

The Christian's Warfare Part 12: A Biblical Perspective on Unity

The Christian's Warfare

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 4. I appreciate Jess preaching last Sunday. We were out and his message was a blessing, getting to watch it ourselves and grateful for the ministry of the word goes on when we're gone, and we're blessed to have a number of excellent Bible teachers in our church, our elders and others, and so we praise God for that.

This morning, I want to, we're going to continue the series of messages on modern spiritual warfare that we've been dealing with looking at issues in the culture, though this is also, I think, a really good subject to talk about related to Communion and to the Lord's Supper which we have the joy of celebrating this morning, second time since March now. We went seven months without being able to celebrate the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and so joyful that we come again to his Table with the elements and so we look forward to that and this is a message I think will help us in preparing specifically for that. The title of the message would be "Modern Christian Warfare, Modern Spiritual Warfare," subtitle, "A Biblical Perspective on Unity." A biblical perspective on unity. You know, it's amazing the polarization and division that is in the culture in America today and it's really astounding. You know, we see it develop over time but you stop and you think about what things were like 10 years ago and what they're like now. Dramatic change for the worse.

And so we look at that and, you know, what does the Bible have to say to that? Well, essentially what the Scripture has to say to us when we deal with all of these things as we've been going through it, I've been trying to help us think biblically about foundational things that help us navigate our way in this fallen world, that we need to know what the Scripture says to us, and one of the things that also guides, it's kind of a commitment that I've made in ministry and I think it's an appropriate and right commitment for a pastor, and that is that the pastor's focus and the focuses of messages on Sunday morning is not about really what's going on out there, it is how we are to live in light of what's going on out there. So it has to be touched on but the major focus is not what's happening out there, the major focus is us and the Lord Jesus Christ and his claim on our lives. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:12, you know basically, "What business is it of mine to judge outsiders?" That's what Paul says. "What business is it of mine to judge

outsiders, yet we judge those within the church." This is in context of that terrible sin that was being allowed and overlooked in 1 Corinthians 5 and Paul says, "Listen, when I said to you to not associate with evil men and sinners, I didn't mean those outside the church. What business is it of ours to judge those outside? No, we judge those inside." God wants us to follow him and to help one another follow him.

So essentially the focus of messages is not to complain about what's going on in the world, the focus of messages should be how are we, then, to live to bring glory to Christ in the midst of a crooked and perverse world, as Paul says in Philippians 2, "among whom you shine as lights in the universe." So this morning, a biblical perspective on unity. Essentially the reality is that true unity in society biblically is impossible in a fallen world. It is impossible and so we should have realistic expectations about that. We should expect that sinners will be divided. Sin divides. I mean, sin separates from God and the first thing that happened after Adam and Eve separated themselves from God in sin was they were separated from one another. You read that account in Genesis 3, they feel the need to hide behind clothing now, they're no longer able to be naked and unashamed, and beyond that they then are accusing one another, blaming one another. Sin divides man from God and sin divides man from man, and so as people are sinners, they cannot help but be divided.

Now God's common grace that he bestows to all people, that is common grace, common to all, God grants grace, and we can pray that he would grant grace to the society in which we live. I think that's exactly what Paul's talking about in 1 Timothy 2 when he says "pray for leaders" so that the common grace of God would work through that to promote, you know, a sense of orderliness, tranquility, so that the Gospel can go forth unhindered. But ultimately our expectations are to be realistic. People can't get along really. Sinners can't. They need Jesus.

So what is the best thing we can do in the midst of a divided world and a polarized world? The best thing that we can do is model true unity in here. We can pursue unity in Christ. In a sense, what we can do to change our world is to let the church be the church and this is the most powerful thing we can do. Jesus said, "I will build My church," Matthew 16:18, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." As he builds his church, I love that because when I first heard that as a young man, you hear that and you have this sense as a Christian in a world that is hostile to God that, "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," somehow I heard that as I'm secure in Christ and hell can't get through the gates. That's just bad exegesis, I know, but when you look at what it says, "No, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," what he's saying is the church smashes through the gates of hell. When the church is the church, when Jesus is building his church, the church smashes down the gates of hell and plunders the kingdom of darkness. So the church just needs to be the church. That's how we should see this issue of unity in a polarized world, like we should see everything else. We need to be who we are called to be for the glory of our great Savior, and if we do that, we will be salt, we will be light, we will make a difference, and most importantly Christ will be exalted and he will have the glory that he deserves.

So a biblical perspective on unity. Ephesians 4. I'm just going to read the first six verses. This whole chapter or these first 16 verses particularly deal with this and we'll probably speak to them a little bit but Ephesians 4:1-6.

