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# WALKING WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

EPHESIANS 4:1–6

**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. (4:1–6)**

**W**hen a person joins an organization, he obligates himself to live and act in accordance with the standards of the group. He accepts its aims, objectives, and standards as his own. A citizen is obligated to abide by the laws of his country. An employee is obligated to work according to the rules, standards, and purposes of his company. When someone joins an athletic team he is obligated to play as the coach orders and according to the rules of the sport. Human society could not operate without such obligations.

We have a natural desire to be accepted and to belong, and many people will go to almost any lengths to qualify for acceptance

in a fraternal order, social club, athletic team, or other group. Many people will also go to great lengths to keep from being rejected by a group. The parents of the man born blind were afraid to tell the Jewish leaders that Jesus had healed their son, because they were afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue (John 9:22). Although they had seen the result of a miracle that had healed their own son of his lifelong blindness, they would not credit Jesus with the miracle for fear of being socially ostracized. For the same reason, “many even of the rulers believed in Him, but . . . were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God” (12:42–43).

Sometimes in the church such loyalties to standards and fear of ostracism do not operate with the same force. Too many Christians are glad to have the spiritual security, blessings, and promises of the gospel but have too little sense of responsibility in conforming to its standards and obeying its commands.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul has set forth the believer's position with all the blessings, honors, and privileges of being a child of God. In the next three chapters he gives the consequent obligations and requirements of being His child, in order to live out salvation in accordance with the Father's will and to His glory. The first three chapters set forth truth about the believer's identity in Christ, and the last three call for the practical response.

When we received Christ as Savior we became citizens of His kingdom and members of His family. Along with those blessings and privileges we also received obligations. The Lord expects us to act like the new persons we have become in Jesus Christ. He expects His standards to become our standards, His purposes our purposes, His desires our desires, His nature our nature. The Christian life is simply the process of becoming what you are.

God expects conformity within the church, the body of Christ. It is not a forced legalistic conformity to external rules and regulations, but a willing inner conformity to the holiness, love, and will of our heavenly Father, who wants His children to honor Him as their Father. “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” Paul admonished the Philippians, “so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27).

The “therefore” of Ephesians 4:1 marks the transition from positional to practical truth, from doctrine to duty, from principle to practice. Paul makes a similar transition in the book of Romans. After laying down eleven chapters of doctrine, he devotes the remainder of the book to urging Christians to live in accordance with that doctrine—to present their bodies as “a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (12:1). In Galatians Paul devotes the first four chapters to explaining Christian liberty and the last two chapters to exhorting Christians to live by that liberty. That sort of division is found in many of Paul’s epistles (see also Phil. 2:1–2; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:1). Right practice must always be based on right principle. It is impossible to have a Christian lifestyle without knowing the realities of the life that Christ has provided.

Right doctrine is essential to right living. It is impossible to live a faithful Christian life without knowing biblical doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching, and there is no way that even the most sincere believer can live a life pleasing to God without knowing what God Himself is like and knowing the sort of life God wants him to live. Those who set biblical theology aside also set aside sound Christian living.

Church renewal does not come with new programs, buildings, organization, educational methods, or anything else external. Church renewal comes first of all through the renewal of the mind. Later in this letter Paul prays that the Ephesians would “be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (4:23–24). It is only when in the spirit of their minds they grasp the righteousness and holiness of God’s truth that God’s people are renewed. At the beginning of this letter Paul prayed “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him” (1:17). Growing in grace, Peter tells us, is linked with growing in the “knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Along with his ministry of proclaiming Christ, Paul also was “admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). It is impossible to do good works without knowledge of the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

### THE CALL TO THE WORTHY WALK

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (4:1)**

Before giving his appeal, Paul once again refers to himself as “the prisoner of the Lord” (see 3:1). By mentioning his imprisonment he gently reminds his readers that he knows the worthy Christian walk can be costly and that he has paid considerable cost himself because of his obedience to the Lord. He would not ask them to walk in a way in which he had not himself walked or pay

a price that he himself was not willing to pay. His present physical circumstance seemed extremely negative from a human perspective, but Paul wanted his readers to know that this did not change his commitment to, nor his confidence in, the Lord.

