

Walk Worthy of Our Calling

Ephesians 4:1-16

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As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

*"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the

whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

We all had to learn how to walk. And someone helped us. If you have children, you help them learn to walk. Due to injury or disease, some of us have to relearn how to walk. There are different kinds of walks we can go on. We may walk for pleasure or for exercise or because we don't have transportation. And, walking seems to go better when we walk with someone, doesn't it?

In Ephesians 4, Paul begins a series of "walks." He says to walk worthy of your calling (4:1), to walk not as the Gentiles or pagans do (4:17), to walk in love (5:2), to walk as children of light (5:8) and to walk wisely (5:15). When he uses the word "walk," he means something like, "live your life" (which is how some translations put it). The New Testament was originally written in Greek and the Greek word here is *peripateo*. To use the word walk for how we live means an active commitment to a way of life. It speaks of behavior that's publicly visible and demonstrates the honor of community members. *Walk* is a word Paul uses often when he's showing the difference between the Christian lifestyle and the unbelieving world's lifestyle (Margaret McDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians. Sacra Pagina*). We saw this earlier in the letter when he writes, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, *that we should walk in them*" (2:10). In the OT, "walk" is a way of talking about everyday behavior. We sometimes talk about many "walks of life" to describe various jobs and careers. Paul is begging his readers to live a certain dynamic way of life based on God's call. Our "walk with God" is action, movement, progress; it's going somewhere.

Paul first says to walk, or live a life, "worthy of the calling you have received." Earlier, in 1:18, he prays that we will know the hope to which God has called us. In 4:4 he speaks of the one hope of our calling. The call of God takes us into the future. It assures us that we have a future and a hope. God calls us to believe, and to live like, the world as it is now won't always be this way. Life as it is now, isn't how life will be forever. God doesn't want us to be hopeless, but to be people of hope.

God calls everyone to come to Jesus and find forgiveness, freedom and new life. Our response to that call is simply to come to him, to put our faith and trust in him, surrender to him.

As Paul speaks about the Christian way of life, he mentions some signs that reflect how we're walking worthy of our calling. In verses 1-16 he includes *unity, diversity, ministry, and maturity*.

Unity builds on and includes these characteristics of Christian life he mentions: humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace. Most of these appear in the list of the "fruit of the Spirit" in Gal 5:22-23. They're characteristics of Jesus. The Holy Spirit reproduces them in us as we walk in him.

More than an attitude, humility is an action. We put others first and think more highly of them than we do ourselves. In humility we don't put ourselves down, but we lift others up. Humility is an honest evaluation of ourselves, our gifts and our weaknesses.

Gentleness is "strength that knows who it is." It's strength submitted to Christ. Gentleness describes a person who's willing to learn and be directed.

Patience or longsuffering often describes how God puts up with us. It's the ability to hang in there and not give up. Patience is the grace of a person who has power to get revenge but refuses. It means bearing with each other, putting up with people and situations until a positive change can be made.

Love is the primary quality of the Christian walk. It flows through all the others and makes them possible.

Peace is the main source of unity. Christian community is based on all of us giving up our self-centeredness. Peace in the community flows from our experience of peace with God that enables us to relate to each other in love.

Paul then calls Christian unity "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The Holy Spirit creates the unity and enables all the qualities that are part of it.

Notice the emphasis on "oneness" here: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

Unity doesn't mean uniformity. Being united does not make us all alike. Notice when Paul lists the unities, he mentions "one Spirit ... one Lord ... one Father." There's the Trinity. Paul probably lists the Spirit first because the Spirit is the one who indwells us, who fills and empowers the church, creates our unity and enables different kinds of service. All that we experience of God is in the Spirit and through the Son, who is called Lord here. And it's all to the Father.

The Trinity is the Christian way of talking about God. There's unity in God. God is one. There's diversity in God. The one God is a community of love. Relationship, love, self-submission, giving and receiving, cooperation—all are at the heart of who God is. The church is called to reflect God's nature, to be like God.

So there's *diversity* within our unity. "*Each of us was given grace.*" Because God calls us all, God gives us all grace to fulfill the call. This grace is part of the gift of Christ. At the same time, Christ also gives various gifts to the church. Again, here's diversity. Christ doesn't give just one gift for ministry in the church—he gives several. Four are mentioned here: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. In other places Paul speaks of the gifts God gives to every member of the church. And in those other places he also emphasizes the diversity within the one Body of Christ.

