

Maintaining Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6
Halifax: 3 February 2008

Introduction

When Junior was almost seven, he mentioned to his parents that he would like to have a Bible of his own—a grown-up Bible.

- His parents told him that if he were to have a Bible, it would be his responsibility to take care of it.
 - Junior heartily agreed, so his parents decided to give him a nice Bible for his seventh birthday.
 - How happy Junior was when he opened it up!
 - It was a burgundy Bible—a New King James—with a leather cover!
- At first, Junior was very careful with it.
 - He was careful when he turned the pages and he always made sure to bring it home—and to keep it away from little children that might tear the pages out.
 - But as time went on, he got used to having it and he wasn't so careful.
 - One day, when he came home from church, he set it on the car to go and watch a couple of squirrels that were having a quarrel...
 - He left it outside all night and the pages got all wrinkly from the dew.
- Then, a few weeks later, his family went on vacation and Junior left his Bible in one of the motel rooms.
 - His parents called the motel to ask about it, and they found it, and they even mailed it, but they did not package it very well and the cover was damaged in transit.
 - Soon Junior's new Bible began to look like an old Bible with the pages falling out.
 - Junior did not maintain what he had been given and so he suffered loss.

That is what we are going to look at today in the Sermon.

- As His people, the Lord has given us something very precious that we are to maintain.
 - He has brought us together as a family—
 - He has taken us sinners, provided atonement for our sins, given us a new heart to turn to Him and serve Him, and made us His very own sons and daughters.
 - He has been exceedingly gracious to us!

- We, who were once enemies—divided from God and divided from each other—have been established in this house of love...
 - but if we are to enjoy all the benefits of this house, we must maintain the unity that we have been given.
- The first three chapters of Ephesians are dedicated to describing how great God’s grace to us is...
 - They lay out for us the benefits that God has lavished upon us and the hope that we have that at last God will perfect us as His sons and daughters—
 - and give us our full inheritance.
- But now, as we come to chapter 4,
 - the focus of Ephesians shifts from a declaration of what God has done to a plea for how we ought to live now that we have been made God’s children.
 - Consider, then, as we begin this morning that:

I. Here is a plea that you should walk worthy of calling with which you have been called.

A. I call it a plea because Paul says,

- “I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”
1. The word “beseech” is one that we don’t use a lot today, but it is a good word.
 - It speaks of an intense pleading or an urging of us to do something.
 - It is something the person beseeching you considers to be very important—
 - something that he is trying to alert you that needs to be done—
 - It is an earnest call to you.
 2. And that something here is to walk worthy of the calling you have to be God’s own children!
 - a. Your walk is your conduct or your behaviour...
 - It is how you live...
 - how you go about your life...
 - how you conduct yourself along.
 - b. And walking worthy means to walk in a way that is in keeping with your calling or appropriate to it... a way that is fitting.
 - 1) You know,
 - if someone is called to be an aerobics teacher, it is not in keeping with their calling to be out of shape...

- 2) Likewise, in Proverbs, King Lemuel's mother gives him advice about behaviour that is appropriate for kings:
 - Prov 31:4-5: It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Nor for princes intoxicating drink; Lest they drink and forget the law, And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.
 - 3) The question for us is,
 - What behaviour is appropriate for those who have been made God's own sons and daughters?
 - How should we live now that we have been called into His household?
- c. The plea of Ephesians 4 is that since God has called you to come and live in His house as His sons and daughters,
- it is only proper for you to live like God's sons and daughters!
 - Every family has family characteristics that distinguish them from others.
 - As God's children, you are to be distinguished by that holy love that has always been a part of His family...
 - The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always lived in that holy love with each other,
 - and now, as those who are added to this most noble household,
 - you are to conform yourself to the ways of that house...
 - you are to honour your Father and to obey Him in all things...
 - You are to imitate Him and to bring honour to His glorious house.
 - You are children of the King of Glory, and it is for you to live accordingly!
3. This plea to walk worthy is a plea that continues all the way to the end of Paul's letter!
- a. This week we are only looking at the introduction,
 - but this introduction provides a summary for us of all that walking worthy as God's children entails.
 - b. And so it is that this week, we will get an overview, and in the weeks to come we will look at the details or what it means to walk worthy of our calling to be God's own children,
 - a holy temple for the Lord.