The apostle was not seeking sympathy or using his Roman confinement as a means for shaming the Ephesians into compliance with his request. He was reminding them again of his own complete subservience to Christ, his being the prisoner of the Lord whether he was in jail or not. He became the Lord's prisoner on the road to Damascus and never sought to be free of that divine imprisonment.

Paul had the ability to see everything in the light of how it affected Christ. He saw everything vertically before he saw it horizontally. His motives were Christ's, his standards were Christ's, his objectives were Christ's, his vision was Christ's—his entire orientation was Christ's. Everything he thought, planned, said, and did was in relation to his Lord. He was in the fullest sense a captive of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of us will admit that we tend to be so self-oriented that we see many things first of all—and sometimes only—in relation to ourselves. But the person who has the Word of Christ abiding in him richly, the one who saturates his or her mind with divine wisdom and truth will ask, “How does this affect God? How will it reflect on Him? What does He want me to do with this problem or this blessing? How can I most please and honor Him in this?” That person tries to see everything through God's divine grid. Such an attitude is the basis and the mark of spiritual maturity. With David, the mature Christian can say, “I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand” (Ps. 16:8).

Paul made no apology for pleading with people to do what

he knew was right. “I . . . implore you,” he says. The Greek word *parakaleō* (translated “implore”) means to call to one’s side, with the idea of wanting to help or be helped. It connotes intense feeling, strong desire. In this context it is not simply a request but a plea, almost a begging. Paul was not giving suggestions to the Ephesians but divine standards, standards apart from which they could not live in a way that fittingly corresponded to their being children of God. Paul never exhorted on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. He could not rest until all those given into his spiritual care walked “in a manner worthy of the calling” with which they had been called.

Paul pleaded with King Agrippa to listen to his testimony (Acts 26:3), he strongly urged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for a repentant brother (2 Cor. 2:8), and pleaded with the Galatians to stand in the liberty of the gospel as he did (Gal. 4:12). He pleaded out of an intense love for others, saved and unsaved. Of unsaved fellow Jews, he wrote, “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:1–3).

Christians should not resent a pastor’s entreating them in the faith as Paul did those to whom he ministered. A pastor who approaches his ministry with detachment or indifference is not worthy of his office. Loving concern for the spiritual welfare of others is costly, and apart from God’s strength it is frustrating and demoralizing.

Not only pastors but all believers should have a loving concern to implore, entreat, beg, and plead with others to respond in obedience to the gospel. Like Paul, they should have a passion to implore their fellow believers to walk in a manner worthy of their

calling—to be everything the Lord desires of them.

“Walk” is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to daily conduct, day-by-day living, and it is the theme of the last three chapters of Ephesians. In the first sixteen verses of chapter 4, Paul emphasizes the unity and in the rest of the chapter the uniqueness of the Christian walk. In chapters 5 and 6 he stresses the moral purity, the wisdom, the Spirit control, the family manifestations, and the warfare of the Christian walk.

The Greek word for “worthy,” *axios*, has the root meaning of balancing the scales—what is on one side of the scale should be equal in weight to what is on the other side. By extension, the word came to be applied to anything that was expected to correspond to something else. A person worthy of his pay was one whose day’s work corresponded to his day’s wages. The believer who walks “in a manner worthy of the calling” with which he has been called is one whose daily living corresponds to his high position as a child of God and fellow heir with Jesus Christ. His practical living matches his spiritual position.

This calling is the sovereign, saving calling of God (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12). Paul tells us that those whom God “predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and . . . whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). As the apostle mentioned in the opening of this letter, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph. 1:4). No person can be saved apart from receiving Jesus Christ as his Savior. But no person can choose Christ who has not already been chosen by the Father and the Son. “You did not choose Me,” Jesus explained to the disciples, “but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain” (John 15:16).



Paul makes many references to the believer's calling (*klēsis*), which, as in this case, refers to the Lord's sovereign, effectual call to salvation (Rom. 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:26; Eph. 1:18; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; cf. Heb. 3:1; 2 Pet. 1:10).

