**The Worthy Walk, Part 4**

**Ephesians 4:3**

**April 11, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. As we return this morning to Ephesians 4:1-6 and the Christian’s worthy walk, I want to briefly remind you of what Paul has been discussing in these opening verses.
      1. Paul has turned his attention in Ephesians 4 to the practical outworking of the doctrine he taught in the first three chapters.
      2. As he turns his attention to the practical implications of these doctrinal truths, the very first exhortation he has for us is to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.
      3. He further delineates what this means for us.
         1. He tells us that to walk worthy of our calling we must first of all understand our calling, that we have been called out of the world and into the body of Christ, the church, as the special people of God.
         2. Then, to walk worthy of our calling we must also cultivate godly character.
            1. We have seen how we must walk with humility, gentleness, and patience toward others.
            2. We must think of ourselves as servants, being slow to anger, not easily offended or annoyed by the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but seeking to build them up in their faith.
         3. Third, to walk worthy of our calling we need to tolerate difficult Christians.
            1. Paul reminds us that there will always be people in the church who are hard for us.
            2. Personal differences, different styles, different interests, different idiosyncrasies and preferences all tend to create situations ripe for conflict.
            3. But because we love the body of Christ, we need to put up with those who are difficult for us, and we need to do so in the love of Christ, not begrudgingly, but joyfully.
   2. All of that leads us to the fourth item Paul mentions when describing the worthy walk: We must preserve a unified church.
      1. Notice what he writes in v. 3…
      2. Here we see the necessity of preserving our unity in Christ as the church.
         1. Of course, this is the natural outflow of the first three elements of the worthy walk.
         2. If we are called to be part of the church, and if we are called to think of ourselves as servants of others in the church and be patient with them, and if we are called to tolerate even those who are immensely difficult for us, then it follows that we must seek to preserve our unity within the church.
         3. All of these items that comprise the worthy walk culminate here, with Christian unity, being a unified body of Christ.
      3. To discuss unity is, ironically enough, one of the most divisive subjects there is.
         1. And for that reason, I think it is especially important that we take this topic and consider it thoroughly.
         2. We will need to spend some time thinking about a biblical picture of Christian unity so that we all end up united at the end and understanding the basis of our unity.
   3. Unity has always been a challenge for the church.
      1. If we go back to the beginning of church history in the book of Acts, we see that things started off great (Acts 2:46-47).
         1. The believers were united in thought, having the same mind.
         2. They had great fellowship together, spending time together on a daily basis in the temple, with smaller groups getting together for meals in each other’s homes.
         3. They were sincere in their love for Christ and for each other, and the church was growing every day with new people coming to faith in Christ.
         4. That’s the ideal scenario for any church!
         5. So much love, so much joy, so much success in seeing people converted!
      2. But sadly, it wasn’t long before the unity was fractured in Acts 6:1…
         1. Note how Luke highlights the growth of the church in connection with the break in the unity of the church.
         2. And this first major break in unity took place over something very practical, namely, the care of widows in the church.
            1. Certain widows who were Jews that had become more integrated into Greek society were being treated like second-class Christians, while the widows who were more culturally Jewish in practice and lifestyle were being treated like first-class Christians.
            2. One scholar, F. F. Bruce, notes that the main difference between these two groups of widows was language: the Hellenistic widows spoke primarily Greek, and the Hebrew widows spoke primarily Aramaic.
            3. Because of these cultural differences with Judaism, the church was being affected since it was exclusively to this point composed of Israelites.
            4. And the unity they had enjoyed in Acts 2 had been fractured over these cultural preferences.
            5. They would get it sorted out by appointing men to oversee this ministry to the widows, men who were wise and filled with the Spirit, to ensure that everyone was treated with love and all widows had their needs met, and the unity of the church was restored.
         3. The restoration of unity, however, was not the end of the story, because soon it would not just be Greek-speaking Jews that would become part of the church, but actual Greeks, and Romans, and Ethiopians, and all kinds of Gentiles were about to become followers of Christ!
      3. Once the Gentiles began to believe the gospel and become part of the church, a significant split occurred, and we read about it in Acts 11:19-20…
         1. Now we have some real division going on, where some missionaries actually refused to preach the gospel to the Gentiles at all!
