

Ephesians 4:1-6 – Church Unity

This morning we are going to cover Ephesians 4:1-6. The first thing we will talk about is the context of the passage. As we all know, that's one of the most basic things in Bible study – when you study a passage – or even when you are just reading – always, always, always understand the passage within its context. So – we are going to follow that rule this morning and take some time and talk about the context and then cover the passage itself. So, let's get going.

Where Does The Letter to the Ephesians Fit In Paul's Timeline?

Ephesians was written by Paul and is one of the Prison Epistles – these are the letters written by Paul during his first imprisonment after he returned from his third missionary journey. Remember – Paul was taken prisoner when he returned to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey. At first, he was imprisoned in Caesarea and then, when he appealed his case to Caesar, he was transferred to Rome. His first imprisonment was difficult, but not desperate – he was held under house arrest and bound to a Roman guard. It lasted approximately 2 years - from about 60-62 AD, and he was released. He continued his ministry after he was released and wrote Titus and 1 Timothy, and then he was arrested again, and imprisoned in Rome. His second imprisonment was very harsh – far different than his first imprisonment – and ended in his execution – probably about 68 AD.

Apparently, during his first imprisonment, he was able to receive visitors relatively freely and through these visitors he could keep up with the condition of the churches and correspond with them. This is when he wrote the Prison Epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon may have been written and sent with Tychicus for delivery at the same time. Ephesians and Colossians are very similar in content.

Where is Ephesus?



Ephesus was a port city in Asia Minor on the East side of the Mediterranean Sea. The letter was written to the Ephesians, but was probably intended to be read first by that church and then circulated to the other churches in the region.

What Was the The City of Ephesus Like?

Ephesus was regarded as “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia”. During Paul’s time it had a population of 200,000 to 250,000. It was a very important city – right up there with Rome and Athens. It was the provincial capital of the Roman senatorial province of Asia. It was the largest trading center in the western side of Asia Minor – situated at a harbor formed at the mouth of the Cayster River at the Mediterranean Sea - and was used to connect many shipping routes. It was at the western end of the Royal Road – connecting East Asia Minor and West Asia Minor. There was a Jewish presence – Paul began his ministry there teaching in the synagogue. There were many cults and religions – by far the most prominent being worship of the goddess Artemis – her temple in Ephesus was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world. Artemis worship was practiced throughout Asia Minor and Ephesus was its center.

Considering its size, location, and importance, the church in Ephesus was strategically placed to spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor. Also, you could expect the church in Ephesus to be relatively populous and diverse – with believers – new and old – from all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds.

What Was Paul’s History With Ephesus?

The Ephesian church was planted by Paul - on his way back to Antioch on his second missionary journey, Paul stopped and taught at the synagogue at Ephesus for a short time – maybe a week or less (see Acts 18:19-22). They actually asked him to stay longer. But, he left, and told them he would return to them “if God wills”.

God did will, and he returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and spent two years there teaching – probably between 53 and 56 AD – first in the Jewish synagogue and when he was run out of the synagogue, in the school of Tyrannus.

During his time there, Acts 19 tells us he performed extraordinary miracles – like healing the sick and casting out demons. Sorcerers and magicians converted and burned their books. Acts 19 tells us the word of the Lord was growing and mightily prevailing and spread from Ephesus to “all who lived in Asia”. Paul’s ministry there was very fruitful and many people turned away from their pagan gods – particularly their goddess Artemis - so much so that it threatened the businesses of the craftsmen and tradesmen who made and sold their images. It hit these guys squarely in their pocketbook and they instigated a huge riot.

After he left Ephesus, Paul went on to Macedonia and Corinth. He left Corinth and on the way back he chose not to stop in Ephesus because he wanted to make it back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. So – he met with the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus on the way back and gave them his very moving commission in Acts 20.