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.

Let's pray.

Our Father, how grateful we are that You are a God who is not silent, that You have spoken with such incredible clarity. We praise You that You're speaking every day in creation, that You are manifesting Your glory in a way that if people just had eyes to see, they cannot escape how Your glory shines out in all of Your works. We look at the heavens, the immensity and the enormity of the universe, galaxies, billions of galaxies with billions of stars in each galaxy, and we see Your infinite majesty, and we can look at the smallest tiniest insect and study it to such a level that we see intricacy, design and glory. And so we praise You as a God who speaks and is always speaking but, Lord, today we praise You that You are a God who has spoken in the Scriptures and as we come to Your word, we rejoice that Your word is clear, that Your Spirit makes it understandable to people whose hearts sincerely want to understand, and we thank You that Your word reveals to us and speaks to us most clearly about the center of Your word, the Lord Jesus Christ. We come asking that we might see Him, that we might understand who He is more clearly, that we might love Him more fully, and that we might serve Him more faithfully and we pray this in His wonderful name. Amen.

So a biblical perspective on unity. A biblical perspective on unity. It's interesting how Paul here, he essentially is going to say, "Let the church be the church." It's essentially what Ephesians is about, letting the church be the church in a very difficult setting. Ephesus was not an easy, there were no easy places to minister the Gospel. There never has been. I mean, there are places that are maybe more relatively or less relatively hard than others. Ephesus was not an easy place to minister. When Paul first evangelized these people here, you have the amazing story of that in Acts 18 where a riot breaks out because Paul's preaching of the Gospel is bringing people, is hurting the idolatry industry and the people are just enraged that they're losing income because people are getting saved, and this uproar happens when people end up trying to persecute Paul and his associates. They go into a stadium, fill a stadium and for three hours in response to someone trying to reason with them, they yell, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Over and over for three hours and it's astounding. This mob of people exalting the god of Ephesus, this, you know, idol, against the Gospel. Three hours. You think we have it tough in our world, these were some crazy idolatrous people they were surrounded by. And so they're being saved out of that and so there's challenges

in the church. They're in a difficult setting with difficult people who now have been saved who are being, God's grace is at work in but who have bad habits and who need to understand what it means to be the people of God.

So, in a sense, his message is, "You need to be what God has called you to be. You need to walk in a manner worthy of the calling of which you've been called." You could, in a sense that could be another way of saying what this means. "Let the church be the church," or individually, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called," his first words of chapter 4. It's interesting, the phrase there, this is the hinge of the book. A number of Paul's epistles he does this, he opens with three chapters of doctrine. Chapter 1, 2 and 3, doctrine. Chapters 4, 5 and 6, application. Three chapters of doctrine, three chapters of application. Three chapters of theology. Three chapters of practice. Three chapters of theology proper, Christology, soteriology, that's the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation. Three chapters of that then three chapters of the theology of living, practical theology, how do you live this out, walk this out, walk in a manner worthy. The phrase, Paul uses this word a number of times in different epistles but particularly here in verse 1, twice in verse 17, he says, "You need to walk in a manner worthy." Walk, literally walk but figuratively live. He's talking about a manner of life. Your manner of life needs to be worthy of the calling. The way that you live should be worthy.

This word "worthy" is an important word. The root of it, it's related to the root, it's related to the word "holy" in that it comes from the same root word, and the root word that it comes from originally is a word which was used to mean "to weigh," and the picture is weighing in a balance. And so the word here, "axios," has that sense of being weighed in the balance and so it means worthy. It has the idea of intrinsic value and think of a balance, you have a weight on one side of the balance and then you put something on the other side of the balance until you get to the same weight and now it balances. And Paul is essentially saying, think of this word picture, "All that God has done for you in your calling, in your salvation on one side of the balance. Look at what God has done for you. Now live in such a way that your life has that same sense of weightiness." I mentioned this other times, but the idea of weightiness is related to the word "glory," which is also loosely related to this word. I'm sorry, glory is not, holiness is. Forget that. Anyway, but the idea of weightiness is also part of the word "glory." In the Old Testament "kavod" means "weighty," and so that informs how it's used in the New Testament and so the idea of weightiness. So when you understand the glory of what God has done for you in Christ, there should be in the Christian life a glory, a weightiness about the way our manner of life that matches up to what God has done for us in Jesus, and that's a high calling. He says, "Does your life, in view of all I've told you in chapters 1 and 2 and 3 about who God is and what Christ has done for you, all I've told you of the doctrine now, all that I've told you of what He's done for you, now you're to walk and to live and to have a manner of life that has the same weightiness to what God has done. Walk worthy of your calling."

