**The Worthy Walk, Part 7**

**Ephesians 4:3**

**May 9, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. As we return to our study of Ephesians 4:1-6 this morning, we find ourselves once again in verse 3, considering what it means to be diligent about preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
      1. To understand what Paul calls us to do that we might walk worthy of our calling, we are working through three questions about this exhortation in verse 3.
         1. First, we have asked, “What is the unity of the Spirit?”
         2. Second, we need to consider how we are to preserve this unity in a practical sense as we live together as the body of Christ.
         3. And then third, we will ask the question, “What are the benefits and blessings that come to a church that obeys this command to walk worthy by preserving the unity of the Spirit?”
      2. We are currently answering the first question – what is the unity of the Spirit?
         1. We have seen two parts to the answer to this question.
            1. First, we have seen that the unity of the Spirit consists of having the same mind.

That mind is referred to in 1 Cor 2:16 as **the mind of Christ**.

We have been given the mind of Christ as believers, so that our thinking is to be patterned after and conformed to the thinking of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

We find this mind revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the written Word of God.

And so for there to be any unity of the Spirit among us, we must be diligent to ensure that our minds are being transformed by the Spirit through the Word to think like Jesus.

* + - * 1. Second, we have seen that the unity of the Spirit consists of serving the same Master.

This naturally follows from having the same mind.

The Word of God reveals God to us, and if the Word of God is active in our minds, we will have the same understanding of God and worship the same God.

The unity the Spirit produces in the church is a unity that consists of all believers serving the same Master, believing the same things about God.

As we said, there are mysteries about God that we cannot understand this side of eternity, and I daresay that there are mysteries about God that we will never fully grasp throughout all of eternity.

We will never become gods ourselves, which means we will never reach God’s level.

With that understanding, then, we make space for some of the more difficult aspects of God’s nature, such as God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility and accountability before God.

We all understand that both of these things are true, but we allow for each other to grow in our understanding of these things as we grow in our faith, recognizing that none of us has a perfect grasp of this complex and infinitely puzzling set of truths.

So then, we as the body of Christ all worship the same God, all serve the same Master.

* + - 1. Third, and what we need to consider this morning, is that the unity of the Spirit consists of all of us pursuing the same mission.
         1. Once again, this follows from what we just discussed last week about having the same Master.
         2. If we have the same Master, that will result in all of us pursuing not our own will, not our own program, not our own desires, but pursuing the same mission entrusted to us by our Master.
  1. It is at this point that unity often breaks down in the church.
     1. People may all have the same intellectual understanding of Scripture.
     2. And we may all have the same basic theological understanding of God.
     3. But then comes the important question, “What are we setting out to do as a church?”
        1. What is the mission God has given us?
        2. And often in the church, people get caught up in pursuing their own mission.
        3. Sometimes I refer to this as kingdom-building.
        4. It’s when someone begins by seeking to be used by God to build God’s kingdom, but over time becomes distracted for one reason or another and begins to work on building his own kingdom instead of God’s.
        5. This can happen at any position in the church.
        6. From pastors to worship leaders to Sunday school teachers to home group leaders to missionaries to evangelists to custodial staff to groundskeeping, it’s easy for us to become consumed with our corner of God’s kingdom to such a degree that we forget it’s God’s kingdom and begin treating it as if it is our own kingdom.
        7. And then we are no longer working in unity with others but in competition with them and in isolation from them.
        8. We’ve all probably experienced this before.
           1. We’ve all probably been part of a ministry where it seemed like it was going well but then suddenly anger, bitterness, jealousy and other fleshly things crept in.
           2. Maybe we wondered what was going wrong, and the answer is typically that the ministry leader has started pursuing the wrong mission.
           3. Pride makes it easy for any of us to fall into this trap of pursuing our own mission rather than God’s, and every time this happens, unity is the casualty.
  2. Now, if we are to pursue the same mission as we serve the same Master with the same mind, what are we pursuing?
     1. That’s what I want to consider with the rest of our time this morning.
     2. To begin, let’s take a look at…