- B. What force this plea has upon you—what force it has upon every believer!
1. I tell you, if you have true faith—if you truly believe that God has done in Christ what He says He has done...
 - a. You will find that you are constrained by His love...
 - As you realise how much the Lord has done for you and what a privilege it is to be His sons and daughters,
 - you will want to do all you can to live up to what you are.
 - b. As Paul put it in Corinthians,
 - 2 Cor 5:14-15: For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
 - c. There is a sense of justice about it...
 - a sense of debt—a debt of love and gratitude...
 - a sense that you want to do all you can for the Lord because He has done so much for you.
 2. The plea to walk worthy is also compelling because of who it comes from...
 - a. It comes from Paul, the prisoner of the Lord...
 - Here is a man in prison because of his service to the Lord pleading with these Ephesians to walk worthy of the Lord!
 - Paul is in prison because of walking worthy, but his troubles do not in the least hinder him from urging others to walk worthy.
 - He does not adjust his counsel simply because there might be hardship involved!
 - He was practicing what he preached!
 - His example reminds us how stupid it is to think a little bit of earthly comfort warrants compromise in our walk!
 - This man, calling others to walk worthy—is himself walking worthy even when that involves suffering.
 - What does this say to us when we are unwilling to bear the frown of family members for our walk—
 - or unwilling to suffer a little loss or a little inconvenience for Christ?
 - Shame on us!

- b. Not only is Paul's plea compelling because he is a prisoner,
 - but also because he is a man who deeply loves the people he is writing to...
 - A plea comes with much greater force when it comes from someone who loves you—who has spent himself for you...
 - And so it was the Paul had spent much time in Ephesus, ministering God's word to them even though his life was in danger for it...
 - He had laboured night and day among them with tears, urging them to serve the Lord...
 - And now, here he is in prison, still thinking of them when others would have been thinking only of themselves...
 - But you will say, "how does that cause his plea to have force upon me?"
 - I am not loved by this man... I am not an Ephesian... this man does not even know me..."
 - Yes, but when you see a man beseeching those he loves...
 - and you know that man to be a wise and holy man...
 - the advice is compelling...
 - If Paul thought this was important for the Ephesians,
 - then it must be important for me also if I have been called to be God's son.
- c. But this has all the more force when you remember that Paul is an apostle.
 - 1) As an apostle, he was sent by the Lord to plead these things...
 - This is not at last the word of Paul, but the word of the Lord that calls us to walk worthy.
 - Paul is His faithful ambassador who brings His message to us.
 - 2) Therefore, this pleading is the pleading of our heavenly Father Himself, and of our Lord Jesus Christ who loves us better than Paul loved the Ephesians...
 - Who went to the cross in order that we might live in His house...
 - who suffered for us the very curse of God...
 - who did all that was required to bring us into His family!
 - And it is, my brothers and sisters, this loving Saviour who beseeches you to walk worthy of your calling!
 - It is the love of Christ who gave Himself for us that constrains us!

- With what wonderful force this plea comes to us!
 - He says, “I have made you God’s own children,
 - I have not only rescued you from the eternal fires of Hell,
 - but I have brought you to live in my Father’s house as real members of the family...
 - Now I beseech you to walk worthy of your calling!”

TRANS> Does this not make you say...

- “Yes Lord, show me how I should walk!
 - Teach me to live as I ought to live in your house!
 - Show me the way and I will walk in it!”
- Is this something you really want to know?
 - Well then, I have good news for you...
 - The Lord gives you such counsel through His apostle from here all the way from chapter 4 to the end of Ephesians...
 - Now that you are His children, He is at work in you to shape you...
 - And He shapes you not only by giving you inward strength through the Spirit, but also counsel from His Word—
 - we follow Christ by receiving and obeying His Word.
- As I told you before, these first three verses of chapter four are an overview...
 - In verse 2, we will see the manner in which we are to walk as God’s children...
 - and in verse 3 we will see the goal we are to have in our walk.

Okay, so from verse 2...

