

**Walking Unified – Ephesians 4:3-10**  
Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis  
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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

If you'll open up your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4 this morning, I'd like to lead us on today in our journey of discovering what it means to walk worthy of the calling we have received and how we can do it in a practical sense.

If you'll remember from our study of Ephesians so far, in chapters 1 through 3 Paul gave us a beautiful picture of the amazing blessings and gifts and tools that have been given to each of us at the moment we placed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He showed us that we have everything we need to be able to walk worthy of the calling we have received. We are new creations, children of God, who have the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead living inside us through the Holy Spirit.

Now in chapters 4 through 6, Paul is showing us what it will look like when we learn to live and walk in the light of this new identity we have in Christ. Paul opens chapter 4 by pleading with us to walk worthy of the calling we have received. Then he shows us that a walking worthy life will be characterized by two very important things: humility and gentleness.

We saw in my last message that humility must be present not only at salvation but must continue also in our daily walk, as we walk with a continual awareness of our desperate need for God every moment of every day. And when we walk in this moment-by-moment dependence on God, that's when we see God doing amazing things through us that we could never otherwise do in our own power and strength.

We saw that gentleness, on the other hand, flows out of humility. It's only when we make an honest assessment ourselves and truly see and understand our own desperate need for God that we can then extend the same grace that God has shown to us to the people around us.

We also saw that the gentleness Paul is speaking of here in Ephesians has nothing to do with being timid and spineless. Instead it is the fruit of power. This kind of gentleness becomes possible only when we find our identity and security in God and His love for us and in the power he makes available to us. When we do that we are freed from needing the approval and acceptance of other people and from trying to prove our value to the world. We are then able to respond in gentleness in even the most difficult conversations and relationships, knowing that our security and acceptance and value are forever established in God. We are able to be patient and show tolerance for one another in love.

So today we're going to delve a little deeper into this walking worthy concept as we study verses 3 through 10 of Ephesians chapter 4. In this section of Ephesians we'll see that Paul is also calling us to walk worthy in unity and oneness.

I'm sure you've all realized by now, even though we live a little bit off the beaten path in rural northeast Oregon, that we live in a world that promotes diversity and openness and many different paths to the same destination. We live in a world where almost anything goes and where moral absolutes are out the window and where the only thing that isn't tolerated is people who believe the Bible is true. We live in a world that demands political correctness in everything except bashing conservative Christians. We live in a world that tells us we have no right to make a judgment about what's right and wrong in other people's lives or to use biblical principles and truths to encourage people to come out of sinful lifestyles.

We live in a world that actually wants to eradicate the concept of sin and tries to portray Jesus as simply a man who came to love everybody and who would have never thought about making a judgment about someone's sinful lifestyle. We live in a world that tells us there's no ultimate meaning and design to life, but that everything we see is simply the result of random accident and chance.

Well what we're going to see in our passage today is that God teaches us a worldview that is in complete opposition to what the world around us wants us to believe. Let's begin by reading Ephesians chapter 4 verses 1 through 10:

***Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 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 was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)***

## II. THE EXCLUSIVITY OF OUR FAITH (Verses 4-6)

As we begin to study this passage today I want to start with verses 4 through 6 where we will first see the exclusivity of our faith. In these verses we see a strikingly bold contrast between what God teaches us about what our worldview should be and what the world tries to convince us is true. In these three verses there is a word that is repeated 7 times, and whenever that happens in the Bible we need to pay attention. Repeated words give us a clue about the main point an author is trying to get across. The word repeated here is "one."

In contrast to the world's claim that there are many ways to God...many paths to the same destination...many acceptable worldviews...many ways to find our hope in life...many alternative things to place our faith in...and even many gods... Paul tells us here that there is one body and one Spirit and one hope and one Lord and one faith and one baptism and one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Jesus Himself in John 14:6 said, ***"I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*** And Luke, speaking of Jesus, says in Acts 4:12, ***"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*** And how about the Apostle John in 1 John 5:11-12, ***"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."***

You see, God has shown us clearly in the Bible that there is only one path to salvation and eternal life and only one true source of lasting hope and fulfillment, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ alone and a life lived in dependence and fellowship with the one true God, our Creator.

Things in life don't often get as black-and-white as this: ***“He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son does not have the life.”*** If we believe the Bible to be the infallible, inspired word of God Himself, then we can take no other view. We must stand in direct opposition to the world around us no matter how unpopular we may be. There is an intense exclusivity to the hope that we have found in Christ. Jesus Christ is the only way, the only door that will get us into true life and hope and eternal fellowship with the One who created us.