Here's a basic timeline. As you can see, over its history, the Ephesian church had exposure to a lot of solid teaching:

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Note</u>
First Visit (Acts 18:19-21)	52 AD (Fall)	Paul there 1-4 weeks
Second Visit (Acts 19)	53 AD (Fall) – 56 AD (Spring)	Paul there 2 ½ years
Commission To Elders (in Miletus) (Acts 20:17-38)	57 AD (Spring)	Few days
Letter From Prison (Ephesians)	Sometime between 60 – 62 AD.	
Letter From Paul To Timothy (1 Tim)	Sometime after release from first imprisonment and before second imprisonment (between 62 and 67 AD)	Timothy was in Ephesus at the time. At Miletus, Paul had warned elders about false teachers and now they were infiltrating the church. (1 Tim 1:3-4)
Letter From Paul to Timothy (2 Tim)	During second imprisonment. (67 - 68 AD)	Timothy was again in Ephesus. False teaching was still a problem. (2 Tim 2:17-18)
Jesus' message to Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7 (written by John)	95-96 AD	Jesus commended church for its stand against false teaching, but rebuked the church for losing its "first love", and called them to repentance and return.

What Was the Church in Ephesus Like?

As I pointed out above - Acts 19 tells us how well received the gospel was in Ephesus and how it spread to all of Asia Minor – presumably converting mostly Gentiles. So, the church there probably started with Jewish believers and then expanded into the Gentile populations. By the time Ephesians was written, the church probably consisted of Jews and Gentiles, but the Gentiles more than likely well outnumbered the Jews.

We know the church had received a lot of teaching. A lot from Paul – up to 3 years of personal teaching. Aquilla and Priscilla were there after his first visit. Apollos taught there. Timothy and other teachers were there. The church must have had a very good grounding in the Word. Paul referred to his instruction when he told the Ephesian elders at Miletus that he “did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

These believers came from very different backgrounds and worldviews. There was the fundamental divide between the Jewish believers and Gentile believers. But the Gentile believers

were not monolithic – there were former Artemis worshippers, worshippers of other gods, sorcerers, magicians, and others. There was much diversity from their former ways of life – religious, cultural, economic, ethical, etc.. There were free men and slaves, men, women and children. Believers from very different cultures, backgrounds and at different stages of life – temporal and spiritual. These differences between believers are fertile ground for divisiveness and conflict – particularly between Jews and Gentiles. As we will see later, our passage – Ephesians 4:1-6 – is a call to unity based on the fact that they are, in fact, unified in the body of Christ.

The Context of the Passage in The Letter of Ephesians

Ephesians can be divided into two basic parts. Chapters 1-3 are what a lot of people call the “doctrinal” portion of the book and Chapters 4-6 are practical application. I think Alex mentioned this last Sunday, that all instruction is doctrine – so really, in that sense, everything in the book is “doctrine”. So - when we say the first three chapters are “doctrine” – to me, it is the part of the book that reveals and explains theological truths – the things we need to know about theological reality – in order to understand how to live and please God based on this reality. This is a common structure of Paul’s letters. Our passage – 4:1-6 – is in the application part of the letter.

Turn to Chapter 1, and we will briefly walk through Chapters 1-3.

Chapters 1-3 are wonderful passages summarizing all the things God has done for us as believers. First, in **1:3-14**, Paul praises God the Father who has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” and goes on to describe these blessings:

- Before the foundation of the world, He chose that believers would be holy and blameless before Him [God the Father] in love.
- He predestined believers to be adopted as His sons through Christ.
- He freely bestowed His grace on believers through Christ – our redemption and forgiveness of our sins
- He revealed a mystery to us - something unrevealed to previous generations - His will concerning the summing up of all things in Christ – all heavenly things and all earthly things.
- We have been made His [God the Father] inheritance (or possession).
- We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit – given as a down payment of our future glorious inheritance.

Paul then offers a prayer for them in verses **1:15-23** – that God will give them wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him so that they will know three things:

- What is the hope of His calling (our glorious future is certain because He called us);
- What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (our value to Him because we are His);
- What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, as demonstrated in actual history by the resurrection, ascension and session of Christ at the right hand of the Father, with authority far above all of creation, this power being available to the church

because the church is Christ's body over which Christ is the head (His power that works through Christ in us).

Basically, God has graciously given us everything we need to serve Him and withstand the attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil. We lack for nothing. Paul prays that the Ephesians – and indirectly us – will really come to know the incredible depths of all the wonderful spiritual blessings God has blessed us with.

In **Chapter 2**, Paul reminds us what we once were and that, when we believed, God saved us solely by His grace without any merit whatsoever on our part.

2:1-3 tells us we were just like all the other pagans – spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins and by nature children of wrath. We were “dead men walking” – physically alive, but spiritually dead. We were on “death row” - condemned to eternal wrath.