Now "calling." This word is used here to be synonymous with salvation. It's used that way a number of times in the New Testament. Those who are called in many verses are

those who are saved. 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul says, "I write to those in Corinth, saints by calling." Saints, holy ones by calling. Jude 1:1, he addresses those believers to whom he writes. He says, "Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and the brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved of God, kept for Jesus Christ." So to be called is to be saved. Romans 8:29, "for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. Those whom He predestined He also called. Those whom he called He also justified. Those whom He justified He also glorified." Five verbs there that describe one group of people. The same group of people God foreknew, which I think in context means loved before time in the biblical sense of the word "know," know intimately, know in a loving way, know in a personal way. Those whom he knew before time, that group is the same group that he predestined. It's exactly and precisely this same group that he called. Is precisely the same group that he justified. And will be precisely the same group that he glorifies. All five are past tense verbs. The idea is what God began, he will complete. In God's mind it's already finished, it's already settled. So to be called, you see, to be called, to be one of those who were called means to be saved, and so Paul is saying here in Ephesians 4:1, "I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called." You could almost say, "I walk in a manner worthy of the salvation with which you've been saved," because that's what he's really described in the first three chapters. The glory of the salvation that we've received, he's basically said, "This is what God has done for you. Now this is, in light of this, this is how you are to live."

And it's interesting, you know, you look at what he says in those first three chapters, they're such a treasure chest, Ephesians. I mean, we'll just hit a few verses to see this, to help us understand the weightiness that we're supposed to then exemplify in our lives to mirror and match, by God's grace, only by his grace what he's done.

Ephesians 1:4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." Look what God has done for us. He chose us in him, in Christ, before the foundation of the world.

Verse 5, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Not only did he choose us, he predestined. He has ordained everything that would happen in our lives so that we would come to the point of adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself.

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." His glorious grace which is freely bestowed. It's not just bestowed, it's freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Do you just see how Paul is just piling up word upon word to try to describe the wonder of our salvation? This is amazing what God has done. This is what he's saying, "You have to understand what God has done for you. If you're going to live in a manner worthy, you have to be cognizant and keeping your heart aware of what God has done for you."

I love this, he finishes up these first 14 verses with all these blessings upon us in Christ, and it leads him to then moving to sharing his prayer, "For this reason I too," verse 15, "having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." I pray for you. And look what he prays, he basically prays, you're going to see, "I pray that what I've just been telling you about," I think he's saying that he's laying this stuff out and just like I know when I read these words, sometimes my heart is so dulled. It's like Paul understands as he's just unpacked these blessings of 3 to 14, chapter 1:3-14, "I know you're not getting it and therefore I'm praying that God would open the eyes of your heart to see this."

Look what he says, "I don't cease giving thanks," verse 16, "while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." To really understand this you need God to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He says there that important phrase, "the hope of His calling." That's what he's talking about in Ephesians 4. "I pray that God would give you enlightenment, spiritual enlightenment so that you could see what is the hope of His calling."

That's a rich phrase itself. "Hope" in the Bible, well, "hope" in general, let's start there, "hope" in our language is the anticipation or the desire, let's say that, it's the desire for future good. "I hope something." It's the possibility and the desire. Biblically "hope" is much different. Biblically it's not the desire for future good, it is the expectation of future good. And I'll go beyond that, it's not just the expectation of future good, it is the certain expectation of future good. That's what the hope in the Bible is. It is not a pie-in-the-sky pipe dream, it is the certain expectation of what God is going to do for those whom he loves. It's in the future. We don't have it now, so we have a hope. This is where faith comes in. We're believing in what we don't see but our hope is certain. And so, "I pray that you would know what is the hope of His calling," but it is about future good.

To be saved, he's saying, "Listen, to be saved, to have been called," remember it's synonymous with salvation? "To have been called is to have hope. It is to have a certain expectation of future good." And I love how he then, he goes to the next thing talking about the riches of his inheritance in the saints. He's thinking about heaven. He says, "Think about your future good in heaven. I pray that God would help you understand that now that you've got the hope of His calling, that you have," what he says in verse 18, "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." You have the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints awaiting you.

But it's not just future hope in heaven, it's hope for today and tomorrow and the next day because the next thing he says, "and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." You can have hope as you look at the future because of the surpassing

greatness of his power toward us who believe. You can have hope as you wrestle with sin, as you fight and you feel like at times it's a death battle almost with your indwelling sin. You can have hope because of the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe.

And he goes on to say this power is "in accordance with the working of His might when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated Him far above all rule and authority seated Him at the right hand of God." The same power that reached into the grave and took Jesus out of the grave, in a sense, beyond the reach of Satan, past all of the power of the one who was the ruler of this world, and placed the man Christ Jesus, his physical body at the right hand of God. That power is at work in you who believe. Think about that.