II. What is the manner in which you are to walk if you walk worthy?

A. First, see that you are to walk “with all lowliness.”

1. In other words, you are to see what you are before the Lord!
 - a. You are a hell-deserving sinner who has no right to God’s favour.
 - b. You have nothing from yourself to bring to God, nothing to boast about, nothing but what He has given you.
2. This is truly the foundation of everything!
 - a. You can’t even enter God’s house until you are lowly...

- This is how Jesus began His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount:
 - He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...”
 - In other words, you haven’t even entered the kingdom of heaven until you realise that you are spiritually bankrupt.
 - The sermon on the mount is given as an example of the king of preaching that Jesus did as He went from place to place...
 - And seeing one’s lowliness was a foundational precept.
 - It is only when you see that you have nothing to bring to God that you turn to Jesus Christ for salvation...
 - As long as you think you don’t need Christ for salvation—that you are okay the way you are...or that you can work it out...
 - You can’t even enter His kingdom.
 - You are excluded from God’s house.
 - Causing you to see what you are before God is one of the first things God does when He converts a soul to enter into His house...
 - If you have not come to an end of self and cast yourself on Jesus, you haven’t even been established as God’s child...
 - You need to repent and believe!
- b. But then after you are in, it is only right that you should continue to walk in lowliness...
- You do not walk worthy if, as the years go by and God begins to change your life, you become proud and arrogant!
 - You bring honour to your heavenly Father by remembering where you came from and what you are apart from His grace.
3. Do you realise how much lowliness will affect your walk as a believer?
- a. First of all, it affects where you look for your help.
- Jesus said “Without me you can do nothing,”
 - but if you cease to walk in lowliness, you begin to shift your reliance from Him to yourself!
 - And when you do that, you will begin to live in a way that is not good—not worthy of God’s sons...
 - When you do not look to the Lord to help you, he will withdraw his help...

- Remember when Israel tried to go into battle without God's help?
 - They were crushed by their enemies!
 - He left them to themselves and world destroyed them.
 - So it is that you will start to lose the battle with the world, the flesh, and the Devil until you realise that you need the Lord.
- b. Secondly, if you cease to walk in lowliness, you will no longer be grateful...
- 1) The attitude of a grateful person is that he can never do enough for his Lord.
 - Like Paul, he considers himself to be debtor!
 - It just doesn't seem fair that he has been given so much when he has done so little!
 - 2) And obviously, if that is your attitude, you will be willing to do a whole lot more than you would if you felt you had been given little—
 - Rather than comparing yourself to others to judge your service,
 - you will look at what Jesus has done for you!
 - 3) You know what a difference gratitude makes in a worker...
 - If a worker feels that he has been given a job that he does not deserve and he is truly grateful, he will be a very hard worker indeed!
 - But the one who always thinks that he has not been given what he is entitled will cut corners and not really give himself to his work.
- c. Thirdly, if you cease to be lowly, you will depart from your Lord's example of considering others more important than yourself...
- 1) Whether you are the lowliest of servants or the noblest of princes,
 - you are to consider others more important than yourself...
 - a) If you have been given authority over others, that doesn't mean that you follow all their orders—far from it...
 - It means rather that you lead them as one who cares more about them than you do for yourself!
 - It means that you don't take advantage of your position, but use it for the sake of others...
 - Jesus is our perfect example...
 - He was the most gifted, the most able, the most powerful man who ever lived,

- but he used His gifts and His abilities and His authority for the good of His people.
 - He was lowly even though He had no sin.
 - He treated others as better than himself.
- b) And if you are under the authority of others, it also means that you will consider the needs of others as more important than your own...
- In other words, you will live to do good in your service to those God has placed over you—to obey them, to please them, to serve them, to benefit them...
- 2) The lowly person is the one who considers the happiness and welfare of others to be more important than his own.
- He lives for others—he cheerfully lays down his life for them because he has more regard for them than for himself.
 - He is always serving and serving with joy... not with an attitude.
 - That is the way God’s children are supposed to be in His house.

