**The Worthy Walk, Part 8**

**Ephesians 4:3**

**May 16, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. Over the past few weeks, we have been considering the question, “What is the unity of the Spirit?”
      1. In this section of Ephesians, Paul is exhorting believers to walk worthy of our calling as Christians, and a significant aspect of the worthy walk is to preserve the unity of the Spirit.
      2. We have seen that the unity of the Spirit consists of three key elements:
         1. The Spirit gives Christ’s people the same mind.
         2. The people of God serve the same Master.
         3. And the people of God pursue the same mission.
         4. These three elements are crucial to the unity of the church, and where they are missing, unity will be unattainable.
      3. We might put it another way.
         1. We all must have the same doctrine of Scripture so that we agree on what the Bible is, both in its authority and its sufficiency for our lives.
         2. We all must have the same doctrine of God so that we believe the same things about God and His character.
         3. And we all must have the same understanding of what the gospel is so that we are proclaiming the same Savior and the same plan of salvation.
      4. The unity of mind, master, and mission is the unity created by the Spirit of God in His church.
   2. The next question that Eph 4:3 raises for us is this: How do we preserve the unity of the Spirit?
      1. We have to begin by understanding that our task is to preserve, not create, this unity.
         1. When we talked about the ecumenical movement a few weeks ago, we noted how it is a group of people who come together with all of their differences and disagreements, and they are trying to find a way to create unity among themselves.
         2. They are not unified, but they want some type of unity, and they even think it is a divine mandate for them to create unity among themselves!
         3. The impetus for this comes from Jesus’ prayer in John 17.
            1. Jesus prayed this in John 17:11…
            2. And then again, we read this in John 17:20-21…
            3. And so people take these verses and they say, “See, Jesus’ desire is for all of His people to be one, to be unified, and so we have to come together and create this unity that Jesus desires for us to have!”
            4. The problem with this approach is that it misunderstands what Jesus is doing in John 17.
            5. Jesus is not teaching the disciples in this passage.
            6. Jesus is praying to the Father in this passage.
            7. He is not saying to the disciples, either the original eleven who heard this prayer or us today, “I want you all to come together as one in My name, so put aside your differences and your opinions and figure out a way to be united in front of the watching world.”
            8. Not at all!
            9. Jesus is asking God the Father to make His disciples unified in Him and in His name.
            10. This is not a command to us; this is a prayer request to the Father.
            11. That means that the One Jesus expected would carry out this request is not the people of the church but their heavenly Father.
            12. The question has to be asked, “Did the Father answer the prayer of His Son as the Son was going to the cross?”
            13. If the answer is “yes,” then this is not a command for us to create unity because the Father has already done that!
            14. If the answer is “no,” then what hope do we ever have of unity if not even God the Son could get His prayers for unity answered!
            15. A proper understanding of John 17, then, demands that we say that the unity of the people of Christ is created by the Spirit at the command of the Father at the request of the Son.
            16. It’s not a human work or a human accomplishment.
         4. We can see how the Spirit accomplishes this work in 1 Cor 12:13, where Paul says…
            1. The Spirit places us into the one body of Christ upon our belief in Jesus Christ.
            2. At that moment, we are united to the people of God.
            3. The unity exists from the moment of conversion because the Spirit immerses us in Christ by making us a member of His body, the church.
            4. There is, then, no need for Christians to go around trying to create unity or trying to achieve unity.
            5. That is the work of the Spirit in answer to the prayer of Jesus in John 17, and we thank God that He answered His Son’s prayer for us all to be one in His name.
         5. And this is why in Eph 4:3 Paul says not that we are to create or manufacture unity but to preserve the unity of the Spirit, that is, the unity the Spirit creates when He baptizes us into the body of Christ.
      2. The word translated **preserve** in v. 3 could be used in a variety of contexts, but the one that best fits Paul’s meaning is *to guard* or *to protect*.
         1. For example, in the verse we just read in John 17, verse 11, Jesus said, **Holy Father, keep them in Your name.”**
         2. That’s the same term as Paul uses in Eph 4:3 to speak of preserving the unity of the Spirit.
         3. Jesus’ prayer was that the Father would protect us by His own name.
         4. The name of our God is a strong tower, a fortress of protection, something that preserves us from the attacks of the evil one.