Now he says that's the salvation you've received, chapter 1. Then in chapter 2 he says, "Let me illustrate for you how this power has already been at work." Chapter 2, verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked." Think about the power that's already been displayed in your life. If you have repented and placed your faith in Jesus, these words are true of you. Hear them, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." You have been raised up into the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Spiritually you're seated with him there now. God reached into the tomb that you were in spiritually, that I was in spiritually, and he made us alive and he lifted us and pulled us the same way, far beyond the reach of rulers and principalities so that what you've entrusted to God is safe with God forever. Your soul is safe forever. That's the power that's at work in you. This is the salvation that has happened to you. This is the calling that you must try to walk worthy of.

He goes on to say the next thing in verses 11 to 23 of chapter 2. He basically says, "Remember what you were and how distant and divided you were." Verse 11, "remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands--remember that you," Gentiles, "were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." That's where you were. "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to those who were far away and peace to

those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." This is true of every believer. We all have access by one Spirit to the Father, Jew, Gentile, black, white, Asian, Hispanic. All of us have access by one Spirit to the Father. And he's abolished all enmity. To abolish the enmity between Jew and Gentile is to abolish the greatest enmity of all. Everything else that we have is second-rate enmity. I'm not saying...it's big, it's tough, it's hard but it's not as big as the Jew/Gentile barrier and he's abolished all of it in Christ.

So we not only received a salvation which took us out of death. I mean, remember he said, "You were dominated by lusts of the flesh and the mind, you were enslaved by the prince of the power of the air, you were dead in transgressions, you were by nature an object of wrath but God made you alive. God raised you up." You and I were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope, without God in the world. Now in Christ Jesus you have been who were far away have been brought near and are now a part of a dwelling for God, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Collectively we are being built as he says in verses 19 to 23, being fitted into a building, a dwelling place for God. We're all a part as living stones, 1 Peter 2, being built into a place to offer sacrifices to God. The spiritual body of Christ.

Then he goes into chapter 3 and essentially chapter 3 is kind of a reflection and an expansion on what he was doing the last half of chapter 2. He's saying, "Listen, guys, this thing about what He's done to make us one is so much bigger than you realize." Chapter 3 is basically a reflection on chapter 2:11-23. He says, a key phrase or a key word in this chapter is "mystery." Verse 3, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." Verse 4, "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ." What is this mystery? "Mystery" biblically just like "hope" is different than the way we use it. "Mystery" doesn't mean something that can't be figured out. "Mystery" biblically is that which was formerly hidden and not understood, that which was formerly hidden and understandable has now been made known. That's how the Bible uses that phrase "mystery." It was formerly hidden, it's now made known and Paul's saying, "Listen, I have been given the blessing of unveiling the mystery of God."

The mystery, and what is this mystery. He's going to tell you in verse 5 and 6. The mystery of Christ, verse 4, "into the mystery of Christ," verse 5, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." That all people are one in Jesus Christ. That's the mystery, that God would take people who are so different, that he would take idolaters like those people in Ephesus who were chanting and yelling, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" I'm sure some of those people are going to be in heaven because that ministry of the Ephesian church kept going on and they were there saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" They hated the people and Israel, the Jews hated that kind of idolatry, and God brought Jews who were proud and self-righteous and going to hell on their own because all Jews

were unless they were trusting in the sacrifice of Christ, he brought Jew and Gentile together in Christ.

And he says, "This mystery was so great," and he goes on to say essentially in verse 10, well, verse 9, "to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." He's saying that when Christians are one, when Christians are one, when he takes us who should be so far apart and because we come to God through one Spirit, through the Gospel, we are one, and when we live like that, he is saying that the manifold wisdom of God, that this incredible glorious wisdom of God, this indescribable infinite wisdom of God is made know through us, through your unity. It's like God is preaching condemnation to Satan and all of his kingdom. The demons in hell tremble when the church is the church. This is what he's talking about. When the church is the church, the gates of hell can't stand against it. This is what Paul is saying right there, the same thing. The manifold wisdom of God is being made known through the church coming together in true unity. That's not a pretend unity, it's not a pie-in-the-sky, you know, let's all love each other and just pretend. No, when you are one in Christ in the truth, speaking the truth in love, that kind of oneness, there is something powerful happening in spiritual places and it's the kind of thing God uses to plunder the kingdom of darkness. Such an opportunity.