TRANS> You can surely see why the great preacher of the fourth century,

- Chrysostom, said that lowliness is the foundation of all virtue.
- And why Augustine said that if anyone was to ask what the first principle of Christianity is, he would say “humility,” and if the second “humility,” and if the third, “humility.”
- Without lowliness, you cannot walk worthy of your calling to live in God’s house.
- Remember that you are but a creature, and the Lord is God.
- You are but a sinful creature, and the Lord is holy...
- Anything other than lowliness is completely out of order for you who have been called to live in His house.
- Closely related to lowliness is the next word that the Lord gives us to describe the manner of a worthy walk...

B. It is to be with all gentleness or meekness...

1. I really prefer the older translations here that use the word “meekness.”
 - a. It is, I believe, a word that is not well known to us because we have lost any awareness of meekness as a virtue.
 - That is not surprising—the Greeks had the same attitude about meekness in Jesus day...

- From our first days we are encouraged to be assertive rather than meek.
 - And what we end up with is a society where people are very assertive when it comes to demanding their own rights,
 - but has little strength to stand up for what is right and true.

TRANS> Meekness is exactly the opposite.

- b. A meek person is one who, because of the lowliness we have already spoken about, does not feel that he is capable of self-government...
 - That is a huge admission for us proud humans to make!
 - It is a complete turn around from what we are by the fall...
 - When the human race, represented in Adam, fell, we cast off God's government and decided that we would govern ourselves!
 - Ever since then, there has been no real meekness apart from God's transforming grace,
 - for no matter how timid and unassertive a person may be,
 - if they are not meek before the Lord, they are not meek because He is our creator to whom all allegiance is due.

2. How does meekness show itself in our walk?

- a. It shows itself in an eager desire to follow the Lord's counsel rather than to walk according to your own desires and wisdom...
 - You realise that your own way is the way of folly and that it is your place to be under the Lord as Lord...
 - That as a member of the household of your heavenly Father who is infinitely wise and good,
 - it is for you to do whatever He tells you...
 - Even if your obedience leads you to the cross, as it will in this world that is hostile to God...
 - that is still the path you choose.
 - In this way, meekness makes you very bold, not to stand up for your own selfish rights, but to stand up for what God says...
 - The meek person abandons self interest to live for His Lord...
 - In doing so, he does not actually lose his life, but finds it.
- b. Meekness also shows itself in a cheerful submission to whatever the Father sends you...

- 1) The assertive child is the one in the grocery store demanding the candy bar or the crackers or the toy...
 - the meek child may ask, but he respectfully leaves the decision to the superior wisdom of his parents...

- 2) If you are meek in your Father's house,
 - a) You will be content with whatever gifts He has given you...
 - Are you less gifted than your neighbour?
 - Do you have less ability at organisation? less intelligence? less personality?
 - Well inasmuch as your weakness is due to sinful misuse of your gifts and neglect to improve them,
 - you will labour to change it,
 - but inasmuch as it is due to your Father's distribution of gifts within His house,
 - you will serve Him in your calling with gratitude—pleased to be a door keeper in his house rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

 - b) You will also be content with whatever material provision He has given you...
 - (i) Has He given you poverty?
 - He knows best—you will serve Him with little—
 - you will see how you may honour Him as the widow with her two mites...

 - (ii) Has He given you riches?
 - You will distribute them freely according to His directives—not hoarding them or exhausting them on yourself, but using them for the good of others.

 - (iii) Has He given you sickness?
 - You will look to see how you can serve Him and honour Him in your sickness, and will count a privilege to have the opportunity to do so in this way.

 - (iv) Has He given you a difficult mother in law? or a difficult spouse or parents?
 - Once again, it is His doing...

- You will serve Him where He had placed you with meekness, making the most of the opportunity that is yours.
3. Brothers and sisters, your level of meekness will have much to do with how you treat others.
- a. Isn't it true that most of your irascibility occurs not so much because of what others have done to you
 - but because you are unhappy with whatever is going on in your life...
 - You take it out on who ever happens to come along—your children, your husband, your wife, your parents... whoever...
 - Your lack of meek acceptance of what God has given you causes you to disrupt the peace of God's house.
 - b. A lack of meekness can also cause you to be mealy mouthed...
 - 1) Some people think that the mealy mouthed person is the meek person,
 - but those who are meek before God are often accused of arrogance because they are absolutely tenacious about standing by whatever their Lord has said...
 - 2) If you are meek before God, you will stand up for His truth,
 - If you are parent, you will correct your children in His name...
 - you will discipline them with the rod as he commands...
 - His way, not your way.
 - If you are a father, you will bring God's word to bear upon your entire household—with gentle firmness.
 - In dealing with those who depart from the Lord, you will not mince words or compromise...
 - You will stand firmly for the truth.

