

# **Unity in the Body of Christ**

## **Worthy of Our Calling**

*Ephesians 4:1-3*

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# Worthy of Our Calling

## Scripture

Today we begin a new series of sermons in Ephesians 4:1-16 that I am calling, “Unity in the Body of Christ.”

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul set forth a number of glorious doctrines dealing with “predestination and election, adoption and redemption, the work of the Holy Spirit, rebirth, the work of God in joining people from all nations and all walks of life together in the one holy body of Christ, the church. This is so marvelous a section that Paul ends chapter 3 with a doxology.”<sup>1</sup>

Then, as Paul began chapter 4 in Ephesians, he transitioned from doctrine to application, which he commonly did in his letters. First, doctrine, and then application. So, as Paul transitioned from doctrine to application, he began with a discussion about Christians walking worthily of our calling.

Let’s read Ephesians 4:1-3:

**<sup>1</sup>I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)**

## Introduction

Tom Wright writes the following in his commentary:

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 121.

If you buy a new car, what's the first thing you do?

Do you sit down for an hour and read through the manual, to make sure you know every little detail about it before you take to the road?

Or do you at once get behind the wheel and go for a drive, enjoying all the things the car can do and not worrying about the details, at least for the moment?

I suspect that most of us give the second answer. In the same way, it's notorious that when people buy a new computer they tend to operate it first and read the instruction manual afterwards.

The trouble is, of course, that things go wrong with machinery. They may go wrong even quicker if you don't read the instructions. But most people will at least keep the instruction book handy and refer to it from time to time to see how the machine was meant to behave, what the fundamental instructions were, and what needs to be done to ensure that it remains at maximum efficiency.

In this section, which opens the quite long second half of the letter, Paul takes his readers back to the fundamental instructions on living the Christian life. He reminds them how they began and what it was all about. There are three things which emerge as basic: the meaning of their call to follow the king; the grace which has equipped each of them to play their part in serving him; and the unity they already have, but which they must make every effort to guard. Of these, the first is the one which Paul stresses, and the one we are most likely to forget. This is the basic manual for living the Christian life, and we need to go back and read it regularly.<sup>2</sup>

Paul began the second half of his letter with a description

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 42–43.

of our call to follow Jesus.

## Lesson

Ephesians 4:1-3 shows us that God has called us to Christlike conduct.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Call to the Worthy Walk (4:1)
2. The Characteristics of the Worthy Walk (4:2-3)

### I. The Call to the Worthy Walk (4:1)

First, let's notice the call to the worthy walk.

Paul began in verse 1a by saying, **“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord.”** The first comment I want to make is that the word **“therefore”** is important. As has often been said, “Whenever you see the word ‘therefore’ in your Bible, you should ask what it is there for.” This is Paul's transition from doctrine to application. As one commentator said, “In a Christian's life, the following things should balance: belief and behavior; creed and conduct; doctrine and duty; lip and life; precept and practice; position and performance; revelation and response; root and fruit; standing and state.”<sup>3</sup> Paul's **“therefore”** is the transition from doctrine to application.

The second comment I want to make is that Paul referred to himself as **a prisoner for the Lord**. Paul was not seeking the pity of the Ephesians. No, he was reminding them that he was not a prisoner of Rome, but that he was **a prisoner for the Lord**. As commentator John MacArthur said, “Paul had the ability to see everything in the light of how it affected

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<sup>3</sup> Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of Ephesians* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 1997), 27.

Christ. He saw everything vertically before he saw it horizontally. His motives were Christ's, his standards were Christ's, his objectives were Christ's, his vision was Christ's, his entire orientation was Christ's. Everything he thought, planned, said, and did was in relation to his Lord. He was in the fullest sense a captive of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

By reminding the Ephesians of his own status, Paul was highlighting the status of the Ephesians and, indeed, of every Christian. Because Jesus Christ has purchased every Christian by his own blood, every Christian belongs—body and soul—to Jesus Christ. We are blood-bought prisoners of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe that?

With that truth and assertion in mind, Paul wrote in verse 1b, **“I therefore... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”** The word **“walk”** in this sentence has to do with behavior. It is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to daily conduct, to how Christians live day-by-day in light of their new status.

Paul went on to urge Christians to walk **“in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”** John MacArthur notes that the Greek word for **“worthy”** (*axios*) “has the root meaning of balancing the scales—what is on one side of the scale should be equal in weight to what is on the other side. By extension, the word came to be applied to anything that was expected to correspond to something else. A person worthy of his pay was one whose day's work corresponded to his day's wages. The believer who walks **in a manner worthy of the calling with which he has been called** is one whose daily living corresponds to his high position as a

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 118.

child of God and fellow heir with Jesus Christ. His practical living matches his spiritual position.”<sup>5</sup>

So, what does that look like in practice? What are the characteristics of the worthy walk? That’s what Paul addressed next.

## II. The Characteristics of the Worthy Walk (4:2-3)

And second, let’s examine the characteristics of the worthy walk.

Paul explained the worthy walk by listing five characteristics in verses 2-3. He said that Christians are to walk **“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

It is important to understand that each one of these characteristics already belongs to every born-again Christian. It is part of the DNA of every Christian, and although it may not be seen in full bloom, it is there in germ form.

So, with that in mind, let’s examine each characteristic.

### A. *Humility (4:2a)*

The first characteristic of the worthy walk is humility.