Now and then so Paul's saying this, it's like he's getting so excited that he's saying this but he's saying, "I know you can't understand it like I can't understand it." He's sitting there saying, and so he starts praying again. Verse 14, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 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 may be able to comprehend. There's no way unless I pray. You have to pray for this to happen.

But look what he prays, he prays that you would be rooted and grounded in love, verse 17, "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." Four-dimensional love that the world can't understand. We live in three dimensions but this is four-dimensional love. It's beyond what we can understand. And he says, "I pray that you can enter into that, and the way you're going to enter into this kind of love is not on your own in your prayer closet." You should be on your own in your prayer closet, that's important, that's an essential part of every person's Christian life is to be alone with God, but you're not going to understand this kind of love, what does he say? That you may be able to comprehend together with all the saints. This kind of four-dimensional love only happens in active relationships, "And I pray that this would happen and that as it happens, hell, the foundation of hell would tremble." And so you see what we're called to do, what we have the opportunity to do is of the highest order of importance in this dark world.

So we're called to this. He says, "This is what God has done for you." He finished up with that praise and this is the most encouraging part, "the love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able." We're not able but he's able. "To Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. Therefore I," Paul, "the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling." Because of what he's done for us.

There's two points I want to with the remaining time we have, I want us to gather our thoughts around. The first is the foundational importance of unity. The foundational importance of unity. He unpacks that incredible salvation we've received in those first three chapters, and then in the last three chapters are now walk it out. This is what it looks like to live this out. If this has happened to you, this is what it should look like in your life. Theology, practice. And think about what he deals with. I mean, he deals with this initial subject of unity, then in verses 17 to 32 of chapter 4 and chapter 5, verses 1 to 14, he basically says, "Be holy. If God has done this in your life, you need to pursue holiness. You need to put off the old man. You need to die and walk in newness of life. Put this off. Put this on. You need to pursue holiness, have nothing to do with impurity and all these things." So that, he's going to talk about that for basically a chapter, the middle of chapter 4 to the middle of chapter 5. Then in the middle of chapter 5 he changes direction and says, "Let's talk about relationships, what Spirit-filled living looks like in relationship because you should have transformed relationship. If your life is going to be worthy and it's going to balance on the balance with this other amazing thing that seems impossible to do, these are areas that you must be pursuing."

So he talks about holiness and then he talks about, as I said in chapter 5:15-6:9, he says, "This is what a Spirit-filled life looks like in relationships. Husbands, love your wives. Wives, honor your husbands. Children, obey your parents. Parents, care for your children. Servants, obey your masters. Masters, treat your servants right. In everyday life, in your marriage, in your parenting relationship, in your work relationship, you see, the Spirit needs to be at work in your life relationally." That's important, right? And then he's going to go in chapter 6, verse 9, to the end of the chapter, he's going to talk about spiritual warfare. You have a new relationship not just to other people, you have a new relationship to the kingdom of darkness, and if you're going to live a life that is balanced with what God has done, all of these areas must be addressed.

But isn't it interesting, think about it, if you were ordering that, where would you start? Where does Paul start? He starts with unity. All of these areas are important but the foundational importance of unity is the fact, the placement of it right off the bat. When he turns the corner and says, "Listen, in light of all I've told you, I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling in which you've been called," the first thing he does is say, "You must pursue godly unity in Christ."

It is, this unity is such a high calling. It's a high priority to God. This is why he starts with it. There's a sense in which he does the same thing in Romans 12. He's not as explicit in

his detail as it is here, but when he turns the corner in Romans, the first 11 chapters are doctrine, the last five chapters, 12-16, are practice. He turns the corner with the same three words. Well, in Greek it's three words but in English four words, "Therefore I urge you," actually that's three words, isn't it? It's four. Anyway. Just take my word, it's three words in Greek too. It's four words in English somehow and one of those... Anyway, okay, "So therefore I urge you in light of all that I've said in those first 11 chapters," he says, "Therefore I urge you to offer your bodies a living sacrifice, to not be conformed to the world." And what does he do right after he says that, that initial thing? Live your life as a priest, offering to God worship. Don't be conformed to the world. Then he says in verse 3, "Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think but so as to have sound judgment." And he talks about spiritual gifts. He says, "If you're going to think of yourself rightly, you need to see yourself as connected to other members of the body."

And in chapter 4 he does this in the same way. He's going to talk about spiritual gifts from chapter 4, verse 7, through chapter 4, verse 12, and essentially he's actually saying after that, "As you're using your gifts, being equipped and every member is doing his part ministering, then the church grows up more and more to look like Jesus, that we are the body of Christ." Literally, he's saying that the body of Christ isn't just a helpful image to let you know how much you need one another, it is that, but this passage is saying that the body of Christ, he means that as we grow in holiness, we grow in love for one another, we pursue unity, that we actually are the body of Christ and that people see Jesus more clearly. That's what he's getting at when he says in verse 13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." We're growing up to look like the fullness of Jesus. That's corporately. That's what we're called to. It is foundational. It is fundamental.

