

## **“WALKING WORTHY OF OUR CALLING.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**October 4, 2020, 9 and 11 AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Ephesians 4:1-6**

### **Prayer**

Holy Father, deal bountifully with us this morning, do more than we dare ask or imagine. Open our eyes to the wonderful things in your Word. Open our hearts to receive your truth to the profit of our hungry and thirsty souls. Feed us from your Word and from your Table, in Jesus name.

### **Introduction.**

What are we getting ready to do here? We are getting ready to sit down to the family meal. We are coming together at the invitation of our Lord to come as brothers and sisters to share His supper.

When you are at home or at a family gathering, how does it feel to you when you come to the table out of sorts or at odds with someone else at the table? It doesn't feel right, does it. The family meal is supposed to be a symbol of family unity, and when that unity is broken, we feel it in our bones, it just isn't right.

Paul spoke to similar issues with the Christians in the church in Corinth when they were taking communion.

**I Corinthians 11:18** When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

I am hearing the same thing, there are divisions among us, a lack of unity. The Covid crisis is testing unity and exposing divisions all across our world and our nation and all the way into our churches and our homes. And that is saying nothing of our political differences.

I want to address this lack of unity and do what Paul does, urge us to walk in a manner worthy of our high calling as Christians. Because of what Christ has done for us as evidenced by this table, let us be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

### **The Messenger of Unity, 4:1.**

Paul starts by referring to himself as a prisoner of the Lord. Notice Paul doesn't say he is a prisoner of Caesar, or of Rome. He is not a prisoner of circumstances, but a prisoner of the Lord. Paul doesn't complain, asking, “what have I done to deserve this kind of treatment?”

Paul could hate his imprisonment, he could hate those who have him in bondage, he could hate Caesar. But Paul chooses to view his imprisonment in a different light, in the light of the sovereignty of God. Paul viewed his imprisonment as for the sake of others.

He is not in bondage even though he is a prisoner. He is a prisoner and he is free. We can have the same attitude about face masks. They aren't bondage, they aren't someone controlling us, telling us what to do, they aren't a reason for anger or hate. They can be worn out of a heart of love, a heart at peace knowing God is sovereign and wise and good. They can be worn in complete freedom for the sake of others, with no regard to ourselves.

Consider how Paul handles his unjust treatment by government authorities and consider your own attitude in the light of his. Notice what Paul is willing to suffer in chains for, what are we willing to suffer for?

“There can be no peace for the mind, no joy of heart, if we fail to recognize that our lot – our circumstances, our condition – is fully ordered by a sovereign and gracious God” (Pink, *The Ability of God*, p. 139).

Life is hard and I see only two real options. Believe God is purposefully right in the middle of every detail of it creating good and beauty and joy and meaning, or take God out of the picture and have everything turn black, bleak, hopeless, joyless and meaningless.

### **The Call to Unity, 4:1**

We are called to act or walk in a manner worthy of God, worthy of the gospel, worthy of our heavenly calling. *What is our calling?* Calling refers to God's act of calling us out of the world into the fellowship of His Son, into His kingdom and His glory. God has called us into salvation, has reconciled us to Himself, has given us new life and a living hope, has made us adopted members of His household. With all these privileges comes great responsibilities.

To walk in a manner worthy of the gospel is the general principle. This calling we have received is a gift of grace of such a great magnitude that it is worthy of our very best.

From this general principle flows the particulars that he goes on to give. Paul's goal here is unity and the path to unity starts with five means.

### **The Means of Unity, 4:2**

“...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...” These five virtues are the means or steps on the path toward unity.

#### ***“Humility, lowliness.”***

This sermon is a call to unity in our flock, but it applies to our homes and to our nation. What we saw and heard last Tuesday night was a terrible display of what is contributing to our lack of unity in our nation. In one word, a lack of humility.

This is the same word used to describe Christ in Philippians 2 when we read that He humbled Himself by taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient even to death on a cross.

Why does Paul put humility first? Because if you want to have unity in your home or in our church, this is the first step. Humble yourselves before each other. Humility leads to the others. The harvest of peace begins with the sowing of humility. This holds true at every level of life.

Where do quarrels and insults and offenses come from? They come from our pride and our seeking for ourselves. They come from wanting our own way. Let's face it, personal pride is messing up our relationships. Pride produces strife (Proverbs 13:10).

This humility comes from recognizing our own absolute dependence on God's grace. When you consider the depths from which we have been redeemed and how far we have been alienated from God, then you can't help but be humble. When we compare ourselves to God we are lowly, but when we compare ourselves to others we become puffed up. Proud people aren't gentle, which comes next.

### ***“Gentleness, meekness, tender.”***

This isn't wimpiness, or weakness, it is the gentleness of the strong, it is strength under control. This is the quality of one who is master of himself and servant of others (Stott, God's New Society, p. 149).

Jesus brought salvation and ushered in His kingdom without force, without violence or coercion.

The person who is gentle/meek is able to overlook and tolerate many things in another person. This is a person who doesn't want to provoke others and who is not easily provoked himself. This is a person who doesn't give offense and who doesn't take offense.

This is the person who is uncomplaining, with the soft answer that turns away wrath, the one who defuses the bomb. This is a person who considers others first, and is willing to waive their own rights.

### ***“Patience, long-suffering.”***

This is the attitude of God in Christ toward us. Patient and long-suffering. This is the person who is tolerant of others shortcomings. This person's disposition is such that anger is reduced.

A patient person makes allowances for others, enduring wrong rather than flying into rage. Think how crucial this is for maintaining unity and harmony in the body.