### III. THE UNITY OF OUR FAITH (Verses 4-6)

This exclusivity and clear black-and-white picture of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, is also what provides us with the basis for our unity within the body of Christ and our fellowship with others who have placed their faith in our Lord and Savior. So the second truth I'd like to focus on in 4 through 6 is the unity of our faith.

Even though we may attend many different local churches, we are all part of the same worldwide body of Christ and can have fellowship with believers from a wide variety of denominations. As long as believers in other churches are holding to the essential tenets of the Christian faith, the most essential of which is that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by works, we can have fellowship with Christians from all over the world and provide encouragement and support to each other, working together to further the kingdom of God.

The former Assistant Pastor at First Baptist Church of La Grande, Dave Steele, once shared with me a useful tool that we can use to evaluate whether other churches are holding to the essential tenets of the Christian faith and are thereby part of the one true body of Christ. The tool is called the box of orthodoxy. I probably won't present it exactly as he shared it with me, but this is how I remember it:

DRAW A LARGE BOX WITH A CIRCLE INSIDE IT ON A WHITEBOARD. WRITE THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES OF TEACHINGS ON THE BOARD AS FOLLOWS: 1) **NON-NEGOTIABLES** (I.E., SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST; THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD AND COMPLETELY TRUSTWORTHY) **INSIDE THE CIRCLE**; 2) **GREY AREAS** (I.E., WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK CHURCHES HOLD THEIR WORSHIP SERVICES; DRUMS SHOULD NOT BE USED IN CHURCH) **OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE BUT STILL INSIDE THE BOX**; **ERRONEOUS TEACHINGS THAT AFFECT THE ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN MESSAGE** (I.E., SALVATION IS BY WORKS; THE BIBLE IS FULL OF ERRORS; WHAT THE BIBLE CALLS SIN IS NOT REALLY WRONG) **OUTSIDE THE BOX**.

What this tool helps us to do is to determine whether or not we can have fellowship and unity with Christians from other churches and whether or not we as a local body of believers can support and cooperate with them. It helps us determine if they are part of the one body spoken of here in Ephesian chapter 4.

Sometimes we can get caught up in our own church and thinking that ours is the best and that we shouldn't support or cooperate with other local bodies of believers, but in reality we need to remember that we are just one small gathering of the universal body of Christ and that we can support and encourage and cooperate with many other denominations and churches. And yet we do need to use the box of orthodoxy tool to make sure that we aren't cooperating and fellowshiping with churches that are leading people astray from the foundational truths of our faith.

This is what is being promoted by the ecumenical movement that calls for cooperation between all "Christian" churches and even sometimes churches of other religions. We need to be careful because more and more so-called "Christian" churches are stepping outside of the box of orthodoxy and caving in to the demands of our culture and the world around us, compromising on the clear Word of God.

In addition to cooperating with believers from other churches, verses 4 through 6 of Ephesians chapter 4 remind us that we always need to be working for unity within our own local church as well. I'm pretty sure that every one of us here in our experience with churches throughout our lives have seen some extremely

memorable examples of ungodly and divisive and hurtful behavior taking place within a church body. Sometimes these experiences have even driven people away from church altogether.

So what Paul is reminding us here is that we need to always remember that in spite of our differences and our opinions about how things should be done, we must always keep before our eyes that we are part of one body working for one goal: knowing and loving our God and making Him known. In humility and gentleness we are always to relate to each other with patience, showing tolerance for each other in love.

We can rest assured that whenever there is divisiveness and bitterness and selfish ambition and criticism not based in love within our church body, then we are not operating as God intended and those involved have lost sight of our common goals and what's really important.

#### IV. THE CALL TO DILIGENTLY PRESERVE UNITY (Verse 3)

Now in my last message on Ephesians we briefly touched on verse 3 of Ephesians chapter 4, but I'd like to take a little closer look at it today. In it we see a clear call to diligently preserve unity within the church. Verse 3 reads: ***"being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."***

Here again we see a reference to the unity to which we are called as the body of Christ. This unity is of the Spirit. Being unified as the one body of Christ is what the Spirit inside each of us is calling us to. So to step out of that and instead promote divisiveness and arguing and tearing other people down is to work against what the Spirit is trying to accomplish. And remember, all true believers have the same Spirit living inside them. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us:

***For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.***

Paul is calling us to get in step with the Holy Spirit inside us and work together as one body, being about the business of God and not about our own agenda.