         5. When Paul, then, says to preserve the unity of the Spirit, he is calling us to protect it, to guard it from destruction at the hands of the world, the flesh, or the devil.
         6. It’s vital that we grasp this: The Spirit puts us in the body of Christ, making us unified with the people of God.
         7. Our job, once that takes place, if we want to walk worthy of Christ, is to ensure that unity is protected from sinful disturbances that threaten to divide the church into ungodly factions.
   3. The question, then, is how do we do this?
      1. We see two things in Eph 4:3 that point us in the right direction to preserving the unity of the church in a real and practical way.
      2. When sin threatens the unity of the church, when factions begin to form, when feelings are hurt and people are upset and decisions are made that, we see two things that give us practical help to preserving unity so these non-essential issues do not fracture us.
      3. Number one: We preserve the unity of the Spirit by doing so…
2. With a Christ-centered focus
   1. Notice how Paul says that we are to **preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**
      1. That phrase, **in the bond of peace**, helps us understand how we can actively seek to preserve the unity of the church.
      2. The word **bond** was used of something that held two or more separate things together.
         1. For example, in Col 2:19, Paul says that the human body is held together by joints and ligaments.
         2. He is applying that to the body of Christ.
         3. Just like the human body is held together by joints and ligaments so that your one body doesn’t fall apart, so the church must be bonded together, it must be held together.
         4. The question, then, is what is that bond?
      3. We don’t have to go far to find out, because Paul says we preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond **of peace**.
         1. What holds the unity of the church together is peace.
         2. Peace with God, and peace with one another.
         3. The church should be a place marked by peace because the fruit of the Spirit is peace.
         4. And this peace is what God has given to us to help us overcome differences and difficulties in the church that otherwise would tear us apart.
   2. When we think about peace, though, to say that we should preserve unity with peace almost sounds redundant, and that is why I say that we preserve our unity with a Christ-centered focus.
      1. When we think about peace in the context of Ephesians, the meaning cannot be limited to something as simple as a cessation of hostilities or even a horizontal friendliness.
      2. Look back at Eph 2:14-15…
         1. We spent time on this passage when we looked at it a few months ago, and we noted that our peace is not merely something we possess, but our peace is Christ Himself.
         2. He is the one who takes the Jews and Gentiles, two groups that hated each other, and makes us into one new man and thus establishes peace between two groups that were formerly hostile.
         3. It is this new creation, this new man that verse 15 describes, that comes about as a result of Christ’s work on the cross that creates peace among us.
         4. When Paul says that Christ Himself is our peace, what that means is that Christ is what enables us to lay aside our former hostilities and come together in unity because He has made us new in Him.
      3. When we come to Eph 4:3, then, the bond of peace is not a human peace, but it is the bond that is Christ Himself.
         1. If we want to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we must stay focused on what it is that unites us: the person of Jesus Christ.
         2. Disunity comes when we begin to lose our Christ-centered focus and we become enamored with something else.
      4. We see a vivid illustration of this in the church at Corinth in 1 Cor 1.
         1. Paul begins in v. 10 by exhorting them to be of the same mind, to restore the unity that they did not preserve because of their sinfulness.
         2. And then in v. 11, he says that what broke their unity is quarrels.
            1. It wasn’t a doctrinal dispute.
            2. It wasn’t an issue of some biblical issue of central significance.
            3. They were fighting, they were quarrelling, they were arguing like two siblings stuck in an intense rivalry.
         3. And then in v. 12 we see the nature of the quarrel…
            1. They were identifying themselves with various spiritual leaders as a way to show off their Christian credentials.
            2. This is not like today when people say they are Calvinists or Arminians, because those labels do have some substantive differences in doctrine.
            3. These labels had no difference in doctrine.
            4. Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ all were on the same page about doctrine.
            5. And so they weren’t using these labels as a way to identify differences in beliefs.
            6. They were simply using these labels as a way to feel superior to others.
            7. It would be like today if you had pastors eating lunch, and one says, “I went to The Master’s Seminary and studied under John MacArthur.” And another says, “Oh, well I went to Southern Seminary and studied under Tom Schreiner, the premiere NT scholar of today.” And then I chime in, “How nice for you both. I went to both schools and studied under both!”