Without God's calling, without His choosing us, our choosing Him would be futile. In fact, if God did not call men to Himself no man would *want* to come to Him, because the natural man—every natural man—is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). The marvelous truth of the gospel is that God not only sent His Son to *provide* the way of salvation (Rom. 5:8) but that He sent Him to *seek* the lost in order to save them (Luke 19:10). God was not content simply to make salvation available. He has called the redeemed elect to Himself.

That is why our **calling** is a high calling, a “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1), and “a holy calling” (2 Tim. 1:9). And that is why the faithful, responsive Christian is determined to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

#### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORTHY WALK

**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.** (4:2–3)

Here Paul gives five essentials for faithful Christian living, five attitudes on which walking worthily in the Lord's call are predicated.

### 1. Humility

These characteristics, of which humility is the foundation, form a progression, the genuine exercise of one leading to the exercise of those that follow.

*Tapeinophrosunē* (“humility”) is a compound word that literally means to think or judge with lowliness, and hence to have lowliness of mind. John Wesley observed that “neither the Romans nor the Greeks had a word for humility.” The very concept was so foreign and abhorrent to their way of thinking that they had no term to describe it. Apparently this Greek term was coined by Christians, probably by Paul himself, to describe a quality for which no other word was available. To the proud Greeks and Romans, their terms for ignoble, cowardly, and other such characteristics were sufficient to describe the “unnatural” person who did not think of himself with pride and self-satisfaction. When, during the first several centuries of Christianity, pagan writers borrowed the term *tapeinophrosunē*, they always used it derogatorily—frequently of Christians—because to them humility was a pitiable weakness.

But humility is the most foundational Christian virtue. We cannot even begin to please God without humility, just as our Lord Himself could not have pleased His Father had He not willingly “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and . . . humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7–8).

Yet humility is terribly elusive, because if focused on too much it will turn into pride, its very opposite. Humility is a virtue to be highly sought but never claimed, because once claimed it is forfeited. Only Jesus Christ, as the perfectly obedient Son, could justifiably claim humility for Himself. “Take My yoke upon you,” He said, “for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). He came

to earth as God's Son, yet was born in a stable, raised in a peasant family, never owned property except the garments on His back, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. At any time He could have exercised His divine rights, prerogatives, and glory, but in obedience and humility He refused to do so because it would have been to go outside His Father's will. If the Lord of glory walked in humility while He was on earth, how much more are His imperfect followers to do so? "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Although humility is at the heart of Christian character, no virtue is more foreign to the world's ways. The world exalts pride, not humility. Throughout history, fallen human nature, ruled by Satan, the prince of this world, has shunned humility and advocated pride. For the most part humility has been looked on as weakness and impotence, something ignoble to be despised. People unashamedly claim to be proud of their jobs, their children, their accomplishments, and on and on. Society loves to recognize and praise those who have accomplished something outstanding. Ostentation, boasting, parading, and exalting are the world's stock in trade.

Unfortunately the church often reflects that worldly perspective and pattern, building many programs and organizations around the superficial enticements of awards, trophies, and public recognition. We seem to have found a way to encourage boasting that is "acceptable," because such boasting is done in the name of the gospel. But in doing so we contradict the very gospel we claim to promote, because the hallmark of the gospel is humility, not pride and self-exaltation. God's work cannot be served by the world's ways. God's call is to humility and His work is only accomplished *through* humility.

HUMILITY VERSUS PRIDE (THE FIRST SIN)

The first sin was pride, and every sin after that has been in some way an extension of pride. Pride led the angel Lucifer to exalt himself above his Creator and Lord. Because the bright “star of the morning” continually said, “I will, I will, I will” in opposition to God’s will, he was cast out of heaven (Isa. 14:12–23). Because he said, “I am a god,” the Lord cast him “from the mountain of God” (Ezek. 28:11–19). The original sin of Adam and Eve was pride, trusting in their own understanding above God’s (Gen. 3:6–7). The writer of Proverbs warns, “When pride comes, then comes dishonor” (Prov. 11:2), “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (16:18), and again “Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, is sin” (21:4).

As believers, our only protection against pride, and our only source of humility, is a proper view of God. Pride is the sin of competing with God, and humility is the virtue of submitting to His supreme glory. Thus James warns us, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; cf. Ps. 138:6).