2:4-10 tells us that because of God's great love for us and mercy towards us, He took us - who were spiritually dead - and made us spiritually alive with Christ. And not only that – He raised us up with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavenlies. Because we are “in Christ” – identified with Christ - we are already positionally seated with Christ – and remember where Christ is now – “far above all rule and authority in the heavenly places”. That's where we are - in a positional sense. And God didn't just make us spiritually alive, raise us up and seat us with Christ – He has a purpose for us – verse 10 tells us that we are His workmanship – His craftsmanship – He created us in Christ Jesus to accomplish good works which He has prepared for us to accomplish.

In verses **2:11-22**, Paul goes on to describe the new condition of both Jews and Gentile believers - and this is very important to our passage today - Gentiles, who were formerly “far off” – in the sense that they did not have the benefits and blessings God promised to the Jews - have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Not only that, through Christ's work on the cross, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been removed because the Law – which was the source of the hostility – is no longer in effect. Through Christ, the two groups have been made into one new man and both groups – now in one new man – are reconciled as one to God through Christ. Now Jews and Gentiles are “fellow citizens” and are a part of God's household – a building having Christ as its cornerstone, with the foundation being the New Testament apostles and prophets, still being built brick by brick as believers are added to the church. We are each a brick in this building and God is fitting us together in this building which is growing into a holy temple in Christ – a dwelling place of God in the Holy Spirit. The body of Christ – the Church – is not divided – there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles – Gentiles didn't become Jews. Both groups became something different - one new man.

In **Chapter 3:1-13**, Paul elaborates on the mystery of the church and his stewardship of that mystery. Remember that “mystery” means something previously concealed but now is being revealed. The “mystery” that was concealed and is now being revealed by Paul in Chapter 2 and 3 is this – **verse 6 – “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”** This reconciliation between Jew and Gentile and the unifying of them into “one new man” in the church is a fundamental paradigm shift for both Jews and Gentiles and is a fundamental change in how God

works in the world. It is a dispensational change that started with the beginning of the Church in Acts 2.

There is a second prayer to conclude Chapter 3 – in verses – Paul prays **“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”**

Notice the sequence – he prays that they will be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner man – the mind, the innermost being – this is similar to being transformed by the “renewing of our minds” in Romans 12:2. Note that the Holy Spirit is the means through which this strengthening occurs. Strengthening of the “inner man” results in Christ dwelling in their hearts through faith. They have already been “rooted and grounded in love” because of what God has done for them through Christ, and this strengthening by the Holy Spirit will enable them to better comprehend the unlimited boundaries of Christ’s love. This will enable them to better comprehend the love of Christ which is beyond knowledge. Which results in being filled up to all the fullness of God. [As an aside – remember what Christ rebuked the Ephesian church for in Revelation 2:1-7 – it had lost its “first love” - notice how this prayer emphasizes love – I’m just pointing this out as something to think about.] There’s a lot in Paul’s prayer – and it’s kind of hard to understand - and it’s a prayer that applies to us, as well – so each of us ought to take some time to really study it to try to grasp what Paul is asking for.

This prayer and a short doxology lead into Chapter 4 and our passage.

There is one more contextual point to make. Notice that Chapter 4 begins with a call to “walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” There are five sections in Chapters 4 and 5 that begin with a call to walk. They are:

- 4:1 – walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called
- 4:17 - that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk
- 5:2 – walk in love
- 5:8 – walk as children of Light
- 5:15 – walk not as unwise men but as wise

The Passage

Now – I bet you are thinking, “finally” - let’s get into the passage. Here’s what it says:

4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (*Ephesians 4:1–6 (NASB)*)

Verses 1-3 are an **exhortation** - Paul is urging them to behave in a way that is consistent with their calling as “one man” in the body of Christ – unity in their diversity. Verses 4-6 describes the spiritual glue that binds them together.

Notice that verse 1 begins with “therefore”. We’ve all heard this for years, but I’m going to repeat it – whenever you see the word “therefore” in a passage, what should you always ask? - What is it “there for”. It ties something before with something after. In this verse, it is tying the theological truths in chapters 1-3 with the practical instructions in the last 3 chapters of the letter. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, has revealed truth to them and now is going to exhort them to live consistent with that truth.