Notice that Paul doesn't just say that we should try to be unified if possible. Instead he says we need to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit. This is something that we need to put lots of effort into and be willing to put aside our own personal preferences and goals in order to preserve it. It's a troubling thought to think of all the harm that's been done and all the people that have been turned off to God when Christians within churches have not been concerned about being diligent to preserve unity and cooperation within the body of Christ.

In the last part of verse 3, we see a clue about how we go about diligently preserving this unity. Paul tells us that this unity of the Spirit is preserved in the bond of peace. Peace among fellow believers is what creates a bond that will preserve the unity of the Spirit.

Now I want you to think for a moment about a relationship in your life now or in the past that is not peaceful, but instead is characterized by conflict and arguing and maybe even anger. If you have that relationship in your mind right now, I want you to ask yourself, "In that relationship do I feel like I'm on the same page with that other person, supporting and encouraging them, and working together to accomplish things together and move forward in our relationship and with our common goals?" What do other people see when they spend time with you and this other person? Do they feel awkward and uncomfortable because they can sense the tension between the two of you or maybe they even witness lots of backbiting and criticizing and tearing down going on? Would you say the two of you are effective at accomplishing things together?

This makes me think of the show, *The Amazing Race*. How many of you like to watch it? It's the one show that Mindy and I look forward to and watch every week when it's on. For those of you that don't watch it, the show is a race between couples who are traveling internationally and having to find their way quickly and accomplish various challenges along the way. The last couple to arrive at the pit stop each week is usually eliminated, and whoever wins the final leg of the race wins a million dollars. Mindy and I enjoy seeing locations throughout the world and watching the drama that unfolds between couples as they face difficult challenges and have to quickly find their way in a foreign country where they usually don't speak the language.

But if you watch the show, you'll see a great illustration of this concept of peace being the bond that creates unity and makes people effective at accomplishing things together. Some couples will just fight and tear each other down the entire time, and they are not usually the ones that win the race. Other couples remain positive and encouraging and don't waste time with the drama and tension and lack of focus that comes from arguing and criticizing each other. These couples tend to be very effective at accomplishing tasks quickly, and they also enjoy the race and each other along the way.

This is the concept Paul is talking about here in Ephesians. We need to be working diligently to create and maintain peace in all our relationships, but especially those with other members of our church body. Without that peace our progress in being effective representatives of Christ on this earth will be seriously impaired, and we will turn a lot of people off to God as they witness the lack of love and cooperation within our church. We need peace in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ in order to create the bond between us that will maintain the unity the Spirit is leading us into.

Now this word, "bond," in the original Greek is used to describe how ligaments hold the parts of a body together. And in case you don't know what exactly a ligament does, listen to this description of the function of a ligament that I found:

"Your skeleton has over 200 joints. Joints are where bones come together. Ligaments are strong inelastic bands of connective tissue that help hold bones together at joints. Joints allow your body to move in many different ways. Bending, twisting, stretching, running, jumping and skipping are made possible by muscles and joints. In your 2 wrists and 2 hands you have about 80 joints. Thanks to these joints, you can tie your shoes, hold a fork, play instruments, video games and many other things."

So what we see here is that without the bond that ligaments provide to hold our joints together, our body would be completely nonfunctional. We would just be a pile of bones lying still on the ground. But because of ligaments we are able to bend, twist, stretch, run, jump and skip. We can also tie our shoes, hold a fork, play instruments and do a thousand different other things. But none of these things would be possible without the bond that is provided by our ligaments.

In the same way, without peace operating within the relationships of people within the body of Christ, we will be like a pile of bones, getting nothing done and causing harm to those who have come into our body looking for hope and joy and love in our Savior, Jesus Christ. But when peace and unity characterizes our church body, God can do amazing things through us and draw many people to Himself.

Now someone might ask, "If we always have to have peace in our church body, then how are we ever supposed to address things that do need to change in other people's lives, or change things that aren't going right in our church, or confront someone about a difficult issue or something they've done to hurt us?" Well the answer to that question once again comes from Scripture. Look ahead in our passage to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15: **"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."**

So what I am NOT saying here is that everything needs to be perfect and peaceful all the time and that we never confront anyone for fear of hurting their feelings and that we all just need to live in denial so that we can maintain peace. Instead we are called to confront difficult issues and to make hard, needed changes sometimes. God calls us to speak truth and to not live in denial and fear of confrontation. He also calls us to care enough about people to confront them when they are involved in destructive behaviors or are doing things that are harmful to themselves or our church body. But whenever he calls us to address these issues, He calls us to do it in a very specific way. He calls us to do it in love and with humility and gentleness. That's how we preserve the bond of peace.