TRANS> So you see then that a worthy walk will be characterised by lowliness and meekness...

- but now comes the hardest part...

C. The manner of a worthy walk will be a walk that **continues** in lowliness and meekness.

1. As our text says, "with longsuffering, bearing with one another!"
 - a. When do you cease to be lowly and meek?
 - Is it not when you get weary of it all because the way is hard and difficult?

- Well you see here that those who walk worthy are longsuffering bear with one another.
- b. When you are longsuffering and forbearing, you keep on loving your brother even when it is hard to love him.
- 1) You keep one whether the service itself is difficult or whether your brother himself is difficult...
- a) It doesn't matter if the service is hard or boring or emotionally draining—you stick at it...
 - I think here about some of the women in our church who work so hard at caring for their families...
 - They run circles around most of us!
 - b) But it also doesn't matter if the people you serve are difficult to love...
 - Perhaps they do not do their share, but that doesn't change what you do...
 - Perhaps they do not show gratitude, but you continue
 - Perhaps you don't see them changing—but you are to be longsuffering and to bear long with them.

TRANS> But oh my brothers and sisters—it is hard for us to keep going!

- 2) It doesn't take much to throw us off!
- a) A little bit of sickness, a little set-back in my work, a little trouble with my computer, a little trouble with my project, a little tiredness—
 - and lowliness and meekness fly out the window!
 - Out come the angry words, that sharp retorts, and the satirical replies.
 - As soon as they come, you cease to walk worthy of the Lord!
 - b) My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so!
 - It is not fitting for those who live in God's house to be so full of pride and self will!
 - You see what you are when you are tested...
 - You find out if you have real lowliness and real meekness that is able to endure...
 - The lowliness and meekness of Jesus was a lowliness and meekness that always remained—all the way to the cross!
 - He was longsuffering and bore long with us sinners...

TRANS> And look at what our text says drives or sustains our longsuffering and forbearance!

2. It is to be done in love!

a. In other words,

- you are not to bear with your neighbour by means of an affected coolness or a studied courtesy, but in love!
- You are to continue in love!

b. You are to maintain a tender regard for your brother's welfare!

- The thing that is to keep your tongue under control and your service going on is your love for God and for your neighbour!
 - No matter what you must bear, no matter how your brother treats you,
 - real longsuffering and real forbearance means that you continue to love—
 - to desire to see your brother blessed and your father honoured!
 - to keep on doing what you can to bring good to them!
 - It doesn't mean you don't rebuke your brother if that is what he needs,
 - but it means you do it with a true desire for his welfare because you consider him more important than yourself...
 - Don't kid yourself—
 - You don't love your wife when you lash out at her in anger!
 - You have forgotten all about her—
 - You are all that matters at that point!
 - Neither do you love your husband when you lash out at him—or when you put on that icy coolness...
 - that is not about lowliness and meekness—that's about you!
 - And I say, neither do you love your children when you forget, in the heat of the moment—to seek what is best for them.
 - You can say, "Oh but I never lose my love for them..."
 - Yes you do!
 - You need to face it
 - You need to learn to walk worthy of the Lord.

- c. How wrong it is to bring this sort of conduct into God's house!
 - 1) When Christ has loved us so well—and when He loves the one that we are refusing to love—refusing to serve!
 - How unfitting it is to have a contrary spirit!
 - If you cannot regard them for their own sake, can you not regard them for His?
 - 2) The bulk of the instruction that we are given in Ephesians 4-6 has to do with continuing in love for our brothers and sisters in Christ...
 - You will never do that without lowliness and meekness before the Lord that continues with longsuffering and forbearance.

TRANS> And this leads us to the goal that you must keep before you if you are to walk worthy...

III. What is the goal you are to aim for if you are to continue to walk worthy?

- You are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A. Christ is our peace... as we saw back in chapter 2...