This is why Jesus, when you look when we preached through John a few years ago, we spent a lot of time on the Upper Room discourse which is kind of like Jesus' farewell address. Chapters 13 to 17 of John are all from the last night before Jesus was crucified and what you see on his heart at the beginning and at the end of the evening is "unity of My people." He starts off by giving a word picture, a living parable by washing the disciples' feet. He, the greatest, humbles himself and becomes like a servant. He washes their feet. Remember, Peter didn't want him to and he says, "If I don't wash you, you have no part in Me." Peter says, "Don't just wash my feet, wash my head and my everything." And he says, "No, you don't need that. You've already been washed but you don't understand what I'm doing but you will later." And what he does after that is he says, "Listen, as I have loved you, you must also love one another. In the same way I have humbled Myself and served you, you must love one another in this way. That's the new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, and when you do this all men will know you're My disciples. Your love, your unity will not just testify to the demons, it will testify to unbelievers. It will break the power and the blindness that Satan has put over them."

That's what he starts with. He talks about a number of things. He comes back to that in chapter 15, "Love one another. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his brothers." And then in chapter 17 the last words of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel from the farewell discourse of the night before he is crucified is his high priestly prayer in John 17 and he says in verse 9, "I ask on their behalf," he's talking to the Father, he's praying and he says, "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world." Do you see that? Jesus is at that moment not praying for those who will not believe. Now there are other times where he offers salvation to all and the Bible commands every man everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel, and the only reason they won't is because they won't. That's what God's word says. Yes, there's the electing purpose of God and all of that but it doesn't change the fact that the offer of the Gospel is free and genuine to all people. But there is this sense and you see this here, that he's praying for his own, those whom he foreknew, those who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. "I do not pray on behalf of the world but of those whom You have given Me for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them."

Skip on down to verse 20, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone," now here's he's talking about, he's talked about the believers that God has given him out of the world already, but he says it's not just those, "but for those also who believe in Me through their word." All future believers, I'm praying for all of them now. What does he pray? Verse 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. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." He wants us to manifest the same kind of unity that he has with the Father, that is, that we are to manifest a unity that is somehow reminiscent and like the unity of the Triune God, and that a lost person cannot understand, and when that is evident, the gates of hell will not stand against that. It smashes them.

So Jesus is praying for unity and so we see Paul has that same heart when he says, "Listen, walk in a manner worthy," back in Ephesians 4, it's like unity is where it starts. It's so important. We don't understand how important it is and you could say, in one sense, under this point, first point, the foundational importance of unity, it's a high calling. That's what we've just seen. It's a high calling. To manifest a oneness that is reminiscent and like the Triune God's oneness, it's supernatural. That's why you have to pray for it. It doesn't happen on our own. We can't gin it up but we can pray it up, and we can do what God tells us to do in obedience and obeying him while praying and trusting and he will do it.

It's not just a high calling, though, it's an urgent need. Sub point under first point, the foundational importance of unity. It's foundational because it's a high calling, it's foundational because it's an urgent need. Just mention some verses to you to look at. Hebrews 10:24-25. We're to consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, to provoke one another to love and good deeds. And he says not forsaking the assembling

of yourselves together as is the habit of some. The author of Hebrews is warning Christian believers, these are Hebrew believers or the Jews who have converted to Christ, he's warning them of the danger of falling away, that they may show themselves to not truly be genuine believers, that they need to press on to hold onto Christ. And he's picturing, as you read the book of Hebrews you see a lot of warnings and the idea is the danger is there and you must be aware of the danger. In fact, in chapter 3, verses 12 and 13, he says, "See to it that none of you have an evil believing heart that falls away from the living God, but encourage one another day after day as long as it is still called today so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Take care, brethren, that there be in none of you, not in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart. That is, look around, be aware of what's going on around you, pursuing unity with one another, caring for one another, loving one another, and helping one another not to fall away, and you need to be regularly assembling together so that you can do that."

