpretations. But. It is still the one meal.

With one loaf. With one cup. Hosted by one Lord. Who has one command. There's only one command to this one meal. And it is. Remember. Me.

[30 : 35] Remember. Me. The implication being. That we forget. Remember. Me. Not.

Work up some kind of pious emotion. Not. Feel sorry for me. Because I'm still hanging on the cross. Not. Feel shame. Because you're a miserable sinner. Remember.

Me. You have forgotten me. It's all about me. You have forgotten who the one Lord is. You have forgotten who does the saving. You have forgotten who unites all things in himself.

You have forgotten who does the believing. You've forgotten who's done the baptizing. You've forgotten who gives hope. You have allowed other lords with other agendas to grab your attention.

Now. Wake up. And remember. Me. He calls us into a radically restructured world.

[31 : 31] An alternative reality. Therefore.