

Muscle Harmony

Ephesians 4:2-6 September 6, 2023

Ephesians 4:1-6 - Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope, at your calling —⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Every time you take a step, 200 muscles flex and stretch and operate together in harmonious unity.¹ It's good that it's so natural, because we each take thousands of steps every day.

In Ephesians 4, Paul talks to us about how to walk worthy. In our last study we looked at verse 1. Walking worthy is our operating principle in the Christian life. That's our goal, that's our heading.

Tonight, Paul describes the muscles that facilitate our walk. He reminds us that the exercise of our faith happens in tandem with other Christians whose lives are knit close with ours. So, the smooth operation of all of those parts is very important. Any of you who have a trick knee know why.

In verses 2 through 6, we get the impression that the trail of faith will not always be easy. We have to balance and bear weight and compensate for those we're walking alongside. We are one body, part of one plan in the Lord's work, so *unity* is not just a pleasant ideal, it's an absolute essential.

So, let's look at some of the muscles of Christianity, starting in verse 2.

Ephesians 4:2 - ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

In athletics, form matters. Whether it's swinging a bat, shooting a free-throw, or diving from the block, a good coach will talk you through the mechanics of the motion. Paul talks about mechanics in these verses. If you want to walk worthy, it's going to look like *this*.

His emphasis in these verses is the unity of the Body. And, he says the best way to maintain unity is for each of us to bear with one another. The phrase means, "put up with each other,"² or, "make allowance for each other's faults."³

The Church is a magnificent creation: God, brings together people from all backgrounds, all social status, all ethnicities, into one, harmonious family of grace and power and purpose. *But*, the Church at large and churches individually are comprised of imperfect people. That means there will be

¹ <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-your-muscular-system-works-emma-bryce>

² *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

³ *The New Living Translation*

interpersonal friction, conflicts, clashes, irritations, annoyances. *You* are going to annoy someone and *they* are going to annoy you. It's part of the human condition.

Walking worthy means we find a way to put up with one another. How? Paul gives us a few medications. First, he says we do it "with all humility." Humility doesn't mean disliking yourself. It doesn't mean constantly trashing yourself. That is often a *synthetic* humility.

Paul defined humility in Romans 12:3, where he said, "don't think of yourself more highly than you should." Humility is having an appropriate mindset of who we are and our place in God's plan.

Humility is *not* a natural way of thinking. In fact, it was considered a vice to be avoided in Greek and Roman culture - something only for *slaves*.⁴ But aren't we slaves to the Lord? Aren't we called to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, Who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, a washer of feet? This calling into Christianity is a calling *out* of the world's culture and the world's values.

Humility isn't natural, but it *is* optional. In Colossians 3, Paul says we can "put it on" like a garment. James puts the choice to us: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Next, gentleness. The term means meekness, considerateness, strength under control. In the Bible, this word is often used in the context of dealing with conflict.⁵ In the Church, conflict is not about me winning or me being right. It's about how we reconcile brothers and sisters back together.

Christians are not supposed to use their strength to tear down. We're to use our strength the way Jesus did, the gentlest of all, the meekest of all. That strength was used to gather, to heal, to direct back to the Father. To reveal the truth with an end goal of restoration and redemption.

Next, patience. Patience means long tempered,⁶ or, the ability to endure over time. In the context, Paul means patiently enduring the weakness and faults of others around you in God's Body. Not driving people away, not beating them down, but staying close even when you're irritated or annoyed or disappointed by them in some way.

Patience, like gentleness, is a fruit of the Spirit, which means that I don't have to do these things in order to become a good Christian. This supernatural equipment is continually provided for me and can infuse my actions and activities and attitudes as I choose to put them on and operate in the Spirit rather than in my natural, human mindset.

Now, Paul is saying, "You need to put up with one another," but God's intent is *never* that we do it begrudgingly, with resentment in our hearts. Paul says there to bear with one another *in love*. In agape. It's a supernatural love. Agape is special because it is always a choice.

⁴ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁵ Darrell Bock *Ephesians: An Introduction And Commentary*

⁶ Andrew Lincoln *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 42: Ephesians*

Some things we love just out of urge. I'm guessing there are some of you out there who love black licorice, *even though you shouldn't!* Agape is choosing to love how and what God loves.