1. The nature of the mission
   1. Here we need to ask a very basic but vitally important question: What is the mission of the church?
      1. This question is so critical because it is the very question where the church has often gone astray.
      2. If we look back a century ago, we see the church misunderstanding its mission and entire denominations falling into error and heresy as a result.
         1. The church looked around at all the suffering in the world, and people were rightly concerned with poverty and oppression and all of the horrible things that various people were experiencing here and around the world.
         2. The response to that from many of the mainline Protestant denominations was to begin ministries that focused on alleviating poverty and suffering and oppression.
         3. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with wanting to help the poor or deliver the oppressed from suffering.
         4. The problem came in the form of the mission of the church being replaced with a mission that was focused on temporal problems and temporal needs.
         5. This became known as the social gospel movement.
         6. Long before we were dealing with the social justice movement, we had a very similar thing in the social gospel of the early 20th century.
         7. The social gospel replaced the true gospel by focusing on man’s needs in this world, often to the exclusion and detriment of meeting his spiritual needs for eternity.
      3. That is but one example of the church losing sight of its true mission, and if we were to do a historical survey, we would note that the church often has lost sight of this over the past 2,000 years in many different ways.
      4. Today, the church is often uncertain of what its mission is for similar reasons to what happened a century ago.
         1. Anyone who loves Christ loves people and wants to see people experience joy rather than pain, success rather than failure, blessing rather than destruction, freedom rather than oppression.
         2. And today, as we have talked about at length in other messages, the church has often fallen prey to the social justice movement, compromising the true mission of the church for a temporal mission focused on things of this world rather than eternal things.
         3. At some point, we’ll move on from social justice and something else will take its place.
         4. The point is not to figure out necessarily how to respond to whatever is fashionable today; the point is to understand the true mission of the church so that no matter what comes along next, we are prepared to stay focused on what truly matters.
   2. To help you see the mission of the church, especially as it relates to unity, turn over to Phil 1:27.
      1. I love the way Paul summarizes the mission of the church in this verse: **striving together for the faith of the gospel**.
         1. The word translated **striving together** is the word from which we get the word *athlete* or *athletics*.
         2. It was used primarily in two contexts in the Greco-Roman world.
            1. It was often used to refer to a team working together to win a competition.
            2. And it was used of an army working together in battle to defeat an enemy.
      2. Paul is picturing the church as an army engaged in warfare.
         1. And he says to them that he does not wanting them fighting against one another but fighting alongside one another for a common cause against a common enemy.
         2. The common enemy is noted in v. 28, the opponents of the gospel.
         3. And the common cause is spelled out in v. 27 – the faith of the gospel.
         4. The idea is that we are to strive together, we are to fight side by side, for the advantage of the gospel, so that the gospel would be victorious over all of its foes.
         5. Paul summarizes the same idea in Phil 1:12 with the phrase **for the greater progress of the gospel**.
         6. The mission in which Paul was engaged, and the mission to which he calls the church to arms, is the mission of seeing progress in the gospel getting out to a dark and sinful world.
         7. He wants to see the church working side by side, shoulder to shoulder, as one army in a common battle so that light might penetrate the darkness.
         8. To use the phrase Paul uses in 2 Thess 3:1, the mission is to see the word of the Lord spread rapidly and be glorified.
         9. The church is, as Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Tim 3:15, **the pillar and support of the truth**.
         10. That means the mission of the church is to hold high the truth of God’s Word, to proclaim it boldly, with the great hope and expectation that the truth will accomplish everything God sends it out to do.
   3. Jude also speaks of this mission in his short little epistle right before Revelation, Jude 3.
      1. Notice how Jude puts it: We are to **contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all handed down to the saints.**
      2. Here, once again, we see the language of warfare: we are to fight!
         1. We are not to fight against one another, but we are to fight alongside one another against anything that would seek to discredit or defile or destroy the truth of God’s Word.