         2. Meanwhile, you had other missionaries who went out and preached the gospel to the Greeks.
      4. All of this came to a head in Acts 15, when the church was split over what to do about all of these Gentile Christians.
         1. Did they need to be circumcised or not?
         2. This major question had to be settled because it was creating, according to Acts 15:2, great dissension and debate within the church.
         3. So in Acts 15, we have the first major church council, where the apostles affirmed the gospel that we are justified by faith alone apart from works of the law, including circumcision.
         4. Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be accepted into the church because we are all saved through faith in Jesus Christ by His grace.
      5. But just when that matter got settled, the church’s two greatest missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, had a major disagreement in Acts 15:39!
         1. In fact, we read in this verse that this disagreement was so severe that they could no longer minister together!
         2. They went their separate ways.
         3. What was the disagreement over?
         4. It was over whether Mark was fit to go on the next missionary journey.
         5. Barnabas, always the encourager who wanted to disciple these young men and help them become more effective servants of Christ, wanted to give Mark another chance.
         6. Paul, who was focused on the mission and did not want to take a risk on Mark leaving them in the lurch again, was adamantly opposed to bringing him.
         7. And this disagreement ended Paul and Barnabas’ joint ministry together.
         8. Eventually, Paul and Barnabas and Mark sorted it out and their unity was restored.
         9. We know that from 2 Tim 4:11, where Paul requests Mark’s help in ministry.
      6. What I find so significant about this particular break in unity is that it involved the very apostle who wrote Ephesians 4:3, that we must do what we can to preserve and protect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!
         1. Even Paul, as an apostle, sometimes struggled to preserve unity.
         2. Listen, unity is not easy.
         3. Unity is not automatic.
         4. And the more the church grows, and the more ministry there is to be done, the greater the likelihood of something coming along that disrupts unity.
      7. In fact, we know that one of Satan’s primary objectives in the church is to destroy unity.
         1. Look at 2 Cor 2:8…
            1. Here, we find Paul urging the Corinthians to affirm their love for a brother in Christ who had been under church discipline for some sinful practice.
            2. Now this man has repented and is seeking to be restored to the fellowship of the saints, restored to the unity of the body of Christ.
            3. And Paul urges them to restore him and to make sure he knows that he is loved and is part of the church.
            4. Why?
         2. Verse 11…
            1. Because if he is not, Satan will exploit the disunity in the church.
            2. In fact, Satan’s scheme in the church is to divide the people of God.
            3. His strategy in spiritual warfare is to divide and conquer.
            4. And if we don’t preserve unity in the church, what’s going to happen?
            5. Satan will take advantage of us.
            6. He will get an edge in the spiritual conflict.
            7. We will find ourselves fighting the wrong battle, fighting the wrong enemy, fighting the wrong war.
            8. And so, Paul says, you have to accept the person who is repentant and restore unity, preserve unity, make sure that you don’t give Satan any room to take advantage in the church through some rupture of your unity in Christ.
         3. Satan knows how fragile our unity can be, and he exploits that, and so if we want to walk worthy of our calling, we must seek to preserve the unity of the church.
      8. What does that mean?
   4. The issue of church unity has been a difficult one to pin down and define, and increasingly so over the past century.
      1. One of the key difficulties Protestants have faced over the centuries is somehow coming together to be unified despite the varied denominational differences.
         1. It is clear from Scripture that believers are to preserve the unity of the church, but how do we do that when we have so many different churches with all kinds of different doctrines and practices?
         2. And not only within Protestantism itself, but what about unity with the larger visible church, including the varieties of Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church?
         3. Shouldn’t the church universal find some common ground, some form of unity, to where we can all agree on some basic set of beliefs and band together as one united group?
         4. The answer to that question by many people over the last century has been, “Yes, we need to figure out a way to unite, and so we all need to come together and see how to make that happen.”
         5. Those who answer the question in the affirmative began what is known as the ecumenical movement in the church.
         6. Sometimes called ecumenism, the ecumenical movement seeks to create unity among churches with a variety of doctrinal beliefs and traditional practices.
      2. This movement traces its roots to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910.
         1. An American Episcopalian bishop named Charles Brent began a movement called the Faith and Order Movement at this conference.
            1. The goal of the Faith and Order Movement was to confront divisive issues within the larger church, especially issues of doctrine, polity, and practice.
