

Intro

Church unity is like a brand new Bible. No loose or torn pages. Pages connected to the spine. Pristine condition. Fully intact.

A brand new Bible can be kept in pristine condition if perfectly cared for. Gently placed on the shelf. Pages slowly and cautiously turned. But if we're not gentle, if we're careless with it, we can have a Bible that's falling apart. Same with church unity.

My point isn't that you need to keep your Bible in pristine condition. My Bible isn't connected to the spine. I have worn and torn and loose pages from turning to 1 Samuel and Isaiah too quick. My point is if we deal gently and carefully with one another, we'll preserve church unity intact. If we deal harshly with one another and we're reckless in our interactions, we'll tear apart our unity.

Let's turn to Paul.

BIG IDEA: How do I walk worthy of my calling?

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: What does it mean to be called? (4:1, 4)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
– 4:1

“therefore” = in light of everything that's been said in chapters 1:3. In light of the fact that you were chosen, adopted, made alive, sealed with the Spirit, forgiven of sins, joined to other citizens of God's household, etc., live in these ways.

Your relationship with God has changed. You've been reconciled. You have peace with God. Your sins are forgiven. You were *“strangers to the covenants of promise”* (2:12). Now you look forward to the world to come. You were dead in your sins. Now you've been made alive. You were separated from God's people. Now you're one of them.

Live out who you are in Christ. That's what Paul's saying. You've been *“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand”* (2:10). So live it!

“a prisoner of the Lord” = Paul writes from prison. He's chained to a Roman guard 24/7.

“walk” = manner of life, our conduct.

What does it mean to “have been called”?

If you are a Christian today, you were called.

God does the calling. God calls people. Who does God call? Those who were predestined for salvation.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. – **Romans 8:30**

God predestines a people. Then he calls those people. Then he justifies those people. Then he glorifies those people.

Before the foundation of the world, God predestined some. In time, God calls those who were predestined. When called, those called inevitably, without fail, are justified = saved, declared righteous, declared not guilty, sins forgiven. At the end of time, the justified person is glorified. They're given a heavenly body fit for the kingdom of God that can't die.

Calling is the mechanism by which God ensures the predestined person is justified. Theologians call this the effectual call. God's call succeeds without fail. The preeminent Greek lexicon defines the verb "to call" this way: "choose for receipt of a special benefit or experience" (BDAG, 503).

Christian, 4:4 notes that "*you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.*" The "special benefit or experience" that we were called to is "*the one hope*" = realization of "*the covenants of promise*" which, ultimately, are fulfilled in glorification and the new heavens and new earth: sins remembered no more, a glorified body that can't die or sin or suffer, all threats forever removed, fit to dwell in the presence of God forevermore.

Christian, this is what you're waiting for.

Application

Paul's urging us to live today "*in manner worthy of the calling.*" To live in a way fitting the benefits that have come to us through Jesus Christ.

So, **how do I walk worthy of my calling?**

Point 2: Humility (4:2)

In the largest sense, the rest of Ephesians is walking worthy of our calling. Today, walking worthy is living in unity.

We don't create unity. We maintain unity. These four characteristics maintain unity. So pursue them!

with all humility

Humility

The essence of humility is self-abasement, self-denial, lowliness of mind, bringing ourselves low. Before God and neighbor.

Our mission statement, "**We exist to glorify God by building a community that is growing in Christlikeness and making new disciples**" describes spiritual progress in terms of Christlikeness. Jesus was humble.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. – **Matthew 11:29**

Jesus encourages us to learn from him because he's "*gentle and lowly in heart.*"

"*lowly in heart*" refers to Jesus' humility. Jesus' nature is to make himself low.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. – **Philippians 2:3-8***

What's humility? Elevating others and lowering ourselves.

Paul encourages us to imitate Jesus.

1. Jesus lowered himself by giving up his heavenly glory to come to earth.
2. Jesus lowered himself by taking on human flesh.
3. Jesus lowered himself by taking the posture of a servant.