            8. Big deal, right?
            9. Who cares?
            10. None of these things matter.
            11. What matters is Christ.
         4. And that’s Paul’s point in v. 13…
            1. Is Christ now divided up among His servants?
            2. Was Tom Schreiner crucified for you?
            3. Were you baptized in the name of John MacArthur?
            4. No!
            5. The only person who matters is Christ.
            6. He was crucified for you, and you were baptized in His name, and He has not been divided into factions.
         5. The Corinthians, you see, had lost a Christ-centered focus.
            1. They were not preserving the unity of the Spirit in bond of the peace of Christ.
            2. They were dividing Christ.
            3. They were quarreling and fighting over who was more spiritual, who had more credentials, who was trained by whom.
            4. And Paul says, “That’s ridiculous. Stay focused on Christ. He is the peace that glues your church together.”
            5. And the minute you get caught up in chasing something other than Christ, you will stop preserving the unity of the church.
   3. If we want to preserve the unity of the Spirit, then, we must keep our focus in the church on Christ.
   4. Now, second, to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we must do so…
3. With a diligent heart
   1. Notice how Paul says that we are to be **diligent** to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
      1. It’s not enough merely to guard it and protect it.
      2. We must protect it diligently!
      3. The Greek word for **being diligent** comes from the verb σπουδάζω.
      4. It sounds similar to our English word *speed*, and in some contexts, it means just that: make haste, speed along.
      5. But it also has the meaning of doing something eagerly or to work hard at some task, to be especially careful about performing your duty.
         1. For example, in 1 Tim 2:15, Paul wrote…
            1. As a steward of the gospel of God’s grace, Timothy must work hard and be careful how he handles the Word of God.
            2. He can’t just show up on Sunday morning and crack open a scroll and say whatever thought pops into his head.
            3. He needs to study, to work hard over the text, to be in prayer, to make sure that when he gives an account to Christ, he is not ashamed of shoddy workmanship in his teaching and preaching the Word.
         2. We also see this term in Heb 4:11…
            1. Be diligent to enter salvation.
            2. How much does eternity matter to you?
            3. Do you see what happened to Israel when they didn’t put a priority on entering the Promised Land by faith?
            4. Don’t be like them, but be diligent in your faith, be especially conscientious to ensure that you are trusting in Christ.
         3. One more, 2 Peter 1:10…
            1. Here, Peter says much the same thing as Hebrews.
            2. Make sure that you are really saved by applying the word of God to your life.
            3. Don’t just say a prayer and then kick back and think that’s all there is to it.
            4. No, the faith we must have before God is a living faith, an active faith, and we want to be certain that our faith is genuine so that our salvation is genuine too.
            5. Be diligent in your obedience to God’s Word.
      6. In Eph 4:3, then, we have a better idea of this term.
         1. Unity should be a top priority for us.
         2. Just as the assurance of our salvation should matter a great deal to us and be at the top of our list, so should unity in the church be important to us.
         3. Just as a preacher should take care of how he handles the Word of God, so we should take care as the people of God with how we handle His church.
         4. We want to be diligent in preserving unity.
      7. And this is hard!
         1. It’s easy, I suppose, when everyone is getting along and there are not disagreements about anything and no personality conflicts.
         2. But it’s hard when a difficulty arises.
         3. And what happens when difficulties arise in the church is most people put almost no effort at all into preserving the unity of the Spirit.
         4. What do they do instead?
         5. They just leave.
         6. That’s contrary to the worthy walk.
         7. To be diligent about something is to work hard at something that is hard.
         8. And unity can be difficult to preserve in this fallen world, as we have discussed in this series.
         9. Now, there are times when a separation is necessary.
            1. There are doctrinal issues such as we have discussed
            2. There can be issues where you have disqualified or unqualified leaders
            3. People move, change jobs, have new opportunities to use their gifts, and so on.
            4. But when it is possible, we should be diligent to preserve unity where there is genuine unity.
            5. And sometimes that might take time.
            6. I think of Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways.
            7. And they had disunity for a season, but they worked at restoring that unity, and we see that eventually their unity was restored.