Ephesians 4:3 - ³making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Scholars tells us that the English translation loses the urgency of Paul's words here. One commentator writes, "*Yours is the initiative! Do it now! Mean it! You are to do it! I mean it!—such are the overtones in verse 3.*"⁷

Paul implores us to keep the unity of the Spirit. What does he mean by unity? In all the New Testament, this Greek word is *only* used in this verse and once again in verse 13. The term itself is defined as "oneness." That's pretty vague.

Unity does *not* mean we all do the same things. Christians sometimes act like unity means every church does the same thing. Every Christian reads the same book. Everybody gathers together in the same spot to present a 'united' front. But that's not what Paul means.

Paul didn't follow up verse 3 with, "By the way, here's what the Church in Jerusalem is doing, so you guys need to do that, too." Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way: It's *unity* not *uniformity*. Think of the analogy he's been using of a body. Your eyes are doing one thing right now, your hands are doing something different. Your feet something different still. They're all needful things.

Paul defines unity as a gracious and loving attachment one to another through the bond of peace. In chapters 1 through 3, Paul talked at length about how God has reconciled us to Himself and all of us to one another, Jews and Gentiles, everybody welcomed in and now we're called to walk in that reconciliation - staying attached to the Gospel and the Lord and the family of Believers.

Paul says *keep* this unity. That means it's not something we *attain*, it's something we *maintain*.⁸ God has already done it. We don't have to *build* a monument of unity through some cooperative activity. We simply walk in the arrangement God has given us.

Paul said, "make every effort." This is important for spiritual health. A friend of mine from northern California was having trouble with the video distribution at their new church campus. So we were sending each other texts trying to troubleshoot together. Try this, try this, try this. Nothing was really working, but we were trying to make *every effort* to get the system functioning again. Finally he figured it out. Now, I wasn't physically there to help, I played a different part.

Christian unity, Paul says, starts with *my* mindset. I should *care* about staying bound to other believers. Sometimes that requires effort, but if I understand the value, if I allow God's perspective to become my perspective, then it is no longer a chore, but a joyful endeavor.

⁷ Markus Barth *Ephesians 4-6: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*

⁸ *ibid.*

Of course, keeping this unity is not always possible. Paul said in Romans 12, “as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” The point in Ephesians is that unity in the Body is something that I should value and invest energy into.⁹

Ephesians 4:4 - ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling

In verses 2 and 3, Paul showed us the muscles of walking worthy. In verses 4 through 6 he’s giving us the frame it’s all built upon - the skeletal structure God has provided so that we can walk.

He gives 7 elements that unity is based on. It’s not based on what we *do*, but it is rooted in understanding Who God is and what He has created us to be - that there is a Head and a heavenly design that has been established by God and we get to walk in obedience according to the plan.

Many scholars believe that verses 4 through 6 are part of a first-century creed or hymn that the churches may have recited.¹⁰ It’s good to *remind* ourselves again and again of what is true.

As we stay attached to the Head, we will stay attached to others. As we are vivified by the Spirit, we are able to exercise our faith and be fruitful toward others.

There is *one* body. Paul means that there is one, universal Church. But, the New Testament is clear that each local gathering of Christians is a legitimate and meaningful representation of the whole.

This is a body and I am a member. I am a part. God has scattered me into a specific time and place on purpose. He has gifted me in certain ways and prepared good works for me to discover and walk in, so my calling is to find my part and then operate appropriately in the power of the Spirit.

But it’s important that we remember there are lots of parts that do lots of things. Scientists aren’t sure why humans swing their arms when they walk. They don’t *have* to, but they do. I suppose if the legs could talk, on a grumpy day they might say, “Since you’re just swinging around, how about you arms take some of the weight for awhile?” But that’s not the job. Arms have other parts to play.

Some research shows that the arms swinging somehow *reduces* the amount of energy the legs have to use up in order to walk.¹¹ You wouldn’t think that by looking at it, but some very complicated things are going on. Each part impacting the overall enterprise.