Here’s a question - Why does Paul emphasize that he is the “prisoner of the Lord” here? This is the second time in the letter he has mentioned it. In Greek, the phrase is actually – prisoner “in” the Lord. It uses the preposition ἐν – which in this case describes Paul’s identification with Christ. He is imprisoned because of his identification with Christ. Why does he mention this? He is setting himself up as an example. The example is this – I live in such a way as is consistent with who God made me in Christ, doing the work He has prepared for me to do, even though I have suffered imprisonment as a result. That is how committed I am to walk in a manner worthy of His calling. You should consider that and be likewise committed. Paul said earlier in Ephesians – in verse 2:10 -

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

Paul was God’s workmanship, created in Christ for good works, and he was committed to walk in them even though it meant suffering prison (among all the many other hardships he suffered). They, too, are God’s workmanship, created in Christ for good works, and they should be just as committed to walk in them. We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ for good works, and we should be just as committed as Paul to walk in them.

Which gets us to the exhortation in verse 1 – ***“I ... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...”***

“Implore” is the verb παρακαλέω - there are several ways to understand this word, but in this context, “strongly urge” and “exhort” may be better than “implore” – the way we use English these days, “implore” sometimes connotes an idea of request, whereas in this passage, there is more of an gist of authority. Harold Hoehner calls it an “authoritative exhortation”. It’s kind of like when your boss “strongly urges” you to do something. This exhortation carries a lot of weight and you know you better do it.

What is Paul exhorting them to do? – ***“walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”***. What does this mean? We are very familiar with the term **“walk”** in Paul’s letters. It is the word περιπατέω – which literally means to walk around – but is also used as a metaphor for living – how you behave, how you conduct your life. So, you could replace the word “walk” with “live your life” or “behave”. Behave in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

“Worthy” is the word ἀξίως and it has the idea of living up to standard, living equivalent to a standard, suitable to a standard.

So – that leads to the question - What is the standard they – and we - are supposed to be living up to? It is - “*the calling with which you have been called*”. “Calling” is the word κλησις- it refers to an invitation or summons. BDAG defines it as an “*invitation to experience of special privilege and responsibility*” [William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 549.]

What is this referring to? What is our calling? In the context of this passage in Ephesians, it is referring to everything in Chapters 1-3 – everything entailed in our calling by God - what God has done for us and who He created us to be and do. Here’s a great summary from Harold Hoehner:

We see the calling first in chapter 1 where we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in that the Father selected us, the Son redeemed us, and the Spirit sealed us (1:3-14). Because of these blessings, Paul prays that the believers might know God and thus know the hope of their calling, God’s inheritance in the saints, and God’s power toward or in believers (1:15-23). This calling is further seen in the salvation of the unregenerate by God’s grace and their placement in the heavenlies in Christ (2:1-10). This calling proceeds from the individual to the union of the Jews and Gentiles into one body, called the church (2:11-3:13). Because of this call of Jews and Gentiles into one body, Paul prays for Christ’s strengthening love in order that the union would not only be true theologically but also experientially among the believers (3:14-21). Because of this calling to individual salvation and to a corporate body of believers, Paul draws the inference that we should walk worthy of that calling (4:1). (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 502)

To me verse 2:10 is a great high level summary of our calling. Here it is again:

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

We are God’s workmanship –According to Tom Constable:

“Workmanship” (Gr. poieme, from which we get the word “poem”; cf. Rom. 1:20) means a work of art, a masterpiece. The Jerusalem Bible translates it “work of art” here. As a master worker, God has created us in Christ Jesus. The word translated “created” here (Gr. ktizo) describes only God’s activity and denotes something He alone can produce.

Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003), Eph 2:10.

When we believed, He created us new in Christ – He made us a new creation in Christ. We were spiritually dead and, because of His unfathomable love and mercy, He saved us and made us alive. We are His “work of art”. Let that sink in.

And we are created for a purpose that God determined – good works that He has prepared for us – He created us to use us to produce His fruit.

But – we have our responsibility – that’s verse **4:1** – we must walk in a manner that is worthy of this calling. That is our choice. God doesn’t force us to do it. When we walk in the Spirit - we walk worthy of our calling, and good works are produced through us. When we don’t, we don’t walk worthy of our calling, and the good works He has prepared for us to do aren’t produced.