Now let me say something. This is really, this is an unmistakably clear teaching of the Bible that you and I desperately need other believers. We desperately need other believers and we ignore these warnings to our own, the peril of our own soul. Now we live in a time and challenging and the coronavirus and some of you have been forced to stay home because you're high risk or you're trying to, you have other, you're caring for people that are high risk, but listen, you need to hear these words that if you can't come and I'm not telling you you have to come in person, you have to make the decision before the Lord with what, and you may be doing exactly the right thing. I'm not saying you're not, but I'm saying this, that if you're staying home, what are you doing to fellowship with other believers? Are you, have you learned how to do a Zoom call? Are you having Facetime with other believers that you can encourage and that they can encourage you? And if you're not, what's going to happen is sin will harden you, the deceitfulness of sin will harden you like he says in chapter 3. Don't allow that to happen. And we need each other. I need other people looking at me to say, "Ty, look at this area of your life." Because I don't want to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. You see, that's happening someone else is telling me, "Look out." We all need that. It's an urgent need. It's a high calling but it is an urgent need.

So some way we've got to address that and we need to be mindful there are people that aren't able to come. We need to be reaching out to them, offering yourself to be a person to have some regular accountability, regular encouragement, time just to pray together, talk together, sing together, share the word together. This is what God wants for us and in doing that, remember what you're doing is you're providing an opportunity for the Spirit of God to work in producing unity that drives back the gates of hell. That's the foundational importance of unity. The second point is the functional practice, let's say the functional pursuit of unity. The functional pursuit.

The foundational importance is there in the fact that where the location of this exhortation but now let's look at the particulars of the exhortation in the time we have left. He says, "I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called," and he uses two participles that really help you understand the flow of argument. The way that you walk worthy, the way that you pursue this unity is by doing two things.

Verse 2, showing tolerance. I don't like that word "tolerance" there. I mean, the NASB translates it that more recently, it originally translated it "showing forbearance," and the other translations tend to say "forbear" or "bearing with one another," and I think "forbearance" is better. The word "tolerance" is okay but it's not quite as, I think, accurate to the meaning of this word in Greek. That's the first participle and the second we're going to see is in verse 3, "being diligent."

So we're going to talk first about showing tolerance or showing forbearance. The way that the functional pursuit of unity, how do you do it? Well, you work at showing forbearance, forbearing with one another. This word translated "forbear" means "to hold one's self up or back." Kind of, "Hold me back." You know, "I'm angry, hold me back." It's not exactly that but anyway it's the idea of holding back. It means "to hold one's self upright," and the idea is against some kind of pressure, some kind of opposition. You're holding yourself up against that.

So bearing with one another and what he's basically saying here is, "Listen, unity is not easy. It's not easy at all." The fact that God has done all that he's done for you in Christ gives you the power not to look to jump over little tiny hurdles, the Christian life just moving from one happy victory to the other happy victory to the other happy. No, it's not like that, it's one war to the next war, to the next war, but the power that you have through Christ is more than sufficient. Bearing with one another. If you're going to be one with other brothers and sisters, if you're going to be one like this with me, you're going to get used to and see things about me, I'm going to see things about you that we don't like, that we find offensive, that we find disturbing, that we find difficult. But he says, "Listen, your calling is to bear with one another, to stand up under those things," and the idea is staying power. The idea is, "I'm not going anywhere. I'm still here and I care about you and I'm not going to change the fact that I care about you because I see more of your flaws." Because, listen, the reality is we're all sinful and if we open up our hearts, you will see lots of things that are ugly that Jesus hasn't finished with us yet and that we need a Savior every moment of every day.

And so you're going to see that, so you have to determine and this is a Greek present tense, it means continually bearing up, that you're in an ongoing way, you're staying, you're making a continual decision to stay in the relationship, to stay there. Listen, I'll tell you one of the things I see so common today in the American church is the lack of staying power. Now I don't mean that you can leave a church for a lot of good reasons, I mean, there are a lot of good reason to leave a church. If the church isn't being faithful to the word, then you should leave. But if it's just you're having trouble getting along with people, that is not a good reason to leave a church. In fact, one of the things that happens is you're going to take yourself with you when you go and so you're going to have conflict eventually wherever you go. I love that poster that says, "The only common denominator in all of your dysfunctional relationships is you." It really is.

So we have to bear with one another, we have to make a determination to stay in there and he gives four adverbial phrases that really, that give power to this. You bear with one another, first of all, with humility. With lowliness of mind, literally lowliness of mind,

that if we're going to bear with one another, we have to think less of ourselves. We need to meditate on what Jesus was doing when he washed the disciples' feet. "I'm not above washing the feet of Simon Peter and all these other brothers," and that was just a picture. He lived with those sinful difficult people who were disrespecting and dishonoring him continually. He stayed with them. His staying power. He was forbearing and having to do that, he had a lowly mind. He thought lowly of himself. He didn't think of himself as too great for that.

