

## Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

As a prisoner in the Lord, therefore, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. <sup>2</sup>Live with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love.

<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling. <sup>5</sup>There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.

<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of the gift from Christ.

<sup>11</sup>He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup>This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ's activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love.

## Unity

### I.

These (hiking poles) were my close companions for much of my vacation. We hiked over 35 miles in four days. Of that, about 1/2 mile was on a gravel surface. Most of the rest was dirt and mud and rocks and tree roots. Climbing up onto ridges for spectacular views, then climbing back down into the valley again.

Paul says at the beginning of today's Second Lesson: "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1, EHV). How does one walk in a manner worthy of your calling to be a Christian? Jesus once said: "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it" (Matthew 7:13, EHV). Your calling as a Christian might have some nice, relatively level and relatively smooth gravel paths, like my hike, but level and smooth will probably not dominate your walk as a Christian.

Wide and easy and smooth is the way Jesus describes the path to destruction, the path to hell. The devil wants nothing less than to suck people in to the easy path. The culture of our day seems to work hand-in-hand with the devil. Immorality has always been there, of course. Bible history is filled with the sins and shortcomings displayed by people.

Sometimes it seems as though sin is getting worse. Things that once were nearly universally acknowledged to be immoral are now things that society demands be accepted as normal. Everyone is not just to *tolerate* behavior once considered immoral; those who do not are labeled as intolerant and bigots who must have their thinking reprogrammed to accept and even *promote* sin.

Christians who hold to what the Bible teaches look around at society and declare that the world is on the wide, easy, smooth path to destruction.

### II.

“I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. <sup>2</sup>Live with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2, EHV). Paul provides a trail map for walking in a manner worthy of the Christian calling. When we look carefully at the map, we realize how easily we have gotten off-track.

Humility? That’s a narrow, twisty, difficult trail. True humility means one has to stifle the natural tendency to pride. The focal point of life is those things about which we can boast. Sometimes *false* humility rears its ugly head; humility is shown only because a display of humility might get one a pat on the back.

Gentleness? Most would agree there is a place for gentleness. How do you do it? Awkwardness in knowing exactly how to be empathetic or sympathetic with someone can cause attempts at gentleness to seem harsh sometimes.

Patience? Bearing with one another in love? The trail map simply can’t show all the boulders that get in the way and the pitfalls you’ll face as you try to show patience. The pitfalls and boulders are the other people you have to show patience. *Your* idiosyncracies are just idiosyncracies; everyone else’s are annoying habits that make it seemingly-impossible to be patient. How can you bear with those annoying habits in love? Not only that, the map doesn’t limit “patience” and “bearing with one another in love” to only those you like. Even with the undeserving you are to be patient and bear with them in love.

### III.

“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Paul gave the trail map, but we would have to admit that sometimes we’re not very good map readers—or map *followers*, perhaps. It’s easy to how we’re *supposed* to walk; it’s something altogether different to try to walk the walk.

“Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3, EHV). Here Paul gives a common thread to help us walk the Christian life of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Did you catch it? It is unity.

Christians are to *maintain* unity, Paul says. We aren’t to *create* unity. We aren’t to declare unity when it isn’t there. Unity is something God *gives*.

Unity is of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Christians have peace with God because we know that Jesus has paid for all the times we strayed off the trails marked out for us in God’s Word. He has paid for our sins of pride and our sins of false humility. He has paid for our sins of harshness as well as for our attempts at gentleness that fall short. Jesus paid for our lack of patience and the lack of love we show to others. Peace with God comes because Jesus walked the trails perfectly in our place. Peace with God comes from all those sins paid in full by Jesus. All the sins we commit that are too numerous to mention have been forgiven.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling. <sup>5</sup>There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all” (Ephesians 4:4-6, EHV). Notice how often Paul repeats the word “one.” Repeating the word one certainly emphasizes for us that God is one. At the same time, however, Paul makes sure to use the “one” to describe the Triune God. One Spirit—the Holy Spirit; one Lord—our Lord Jesus Christ; one God and Father of all—our Heavenly Father.

This is where you have been called: into the family of the One True God. You were made part of that family by the one faith and one baptism that are your adoption papers.

#### IV.

“But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of the gift from Christ” (Ephesians 4:7, EHV). Paul told us to walk in a way that is worthy of our calling as Christians. He talked about the unity of the Christian Church established by the Triune God.

With the word “but” Paul shifts the focus. He told us to maintain the unity God has established. We maintain unity by using the gifts God gives to his church. “Each one of us” receives the gift of grace. Each of us is to walk the trails—to use the gift of faith—in the measure Christ has given it to us.

“He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12, EHV). In the Old Testament there were priests and prophets who were special messengers from God and were to intercede with God for the people. In the New Testament church Jesus still commissions pastors and teachers.

While every believer can speak to others about the need for Jesus, pastors and teachers in the church do this full time. But Paul lists another purpose of pastors and teachers in the church—to train believers for the work of serving. *Every* Christian is to continue to build up the body of Christ.

“This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ.<sup>14</sup> The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray” (Ephesians 4:13-14, EHV). The smooth, easy path Jesus said leads to destruction is always nearby. The devil constantly wants us to stray off the path God has designed for us and into a path that seems so much easier that it just *must* be better.

You don’t just take one glance at a trail map and stuff it in your pocket, never to look at it again until the hike is done. Walking in the manner worthy of your calling as a Christian also requires frequent references to the trail map of God’s Word. Those references will continually remind you that, while Jesus did everything to pay for your sins and give you back his perfection so that you can enter heaven, you will want to learn what pleases God so that you can say “Thank You” by following carefully the map God has said is best for you while you are in this life.

That process continues to this day. It will continue until the day you die. Then you will be truly mature; you will have the fullness of Christ when you live with him in heaven.

God bless your hike. Walk in a manner worthy of your calling as a Christian in the unity God has established by the work of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.