Taken in the order of our perspective – when we were spiritually dead, we were saved by God’s grace through faith – justified and regenerated – given new life in Christ – and raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenlies. God saved us for a reason – to do the works He prepared for us to do. He blessed us with every spiritual blessing – everything we need to live and serve Him. God gave us a position. God gave us a purpose. God gave us provisions. God gave us a certain future. God did it all for us. We did nothing. Our job – our responsibility - is to live up to it.

More specifically, notice that Paul spent a lot of time in Chapters 2 and 3 explaining the mystery of the Church and how God has unified Jews and Gentiles as “one new man” through Christ in the Church. God’s workmanship is not just individual believers. The Church – the corporate body of Christ - is also God’s workmanship - **verses 2:15-16** tells us He made the two into “one new man”, thus establishing peace, reconciled them both in one body to God through the cross. And **verses 2:20-22** tell us that individual believers are the bricks in the church, being fitted together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord,being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

I personally think I tend to take this work of God lightly – it may be because I have not experienced the very deep differences between cultures like there were between Jew and Gentile back then. But it was monumental and required a fundamental change to both groups’ ways of thinking and relating to each other. And that doesn’t happen overnight. There were bound to be conflicts amongst the body that would threaten the manifestation of the unity that God created. It’s like marriage – God joins together a man and a woman in marriage. They are in fact unified – the two become one flesh. However, they don’t necessarily manifest that unity all the time. There is conflict and it’s their responsibility to relate to each other in ways that preserve their unity. If they don’t, they are still married – still in fact unified as one flesh, but they do not manifest that unity. Their walk does not match up to their “calling” – so to speak - as one flesh. In the church, God made Jews and Gentiles “one new man”. That is a fact. They have been joined together by God in the church. He has made it possible for them to be unified in the church by tearing down the barrier of the Law that created the hostility between them. However, it is up to each

individual in the church to relate to the others in a way that will preserve the unity that God created. That's the point of verses 4:2-3. So - let's move on to them:

4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, **2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

So – we know what the calling is. These next verses describe the quality of the “walk” that will be consistent with the calling with which they have been called, and are the qualities required to preserve unity in the church.

The first quality – “**humility**”. The word is ταπεινοφροσύνης. According to Harold Hoehner,

“the word did not exist before NT times. In fact, Epictetus (AD 50-130) listed ταπεινοφροσύνης first among the qualities not to be commended.”

According to Kenneth Wuest:

in pagan Greek [ταπεινοφροσύνης] meant only abject servility, slavishness, a grovelling, mean-spirited disposition, but in the N.T. has been glorified in its meaning. Trench says of this word: “The Christian lowliness is no mere modesty or absence of pretension, nor yet a self-made grace. The making of ourselves small is pride in the disguise of humility. But the esteeming of ourselves small, inasmuch as we are so, the thinking truly, and because truly, therefore, lowly of ourselves.” The word is used in an early secular manuscript of the Nile River at its low stage, “It runs low.” Expositors defines it: “the lowliness of mind which springs from a true estimate of ourselves—a deep sense of our own moral smallness and demerit.”

Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 94.

Tom Constable defines humility as “a proper assessment of oneself in God's program”.

We should look to Christ as our example of humility:

Remember what Christ said when He washed the disciples's feet:

John 13:12–15 (NASB95)

12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? 13 “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 **“For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.**

Christ was Lord, yet He washed their feet. If Christ, who was God Incarnate, the promised Messiah, and who, in His humanity lived a perfectly holy life, would humble Himself to

wash their feet – we should do the same. Remember the great passage on the kenosis is Philippians 2:

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. *Philippians 2:3–8 (NASB95)*

I think the ideas of selflessness, servanthood, having a proper appraisal of ourselves, and regarding one another as more important than ourselves, are good ways to understand the idea of humility. It's "other focused" and not "self focused".

"Gentleness" is the Greek work Πραϋτης. According to BDAG it is:

the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness

William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.

According to Hoehner:

The word never connotes the idea of weakness. Rather, it implies the conscious exercise of self-control, exhibiting a conscious choice of gentleness as opposed to the use of power for the purpose of retaliation. Barclay states it well when he writes, "The man who is praus is the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time.... Only the person who is controlled by the Spirit of God can truly be gentle – angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. When such a person is wronged, he or she does not seek revenge, but when a wrong has been committed toward a brother or sister, or the body of believers, he or she has the power to address the situation." (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 502)

Here's another helpful definition I found online:

"Gentleness, also translated "meekness," does not mean weakness. Rather, it involves humility and thankfulness toward God, and polite, restrained behavior toward others. The opposites of gentleness are anger, a desire for revenge, and self-aggrandizement..... Might restrained. Humility and grace.