- 1. He is the one who came to reconcile us to God and to each other.
 - It was His purpose that He should make us into a holy temple for the Lord...
 - That each of us should be pardoned and sanctified in order to live in His Father's house forever and ever...
 - We, who once were enemies, now have the fullness of peace.
 - He brings together what was torn apart by sin.
- 2. And so by His work for us, Christ has bound us together as one in His house...
 - He has given us His Spirit, and His Spirit binds us all together...
 - He binds us to Christ upon whom we depend for life and salvation...
 - And He binds us to God as our Father....
 - And He binds us to each other as brothers and sisters who have been restored to God....
 - This is what our text calls "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

B. And *this* unity that Christ has established is the unity you are to endeavour to keep!

1. And I want to say right from the start that this is **not** unity in deviation from God.
 - a. No! No! No!
 - That is the message of ecumenical Christianity...
 - But that is not the kind of unity that Christ died to establish!
 - b. What do I mean by unity in deviation?
 - 1) I mean that insipid, despicable notion of unity that calls us to be unified with those who are rejecting the heavenly Father who is the head of the house!
 - those rebellious sons (or those who call themselves sons) who are walking contrary to God's word and want us to accept them in Christian love!
 - Christian love does not accept defiance against the Father in whose house we have been established!
 - You don't promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by winking at rebellion against the Father of the house!
 - That is to encourage division!
 - I'm not talking about weakness, immaturity, or ignorance...
 - I'm talking about those who knowingly reject God's word or those who deny the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.
 - 2) This needs to be said because this false unity is so prevalent—it is so promoted in the world today—
 - and it has nothing to do with the unity that Christ died to establish His people in.
 - The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is that unity that Christ has established among those He has reconciled to God—
 - not those who remain in rebellion against God.
 - It is not the acceptance of rebellion into God's house.
2. Yet, at the same time, this is not at all to say we can be ornery “for the Lord” against every offence.
 - a. As I have already shown you, most of your sharpness or coolness toward your brothers and sisters is because your little selfish desires were crossed.
 - You were tired, you were mistreated, you couldn't take it any more...
 - b. It had nothing to do with trying to preserve the peace that Christ has given to us with God in God's house...

- You lost sight of trying to do what you could to maintain that unity that He has given us...
- You lost sight of the goal and had very different goals.

TRANS> I'm not saying this is easy to do!

C. Its one of the hardest things you will ever have to do—that's why it says you must "**endeavour** to keep the unity of the Spirit."

1. **endeavour** means "give diligence"

- a. It is something you are going to have work hard at...
 - I explained last week that since the fall, fruit does not come easy, but by sweat...
 - This is a true of the fruits of the Spirit as it is the fruits of the ground.
 - If you are going to have a crop, you will have to **labour** (not just dabble) in prayer and the Word—
 - and in living your life in obedience to God.
 - b. I tell you, it won't be automatic...
 - You are going to have to work hard at it and you will find that you often fail.
 - But you must never ever give up!
2. And if I may say—one of the most important things you will do if you really want to work at this is acknowledge every time you go wrong...
- a. Every time you lose sight of the goal and stop endeavouring to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,
 - you will need to repent!
 - You have lost sight of the goal of God's house to become a holy temple!
 - You have gone contrary to the Lord Jesus' who died in order that we might live in God's house.
 - You need to be deeply humbled and you need to ask God to forgive you.
 - b. And that's not all...
 - You also need to ask your neighbour to forgive you...
 - Your spouse, your children, your parents, your brothers and sisters at church or in the church across town...

- If you have disrupted the peace of God's house by an unworthy walk...
 - go to that brother, go to that sister and ask them to forgive you.
- You say, but I will be doing that all the time!
 - Good—that means you will get tired of it after a while and start to change your ways!
 - Now of course, I don't mean that you must go to your neighbour whenever your thoughts have drifted from loving him...
 - but when you have spoken wrongly to him or neglected to serve him...
 - Humble yourself and go to Him!
 - You need to be lowly...
 - And I don't think you can expect to walk worthy of your calling until you are willing to humble yourself and admit that you have been wrong.