Paul said in verse 2a that Christians are to walk **“with all humility....”** Apparently, there was no Greek word for humility, at least in a positive sense, and so Paul made one by joining a noun and a verb. John Stott said that “the word Paul uses here is *tapeinophrosynē*, which means ‘lowliness of mind,’ the humble recognition of the worth and value of other people,

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<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 119.

the humble mind which was in Christ and led him to empty himself and become a servant.”<sup>6</sup> Tim Keller describes **“humility”** this way: “The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less” (*Freedom*, Kindle, 32).<sup>7</sup>

The Greeks did not prize humility at all. They thought of humility much like Uriah Heep did in Charles Dickens’ novel *David Copperfield*. You remember that Uriah Heep was noted for his cloying abasement and insincerity, making frequent references to his own “umbleness.” Instead of humility, the Greeks prized pride, and the first-century Christians were ridiculed for their biblical humility.

Our culture today ridicules humility and promotes pride and self-exaltation. Our culture says, “Look out for number one,” “Pamper yourself,” “You deserve it,” and “Think about yourself first.” And that is exactly the problem in our culture! You think only of yourself! Pride is being filled with self.

Biblical humility, however, is being filled with God. Paul described biblical humility in Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

So, is your life characterized by humility?

#### B. *Gentleness (4:2b)*

The second characteristic of the worthy walk is gentleness.

Paul said in verse 2b that Christians are to walk **“with**

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<sup>6</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 148.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

**all... gentleness....**” Interestingly, this characteristic is often misunderstood. Biblical gentleness does not mean timidity. It is kindness of “attitude and behavior, in contrast with harshness in one’s dealings with others.”<sup>8</sup> The biblical word for **“gentleness”** is sometimes translated as “meekness.” So, as John Stott notes, “‘meekness’ is not a synonym for ‘weakness.’ On the contrary, it is the gentleness of the strong, whose strength is under control.”<sup>9</sup>

Numbers 12:3 says, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” Yet, Moses was anything but weak or timid. No, he was God’s leader who challenged the power of the Egyptian Pharaoh. His strength was under God’s control, albeit imperfectly.

Moreover, gentleness is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22–23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, *gentleness*, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Thus, every Christian has the fruit of the Spirit in his new nature.

So, is your life characterized by gentleness?

### C. *Patience (4:2c)*

The third characteristic of the worthy walk is patience.

Paul said in verse 2c that Christians are to walk **“with patience....”** MacArthur notes that **patience** (*makrothumia*) “literally means long-tempered, and is sometimes translated long-suffering. The patient person endures negative circumstances and never gives in to them.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 748.

<sup>9</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 126.



James Montgomery Boice tells the story about a rather pious individual who once came to a preacher and asked him to pray for him that he might have patience. “I do so lack patience,” he said, trying to be humble as he said it. “I wish you would pray for me.”

“I’ll pray for you right now,” the preacher replied. So he began to pray: “Lord, please send great tribulation into this brother’s life.”

The man who had asked for prayer put a hand out and touched the preacher on the arm, trying to stop his prayer. “You must not have heard me rightly,” he said. “I didn’t ask you to pray for tribulation. I asked you to pray that I might have patience.”

“Oh, I heard what you said,” the preacher answered. “But haven’t you read Romans 5:3, ‘And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience?’ It means we acquire patience through the things that we suffer. I prayed that God would send tribulations so that you would have patience.”<sup>11</sup>

So, is your life characterized by patience?

#### D. *Forbearance (4:2d)*

The fourth characteristic of the worthy walk is forbearance.

Paul said in verse 2d that Christians are to walk “... **bearing with one another in love...**” Tony Merida says, “This means ‘to put up with each other in love.’”<sup>12</sup> The Apostle Peter exhorted Christians in 1 Peter 4:8, “Above all, keep loving one

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<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

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another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

This forbearance is illustrated in marriage, isn't it? My wife is forbearing toward me, in spite of my many sins. She puts up with me in love. Her love for me covers a multitude of my sins. And I love her for it. And isn't that how it works in every marriage?

Well, that forbearance that makes a marriage work well is the very same forbearance that makes a church work well too.

So, is your life characterized by forbearance?

### E. *Unity (4:3)*

And the fifth characteristic of the worthy walk is unity.

Paul said in verse 3 that Christians are to be “... **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” Paul's language is wonderfully careful. You see, we don't create unity. It is given to every Christian by the Holy Spirit. Our task, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, is **to maintain the unity of the Spirit**. It is like an orchestra working hard together to make a beautiful, unified sound. So, Tony Merida writes, “Unity is active, not passive. We should be zealous to maintain unity. Notice we do not work to *create* unity but to *keep* unity! God unites us, and we are to seek to maintain unity by the Spirit's help.”<sup>13</sup>

So, is your life characterized by unity?

Tony Merida sums up how to understand the five characteristics of the worthy walk. He writes:

In order to pursue these qualities, we must be willing to renounce the opposite of each (Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 218). We must renounce self-centeredness in order to walk in humility. We must renounce harshness in order to walk with gentleness.

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

We must renounce the tyranny of our own agendas in order to walk with patience. We must renounce idealistic expectations in order to walk in forbearing love. We must renounce indifference and passivity in order to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The church is unified, and God is glorified when we live with such Christlike conduct.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 4:1-3, let us walk worthy of the calling we have received.

In conclusion, let me quote from Merida again. He writes:

No one exemplified these virtues better than Jesus, who was the supreme example of humility (Philippians 2:5-11). As for gentleness, Jesus said, “Come to me... because I am gentle” (Matthew 11:28-29). His patience is unparalleled (1 Timothy 1:16). As for [forbearance], Christ demonstrated it in manifold ways and most vividly at the cross (Romans 5:8). As for being eager to maintain [unity], he was the Peacemaker (Ephesians 2:14). Therefore, the more we look like Jesus individually, and the more we live like Christ relationally, the more united we will become.<sup>15</sup>

May God help each one of us who knows Christ as our Lord and Savior to walk worthy of the calling we have received. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
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