### ***“Bearing with one another, enduring.”***

When you hear a phrase like “bearing with one another in love” you hear the clear implication that there are issues, stuff, junk, reasons for having to bear with each other. Remember Paul is writing to Christians. Even the best Christians will need to bear with others and make the best of others and assume the best of others. Perfect people don’t need to be forgiven or endured. But there aren’t any of those here.

How many of us have things in us that we find hard to forgive? So it is no surprise that we will find things in others that are hard to forgive, yet we must forgive others, because without this there is no unity. Without this trait, no group of humans could stand each other for long.

This kind of person makes allowances for others and gives others the benefit of the doubt. This is a person who forgives because Christ first forgave.

Bearing with one another. How often is that challenged every day in your world, at home, at work, at school, even weekly at church? How often in a day do we have an opportunity to bear with one another, put others first, to overlook insults and offenses, be tolerant of others?

### ***“In Love.”***

Nothing is exhorted more in all of Scripture than to love. Love is the law of Christ. Love is the way, the plan, the goal, the beginning and the end. This is the power for unity and for all these virtues that promote unity.

Remember how important this was to Paul in all his prayers as he prayed we would be rooted and grounded in love, that we would know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for us.

Life gives us innumerable opportunities for offenses every day. When love rules our hearts and attitudes, we will put up with a lot from each other.

These five traits or characteristics or steps make it possible for peace to be maintained and to continue. And where peace has been broken, these are the steps back to peace. But without these there is no hope for unity. These are the foundation stones

The goal of all of this for us is the pursuit of unity. All of this is necessary to reach the goal.

### **The Goal of Unity which is peace, 4:3.**

In all of Paul’s letters to the churches he addresses these very matters. They are important, they are relevant, they are a part of church life. We can’t assume that because we are in a church that everything will go fine and smoothly, and that we will all get along just beautifully. This unity takes work and effort, it takes grit and courage and perseverance and forbearance.

“...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (ESV)

My translation says “be eager to maintain,” others have endeavor, or be diligent. Spare no effort. Strive, exert much energy. It’s a present participle meaning on-going, continuous, diligent activity.

It implies I am doing my utmost. If someone does evil to me, I strive not to return evil. If someone hates me, I don’t return hate. If someone wants to fight, I don’t fight back. And all of that is hard. Our default mode is to respond in kind. So we must labor to overcome that and be zealous for the unity that comes from the Spirit. Let us fight for peace.

Unity is ushered in by the Spirit of God. He is the author and peace is the fruit and evidence of His presence. It is the Holy Spirit who sets our hearts free from pride and prejudices, from resentment and bitterness, from being defensive and taking offenses. No wonder Jesus said, “blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). Their place in the body/church is indispensable. Sow peace, work for peace, pray for peace. Paul did this as he labored to bring Jews and Gentiles together.

Paul is writing to Jews and Gentiles. Don’t think for a minute this is an easy unity, an easy peace. There are massive differences between them. What about our differences, Dutch and non-Dutch, public school and Christian school, Democratic and Republican, town folks and country folks, Ford and Chevy? Can we survive those differences? What about masks or no masks? What about the next big one, vaccines or anti-vaccines?

What hill are we willing to die on and divide over? How about only Calvary, Christ alone?

Our call is to show the worthiness of our calling by striving with all means possible to demonstrate in visible ways the unity of the Spirit. We are called to demonstrate our family bond, our family unity in Christ’s Spirit. Demonstrate it by repentance and reconciliation; demonstrate it by humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, forgiveness, making allowances for each other.

### **Application and Conclusion:**

What tugs at our unity, what seeks to divide us? Is it masks? No, it is we who divide ourselves and when we divide it reveals we are putting something else, usually ourselves above our calling in Christ and above our eager pursuit of unity and peace.

We do not love if we have not put love above our political, ideological, scientific, personal differences. Masks should never be more important than our love for each other and our seeking to walk worthy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What did Jesus lay down for us? Will we lay aside our own desires and sacrifice our lives for the good of others?

I have heard reports that in Lynden there are those who mock or ridicule or make fun of people wearing masks. They say those who wear them are dumb sheep, they are living in fear, they are being controlled. None of that can be done in a spirit of humility and love. When you see

someone wearing a mask do you assume the worst about them or the best? Paul wore the humiliation of his imprisonment with humility and even honor. What about us?

What divides us? What unites us? Would we rather be of the party of Trump or the party of Jesus Christ? Which one is more important? Which one will last longer? Which one has done more for us?

What would we rather spend our time on? Defending our opinions or healing our divisions? Are we more eager to fight for our viewpoint, or more eager bear with each other in love? Do our words build up or tear down, do they squash or encourage, do we use put downs or sarcasm?

Do we want that? Do we care about that? Do we pray for that? What would each of us be willing to do for that kind of display of the glory and power of God in our fellowship?

Where the Holy Spirit is alive and well and active, there is real fruit, like love, joy, peace and patience. There is real humility. When we see this in our fellowship, that is evidence of the glory of God, of the riches of His grace, of the power of the Gospel.

Of the five qualities in verse 2, which one needs the most work in your own life? How would your relationships change if you would start asking the Spirit's help with that trait?

As we come to this family meal, meant to be a symbol of our unity in Christ and with each other, are you ready and willing to follow Him, to walk in a manner worthy of Him and His calling on our lives? Do you have an eagerness, an earnestness to seek and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by exercising humility, gentleness, patient endurance and above all, love?

**Prayer:** Our Father and our God, we humble ourselves before you and your Word. By your Holy Spirit convict us and cleanse us and enable us to live worthy of our calling and to spare no effort in preserving the peace in our homes, our church, community, in all our relationships. We pray for this peace and unity in our church that it would become real, visible. Help us to daily live this out that we not dishonor you who has called us as brothers and sisters into your kingdom and glory.