Pride comes in many forms. We may be tempted to be proud of our abilities, our possessions, our education, our social status, our appearance, our power, and even our biblical knowledge or religious accomplishments. But throughout Scripture the Lord calls His people to humility. “Before honor comes humility” (Prov. 15:33); “The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life” (22:4); “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (27:2).

HUMILITY: A PART OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Humility is an ingredient of all spiritual blessings. Just as every sin has its roots in pride, every virtue has its roots in humility. Hu-

mility allows us to see ourselves as we are, because it shows us before God as He is. Just as pride is behind every conflict we have with other people and every problem of fellowship we have with the Lord, so humility is behind every harmonious human relationship, every spiritual success, and every moment of joyous fellowship with the Lord.

During the days of slavery in the West Indies, a group of Moravian settlers found it difficult to reach out to the slaves, who were almost totally separated from the ruling class. Many of the Moravians proudly felt it beneath them even to speak to a slave. Two young missionaries, however, were determined to reach those oppressed peoples at any cost. In order to fulfill God's calling they joined the slaves. They worked and lived beside the slaves, becoming totally identified with them—sharing their overwork, their beatings, and their abuse. It is not strange that the two missionaries soon won the hearts of those slaves, many of whom accepted for themselves the God who could move men to such loving selflessness.

A person cannot even become a Christian without humility, without recognizing himself as a sinner and worthy only of God's just condemnation. "Truly I say to you," Jesus said, "unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself . . ." (Matt. 18:3–4). At the height of his own fame and recognition as a prophet, John the Baptist said of Jesus, "I am not fit to remove His sandals" (Matt. 3:11) and "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Martha was busy doing many things supposedly for Jesus' sake, but on three different occasions we see Mary simply sitting humbly at Jesus' feet.

In all four Gospels the writers hide themselves and focus attention on Jesus. How easy it would have been for them to subtly in-

clude accounts favorable to themselves. Matthew identifies himself as a despised tax collector, which none of the other gospel writers does. On the other hand, he does not mention the feast that he gave for his fellow tax collectors to meet Jesus. Because of Matthew's humility, it was left to Luke to write about that. Mark probably wrote under the tutelage of Peter, and possibly because of that apostle's influence he does not report two of the most amazing things that happened to Peter during Jesus' ministry—his walking on water and his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. John never mentions his own name, referring to himself simply as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In a compilation of old quotes is an excellent paragraph written by Thomas Guthrie:

The grandest edifices, the tallest towers, the loftiest spires rest on deep foundations. The very safety of eminent gifts and preeminent graces lies in their association with deep humility. They are dangerous without it. Great men do need to be good men. Look at the mighty ship. A leviathan into the sea, with her towering masts and carrying a cloud of canvas. How she steadies herself on the waves and walks erect on the rolling waters like a thing with inherent, self-regulating life. . . . Why is she not flung on her beam's end, sent down floundering into the deep? Because unseen beneath the surface a vast well-ballasted hull gives her balance and takes hold of the water, keeps her steady under a pressive sail and on the bosom of a swelling sea. Even though to preserve the saint upright, to preserve the saint erect and safe from falling, God gives him balance and ballast bestowing on the man to whom He has given lofty endowments, the [attending] grace of a proportionate humility.

SOURCES OF HUMILITY

Humility begins with proper self-awareness, “the virtue,” said Bernard of Clairvaux, “by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness.” It begins with an honest, unadorned, unretouched view of oneself. The first thing the honest person sees in himself is sin, and therefore one of the surest marks of true humility is daily confession of sin. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9). “We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves,” Paul says; “but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding” (2 Cor. 10:12). It is not only unspiritual but unintelligent to judge ourselves by comparison with others. We all tend to exaggerate our own good qualities and minimize the good qualities of others. Humility takes off our rose-colored glasses and allows us to see ourselves as we really are. We are not “adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves,” says Paul, “but our adequacy is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5).