"The Fruit of the Holy Spirit – What is gentleness? GotQuestions.org." <https://www.gotquestions.org/fruit-Holy-Spirit-gentleness.html>

I like the concept of “might restrained”. Just like humility, gentleness is “other focused” – not selfish, but concerned about what is best for others. Christ is our example. Think about His gentleness – His “might restrained” – in His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well – and in fact pretty much everyone else He encountered. Christ had all power and authority available to Him; yet, He manifested Himself as gentle. See what Christ said about Himself in Matthew 11:28-30:

28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

For many, the truth with gentleness was what was needed. Compare that with how He directed His righteous anger at those who were taking advantage of the people - the fraud and thievery of the moneychangers in the Temple, as well as the self-righteousness and false teaching of the Jewish leadership. These guys needed much harsher treatment.

Now - Notice that “**all** humility and gentleness” is required. By “all” Paul means “all possible” or “every kind” of humility and gentleness. It is humility and gentleness of every kind at the highest level. It is a commitment – a commitment to consider a situation and figure out – from a Biblical perspective - what humility and gentleness looks like in that situation – and a commitment to actually stick with humility and gentleness even if the other guy doesn’t react the way you want.

Also, the walk is to be “**with patience**”. This is the word μακροθυμία. It can be translated “longsuffering”. BDAG defines it as *the state of being able to bear up under provocation*. Hoehner says:

God is the greatest example of all. He stayed His wrath when he was wronged by human sin (Romans 2:4). Thus must the believer stay his or her impatience or vengeance when wronged by another believer, exhibiting patience one toward another, especially in light of the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body. (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 509)

Just like “humility” and “gentleness”, the quality of patience is “other focused”. The flesh wants to retaliate against a wrong. Patience endures the wrong for the good of the other person.

Look again at verse 4:2 - Here’s another quality of the walk - “**forbearing one another in love**” – “forbearing” is the word ἀνέχομαι. It means “*to regard with tolerance, endure, bear with, put up with (BDAG)*.” I hate to keep quoting Hoehner, but he has some great comments that are helpful to understand the word. Here’s what he says:

“Hence, this word has reference to bearing or enduring with respect to things or persons. In the present context and in Colossians 3:13 Paul asks them to bear with those in the assembly.... Robertson suggests that it is a direct middle meaning ‘holding yourselves back from one another.’ In other words,

differences between believers are to be tolerated.” (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 509)

Note that forbearance is **“in love”**. We all know this word translated “love”. It is ἀγάπη – unconditional love - 1 Corinthians 13 is the best description of ἀγάπη love:

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NASB95)

Here's what Wuest says about love in this passage:

We are to bear with one another “in love.” It is in the sphere of the love that God the Holy Spirit produces in the heart of the yielded believer (Gal. 5:22), that we are to be patient with each other as misunderstandings arise, as cutting words are said, as unkind actions are done. The love shown at Calvary was a forgiving love. Ours should be the same.

Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 95.

Here’s Hoehner again:

“This kind of love seeks the highest good in the one loved, and more particularly for the believer, it has the idea of seeking the will of God in the one loved. It is an unconditional love that does not seek a response in kind.” (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 510)

Once again, note how this quality is selfless and other focused. All of these qualities are selfless – a denial of self – and focused on the good of the other person. Walking this way cannot help but preserve unity. But the only way to do it – the only way – is to walk by the Holy Spirit. These are fruits of the Spirit.

Now – here’s something else a walk consistent with our calling also requires – **verse 3 - being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** “Diligent” is σπουδάζω which means *“to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, be zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort, be conscientious.” BDAG*

This isn’t just – hey, try, do what you can – no – its “make every effort” to preserve this unity. It is a choice, it is our responsibility, and it takes work, and thought, and commitment, and faith, and prayer.