            2. What does the Christian faith look like, and what is the proper order of the Christian faith, and is there some way that all people who call themselves Christians can come together and agree at some level about these things?
            3. Brent’s movement, the Faith and Order Movement, had their first preliminary meeting in Geneva in 1920.
            4. In 1927 at Lausanne, Switzerland, the first world conference on Faith and Order took place.
            5. Ninety different church traditions participated in the meeting, but notably no one from evangelicalism, Roman Catholicism, or Russian Orthodoxy.
            6. This expanded to 123 churches in 1937 in Edinburgh, where they met to discuss ministry and the sacraments.
         2. All of this culminated in 1948 in Amsterdam, when the World Council of Churches was officially formed.
            1. What began as a movement of 90 churches swelled to over 300 churches, including Pentecostals, the Russian Orthodox, and, after Vatican II in 1965, the Roman Catholic Church.
            2. The goal was to bring together the many disparate traditions of Protestantism, as well as now Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and to form one universal church.
      3. This larger ecumenical movement has given rise to smaller movements, less ambitious in scope but exhibiting the same spirit.
         1. In 1982, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on justification was formed to discuss their differences in the doctrine of justification.
         2. In 1984, a group was formed between Anglicans and Reformed Christians once again to try to find some common ground and become united.
         3. In 1974, a group came together once again in Lausanne and drew up the Lausanne Covenant.
            1. One of the three key tenets of this meeting is called “Holistic Mission.”
            2. The Lausanne website describes this as follows: “The Congress urged the necessity of both evangelism and social justice in mission, with the voices of Latin American theologians Samuel Escobar and Rene Padilla among the clearest to be heard.”
            3. They go on to note that the shift in evangelical thinking that has embraced social justice as part of the church’s core mission “can largely be attributed to the 1974 Congress.”
         4. Then, in 1994, perhaps one of the most significant documents in Evangelical history was signed – *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*.
            1. This document was signed by J. I. Packer, Pat Robertson, Bill Bright, and others in the evangelical world.
            2. The stated goal of this document is “visible unity” within the broader, global church.
            3. The document explicitly states, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.”
            4. Furthermore, it goes on to say that no one should evangelize people who are already within the Christian community, meaning that Evangelicals should not seek to evangelize Roman Catholics.
            5. It goes so far as to say that to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Roman Catholics is “sheep stealing” and that it “undermines the Christian mission.”
            6. This document, then, essentially abolishes the Reformation, asserting that whatever differences do exist between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Christianity, they are not gospel issues.
            7. We can be united and work together to achieve the Christian mission rather than seeing Roman Catholics as one of many mission fields, full of people who have embraced a false gospel of works-righteousness rather than the true gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone on the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone.
      4. This idea of unity, joining together across theological lines and sweeping aside doctrinal differences, has come to dominate the thinking of the church today.
         1. It has become so dominant, that one writer notes, “The study of theology has become in the 2nd half of the twentieth century, increasingly an ecumenical activity with cooperation and interaction between scholars of different traditions so commonplace that confessional distinctives have steadily diminished.”
         2. Here’s the primary issue: the ecumenical movement has moved from theology being primarily an interaction with the text of Scripture to theology being primarily an interaction with people who believe something entirely different about the Scripture, and finding some way to squeeze the Bible into saying what both theologies believe.
         3. And we see this everywhere today.
         4. Whether it is evangelicals and Roman Catholics sweeping aside massive differences in the nature and content of the gospel, or whether it is evangelicals embracing the false religion of social justice and trying to syncretize it with the Bible, the stated goal is always unity, unity, unity.
         5. And of course, the question must be asked, “Is this the kind of unity Paul had in mind in Ephesians 4:3?”
         6. Is this the kind of unity Jesus had in mind in John 17?
         7. Is this the kind of unity the NT writers had in mind whenever they talk about this important and critical subject?
      5. We had to face this question on the nature of true Christian unity just a year ago when we were in discussions with the leadership of the EFCA about differences we held from them on significant matters.
         1. Could we separate from the EFCA without violating Paul’s command in Ephesians 4:3 to **be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit**?
         2. We had a number of areas of disagreement.
            1. The EFCA was promoting speakers who taught that we could syncretize Christianity with Buddhism and other eastern religions.
            2. They were promoting the egalitarian movement that taught that women could be pastors in the church and preach and teach with spiritual authority to men, in clear violation of 1 Timothy 2-3.