Second, humility involves Christ-awareness. He is the only standard by which righteousness can be judged and by which pleasing God can be judged. Our goal should be no less than “to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6), and Jesus Christ walked in perfection. Only of Jesus has God ever said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

Third, humility involves God-awareness. As we study His life in the Gospels we come to see Jesus more and more in His human perfection—His perfect humility, His perfect submission to the Father, His perfect love, compassion, and wisdom. But beyond His

human perfection we also come to see His divine perfection—His limitless power; His knowing the thoughts and heart of every person; and His authority to heal diseases, cast out demons, and even forgive sins. We come to see Jesus Christ as Isaiah saw the Lord, “sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted” and we want to cry out with the seraphim, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory,” and with the prophet himself, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:1, 3, 5).

When Paul looked at himself in self-awareness, he saw the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). When Peter looked at himself in Christ awareness, he said, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). When Job looked at himself in God awareness, he said, “Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6).

Our business success, fame, education, wealth, personality, good works, or anything else we are or have in ourselves counts for nothing before God. The more we rely on and glory in such things, the greater barrier they become to our communion with God. Every person comes before the Lord with nothing to commend him and everything to condemn him. But when he comes with the spirit of the penitent tax collector, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner,” God will willingly and lovingly accept him. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:13–14).

## 2. *Gentleness*

Humility always produces gentleness, or meekness. Meekness is one of the surest signs of true humility. You cannot possess meekness *without* humility, and you cannot possess meekness *with* pride.



Because pride and humility are mutually exclusive, so are pride and meekness, or gentleness.

#### THE NATURE OF GENTLENESS

Many dictionaries define meekness in terms such as “timid,” or “a deficiency in courage or spirit”; but that is far from the biblical meaning. *Praotēs* (here translated “gentleness”) refers to that which is mild-spirited and self-controlled, the opposite of vindictiveness and vengeance. Jesus used the adjective form in giving the third beatitude (“Blessed are the gentle,” Matt. 5:5) and to describe His own character (“For I am gentle,” Matt. 11:29). Gentleness is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and should characterize every child of God (Col. 3:12; cf. Phil. 4:5).

The meaning of *praotēs* has nothing to do with weakness, timidity, indifference, or cowardice. It was used of wild animals that were tamed, especially of horses that were broken and trained. Such an animal still has his strength and spirit, but his will is under the control of his master. The tamed lion is still powerful, but his power is under the control of his trainer. The horse can run just as fast, but he runs only when and where his master tells him to run.

#### EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL MEEKNESS

Meekness is power under control. Biblical meekness, or “gentleness,” is power under the control of God. A meek person is normally quiet, soothing, and mild mannered, and he is never avenging, self-assertive, vindictive, or self-defensive. When the soldiers came to arrest Him in the garden of Gethsemane and Peter drew his sword to defend His Lord, Jesus said, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53). Even in His

humanity Jesus had access to infinite divine power, which He could at any time have used in His own defense. Yet not once did He choose to do so. His refusal to enlist divine resources for anything but obeying His Father's will is the supreme picture of meekness—power under control.

David displayed such meekness when he refused to kill King Saul in the cave near Engedi, although he had easy opportunity and considerable justification from the human point of view (1 Sam. 24:1–7). After David himself became king, he again showed the restraint of meekness when he refused to retaliate against the malicious taunts, curses, and stone throwing of Shimei (2 Sam. 16:5–14).

Moses is described as “very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Yet he fearlessly confronted Pharaoh in the Lord's name (see Ex. 5–12), angrily confronted Israel with her rebelliousness and idolatry (32:19–29), and even boldly confronted the Lord to forgive the people's sin (32:11–13, 30–32). Yet Moses's confidence was not in himself but in the Lord's character and promises. When God first called him, Moses replied, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (4:10). As he served the Lord throughout his life, Moses had God's rod to remind him that the great work to which the Lord had called him could be accomplished only in the Lord's own power. That he himself was nothing and God was everything were the marks of Moses's meekness. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones has observed, “To be meek means you have finished with yourself altogether.”

