Walking Together

Believers demonstrate the truth of the gospel by being unified in their actions.

Ephesians 4:1-10

Many churches have adopted recovery ministries to help people in addiction find freedom from substance abuse. In some cases, the focus in those congregations moved from “those people” to “us” as they realized their own need of deliverance. It is interesting how our perspective of others changes when we realize our own dependencies. The sense of solidarity among fellow strugglers cuts across the normal dividing lines of class, ethnicity, and political affiliations.

How can a personal struggle or crisis bring us into a relationship with another person with whom we would not have connected under normal circumstances?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 4:1-10

As we approach the fourth chapter of Ephesians, we see a characteristic pattern of Paul’s writing. He begins with the word “therefore,” connecting Ephesians 1–3 with chapters 4–6. The former focused on the new life offered in Christ. The latter addresses the new walk that should characterize His followers because of that new life.

Some scholars see Paul’s approach here as the “indicative/imperative” principle of the Christian life. The indicative describes the mood of a verb in the original language of Scripture. It is used for an action that is already true. On the other hand, the imperative (a command) is used for an action that has not yet taken place. In other words, the walk of a believer should express the new life he or she has received in Christ.

The persistent danger for the church throughout the ages has been to reverse the proper order of the indicative and imperative. At times some have taught that by doing Christian things we become Christian people. Nothing could be further from the truth. We obey God’s commands in Scripture because we are saved, not in order to be saved. The command to live worthy in Ephesians 4:1 should be interpreted in this manner. Actions do not make us worthy of salvation; rather, having received it, we live in light of its magnificence.

This is what is true about every person: we are broken by sin. Here is what God wants to see as true about us—that we live in unity with other believers. At the cross, we all stand in need of the Lord’s forgiveness. Thus, our unity in Christ demonstrates the very essence of the gospel: all have sinned, and salvation is available to all through faith in Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:1-10, noting the commands given. How is each command connected to a person’s salvation?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

WALKING WORTHY (EPH. 4:1-3)

1 Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

VERSE 1
Paul wrote to the Ephesians as a prisoner. However, he was not prevented by his imprisonment in making a positive impact for Christ’s kingdom. Paul was not trying to enlist the Ephesians’ sympathy in reminding them of his situation. Instead, he was intensifying his appeal. As he began to call for Christian attitudes and character, no doubt the Ephesians would have realized that what takes place inside the life of a Christian is what drives the outward expression of a new life in Christ. They could see this truth in Paul himself. As Christ transforms our attitudes, our actions will change as a result.

Ultimately, the code of conduct for any believer in Christ is to live worthy of the calling upon their lives. Paul had already taught about the nature of this calling. (See Eph. 1:18). The behavior of Christians is to be in direct proportion to the greatness of God’s power He has bestowed upon them. This is why Paul took the first half of his letter to describe for his audience the glory of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Then with his therefore in 4:1, he drew out the implications of that holy calling on Christian behavior.

VERSES 2-3
Having highlighted the great calling upon the lives of believers, Paul proceeded to set forth how this calling can be fulfilled. The key would not primarily be external resources but rather internal character and virtue. In verse 2 he mentioned four key attitudes: humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.

Humility was not considered a virtue in the ancient world but became one through the influence of the gospel. It is a key virtue that Paul enjoined the Ephesians to pursue. Gentleness is frequently translated as “meekness,” which should not be equated with weakness. It is best defined as “strength under control.”
As those who are called to a future glorification, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to practice *patience* in their relationships. Having a strong sense of our future inheritance in heaven motivates us to be restrained in our reactions. *Bearing with one another* is an amplification of what it means to be patient. Both are used in Romans 2:4 to depict how God extends Himself on our behalf. Embodying these virtues is part of living worthy of our calling and demonstrating the truth of the gospel.

**Not everyone who acknowledges the value of unity will exert himself or herself to create and keep it.**

Though Paul previously asserted the essential unity between Jews and Gentiles in the church (2:11-22), he contended that this status (indicative) must be maintained in on going practice and experience (imperative). This unity would need to be kept through *making every effort*. Not everyone who acknowledges the value of unity will exert himself or herself to create and keep it. The godly attitudes and character set forth in verse 2 are, in part, how unity is maintained.

Though human effort would be required, ultimately unity in the Ephesians church would originate in the *Spirit*. His transforming presence in the life of every believer makes unity possible through effort and commitment. While we must work toward harmony in the church, we can’t accomplish it in our own strength. It takes the empowerment of the Spirit to see it happen.

This unity occurs in the context of *the bond of peace*. While we might be tempted to see this peace as the means to unity, remembering Paul’s previous treatment of it in his letter helps to fine tune the actual meaning. Since God has already made us one in Christ (2:14-15), our call is to affirm and embrace what is already true, not create something from scratch. This is an encouragement to us as we pursue this oneness in actual experience.

*How do the attitudes and actions identified by Paul in these verses serve as a demonstration of the gospel? How do they help us share Jesus with others?*
LIVING UNIFIED (EPH. 4:4-6)

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling — 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

VERSE 4

After laying the biblical foundation for unity through a gospel-worthy lifestyle, Paul continued by including our common hope in Christ. The church is the one body of Christ. It is a single community made up of Jews and Gentiles who have been reconciled to God through Christ. Though this body meets in many places, speaks different languages, and serves in various cultures, the body of Christ is still one.