4. Jesus lowered himself by obeying the Father.
5. Jesus lowered himself by dying on the cross.

Application

Us individuals lowering ourselves is good for the unity of Palermo Christian Church. What does this look like?

Lowering ourselves by submitting to the majority vote.

Lowering ourselves by taking time to pray for someone else.

Lowering ourselves by serving in the nursery.

Lowering ourselves by giving up our time at a church work day.

Lowering ourselves by not having to have everything exactly the way we want it.

The essence of humility is lowering ourselves. When we forget about ourselves and consider one another and the good of the whole body, we maintain church unity.

Point 3: Gentleness (4:2)

and gentleness,

“gentleness” maintains unity.

Gentleness

The essence of *“gentleness”* is mildness. Not dealing harshly with others. Not using force to get our own way. Dealing with others in a considerate and courteous manner.

Gentle when evangelizing: Gentle when responding to the slander of non-Christians (1 Pet 3:16). Gentle when correcting a false teacher (2 Tim 2:25). Gentle when correcting a brother or sister’s sin (Gal 6:1). Gentleness (Jas 3:13) rather than jealousy and selfish ambition (Jas 3:14). Gentleness is the opposite of Christians fighting for their own passions and personal gain (Jas 4:1-2).

Earlier we read that Jesus is gentle. He overlooks our sin and doesn’t jump down our throat when we fail.

Application

Gently correcting an incorrect interpretation or comment in a Sunday school class.

Gently discussing theological disagreement.

Gently approaching leadership with a concern.

Leadership gently expressing spiritual concern.

Gently dealing with a discouraged brother or sister.

Gently addressing sin concerns.

Dealing with one another in a delicate way rather than harshly. Like Jesus deals with us.

Yes, there are times to up the intensity. Yes, there were times Jesus wasn’t gentle. In Matthew 21, he drove people out of the temple and overturned tables. In Matthew 23, he verbally scorched the scribes and Pharisees, calling them *“blind fools...hypocrites...whitewashed tombs.”* This is the exception, not the norm. Direct, intense speech is used to wake up the obstinate and hard-hearted from their blindness, not to deal with the grieving, discouraged saint who’s broken by

unrelenting trials. Direct, intense speech isn't the way to deal with the newer Christian who's working to overcome a number of decade-long sin patterns.

Gentleness is the norm for our dealings with each other. Courteous, considerate, mild, not harsh interaction.

Point 4: Patience (4:2)

“with patience”

“patience” maintains unity.

Patience

The idea is **restraint**. Like God is slow to anger. God sees sin and he exercises restraint (Rom 2:4). For now. One day God won't restrain his wrath.

For us, slow to anger. Slow to be irritated. Slow to be provoked. Even when there's a legitimate problem. Enduring foolishness. Enduring unformed character. Enduring sin.

Application

Slow to anger when I would have preferred a different song to have been sung.

Slow to anger when the pastor didn't highlight a particular phrase to the extent I would have liked.

Slow to anger when someone makes a comment in Sunday school I disagree with.

Slow to anger when the Trustees' priorities don't match my priorities.

Slow to anger when someone didn't remember my name.

Yes, it's legitimate to get angry about sin. But sometimes we need to be slow to anger when our brothers and sisters sin. Like God is slow to anger when we sin. God's patience means mercy for us. The idea is restraint. Self-control when outraged.

Point 5: Forbearance (4:2)

“bearing with one another in love”

“bearing with one another” maintains unity.

“bearing with one another” = **tolerating**, putting up with one another. Tolerating disagreement. Tolerating irritating behaviors.

If *patience* is the inner emotional restraint that refuses to lose our cool, *bearing* is the endurance, the continuing to love, the toleration of what we perceive to be faults. You tolerate what you don't like. Christian community requires tolerating people who do things you don't like. Paul assumes Christians will do things other Christians don't like.

Application

Putting up with someone who hasn't mastered humility.

Putting up with someone who isn't gentle with you.

Putting up with someone who isn't slow to get angry with you.