            3. They were softening the church’s understanding of human sexuality and that the only godly sexual relationship with between a man and a woman in the confines of marriage.
            4. You can read the evidence of them doing this on our website blog, where I detailed exactly how and where they did these things.
            5. And it came to the point where we could no longer in good conscience support or participate in a movement that promoted things God condemns.
         3. But how do we justify that kind of disunity in light of Scriptures call to preserve unity?
         4. That’s no light matter to consider.
   5. To understand this, and to understand the times in which we are living where so many things are done in the name of unity, or the new term that has replaced unity in many instances, reconciliation, we need to understand exactly what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 4:3 when he commands us to walk worthy by being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.
      1. To unpack this verse will take a few weeks because not only do we have to contend with the confusion today about what biblical unity is, but we also have seen that unity is not natural to us.
      2. So, I want to do this by answering a few questions that come up when we consider this verse.
      3. Here are the three questions in advance, and we’ll begin to work through them this morning in the time we have left.
         1. First, what is the unity of the Spirit?
         2. Second, how do preserve the unity of the Spirit? What are the practical steps we need to take to be obedient to this command?
         3. And third, what blessings come as a result of being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit?
         4. Obedience leads to blessing, and so what does God do in a church where the members are committed to preserving this kind of spiritual unity?
   6. The first question, then, is this: What is the unity of the Spirit?
      1. Notice that Paul wrote in v. 3…
      2. What is this unity?
      3. If we look throughout the NT, we can see this unity defined in three ways.
      4. First of all, the unity of the Spirit means that we must…
2. Have the Same Mind (v. 3)
   1. This is the most common phrase the NT writers use to talk about the unity we are called to have in Christ.
      1. For example, Paul wrote in Romans 12:16…
      2. Then, just a few chapters later, he reiterated this in Romans 15:5-6…
      3. In 1 Cor 1:10, Paul put it like this…
      4. Then he closed his second letter to the Corinthians by saying this in 2 Cor 13:11…
      5. In Philippians 2:2 we read much the same thing, as Paul writes…
      6. The most common Greek phrase used in the majority of these passages literally means, “to think the same thing.”
      7. It could be understood as meaning to be in agreement, or to have the same mindset, the same worldview, the same outlook on life.
      8. Or we might put it like this: we need to have the same doctrine.
      9. We need to think the same things about Christ and about His Word.
   2. When we think about this today, we see how the worldly church tries to accomplish this.
      1. These churches come together in a conference, and they all share their ideas and try to come up with some statement they can all agree with.
         1. The methodology is to share opinions and thoughts and interpretations, and find something that everyone can sign off on.
         2. What typically transpires might be called lowest common denominator theology.
         3. You get down to that one small shred of doctrine that everyone can agree on, and that becomes your statement.
         4. But the call to be of the same mind is not the call to have a discussion of our varied opinions and see if we can broker some human agreement so that we can all get along.
         5. The call to be of the same mind is that we would all look to the Word of God and submit our thinking to the Scriptures so that what has determined our thinking is not what you or anyone else believes but what the Bible says.
      2. It’s interesting to see how the church came to be of the same mind in Acts 15 when they had the disagreement over circumcision.
         1. First, there was a lot of debate and disagreement in v. 7.
         2. Then Peter stood up and related what God had said and done through him.
         3. Then Paul and Barnabas stood up and related what God had said and done through them.
         4. Now, this is fascinating because there were not many books of the NT written yet when this council took place.
         5. And so the apostles had to relate the words God had spoken directly to them as the authoritative word of God in this situation.
         6. Then, finally, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, stood up to speak.
         7. And what did James do in his speech?
         8. He broke out his copy of the Old Testament, and he quoted from the prophet Amos.
         9. The word that God had spoken to Peter and the word of God written down in the OT were in agreement.
         10. And what ultimately was the determining factor in bringing these Christians to unity over this question was not someone’s opinion, not a sharing of various ideas and traditions about circumcision, not doing theology in their diverse communities, but it was the authority of God’s Word and their willingness to submit to that authority alone.