It is the Spirit that animates the church to live in a unified manner (2:18). To neglect the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit in the church is to effectively cut off her very source of life. Unity isn’t easily attained, but thankfully we do not have to pursue it in our own power.

Notice how Paul wrote this section as three triads in verses 4-6. Each verse contains a triad focusing on a different member of the Trinity. The unity among believers should mimic the unity between the three Persons of the Godhead.

BIBLE SKILL: Compare Bible passages.

Read the following Bible passages and take note of what they say concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2:38; 4:31; 13:52; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and Ephesians 5:18. What do these passages teach about the filling of the Holy Spirit? Write a summary statement about what you discover.
In verse 4 Paul called attention to the *one hope* to which every believer is called. Unity emerges among believers when eternal realities are a clear and precious fixation. When our focus becomes too oriented to this life, disharmony will enter the picture.

**VERSE 5**
In his second triad, Paul focused on Christ and how He brings unity to His church. This begins with affirming Him as *Lord*. The lordship of Christ was the defining statement of the early church (Phil. 2:11). In the Old Testament, “LORD” translated the covenant name of God, Yahweh. To call Jesus *Lord* is to acknowledge His deity and oneness with God the Father.

The *one faith* could have been a reference to the belief needed to embrace Jesus as Lord, or it could have been a reference to the truths about Jesus. Certainly a person is saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9). However, the word *faith* sometimes appears as a body of truth (1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1,6; Titus 1:4; Jude 3). In a culture marked by inclusiveness of all viewpoints, we dare not accommodate unbiblical beliefs to achieve unity. While there is no need to divide ourselves on secondary matters, we must always insist on adherence to the core tenets of Christianity.

The *one baptism* spoken of by Paul is debated as being either baptism in water or the baptism of the Spirit. It is not necessary to speak in either/or terms when one considers that the former is a symbol of an inward experience and thus accurately represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

*The unity of the church is a unity of mission.*

**VERSE 6**
In his final triad, Paul highlighted *God* the *Father* as the source of the church’s unity. If God is my Father, then other believers are my brothers and sisters in Him.

What we learn from this is crucial. First, unity among believers is based on the preeminence of God, that He is *above* us. Idolatry dismantles church unity. Second, unity must take into account the fact that God’s purpose is to work *through* every believer. The unity of the church is a unity of mission. Finally, God is *in* every believer, which forbids us from building a fellowship based on externals, such as race or class.
How should believers’ relationships with one another mirror the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

**KEY DOCTRINE:** *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Col. 1:21-22).

**ENJOYING VICTORY (EPH. 4:7-10)**

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. 9 But what does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

It seems like all the human grasping in life contributes to disharmony. Empty people claw after status and prestige in order to fill the gaping holes in their souls. However, when a person is assured that an ultimate triumph belongs to them in Christ, they are able to relax and live contently in a manner conducive to unity. Christ has won the victory in which every believer should rest.

**VERSES 7-8**

Unity in the church is biblical but so is diversity. *Grace was given to each one of us.* People are saved not because they deserve it or have earned it but because God is a gracious God who took the initiative to give salvation freely to all who would believe. This gift was distributed not based on the believer’s merit but according to the merit of Christ’s gift. With the gift of salvation came other gifts of God’s grace that were to be used to build up the body of Christ.

In verse 8 Paul employed a vivid picture of a military victory parade to convey the triumph of Christ. He quoted Psalm 68:18, which portrayed the Lord leading a glorious procession to Mount Zion after having defeated His enemies. In the psalm, the Lord...
received tribute from those He conquered and probably distributed it to His people. Paul clarified that, as the conquering king, Jesus gave gifts to the church. While these gifts are the spiritual gifts mentioned in other places in Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, we should not lose sight of the spiritual victory they represent.

**VERSES 9-10**

The ascension of Jesus is probably one of the most neglected aspects of His life and ministry. Previously, Paul taught the Ephesians about its importance in connection to the believer’s assurance and hope (Eph. 1:20-21). The backdrop against which we see the exaltation of Jesus is His incarnation, and how He humbled Himself and descended to earth as a man.

An urban church in the West is not better equipped to advance the kingdom than one in a remote area of the third world.

He ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things. This is how Paul described the supremacy of Christ above all creation. Referring back to what he wrote previously (1:23), the apostle set forth the basis by which unity is possible in the church. Christ fills all things, including the church, because He is everywhere. A suburban church is not more advantaged over a rural one when it comes to demonstrating the truth of the gospel through unity. An urban church in the West is not better equipped to advance the kingdom than one in a remote area of the third world. In His triumph over sin and death, Christ has equally resourced His church with the Spirit to model His victory before a lost world. Because He fills the church, she draws her life from Him. This is the basis for unity, and this unity models the gospel before a watching world.

What does walking in victory look like in the life of a believer? What about in the life of a local church?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to live lives worthy of the gospel through their Christlike attitudes and actions.
- Believers are to live in unity with one another.
- Believers have victory in Christ.

*In what particular attitude could you grow and thereby contribute to greater unity in your church?*

*How might the current level of unity in your church impact receptivity to the gospel in your community? How could you change this for the better?*

*How could your small group become more intentional in its celebration of the victory won by Jesus?*

Prayer Needs