Yet the meek person is also capable of righteous anger and action when God's Word or name is maligned, as Jesus was when His Father's house was made into a robber's den and He forcibly drove

out the offenders (Matt. 21:13). As Paul affirms later in this letter, it is possible to be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26). Like the Lord Himself, the meek person does not revile in return when he is reviled (1 Peter 2:23). When the meek person becomes angry, he is aroused by that which maligns God or is harmful to others, not by what is done against himself. And his anger is controlled and carefully directed, not a careless and wild venting of emotion that spatters everyone who is near.

#### THE CHARACTER OF THE MEEK AND GENTLE

One of the marks of true meekness is self-control. People who are angered at every nuisance or inconvenience to themselves know nothing of meekness or gentleness. “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Prov. 16:32). Two other marks of meekness, already mentioned, are anger at God’s name or work being maligned and *lack* of anger when we ourselves are harmed or criticized.

The meek person responds willingly to the Word of God, no matter what the requirements or consequences, humbly receiving “the word implanted” (James 1:21). He is also a peacemaker, who readily forgives and helps to restore a sinning brother (Gal. 6:1). Finally, the person who is truly meek and gentle according to God’s standards has the right attitude toward the unsaved. He does not look down on them with a feeling of superiority but longs for their salvation, knowing that he himself was once lost—and would still be lost but for God’s grace. We are to be “ready to make a defense to everyone who asks [us] to give an account for the hope that is in [us], yet with gentleness [*praotēs*] and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15). Not only Christian women but all believers should be adorned “with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4).

### 3. *Patience*

A third attitude that characterizes the Christian's worthy walk is patience, which is an outgrowth of humility and gentleness. *Makrothymia* ("patience") literally means long-tempered, and is sometimes translated "longsuffering." The patient person endures negative circumstances and never gives in to them.

#### BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF PATIENCE

Abraham received the promise of God but had to wait many years to see its fulfillment. "Thus," the writer of Hebrews tells us, "having patiently waited, he obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:15). God had promised that Abraham's descendants would be a great nation (Gen. 12:2) and yet he was not given Isaac, the child of promise, until after Abraham was nearly a hundred years old. "Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20).

God told Noah to build a ship in the wilderness, far from any body of water and before there had ever been rain on earth. For 120 years Noah worked at that task, while preaching to his neighbors of God's coming judgment.

In the chronicle of faithful Old Testament saints in the book of Hebrews, Moses's patient endurance is mentioned twice. He chose rather "to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen" (Heb. 11:25-27).

James said, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (James

5:10). When God called Jeremiah, He told the prophet that no one would believe his message and that he would be hated, maligned, and persecuted (Jer. 1:5–19). Yet Jeremiah served the Lord faithfully and patiently until the end of his life. Similarly, when the Lord called Isaiah he was told that the nation would not listen to him nor turn from their sin (Isa. 6:9–12). Like Jeremiah, however, he preached and ministered with patient faithfulness.

Paul was willing to endure any hardship, affliction, ridicule, or persecution in order to patiently serve his Master. “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?” he asked the Christians at Caesarea after the prophet Agabus predicted the apostle’s arrest and imprisonment. “For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

#### THE IMPACT OF PATIENCE: DR. LIVINGSTONE

When H. M. Stanley went to Africa in 1871 to find and report on David Livingstone, he spent several months in the missionary’s company, carefully observing the man and his work. Livingstone never spoke to Stanley about spiritual matters, but Livingstone’s loving and patient compassion for the African people was beyond Stanley’s comprehension. He could not understand how the missionary could have such love for and patience with the pagan people among whom he had so long ministered.

Livingstone literally spent himself in untiring service for those whom he had no reason to love except for Christ’s sake. Stanley wrote in his journal, “When I saw that unwearied patience, that unflagging zeal, and those enlightened sons of Africa, I became a Christian at his side, though he never spoke to me one word.”

Aristotle said that the greatest Greek virtue was refusal to tolerate any insult and readiness to strike back. But that is not God’s

way for His people. The patient saint accepts whatever other people do to him. He is “patient with everyone” (1 Thess. 5:14), even those who try his patience to the limit. He is patient with those who slander him and who question his motives for serving the Lord.

The patient saint accepts God’s plan for everything, without questioning or grumbling. He does not complain when his calling seems less glamorous than someone else’s or when the Lord sends him to a place that is dangerous or difficult. He remembers that God the Son left His heavenly home of love, holiness, and glory to come to earth and be hated, rejected, spat upon, and crucified—without once returning evil for evil or complaining to His Father.