God gives grace and gifts to the church for *ministry*. Included in the call to know Jesus and to follow him is the call to be servants. The word for servant in the New Testament also means minister. So the call to come and receive includes the call to go and serve. And this call to serve doesn't just mean doing church work. It means serving the Lord in all our work, doing all that we do to bring glory to God.

The gifts listed here are given "to equip God's people for works of ministry" or service. We're all ministers. Preachers aren't the only ones God calls. God gives a variety of gifts to make us able to serve in a variety of ways. We all serve in different ways as God calls and equips and enables us. Part of my job as a pastor-teacher is to help you discover your calling and ministry and gifts so we can all do all that God wants us to do.

A second purpose for the gifts in the church, and the result of all God's people being equipped for ministry is "building up the body of Christ." We serve according to our calling and gifts so the church will be strengthened, so it will increase and grow to be more like Jesus.

That leads to the last sign of walking worthy of our calling: *maturity*. We're to keep serving and building up the body of Christ, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). The church is to become mature, to grow into the maturity God intends for it.

Paul goes on to describe this maturity a bit. He says not to be gullible. Don't believe everything you hear. Grow up and learn to discern truth from error.

Maturity is a result of service and it helps produce and maintain unity. "Speaking the truth in love" is not just straight talk—though we can certainly use more of that. It's talk tempered by love. It's love expressed in truth. We grasp the truth that Christ is and we live the truth so that all we are, all we do and all we say expresses the truth in love.

There's false teaching done in the name of God. We need to recognize it and not be deceived by it. There's the so-called Prosperity Gospel that says if you have enough of the right kind of faith you'll always be healed and always have abundant wealth. That's a distortion of biblical teaching. The truth is, God does heal and provide for us, but we still live in a fallen world. The kingdom of God is present and active, but not fully realized. Suffering and struggle are part of life, even for Christian believers.

There's a kind of spin-off of that teaching that says Jesus has already done everything for us, so there's really nothing for us to do except receive. God's commands aren't really for us to obey. That's an overreaction to a lot legalistic teaching that makes everything depend on us. The truth is, God does offer us great gifts, but we're still responsible.

In the past week's news we heard from a doctor who's also a preacher. I didn't go to her online sermons, so I just know what reporters have found that she's said. There's some bizarre stuff there. She apparently teaches that demons can influence people physically through dreams and

cause diseases. This seems to be based on obscure passages in the Bible, but it's mostly just made up stuff as far as I can tell.

It's easy to pick on other groups, but United Methodists have to deal with false teaching too. A UM bishop recently published an article where he relates several conversations that show UM pastors promoting doctrine that's not true or rejecting true and healthy doctrine.

One retired pastor said he would vote to ordain a ministerial candidate who doesn't believe in the Trinity. In a discussion among District Superintendents, one said, "We have to stop preaching that Jesus died on the cross for us ... it does damage to people." Another added that we shouldn't have a prayer of confession during Communion. "We have to stop make people feel guilty and like they need to confess sins when they come to church." In a discussion about the mission statement, "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," a senior pastor of a large church argued that we need to leave out the part about Jesus and just emphasize transforming the world

(<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/a-fight-for-the-faith-delivered-once-for-all>). I hope you see the trouble with that. I'm grateful that we've recently put the full mission statement on the wall in our main hallway.

The truth is that Trinity is how Christians talk about God. Without that doctrine, Jesus is just a nice guy and the Holy Spirit is just a vague influence, if that. We can't set aside the uniqueness and greatness of Jesus. The truth is Jesus did die on the cross for us—and that's the greatest act of healing and redemption. We do need to know, not neurotic guilt, but real guilt for real sin. We need to confess our sins as part of God's forgiving, healing, restoring process.

Don't get blown away by deceitful teaching. Read the Bible for yourself. Learn the basics of Christian faith. There are good reasons for what we believe as Christians and we need to know those reasons. Solid teaching, speaking the truth in love helps us grow and become mature. Stick with that healthy diet.

God has called you. God is calling you. Have you heard? Have you answered? Are you walking worthy of that calling? Are you living in light of that calling? Let's give ourselves fully to walking with the Lord. He calls us.

He empowers us. But we walk, we live. Let's be people who walk worthy of our calling. Let's be a church that walks worthy of our calling. Let's show the hope we have in Christ through unity, diversity, ministry, and maturity.