         11. What an instructive passage about how to accomplish being of the same mind when there is a disagreement!
         12. What is it that creates the atmosphere where unity exists?
         13. It’s nothing less than the Word of God.
         14. The truth of the Word of God comes to bear on a subject, and people have a choice, don’t they?
         15. They can submit to the Word of God, or they can reject the Word of God.
      3. Now, here’s what Paul is saying, then, we he calls believers to be of the same mind.
         1. He is not saying that we are to be of the same mind as each other, as if your opinions or my opinions should determine what you or I think.
         2. He is saying that we are to be of the same mind as the Word of God.
         3. True unity is not everyone setting aside their various theologies and coming together as some show of external unity built upon nothing but a feeling or a desire to appear united.
         4. True unity is when everyone subjects themselves to the same standard of truth, the Scriptures.
         5. True unity happens when our minds and our thoughts and our worldview is shaped by the Word of God.
         6. If you don’t have the same mind, you will never have unity.
   3. The NT, in fact, assumes that there will be disunity where there is a lack of submission to Scripture.
      1. Look at 1 Cor 11:18-19…
         1. Paul says, “Look, I hear that when you gather together, there are factions, there are disagreements, there are people who are not united, and what’s more, I believe that!”
         2. In fact, Paul expects that to happen.
         3. Why?
         4. Verse 19…
         5. These divisions, these factions indicate who is approved and who isn’t.
         6. These divisions mark out the true believer from the false.
         7. There are certain issues over which we must divide.
         8. To have divisions, if they’re the right divisions, is a mark of spiritual integrity, not a mark of divisiveness.
         9. A church where no one ever feels like they’ve been offended is probably a church where the truth is not being taught.
         10. The Word of God naturally creates divisions.
         11. It naturally separates the sheep from the goats.
         12. And Paul says that when the church gathers, he would expect some division, some factions, some disagreement, some disunity, because the Word of God is to act as a purifier to the church, driving those away who are not in the truth or bringing them to a place of repentance and submission to the truth.
      2. Unity is not to be achieved by setting aside truth but by coming under the truth.
         1. When we have disunity with someone in the church, one of the first things we should consider is, “Are we submitting ourselves to the Word of God?”
         2. See, we can’t have unity with those who are not followers of Christ.
         3. We can’t have unity with those who disregard the authority of God’s Word.
         4. We can’t have unity with those who teach and believe false doctrine.
         5. And we shouldn’t even try to have unity with them apart from evangelizing them with the prayer and hope that they will repent and come to saving faith in Christ.
         6. That is the only path to unity with people who believe false doctrine.
         7. That’s why evangelicals and Catholics can never come together.
            1. We cannot have unity when Rome teaches that we are justified through baptism and works and grace.
            2. That is a different gospel.
            3. We can never say that we won’t evangelize Catholics.
            4. You better believe we are going to evangelize Catholics, because we don’t want to see them perish in their sins with a false hope in a deficient gospel.
            5. If that offends you, you either don’t understand Roman Catholic theology, or you don’t understand the gospel.
         8. We can never seek to achieve unity with people who set aside the Word of God, or who place the Word of God equal to or under some human tradition or authority.
         9. Why not?
         10. Because we don’t have the same mind.
         11. And unity is first of all about having the same mind, thinking the same things, sharing a common set of beliefs that are derived from the Word of God.
   4. That raises a really important question, and it’s this: How much agreement do we have to have about the Word of God to be united?
      1. It sounds well and good to say we must be of the same mind, but we all know that in practice we are going to disagree about some things.
      2. Do we have to agree on every finer point of doctrine?
      3. If so, we might all end up being members of a church of one, condemning everyone but ourselves to destruction.
      4. And so there is a necessary balance here.
      5. We need to understand what it means to be united in the truth, to share the same mind, and what areas are places we can disagree, and what areas are places we draw the line and say, “No, if you cross this line, we are no longer of the same mind.”
      6. We’ll begin next time by looking at this question of where these lines are.
3. Conclusion
   1. This morning, I want to encourage you to once again think of your relationships within the body of Christ.
      1. Are you seeking to cultivate godly character that enables you to tolerate difficult Christians in love and find unity with people that irritate you?
      2. Is unity within the church among those who share the same set of beliefs important to you?
      3. Do you seek to promote unity, or do you find that division seems to be result more often than unity among people where there should be unity?
   2. If you’re here this morning and you don’t know Christ, God is calling you today to turn from your sins and to put your trust in Christ alone for salvation, to come under the authority of the Bible, and to receive eternal life through faith in Jesus’ name…