And that's amazing when you think that this is the Son of God and so you and I are to be that way, wash the disciples' feet. We're to wash one another's feet. That is, we're to be really willing to get into the nitty-gritty and to see that and just to stay there with humility because we don't think too highly of ourselves to be involved in that. I'm not above helping you clean up this mess in your life. I'm not above helping you clean up this mess that you've made for the hundredth time again in your life. I'll get on my knees with you and help you clean it up with humility, with meekness, gentleness is what it says but in the Greek the word "meekness," the idea of surrendered heart that doesn't, is not easily offended. It's so very hard to offend a meek person because the meek person is not thinking about his rights, he's not thinking about what he is owed. He is thinking as a servant and so he's able to bear with one another because he expects it. He realizes, "God just brought this into my life. This is a challenge. This difficult relationship is a challenge that the Lord has brought into my life. I belong to Him. I don't have any rights. Lord, let's go at it. Let's do what You want to do."

With patience. The word literally in the text means "suffers long." With a commitment to be willing to suffer a long time in pursuing oneness. It's going to be painful. It's going to hurt. We don't like to hurt but if you're going to build this kind of unity, you're going to have to be willing to hurt and God's grace will give you the strength to do that. It will help us.

And then lastly, in love. Those three leading in, he says, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love," that's the fourth adverbial phrase because of what Christ has done for us. How do we love other believers? Listen, when you find someone that's hard to love which you're going to find regularly because you're around other people who are hard to love, all of us are, it's just kind of nice to remember that. We forget it. We pretend. We think that people because they look good on the outside that they're easy to love but the closer you get to them, you're going to see they're hard to love. We must be committed to bear with one another and what love does, love looks for the other's, puts the other's needs above our own and the only way you can do that is to be fully resting in Christ's love for you.

"Because You've loved me, Jesus, I'm going to love this child of Yours and I'm going to love You back by loving them." That's so important. When you have an opportunity to love the unlovely, first of all, remember you should be humble to know that you're unlovely too but when you have an opportunity to love the unlovely, know that Jesus loves you in all of your unloveliness and love him back by loving them. That's what will give you the strength to bear with one another.

Then he says, the second participle, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This word "being diligent," it pictures hurrying. It pictures a focus. Like you're hurrying, you're running with purpose, earnestness, zealousness. So it means that we're to have, we're to be bearing with one another continually, as we said earlier, but we're to be also hurrying. Now not in hurrying and running around each other and missing. No, hurrying to preserve, to guard literally, to guard, to watch over. We're to hurry after watching over the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It's like when we're relating to one another and we're offending each other, we're dealing with life, we're dealing with the problems of life, he says, "Get your eye back on the ball and keep focus on what really is the ball." What is the goal? The goal is to keep and preserve this unity of the Spirit. It's not something you make, it's something the Spirit already has done because we have been made one. Christ has abolished. And so you think even about those things.

Hey, we have unity here. We're not on the, this is where you remember, you know, because you feel like we're opponents as we're having this conversation. I feel like I'm on the defense and now I'm on the offense and you're on the defense, now you're on the offense. No, this is remembering we are on the same team. We are united. We need to be able to stand side-by-side and now look over there at my sin and your sin, that's the enemy. You and I are together. That's what he's talking about and, again, continually hurrying, remembering, focusing on that.

When we have a heart to do these things, this means getting into each other's lives and finding out the struggles and finding out the things that are the hardest for people, and staying with them in it sometimes for years and realizing that as you're doing it, unseen to you, often completely unseen God is proclaiming his manifold wisdom through your interaction to the principalities and powers and condemning them and he is doing work that is hindering their hold on unbelievers because there are people around you who are watching, who are seeing, and they're sitting there saying, "Look at how, behold how they love one another." They're doing like the men who arrested James and John and they looked at their character and they said then they remembered that these men had been with Jesus. They said, "These people are different. Oh, they're disciples of Jesus Christ and He is God's anointed."

That's the calling the Lord has given us and as we do that, that is the most powerful thing, that is unleashing the power of God. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation and when the Gospel begins to go more and more into our lives and to build oneness, that is the power of God being unleashed in his world. That's a high calling. That's a worthy calling.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we pray that You would help us to be one even, Lord, as You and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one that we would as unique individuals with different gifts, with different experiences, with different sin, with different problems, with different

challenges, that You would show us how to love one another, to bear with one another, to be lowly-minded, and to keep our eye on the goal. We ask this for the glory of Your Son. He is worthy, Lord, Make us, make our lives a true representation of the incredible value of our salvation. May tomorrow that be clearer and may there be more value in my life and the life of my brothers and sisters tomorrow representing the value of our salvation than there is today and more than the next day, and more the next day until Jesus comes. We pray this in His name. Amen.