      8. Because this is hard, how do we practically exercise diligence in preserving unity?
         1. It’s one thing to say, “Be diligent to do this,” but it’s also important to show you how.
         2. And so I want to give you four ways that you can practically show diligence in seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit.
   2. Pray for discernment
      1. We should always pray for discernment, especially today when discernment is in short supply.
      2. But the kind of discernment I’m referencing here is the kind discussed in Phil 1:9-10.
         1. Paul is praying for this church that struggled mightily with unity.
         2. He is praying that their love for God and for each other would abound more and more.
         3. And that this love would be accompanied by real knowledge and all discernment.
         4. Now what does he want them to know?
         5. He tells them in v. 10.
         6. This knowledge and discernment should result in them being able to approve the things that are excellent.
         7. Now, that translation is not ideal, as the NASB footnote points out.
         8. The word translated **excellent** has the idea of things that differ.
         9. And in this context, the meaning is something like this, “So that you might test to know what things really matter,” with the implication that they would focus on those things and be sincere and blameless.
         10. Paul, then, wants the Philippians to have the kind of discernment that enables them to tell the difference between the big issues they should focus on and the minor issues they should let go.
         11. “I want you to have discernment to focus on the things that are really important,” Paul says.
      3. That’s the kind of discernment people need in the church to preserve unity.
         1. We need to know if something is worth fighting over.
         2. And we also need to know when there is something that maybe isn’t our preference or even our personal conviction, but it’s not worth dividing over.
         3. I remember this church I knew of in Kansas, and every single family at that church homeschooled their kids.
            1. That was the glue that bonded them together.
            2. But in that church they had elders who were teaching that sinners are justified by grace and works.
            3. They didn’t have the gospel right.
            4. That’s a mixed-up church.
            5. That’s a church without any discernment.
            6. Now, I can make a really good case for homeschooling, but I would never build a church around it.
            7. And I would never shame anyone who educated their children a different way.
            8. But the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone?
            9. Now that I will build a church around because that is the gospel on which Christ builds His church, right?
            10. But so often in the church we come together over something that does not rise to the level of most importance and we tolerate errors in things that should be of most importance.
            11. We’ll divide over trivial concerns and lesser important concerns.
         4. We need discernment so when an issue arises in the church, we know whether we should take our stand or whether we should back off and let God work without creating a disturbance over it.
      4. If you want to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit, then diligently pray for discernment to know the things that matter and the things that are of secondary importance.
   3. Examine your motives
      1. Look over at Phil 2:3-4…
      2. Why do you do what you do in the church?
         1. Do you ask yourself that question from time to time?
         2. Why do I insist on things being this way?
         3. Why do I care so much that it works out this way and not that way?
         4. Is it because I think that’s what is in the best interest of the whole church, or is it because that’s the way I like it?
      3. Here, Paul highlights how dysfunctional the unity had become at Philippi, and they were losing their unity of mind and mission and master because their motives were self-driven rather than driven by love for Christ and His church.
         1. I would say that one of the main causes of unnecessary conflict in the church is people who make decisions or get upset because of how something affects them personally.
         2. Even if it is in the best interest of the church as a whole, if they don’t like it, then they can’t have unity.
         3. In fact, you have some churches that are so dysfunctional that the preferences of a small number of self-centered people hold the entire church hostage so that it can’t advance in its mission!
         4. Thankfully, that is not the case here, but I have seen this in churches in the past, and it’s a really dreadful situation.
         5. It cripples the church.
         6. Not everyone in the church has enough clout to bring things to a grinding halt if decisions cross their desires, but that doesn’t mean the attitude can’t still be there even if the effect isn’t.
      4. We need to examine our motives, especially when we are upset, annoying, or frustrated by what is happening in the church.
         1. Am I upset or frustrated because something has happened that I need to take a stand against because it violates a clear teaching of God’s Word, or because something has been decided that will be harmful to the body of Christ as a whole?
         2. Or am I upset because I liked the way things were and now they’ve changed, or because a decision was made that doesn’t suit my preferences, or because of an interpersonal interaction that offended me?