Notice also that this unity is the “unity of the Spirit”. This means that the source of unity within the church is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces unity within the church. So - How can we be diligent to preserve unity that we can’t produce? There’s the rub – we can’t decide that we will produce unity on our own – that just leads to gimmicks that won’t

work - but what we can decide is that we will walk by the Spirit and the Spirit will preserve the unity. None of these qualities – humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love – can be produced by our flesh. They are fruits of the Spirit and will not be produced apart from our walking by the Spirit. These things need to be produced, and God is telling us – here and other places – that we must be this way and do these things, but we have to realize that we cannot do them walking in the flesh, the prerequisite for our ability to walk in this way is that we must walk by the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit is the exercise of faith – it is the active application of faith – faith in action. And it takes faith to have humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love.

Paul says the unity of the Spirit is “in the bond of peace”. The “bond of peace” is most likely referring to peace as the bond – “the bond which is peace”. It’s indicating that the peace between the two groups – Jew and Gentile – which resulted from Christ’s work on the cross and the tearing down of the barrier between them – is the environment in which unity in the church is preserved and manifested. Where there used to be an environment of hostility in which conflict can thrive, there is now an environment of peace in which unity can thrive.

Ok – let’s move on to verses 4-6 –

4 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

in these verses, Paul describes **seven elements** that serve to unify the church – organized in terms of the Trinity – beginning with the Holy Spirit and ending with God the Father.

The first three elements are in **verse 4:4** – and in these verses the **Holy Spirit** is prominent:

There is “**one body**” – this refers to the universal church. There is only one body of Christ, and all believers are members of this one body – everyone from the day of Pentecost through the Rapture. In **Ephesians 2:12-22**, Paul already explained how Jews and Gentiles have been made by God into one new body.

There is **one Spirit** – this refers to the Holy Spirit. **Verse 1:13** tells us how all the members of the body have been sealed by the Holy Spirit as a down payment. **Verse 2:18** tells us that all the members of the one body have access in one Spirit to the Father. **Verse 2:22** tells us how the church is being built into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. The Spirit who seals, is the same Spirit who gives access, is the same Spirit through whom God dwells in the church. One Spirit for all believers.

There is **one hope** – “Just as also you were called in one hope of your calling” – “hope” is the certainty – founded on God’s Word - that God will fulfill His plan and His promises and, in particular, the future He has promised for believers. **Verses 1:13-14** tells us that God will redeem us as His own possession, and that we have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment on the inheritance we will receive upon our future redemption.

The next three elements are in **verse 4:5** – in which **Christ** is prominent:

One Lord – this is Jesus Christ. This brings to mind **verses 1:22-23**:

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22–23 (NASB95)

One faith – this is probably referring to the subjective faith that each believer has placed in Christ. There is one faith directed to the one Lord. We are bound together through this faith.

One baptism – it is the subject of much debate as to whether Paul is referring to water baptism or Spirit baptism. Most commentators who organize the seven elements in terms of the Trinity (as we are doing) conclude that this is not referring to Spirit baptism because it is in the section dealing with Christ and Spirit baptism is a work of the Holy Spirit. It would be out of place for it to be here. So – they conclude Paul must be talking about water baptism here. However, that conclusion is not necessarily required – Paul can be referring to Spirit baptism and still refer to it in this verse in which Christ is prominent. The verse could be talking about baptism in the sense of identification with Christ – in which case Christ is prominent (even though this identification is accomplished through the Holy Spirit). There are some good reasons why this is not referring to water baptism; and it is my opinion that Paul is talking about Spirit baptism in this verse. This a unifying element for all believers.

The seventh and last unifying element is in verse 6 about **God the Father**. It says “*one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*” God is the **Father of all** believers – Jew, Gentile, men, women, children, slaves, freemen – past, present and future. He is “**over all**” – describing His absolute sovereignty and authority. He is “**through all**” – He works out His plan through believers. And He is “**in all**” – He personally indwells believers through the Holy Spirit.

Here’s a great summary from Hoehner (again):

...the Trinity is an integral part of this treatise on unity. The one body of believers is vitalized by one Spirit, so all believers have one hope. The body is united to its one Lord (Christ) by each member’s one act of faith, and his or her identity with Him is in the one baptism. One God, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all. All seven components are united in the Trinity in reality the Triune God is the center and model for unity.” (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 509)

The Trinity is the basis and ultimate reality of unity in diversity. The Trinity is one God – unity – in 3 persons – diversity – each Person with distinct roles – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As there is unity in diversity in the Trinity, so should there be unity in diversity in the Church – the one body of Christ, made up of many diverse members, each with their distinct roles within the body. This is one of the many ways the Church glorifies God –

reflects His essence and character – by demonstrating unity in diversity. Otherwise, His name is tarnished.