         2. We are to contend earnestly for the faith that has been forever settled in heaven and now in the Scriptures has been given as a trust to the church.
      3. Notice that Jude is not writing to pastors in this verse.
         1. Sure, they are included inasmuch as pastors are members of the church.
         2. But he is writing in v. 1 to all the saints, to everyone who is called and beloved in God the Father.
         3. He is writing to everyone who shares in this common salvation
      4. We are all called to this mission, brothers and sisters, to contend for the faith, to strive together for the progress of the faith of the gospel.
   4. One of the things that jeopardizes the unity of the church, in addition to people pursuing the wrong mission, is people not pursuing any mission.
      1. I’ve coached quite a few teams as a dad, and on every team you always have that one kid who has no clue what is going on and is only out there because his parents want him to have a few hours each week not in front of the tv.
         1. That kid is not pursuing any mission.
         2. He has no interest in the game, in the score, in learning the skills.
         3. Most of the time he is counting clouds or throwing dust or picking dandelions.
         4. And that’s fine when he’s on the bench, but in most leagues, you have to play every kid at least half the game.
         5. And oh what a painful half that is.
         6. It disrupt the entire flow of the game when you have one person out there completely detached, not pursuing any real mission, just taking up space.
      2. There are people in the church today who simply do not want to fight for the truth of the gospel.
         1. They just want everything to be pleasant and nice.
         2. They don’t want to confront the errors of our time or the sins of others or deal with doctrinal issues or evangelize the lost or disciple other believers.
         3. They have what I call an over-realized eschatology.
         4. They think they’re in the eternal state now, and the fight is over, and they’ve disengaged from the fight.
         5. A time will come when we will no longer strive together for the faith of the gospel because the war will be over, but that time is not now.
         6. We have to come to grips with the fact that everywhere in the NT you see that we are at war.
         7. And we are not at war with each other.
         8. We are at war with ideologies and philosophies and speculations and religious systems and worldviews that are demonic and Satanic.
         9. I don’t come here on Sunday to make you comfortable in a world that is hostile toward God; I come here on Sundays to call you to battle.
         10. I come here on Sunday to remind you to pick up a sword, stand next to your brothers and sisters in arms, and contend earnestly for the faith that has been entrusted to us during this generation.
         11. What a debt we owe to the previous generations who fought for the faith so that we might have the truth of the gospel today!
         12. And the way we express gratitude for their faithfulness is by stepping up in our day and fighting the good fight of faith together for the progress of the gospel.
         13. This is our time, brothers and sisters.
         14. Maybe we are happy about it, and maybe we aren’t, but this is the time God has called us to this mission.
         15. If we want to be united, we need to strive together for the faith of the gospel now.
         16. It’s not enough to look wistfully back with admiration at those who contended valiantly for the faith in the past; we must follow their example and contend valiantly for the faith today.
         17. People will criticize us.
         18. They’ll call us zealots or freaks or extremists.
         19. That’s fine.
         20. Because what Christ will call us is *faithful*.
      3. If you feel disconnected, maybe it’s because you’re not in the battle.
      4. Are you pursuing the mission with the goal of advancing the gospel?
   5. Now, that leads us to a very important point, and that is…
2. The message of the mission
   1. We can talk about advancing the gospel all day long, but we need to make sure we know what the gospel is, right?
      1. We have seen that being like-minded requires the same view of Scripture and the same view of God.
      2. It also requires the same understanding of the gospel itself.
      3. So what is the message we are seeking to promote?
      4. What is this good news?
   2. I’m just going to give you a summary this morning.
      1. The best summary of the gospel found anywhere that I have ever read is in 1 Cor 15:1-8…
      2. Here are the key elements Paul notes in this marvelous summary:
         1. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
            1. The gospel is the message of salvation from our sins.
            2. That means that there is some bad news that Paul assumes we understand behind this gospel, namely, that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
            3. And that because of our sin, we are under the righteous and just wrath of a holy God.
            4. The only solution to that wrath, the only way God’s just wrath could be satisfied for us, was for Christ to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.