In the Church, we’re all headed toward one hope, and thanks to God’s enabling, we’re going to get there. Along the way, it’s easy for us to become frustrated at others or assume that they’re not pulling their weight or think that *real* unity means they do what we’re doing. But God has many

⁹ Klyne Snodgrass *Ephesians*

¹⁰ See R. Kent Hughes *Ephesians: The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ*, Stephen Fowl *Ephesians: A Commentary*

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2817299/>

parts to His Body and is accomplishing profoundly complex things through His people, by His Spirit. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Unity means we understand this diversity and the bigger picture and say, "I'm doing what God asks me to do. You do what God asks you to do." And to stay connected by the love of God and the power of His Spirit.

Ephesians 4:5 - ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

It's sad that there is so much division on these basic elements of Christianity. If you want to get into a fight with a Christian, start talking about one of these items.

Paul says there is one Lord. If you open up social media today, you'll see people all over the political spectrum claiming Jesus Christ as their emblem. One person will have on a shirt that says, "Jesus was a refugee." The next will have a shirt that says, "Proud Christian nationalist." Who's right?

God forbid that we make the Messiah in our own image. There is *one* Lord. Who He is, what He said, what He's done, what He's going to do has been *revealed* to us on the pages of Scripture. If we want to be thriving Christians who walk worthy, we need to base our lives on the Biblical Jesus, not any sort of cultural Jesus. Not a Jesus that reinforces *my* desires or is wielded like a talisman.

"One Lord" is a controversial statement to our human hearts and human culture. An inscription from the time of Ephesians has been found which read, "*Nero, Lord of the universe.*"¹² But it's not true. Jesus is King and no one else. Jesus is Lord and there is no other. Not Nero, not you, *Jesus is Lord.*

There is one faith. Jude talks about contending for *the* faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. Unity doesn't mean compromising what we believe just to keep relational peace. There *are* essentials that we must hold to, no matter what. Paul was very concerned about false teachings and doctrinal errors in all the churches he wrote to. "No, salvation *wasn't* faith plus circumcision. It *wasn't* faith plus ceremonial law." Paul would not back down on essentials and neither should we.

What is *the* faith? It's not just what we feel is good or things that are emotionally pleasing to us. *The* faith is what has been revealed and taught in the Word of God. That's why we study the Bible.

There is *one* baptism. Scholars divide over whether Paul is referring to being baptized into the Holy Spirit at salvation or actual water baptism. It doesn't really matter because water baptism is simply the outward sign of the inward reality. It is a very important part of our walk with the Lord. If you're a Christian and you haven't been water baptized, you need to be. Jesus commanded it. It is the public testimony of the inward work of salvation in your heart.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism. These are all things that have been *revealed* and we can find in the Scriptures. So, we can *unify* around God's Word, around studying it and writing it on our hearts and applying it to our lives. We can enjoy greater *unity* when we're all on the same page, Biblically.

¹² Frank Thielman *Ephesians*

Ephesians 4:6 - ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

All, all, all, all. Paul drives home God's power and transcendence. This *is* the deal, this *is* how God has designed His Church and it is an unstoppable work that will come to fruition. He is in charge. He is providentially accomplishing His will. He intends to include every single one of us in this Master plan of His.

So, *my* imperative is to walk worthy in this plan God has called me into. And a big part of walking worthy is to maintain the unity God has given in the Church.

What we find in these verses is that unity is not really about what others do, it's about *me*. It's about my treatment of the believers around me. I can't just write people off or reject them because they annoy me or aren't as excited about some service or ministry as I am. Unity, to Paul, is not about all of us building some monument together, it's about my attitude toward brothers and sisters near and far. Do I *love* them? Do I *value* them? Do I put on humility and gentleness and patience, knowing that God is working out His plan through the whole Body?

When I have the urge to think, "That person needs to *step up*," the better thought is, "I just need to be *in step* with the Lord." I help maintain unity as I understand what God is doing, keep an appropriate perspective on my own part to play, and remember that God loves and values the Christian next to me as much as He loves and values me.

Having this perspective doesn't lead us to compromise or look the other way when a Christian is out of joint. But it causes us to be strengthened in grace, which will make us stronger for the walk, more able to strengthen the weak members around us, and be built up and equipped for the trail ahead.