Ok, so in summary, in Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which they have been called”. What is the calling? Basically, everything in Chapters 1-3 – everything entailed in our calling by God - what God has done for us and who He created us to be and do – particularly the unification of Jews and Gentiles into “one new man” – the body of Christ. Therefore, their walk – and our walk - should preserve the unity among believers that God has created. This walk is characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love among the church, as well as diligence to maintain that unity. This unity is grounded in the Trinity and the work of each Person in the Godhead - One body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Some Observations/Applications

1. Knowledge of the Truth is the Foundation for Godly Living. This observation is based on the “Therefore” in verse 4:1. Paul spent 3 chapters on theological truth before he ever got to his exhortation in verse 4:1. What if he hadn’t taken the time to lay out the truth in chapters 1-3? What if Paul had just started with “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”? First, we wouldn’t know what Paul was talking about. What calling? So – we can’t just skip around in the Bible and pick passages out of context. If we do, we will end up making the verse say whatever we want it to say. Second, theological truth is the foundation for our ethics – how we should behave. When we understand the theological truth that grounds our behavior, we can act in faith and are much less likely to be deceived. If we know why we are instructed to behave a certain way, we are less likely to give in to temptation. That is why we, individually, must be diligent to study the Bible. And that is why we, as a church, must be diligent to accurately teach everything in the Bible – the “full counsel of God”. If a person neglects the Bible, they aren’t putting on the “full armor of God” and will not be equipped to “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” as Paul describes in Ephesians 6. That person is a soldier going to battle without armor. And if the church fails to teach the full counsel of God accurately, it is neglecting its obligation to equip the body. For several generations now the church in America has moved away from teaching the full counsel of God and that is why so many Christians really don’t know what the Bible says about truth and reality, don’t have a basis for ethics and behavior, and accept the morals of our worldly culture in their ignorance of the truth.

2. God Has Given Us All the Tools, It’s Our Responsibility to Behave Accordingly. I mentioned this earlier. God saved us for a reason – to do the works He prepared for us to do. He blessed us with every spiritual blessing – everything we need to live and serve Him. God gave us a position. God gave us a purpose. God gave us provisions. God did it all for us. We did nothing. Our job – our responsibility - is to live up to it. If we aren’t experiencing unity, it is not His fault. It’s totally ours.

3. Unity Within the Church Is Very Important To God. It is a reflection of His character. He is glorified through the unity manifested by the Church. And we are to be diligent - work hard - to

maintain that unity. This applies to both the local church – like ours – and the universal church – the whole body of Christ. When we think about the universal church worldwide, we see a lot of diversity – particularly denominational diversity - some of this diversity is benign but, unfortunately, some of this is caused by deviations from the truth. To the extent there are deviations from the truth within the body of Christ, unity in the body of Christ suffers, and this tarnishes the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world and the church fails to reflect the true character and glory of God. We as a local church must be faithful and fulfill our responsibility by learning, holding to and teaching “sound doctrine”.

Now, thinking about unity within the local church, like ours, these days, in America, the local church isn't dealing with the challenges presented by the former hostility between Jews and Gentiles Paul referred to in Ephesians. But – the local church can be a very diverse group – in age, background, ethnicity, experiences, politics, and many other differences that our flesh and Satan can use to divide us. And we all too often don't walk as we should - with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. And we all too often aren't diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – our selfish fleshly nature takes over and, when we do that, we “bite and devour” one another (as Galatians 5:15 describes it). Walking the right way is hard to do and takes commitment, faith, prayer and diligent effort; and under no circumstances can it be done if we aren't walking by the Spirit.

4. Unity is Not At the Cost of Truth. We talked about this above. We are to diligently pursue unity. But - it is not unity at all costs. Notice how Christ tied unity and truth together in John 17:

John 17:17–21:

17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

We have unity because we are sanctified (or set apart) in the truth. We cannot compromise the truth in the pursuit of unity. This will cut us off from Christ – the source of true unity – and replace the unity we have in Christ with an impotent ungodly counterfeit. We cannot let that happen.