#### *4. Forbearing Love*

A fourth characteristic element of the worthy Christian walk is showing “tolerance to one another in love.” Another word for tolerance is “forbearing” (see ESV, KJV, RSV). Peter tells us that such “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). It throws a blanket over the sins of others, not to justify or excuse them but to keep the sins from becoming any more known than necessary. “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions” (Prov. 10:12). Such forbearing love takes abuse from others while continuing to love them.

Forbearing love could only be *agapē* love, because only *agapē* love gives continuously and unconditionally. *Erōs* love is essentially self-love, because it cares for others only because of what it can get from them. It is the love that takes and never gives. *Philia* love is primarily reciprocal love, love that gives as long as it receives. But *agapē* love is unqualified and unselfish love, love that willingly gives whether it receives in return or not. It is unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodness—love that goes out even to enemies and prays for its persecutors (Matt. 5:43–44). That is why the

forbearance of which Paul speaks here could only be expressed in *agapē* love.

### 5. *Unity*

The ultimate outcome of humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance is “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The Greek word for diligent, *Spoudazō*, basically means to make haste, and from that come the meanings of zeal and diligence. One commentator describes it as a holy zeal that demands full dedication. Paul used the word in telling Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. Titus 3:12–13).

#### OUR CONSTANT CONCERN: UNITY THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Preservation of the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” should be the diligent and constant concern of every believer. Paul is not speaking of organizational unity, such as that promoted in many denominations and in the ecumenical movement. He is speaking of the inner and universal unity of the Spirit by which every true believer is bound to every other true believer. As Paul makes clear, this is the unity of the Spirit working in the lives of believers. It does not come from the outside but the inside, and is manifested through the inner qualities of humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearing love.

Spiritual unity is not, and cannot be, created by the church. It is already created by the Holy Spirit. “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. . . . There are many

members, but one body” (1 Cor. 12:13, 20; cf. Rom. 8:9). It is this very unity of the Spirit for which Jesus so earnestly prayed in the upper room shortly before His betrayal and arrest: “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. . . . that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, . . . [And] the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity” (John 17:11, 21–23).

#### OUR PART IN UNITY: WALKING IN A WORTHY MANNER

The church’s responsibility, through the lives of individual believers, is to preserve unity by faithfully walking in a manner worthy of God’s calling (v. 1), manifesting Christ to the world by oneness in Him (cf. Rom. 15:1–6; 1 Cor. 1:10–13; 3:1–3; Phil. 1:27). The world is always seeking but never finding unity. All the laws, conferences, treaties, accords, and agreements fail to bring unity or peace. Someone has reported that throughout recorded history every treaty made has been broken. There is not, and cannot be, any peace for the wicked (Isa. 48:22). As long as self is at the center—as long as our feelings, prestige, and rights are our chief concern—there will never be unity.

The bond that preserves unity is peace, the spiritual belt that surrounds and binds God’s holy people together. It is the bond that Paul described in Philippians as “being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (2:2). Behind this bond of peace is love, which Colossians 3:14 calls “the perfect bond of unity.”

Humility gives birth to gentleness, gentleness gives birth to



patience, patience gives birth to forbearing love, and all four of those characteristics “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). These virtues and the supernatural unity to which they testify are probably the most powerful testimony the church can have, because they are in such contrast to the attitudes and the disunity of the world. No program or method, no matter how carefully planned and executed, can open the door to the gospel in the way individual believers can do when they are genuinely humble, meek, patient, forbearing in love, and demonstrate peaceful unity in the Holy Spirit.

#### THE CAUSE OF THE WORTHY WALK

**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. (4:4–6)**

Everything that relates to salvation, the church, and the kingdom of God is based on the concept of unity, as reflected in Paul's use of seven ones in these three verses. The cause, or basis, of outward oneness is inner oneness. Practical oneness is based on spiritual oneness. To emphasize the unity of the Spirit, Paul recites the features of oneness that are germane to our doctrine and life.