            5. And that is what Paul says is of first importance, the cross of Jesus Christ!
            6. The OT prophesied that the Messiah would come and suffer for the sins of His people, and Jesus is that Messiah who was crucified for our sins, so that we have forgiveness through the blood of His cross.
            7. It is so vital that we keep in mind the gospel is message of salvation from the wrath of God, and not salvation from some temporal problem.
            8. The cross was not to alleviate our poverty or eliminate our suffering in this life.
            9. The cross was to pay for our sins, and that is the message we bring to a world that is under God’s wrath: there is salvation from that wrath through the cross of Christ!
            10. If you’re preaching anything else, you are not preaching the gospel.
            11. Today, almost everything under the sun has been defined as a gospel issue, but almost none of those things are gospel issues.
            12. The gospel issue is the salvation Christ purchased for us from God’s wrath through the forgiveness of our sins.
            13. Does that have implications for how we live?
            14. Of course, and that’s why we are on week 7 of walking worthy of this gospel, but walking worthy of the gospel is not the gospel.
            15. It is the consequence of the gospel.
            16. The gospel message is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
         2. Further, he was buried.
            1. This emphasizes the true humanity of Christ.
            2. It wasn’t the body of Jesus that was crucified but not the Messiah Himself.
            3. The Son of God was made human flesh and the Son of God died on a cross as a man, and we know that because the same one who died was physically buried in a tomb.
         3. Third, He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
            1. There is no gospel without the resurrection of Christ.
            2. It was the resurrection that proved that He had satisfied the wrath of God and did not deserve to die but died in our place.
            3. The Apostles make this point repeatedly in Acts, as they reference the OT Scriptures that say the Messiah would die unjustly, and the proof was that He would not see decay.
            4. Jesus being raised from the dead is the hope of the cross, because now we see the cross not as the death penalty for Jesus but as the death penalty for us, and His resurrection means our eternal life now that our sins have been paid for and He is alive again.
            5. And note that this all happens according to the Scriptures.
            6. The Scriptures foretold all of these things, and when they all happened, they proved that Jesus’ resurrection was utterly unique and unlike anything that had ever happened before.
            7. Yes, people had been raised before Jesus, but no one had been raised like Jesus, according to the Scriptures, never to die again.
         4. Fourth, this was all made known to hundreds of witnesses.
            1. We are not speaking of some spiritual resurrection that no one saw but was just an idea in someone’s mind.
            2. This was a bodily, verifiable resurrection.
            3. Over 500 people saw Jesus alive from the dead, most of whom were still alive for decades after it happened and gave testimony to it, solidifying the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ in the early church.
            4. God gave ample evidence of Jesus’ resurrection so that now throughout all of history, we are not believing something privately revealed to one person or that no one saw but we are told to blindly believe; not at all!
            5. We believe something that literally hundreds of people witnessed, that Jesus, who was crucified, was raised from the dead with power as the Son of God and Savior of the world.
      3. The gospel, then, is the message of the Son of God coming into the world as a man, dying on the cross for our sins, being buried, rising again, and proving His resurrection by appearing to hundreds of people over a span of forty days, and then finally to the Apostle Paul.
      4. Now, Paul says that we are saved by this gospel if we receive it through faith and hold fast to this word.
         1. The gospel call to sinners is to hear the good news that God sent His Son as Savior of the world.
         2. But we don’t just want them to hear it.
         3. We call them to receive Jesus Christ through faith that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, who died on a cross and rose again.
         4. And we promise on the word of God that if they receive this gospel, they will be forgiven and have eternal life in Christ.
      5. That’s the message of the mission, the gospel of Jesus Christ.
         1. And it’s incredibly simple and focused, isn’t it?
         2. There isn’t a word in it about all the complicated, intersectional categories so popular today.
         3. The gospel is addressed to one type of person in the world: sinners.
         4. Because that’s really the only type of person in the world; we are all sinners, and we all need the gospel, don’t we?
      6. Now, you say, “What happens after someone believes the gospel?”
   3. Jesus said in Matthew 28:20 that we make disciples by teaching them to observe everything He commanded us.