         3. We should constantly be on the lookout for self intruding into why we do the things we do, and constantly be diliegent to ensure that we are looking out for what is best for others because we see them as more important than ourselves.
      5. Third, we cultivate a diligent heart when we…
   4. Pursue edification
      1. This goes right along with the previous point.
      2. Look at Rom 14:19…
         1. Here we have the context of another church squabble, this time over the diet of other believers.
            1. Some people ate only vegetables, while others were ready for the bacon-wrapped sirloin with a side of shrimp.
            2. And the church was dividing over this issue.
            3. You had one half of the church, and only vegetarians could sit there.
            4. And then you had the other half of the church, and only people who were able to eat meat along with their veggies were allowed to sit there.
            5. And these two sides were not coming together.
            6. And diet was becoming a significant problem in the church because of its connection with previous religious experiences for some church members.
         2. Paul sums up this entire chapter in v. 19, saying…
            1. We’re not going to focus and get all bogged down by meat and vegetables.
            2. Eating and drinking have nothing to do with the kingdom of God, verse 17 says.
            3. Focus on pursuing what builds the other person up.
            4. Focus on edifying your brothers and sisters in Christ.
            5. Look, if your brother is a vegetarian, just let it be.
            6. You don’t have to convince him to eat meat no matter how much you think he his missing out on something delicious.
            7. Instead of bringing up his vegetarian diet every time, or always showing up to your lunch meeting with the meat tornado sandwich, focus on what will edify both of you.
            8. Pursue the kinds of things that will generate peace in the church, not division.
      3. We have this natural inclination because of our sin to focus on what divides us.
         1. It just really gets our blood moving when we have a good controversy!
         2. People take sides, you have the good guys and the bad guys, and you rally your people to your side and talk about how dumb the other side is.
         3. And Paul says, “Brothers and sisters, let’s not do that! Let’s focus on what brings us together, what builds us up in our faith!”
         4. Don’t get all worked up over disputable matters, things that are indifferent.
         5. You say, “Well how do I know if this is something indifferent?”
         6. Point 1 above – pray for discernment.
         7. Before confronting someone over something that may be a preference issue, or a disputable matter, have some prayer time first and discern if it’s a way you could pray for that person, or if it’s something you need to prayerfully address with them.
         8. And pursue those things that build up, that promote harmony in the church.
      4. Finally…
   5. Encourage the strugglers
      1. Phil 4:2-3…
      2. You want to talk about a moment where the sermon just got real?
         1. Imagine being those two women in the church as Paul’s letter is read.
         2. They just got called out.
         3. By name!
         4. And they’re fighting over something, we don’t know what, but whatever it was, it wasn’t an issue they should have been fighting about.
         5. And we know these were not some fringe Christians, some ladies who had no clue about doctrine or who were deviant in their faith.
         6. They had shared Paul’s struggle in the cause of the gospel.
         7. They were his co-workers.
         8. They were dear to him, but for whatever reason, they were not getting along with each other.
      3. And so Paul calls out his true companion, unnamed here, and says, “Please help these two women live in harmony!”
         1. You know, there are times when a problem is so deep, it’s become so hurtful, that you need a third party to step in and help restore unity.
         2. And that requires that you have people in the church courageous enough to mediate those issues.
         3. I can only imagine how difficult Paul’s companion must have thought this task would be, because Paul rarely calls out people like this by name.
         4. This must have weighed heavily on his heart and been a serious issue that needed addressed.
         5. But if we want to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we sometimes have to encourage those who are struggling to live in unity.
         6. Even if we have to keep doing it over and over again, sometimes we need help.
         7. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:9?
         8. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
         9. If you see two people in the church who are not getting along, prayerfully see if you can encourage unity, if you can help them live in harmony in the Lord.
4. Conclusion
   1. Those are some practical steps to being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.
      1. Pray for discernment
      2. Examine your motives
      3. Pursue edification
      4. And encourage the strugglers
   2. Guarding the church’s unity is not an easy task, but we are called to this task by the Word of God.
      1. And in the end, what holds us together is nothing that we can do.
      2. What holds us together is the bond of peace, which is Christ Himself.