

Ephesians: Living in Sync with Reality
Part 8: Unity, Diversity, Maturity

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Ephesians 4:1-16

Learning to Walk

In the first half of Ephesians, Paul offers this grand, sweeping vision of what God has done for us, and it tells us:

“This is who you are in Christ.” – **Ephesians 1-3.**

“This is how to “walk out” the Gospel in real life.” – **Ephesians 4-6.**

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life [Greek: “to *walk* in a way”] worthy of the calling you have received.” – **Ephesians 4:1**

“Become what you are.”

“Become, in your character, your habits, your patterns of relating to others, what God, in Christ, has already made you to be.”

Walking is the key image for the Christian spiritual life.

Walking Worthy

“Worthy” doesn’t imply that we *make ourselves* worthy to God. Worthy means “fitting.”

“Walk in a way that’s “fitting” to your new identity in Jesus. Live in alignment with the salvation-gift God has given you. Live in sync with the reality of your new life in Jesus.”

I. Unity

Unity is God’s ultimate goal: “...to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” – Ephesians 1:10

The Spirit Creates the Unity

“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.” – **Ephesians 4:2-3**

“While [believers] do not create unity on their own strength, they can by their own willfulness destroy it.”

– Lynn Cohick

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.” – **Ephesians 4:32.**

1. *Humility*

“Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.” – Tim Keller.

The opposite of humble is self-centered; self-serving. The humble aren’t those with low-self-esteem, but high esteem for God and for others.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, *in humility*, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!” – **Philippians 2:3-8.**

2. *Gentleness*

“Gentleness” carries the sense of “self-control and kindness.”

– Lynn Cohick

3. *Patient love*

The Greek word for patience is a compound of two words – the root, “anger”, and the adjective, “a long time.” This is like our phrase to have “a long fuse.” Not quick to lose our temper. Not fast to become mad.

Paul will address this from another angle in the next section: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” – **Ephesians 4:31**

Paul roots our unity in the life of the Trine God:

⁴There is *one* body and *one* Spirit, just as you were called to *one* hope when you were called; ⁵*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; ⁶*one* God and Father of *all*, who is over *all* and through *all* and in *all*.
– **Ephesians 4:4-6**

II. **Diversity**

Our unity does not mean *uniformity*. “God was kind to the world because he didn’t put all the talents in one place.”

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”
–**Psalm 68:10**

⁹(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

The ascension: **Jesus', our risen and ruling Saviour**, has ascended to his heavenly throne, to take up his rightful place to rule at the right hand of God the Father. He "sits down" in his place of authority as our ruling, reigning king.

Jesus is not "less present", but in his place as the ascended King, he sends the Holy Spirit, and is now *more available than ever*. He gives the Holy Spirit to fill us, speak to us, and empower us. Jesus is now present to all of us at all times through the Spirit.

III. Maturity

¹¹So **Christ himself gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²**to equip his people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until 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." – **Ephesians 4:11-13**

Pastors and other servants are given to the church not to "do the ministry" and the rest of the church to "receive" that ministry, but to equip all God's people for ministry.

The question I often ask myself as a pastor is this:

- Am I equipping people to really know God and love each other well? Am I creating a context for people to grow in maturity and to deepen their engagement with the mission of God in the world?

As one pastor put it: "The Church is not a supermarket but a community garden where we are all here to pitch in and grow something amazing together."

God gifts his church with these servant-leaders:

"...¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be **built up** ¹³until 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.

¹⁴Then 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.

¹⁵Instead, 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. ¹⁶From 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." – **Ephesians 4:12-16**

1. **The Mature are: Committed to "works of service."**
2. **The Mature are: Clear on what they believe.**
3. **The Mature are: Courageous and compassionate.**
4. **The Mature are: Consumed with love for the community of Jesus.**

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

Who among your friends or peers do you consider to be “mature”? What qualities do you see in their life that led you to that conclusion? Which do you want to develop or deepen?

Dig In

1. **Read Ephesians 4:1-16.** If we were to read between the lines in our passage, what issues do you think Paul was concerned about the Christian community? List them here.
2. What qualities does Paul say are “fitting” of our calling?
3. What happens when believers live out the qualities? How do they promote unity? How have you seen this in your experience?
4. Paul speaks of God’s own unity “one Spirit...Lord...God and Father” as the basis of our unity. He also notes the diversity of gifts God gives his people, including the gift of servant-leaders. What is the main task of these servant-leaders? How is that different than the way Pastors are commonly thought of? How might considering this shift how you view life in the church, and how you participate?
5. One way to summarize this text is to say that: “The unity that God is creating requires a deepening of maturity.” The mature, we find in this text, are:
 - 1) committed to “works of service”,
 - 2) clear on what they believe,
 - 3) courageous and compassionate, and
 - 4) consumed with love for the community of Jesus.Which of these areas do you think you need to do the most “maturing”? What steps can you take this week to do that?

Pray

Take time to give thanks for the unity we enjoy through the Spirit’s work. Ask for help to develop the Christ-like qualities of humility, gentleness, and patient love. Pray for each other in the ways you’ve discussed the maturity you desire to grow in.