      1. When someone believes the gospel, we then teach them everything else in the Bible.
      2. And we call them to submit to the authority of Christ mediated through His Word.
      3. And so the mission is simply this: preach the Word.
         1. Call the unbeliever to repentance and faith in Christ.
         2. Call the believer to walk worthy of his calling in Christ.
   4. Now, the last piece of this is understanding…
3. The pursuit of the mission
   1. The idea of unity in mission does not mean uniformity in tasks.
      1. Just like a team has many different positions as they pursue one goal, and just like the military has many different jobs as they pursue victory in battle, so the church has many different roles even as we pursue one mission.
      2. Paul hints at the necessity of diversity when we get to Eph 4:11-12…
         1. There are a variety of offices and tasks and gifts in the church.
         2. And in v. 16, Paul talks about every part doing its part for the growth of the body, or, to put it another way, for the progress of the gospel.
         3. Paul also talks about this in 1 Cor 12, when he talks about the one body composed of many member with diverse gifts.
      3. It’s really amazing how much goes into making this church function as it does.
         1. You think about a Sunday morning service and the variety of gifts needed to pull this off.
            1. We need someone to clean the facility to make sure when you get here, you don’t find last week’s bulletins and communion cups everywhere, it doesn’t smell like week-old coffee cups, the cheerios the kids tried to eat but missed their mouths get vacuumed so we aren’t overrun by bugs, and so on.
            2. We need someone to print the new bulletins for the service each week, which also requires some graphic design experience so they look nice and are easy to read.
            3. We need people who can fix problems to make sure the AC is working, the lights work, and the place looks nice.
            4. We need someone to run sound.
            5. We need someone to run the slides.
            6. We need someone to help with the livestream and another person to operate the cameras
            7. We need musicians for our worship in song
            8. We need greeters and ushers
            9. We need nursery workers and Sunday school teachers
            10. We need someone to take care of the landscaping
            11. We need a preacher
            12. We need someone to work in hospitality for coffee and information tables and so on.
            13. The list goes on and on and on.
            14. And the thing about it is, that’s just one ministry, the Sunday morning service!
            15. Think about how many different varieties of gifts and people are required for everything that goes on here!
            16. And we all do all of these different tasks with one purpose: so that the Word of God will spread rapidly and be glorified.
            17. When Danny maintains the grounds, that’s his purpose.
            18. When Tony and Gina and Alex clean the facility, that’s why they do it.
            19. When Jacklyn prints bulletins, when Josh and Sam plan and lead us in song, when the ushers help you find a seat, we all have the same goal: we want God’s Word to be proclaimed and glorified!
         2. No one can do this alone.
         3. And no one who is using their gifts to make sure the Word can be proclaimed and glorified can say their part is unimportant.
         4. Every part matters, and every part must work together in their diversity to pursue one, all-important mission: the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
   2. In this unified diversity of gifts, we pursue this mission unyieldingly.
      1. Let’s end where we started: Phil 1:27…
      2. Notice that we are called to **stand firm in one Spirit**.
         1. We don’t depart from pursuing the mission.
         2. Adversaries will come to corrupt the gospel.
         3. False teachers and false brethren will slip in to divert our attention away from the mission.
         4. We must stand firm.
         5. We must plant our feet in the Word of God, and no matter what winds blow in the culture or what men want us to do or how people respond to the gospel, we must stand firm that we are people of one mind serving one Master pursuing one mission.
      3. This is the real test.
         1. It’s not whether you can pursue the mission for a week, or a year, or a decade.
         2. It’s: Will you stand firm in one Spirit for a lifetime?
         3. That’s what you love about men like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones.
         4. They lived through all kinds of adversity, all kinds of changes in the visible church, all kinds of compromises all around them with the world, but they stood firm in their ministries with the churches they pastored until the end.
         5. Even when they and their churches stood alone, they stood firm.
4. Conclusion
   1. Brothers and sisters, may we be people who stand firm.
      1. People of one mind.
      2. People serving one Master.
      3. People pursuing one mission.
   2. The next question we need to answer is this: How do we preserve this unity at a practical level? That’s for next time.