Paul does not develop the particular areas of oneness, but simply lists them: body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father. His focus is on the oneness of those and every other aspect of God's nature, plan, and work as a basis for our commitment to live as one. It is obvious that verse 4 centers on the Holy Spirit, verse 5 on the Son, and verse 6 on the Father.

## UNITY IN THE SPIRIT

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (4:4)**

There is only one body of believers, the church, which is composed of every saint who has trusted or will trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. There is no denominational, geographical, ethnic, or racial body. There is no Gentile, Jewish, male, female, slave, or free-man body. There is only Christ's body, and the unity of that body is the heart of the book of Ephesians.

Obviously there is but one Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, who is possessed by every believer and who is therefore the inner unifying force in the body. Believers are individual temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17) that are collectively "being fitted together [and are] growing into a holy temple in the Lord, . . . being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22). The Spirit "is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:14). He is the divine engagement ring (pledge), as it were, who guarantees that every believer will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

If all Christians were walking in obedience to and in the power of the Holy Spirit, first our doctrine and then our relationships would be purified and unified. The spiritual unity that already exists would be practically manifested in complete harmony among the people of God.

Believers are also unified in the one hope of their calling. Our calling to salvation is ultimately a calling to Christlike eternal perfection and glory. In Christ we have different gifts, different ministries, different places of service, but only one calling, to "be holy

and blameless before Him” (Eph. 1:4) and “to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29), which will occur when we see the glorified Christ (1 John 3:2). It is the Spirit who has placed us in the one Body and who guarantees our future glory.

### UNITY IN THE SON

**one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (Eph. 4:5)**

Just as obviously, there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ our Savior. “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” (Acts 4:12). Paul told the Galatians, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, he is to be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). “For the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him” (Rom. 10:12).

Consequently there can only be one faith. Paul is not referring here to the act of faith by which a person is saved or the continuing faith that produces right living, but rather the body of doctrine revealed in the New Testament. In true Christianity there is only one faith, “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” and for which we are to contend (Jude 3). Our one faith is the content of the revealed Word of God. Lack of faithful and careful study of His Word, unexamined tradition, worldly influences, carnal inclinations, and many other things fragment doctrine into many varying and even contradictory forms. God’s Word contains many truths, but its individual truths are but harmonious facets of His one truth, which is our one faith.

There is but one baptism among believers. Spiritual baptism, by which all believers are placed into the Body by the Holy Spirit,

is implied in verse 4. The “one baptism” of verse 5 is best taken to refer to water baptism, the common New Testament means of a believer’s publicly confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is preferred because of the way Paul has spoken specifically of each member of the Trinity in succession. This is the Lord Jesus Christ’s verse, as it were.

Water baptism was extremely important in the early church, not as a means of salvation or special blessing but as a testimony of identity with and unity in Jesus Christ. Believers were not baptized in the name of a local church, a prominent evangelist, a leading elder, or even an apostle, but only in the name of Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:13–17). Those who by one Lord are in one faith testify to that unity in one baptism.

#### UNITY IN THE FATHER

**one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (4:6)**

The basic doctrine of Judaism has always been, “The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deut. 6:4; see also 4:35; 32:39; Isa. 45:14; 46:9), and God’s oneness is just as foundational to Christianity (see 1 Cor. 8:4–6; Eph. 4:3–6; James 2:19). Yet the New Testament also reveals the more complete truth that the one God is in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 6:27; 20:28; Acts 5:3–4).

God the Father is often used in Scripture as the most comprehensive and inclusive divine title, though it is clear from many New Testament texts that He is never separated in nature or power from the Son or the Holy Spirit. Paul’s point here is not to separate the Persons of the Godhead but to note their unique roles and yet

focus on their unity in relation to each other and in relation to the church—manifested in the several different aspects mentioned in these three verses.

Our “one God and Father,” along with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is “over all and through all and in all.” That comprehensive statement points to the glorious, divine, eternal unity that the Father gives believers by His Spirit and through the Son. We are God created, God loved, God saved, God Fathered, God controlled, God sustained, God filled, and God blessed. We are one people under one sovereign (“over all”), omnipotent (“through all”), and omnipresent (“in all”) God.