Putting up with someone who has different convictions on lying and deception and Rahab and the midwives (Exod 1:15-21; Josh 2:1-21). Everyone thought deception was okay in exceptional circumstances. Some thought lying was okay in exceptional circumstances. Some didn't.

“in love”

Love is the means/instrument by which we tolerate one another.

Love (commitment, affection, valuing our brothers and sisters) is the fuel that drives humility, gentleness, patience (restraint), and bearing with one another (tolerance).

Note: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love is the opposite of American political culture.

Point 6: Eager to maintain unity (4:3)

“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” – 4:3

1. We maintain the unity the Spirit’s already created between us.

The Spirit has already bonded us together in peace by indwelling us. We’re bound together like the binding that holds our Bibles together. ***“unity of the Spirit”*** = unity produced by the Spirit.

The problem is we can rupture the bond. So Paul’s telling us how we preserve the binding: *“with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”*

We don’t create the bond. But we can cut the threads. Pride, harshness, quick to anger, unwillingness to tolerate other Christians. These cut the threads that hold us together!

2. Unity speaks to “oneness.”

By the Spirit’s work, we are one.

3. ***“eager”*** speaks to a readiness, a zeal, a passion that results in effort to accomplish what we desire.

A spiritual passion for the spiritual virtues that maintain peace in the church.

Application

We need a passion to preserve our oneness. Which means a passion for character gain.

The challenge in the church is, if we’re making new disciples, we bring new sin and new character deficiency into the church. Which is God’s design. Thus, the need to welcome new believers with gentleness and to be restrained in our anger and tolerant in our dealing with them.

A living organism (growing church) requires mature saints who deal well with the flaws of new believers. People who are already Christians may join themselves to us. We may have to tolerate their differences too. They may have to tolerate us.

Point 7: Why Unity? (4:4-6)

There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. – 4:4-6

Unity (oneness) is appropriate because of all the things we have in common.

“one body”

If we’re born again, we’re part of Christ’s church. The human body illustrates the church in that the church is both united and diverse. Our body works as one with the different body parts serving diverse functions. The brain and the eyes and the hands work in tandem, not against each other. So it should be with members of the church.

“one Spirit”

We who are born again are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.

“one hope”

We share the same hope. Hope = waiting for something with confident expectation. We wait for the new heavens and the new earth and our glorified bodies and for Jesus to put an end to every threat.

“one Lord”

Jesus Christ. We all submit to the same master. We take our orders from the same Lord.

“one faith”

Here faith means the set of truths we believe in. The Christian faith includes things like God creating the world by speaking it into existence, substitutionary atonement on the cross, the resurrection of Christ, judgment day, etc. Because our faith has content, there are beliefs we share in common.

“one baptism”

In those days there were no debates about how to baptize and who gets baptized. Sadly, over the years local churches reached different conclusions. Today churches are divided over baptism. It wasn't the case in Paul's day.

“one God and Father of all”

We believe in the same God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

There's a sense in which God is Father of only believers. Only believers have been adopted as God's children. And there's a sense in which God is Father of everyone. Every human being was made by the Father.

Over, through, and in all means God rules over all he created and he's present everywhere within creation.

Conclusion

The Spirit has made us one. We're cared for by the same Father. We pray to the same Father. We serve the same Lord. We're indwelt by the same Spirit. We're part of the universal church. We share the same faith. We share the same hope.

We have reason to be one. And we've actually been made one. The problem is we're flawed and in need of spiritual progress. So we work against the oneness we possess. Maintaining unity requires spiritual progress.

Non-Christian

What have you learned today? There's one God. He made you. He rules over everything he's made. Including you.

The same God unites diverse people by making them born again. These people share common beliefs and the same hope. And God works in their hearts, making them new people, so they can remain one.

The Christian hope is Jesus died on the cross, in our place, so our sins could be forgiven. And this same Jesus rose from the dead and will return one day to set up a kingdom where death and sin and suffering are no more.

How can you move from guilty to forgiven, excluded from the promises to included? Through faith and repentance. Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Learn from Jesus. Become one with his people in the local church.