Now some people who specialize in and pride themselves on always speaking the truth can actually cause some of the worst harm in other people's lives. They just speak out whatever comes to mind and don't concern themselves with doing it in love. But remember God also teaches us to control our tongue. Not everything that's true needs to be shouted out. We need to speak the truth, but always do it in love and with concern for the growth and building up of others...***with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.***

## V. THE DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR UNITY (Verses 7-10)

Well as we move into our final section today, verses 7 to 10 of Ephesians chapter 4, someone might get the picture from what I've said so far that we have no diversity within the body of Christ. We might be called narrow-minded with our belief in one way to salvation and one true God. Or someone could say that there's no room for individuality or uniqueness in the Christian faith, and that in order to be unified we're all just supposed to be cookie-cutter Christians with no individual personality.

Well as far as being called narrow-minded, you may as well just get used to that since that's what the world calls anyone who believes in absolute truths and that the Bible is the actual word of God Himself. Just think of it as more evidence that you are walking the narrow road described in the Bible.

However, the claim that there's no room for personality or diversity within the body of Christ is utterly untrue. Let's read verses 7 through 10, where we will see by God's design the diversity within our unity:

***But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)***

So up to this point Paul has been talking about unity and oneness and peace in the body of Christ. But in verse 10, with the word, "but," he moves on to the concept of diversity within the unity we have through our faith in Christ. He's been talking about one Lord, one faith and one hope, but now he moves on to talk about each one of us as individuals. The body of Christ is made up of many members and to each of these members Christ has given certain gifts.

So we see first of all that every last one of us has been given by Christ Himself a certain amount of grace in the gifting He has allotted to each of us. Each of us has something to offer as a result of Christ's gift to us. There's not a single true believer in Jesus Christ who has been left out or who does not play a role in the body of Christ. So if you feel like you have nothing offer, it's time to wake up and discover how God wants to use you in the body of Christ.

Satan would like you to think you have nothing offer, but the Word of God tells us the truth we need to hear: we are each valuable and needed in the body of Christ and God can use each of us as we learn to put aside fear and walk by His Spirit. There is incredible diversity and amazingly unique gifting within the individual members of the body of Christ! We'll look more at this gifting in my next message on Ephesians.

Now in verses 8 through 10, we get a brief summary of what Christ did when he came to earth as a baby and walked to the cross to die for our sins and rise from the dead victorious over sin and death, making a way for us to finally be reconciled to our Creator. We also see a reference to His ascension back to heaven after descending to earth. He ascended so that He might fill all things. In ascending to heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit to fill each of us and provide us with His presence and power and wisdom and strength and gifts that would enable us to accomplish His purposes in the world.

This process was predicted by Jesus in some of His final words to His disciples in John 16:5-13: ***But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.***

Jesus, in ascending to heaven, has not left us alone. He has provided us with the Helper, the Holy Spirit. In fact, He fills us with His Holy Spirit. Left to our own devices and our own human effort, we can never arrive at the unity and peace that God is calling us to as His body. Only the Holy Spirit can create within us the humility and gentleness that will create the bond of peace among fellow believers and enable us to glorify Him and accomplish His purposes as we walk in his power.

So as we close today, I'd like to encourage each of us to ask ourselves: How am I doing personally at fostering unity and oneness in this local church body? Am I walking in humility and gentleness in all I do and as I relate to the people around me? Am I keeping my eye on what's important and working for unity and oneness at Union Baptist Church or does my own agenda and the way I want things done take priority? Am I speaking the truth in love to the people around me or am I just dishing out criticism with no concern for people's feelings and/or their continued spiritual growth?

I can guarantee that none of us here are doing any of these things perfectly. But my desire for each of us is that we recognize the areas where we need God's work in our lives and draw near to Him in repentance. We can't fix these areas in our lives by gritting our teeth and resolving to never do it again. Only God can bring the changes we need as we draw near to Him in repentance and ask Him continually to change us and make us more like Him.

So let's draw near to Him and seek His wisdom and rejoice in His love and find our security and hope and power in Him alone. Let's walk with Him in continual conversation and prayer. Let's be in His Word and allow Him to use it to transform the way we think and live. He will guide us into the humility and gentleness we need to diligently preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And as we learn to walk as the unified body of Christ, loving the people around us and walking in humility and gentleness, the world will see the glory of God on display and God will use us to draw people in the world out of their anything goes mentality to the one true God who alone can provide them with lasting hope, new life and a forever relationship with their Creator.

We can invite them to become “narrow-minded” like us, walking the narrow road and experiencing life like they’ve never know it as part of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all!