

Transcription of 17GS1015

Ephesians 4:1-3

"Walk in Unity"

February 5, 2017

Good morning. It's good to be together and be in God's Word. That's our hope and our faith, isn't it? Why don't you open up your Bibles to Ephesians 4 this morning? I wanted to spend a few minutes looking at what Paul has to say there.

Just to give you a quick background on the book of Ephesians and who Paul was writing to, Paul wrote this letter somewhere around 61 A.D. or so. He would have been somewhere around 65 years old at the time, and he wrote this letter not just to the Ephesian church, though it's called the book of Ephesians, but also to the other churches that were there in that region. He says "to the faithful in Christ." So, like many of Paul's letters, they would be written and then taken and passed around to the different churches there. But he wrote this with them in mind. Ephesus was a large city there in Asia Minor. It was a port city, probably had some 400,000 people or so that lived there; has a huge amphitheater - I say has because if you go to Ephesus today, you'll see the amphitheater still there - huge place. There were both Jews and Gentiles that lived in this city. They had a synagogue there. When Paul first went to Ephesus, he went and taught in that synagogue. But the majority of the city was given over to idolatry. They worshipped the goddess Diana there; and Diana was the goddess of fertility, so you can imagine the worship of Diana was vile. They used temple prostitutes, and very occultish practices followed as well. It was just a bad place. I don't know if you look around today and see the idolatry and false worship that goes on today, you might think, "Wow, it's not too much different than what we see sometimes today" - the things that people would worship. But that was the place and the people that Paul was writing to, to the church there. He would first visit the church of Ephesus on his second missionary journey, and it was right at the end of that journey that he went there. He went and only spent a few days there in Ephesus. He went and taught in the synagogue there, and they had asked him to stay and to teach some more. But he told them he couldn't, that he had to get to Jerusalem for the feast - probably the feast of Passover at that time. But he said, "If the Lord wills, I'll come back," and he left after only spending, like I said, a short time with them.

But there in Acts 19, on his third missionary journey, Paul would go back to Ephesus, and he would teach there for right around three years. So you can imagine the love that Paul had in his heart for these people and the work that God

had started there and his desire to see them do well. So he writes this letter to them to encourage them in their walks with the Lord. And he'll begin here in chapter 4 to speak about how they should live and how they should walk in the light of what God had done for them. In the first three chapters of this letter, Paul would do exactly that. He would talk to them about everything that God had done, who they are in Christ. And then he would start his second half to this letter here in chapter 4.

So this morning I want to just look at the first three verses, here in Ephesians 4, where we read in verse 1 (it says), "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." The word "therefore" is always a pivotal word when you read it in the Scriptures. You've probably heard it said - I've heard it many times - if you see the word "therefore," you should look and see what it's there for because it speaks about something in a transition. And here Paul uses it to transition between these first three chapters of him encouraging the people of what God has done for them and who they are in Christ. It was key to Paul as he taught them. He spends three chapters teaching them doctrine, teaching them and reminding them of the things that God had done for them, giving them time to read these verses and go over them and sit at God's feet and just take the time to take in who they are and what God has done - this awesome love that has been poured out upon them. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul tells them a lot of things about who they are and what Jesus has done. He says they were adopted into the family of God; that they'd been chosen before the foundations of the world to be holy and to be blameless; that God had redeemed them by His blood; that they'd been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise; that they had a great inheritance to look forward to and that inheritance was in Christ; they had been called God's workmanship, and that this great mystery had been revealed to them - this new family, a new nation that God had put together that would comprise both Jew and Gentile. He would call it the building of God. I mean, over and over and again and again, Paul would say to them, "Look at who you are! Look at how great our God is! Look at what He has done for you because of His love!" All these things God had planned out for them while they were yet sinners, Paul said. I mean, doesn't that make you feel good? Doesn't that help you to just go, "Oh, oh, that's the God I want to serve. That's the Savior that I know."

And Paul spends these very foundational three chapters that they might see those things in light of now saying, "Now how should you live? How should you walk?"

What kind of people should we be?" I think that's why so many Christians kind of stumble and fall in their walks with the Lord as new believers, so to speak. They try and walk before they take the time to sit at the Lord's feet and really take in and ponder and allow to grow all that God has done for them on their behalf. I think too many times churches will preach to people about what they should be doing for God - those things that, "Hey, if you're a Christian, you'd better be doing this and this and this. You should be loving your wife like Christ loves the church. You should be not drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit. You should love your enemies and bless them; pray for those who are mean to you and curse you." All great things. Don't get me wrong. All things that the Scriptures instruct us to do as God's people. But we first need to, as saints, sit at the Lord's feet and learn about God's great love for us, this grace and mercy that we've received from Him. Because when that takes root in your heart, when you truly understand what God has done for you and where you sit, wow, what a change can come over your life! Now you're not serving because you've been told to or because you've been instructed to. "Well it says it, I guess I've gotta do it." But in light of all that Jesus has done for us, our natural response is, "Oh, I just want to serve Him." And, as that truth takes root in your heart, you begin to love your wife and love your spouse. You begin to forsake your sin and say, "I don't need those things of the flesh any longer. I want to be filled with the Spirit." You now have compassion for your enemies and for those who are working against you, even though many times they're not (I think that's just the way we perceive things). But it helps you to love them and pray for them. The strength of God's love taking root in your heart will do all of those things in us.

So Paul writes here, "I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord," (chained up in the love of Christ) "beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." What is this calling that he speaks of? Here, in the first sixteen verses of chapter 4, Paul deals with the subject of unity. Though this walk kind of takes us in different aspects of our lives - there're a lot of different things that it deals with when you read about this word "walk" - it really is your conduct or how you live, when you read this word, how should you walk in the Lord. But all of those things really take root and start here with this one basic truth - that God desires unity amongst His people, unity there in the church. So Paul begins to instruct them about this unity in the church, and he talks about this calling that God has put upon our lives. Do you feel called by the Lord? Maybe you feel called to a lot of different things - maybe it's ministry or certain things in your life, your family, some direction for your home. But God has called all of us to walk worthy of this

calling that He has put upon our lives. This word "calling" here isn't just speaking of those ministry things. Literally it says, "Hey, live your life in a manner that reflects God's work on your behalf." That's the way you should walk. Those are the lives that we should live. Paul says, "I beseech you." It's a pretty strong word there in the Greek. It means to beg or to exhort. It's not just Paul saying, "Hey, I suggest that these are some really good things that you might want to start putting into your life. These are a few good ideas, some tips that I have for you as you want to walk with the Lord." No. This word "beseech" there is a strong word. And like I said, this "calling" is much more than being called to teach in a Sunday school class or to lead worship or to be an evangelist. It speaks of a calling that God has put upon every single believer; not individual callings, the one for the body of Christ, the church of God. That's the calling that Paul is speaking of here and that our conduct that we live day in and day out would be consistent with somebody who has experienced the love of God in their life, who has read chapters 1, 2 and 3, who understands all of those things. That's this calling that God has put on us. In 2 Corinthians 5, God says (there in verse 17), "If anyone is in Christ," (it's probably a verse you know very well) "he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." This new creation begins because of the work of God in our life, and then that calling comes, and we decide, "Hey, I'm going to begin to do the things that God says in His Word. I'm going to begin to walk with Him, and, as God instructs me in the way I should live as part of the body of Christ, I'm going to answer that call to live in unity with my brothers and sisters."

So in verse 2, Paul begins to describe this walk. And like I said, here in chapter 4 - especially the first sixteen verses there - he talks about, and focuses on, unity within the church. So we read here, in verse 2 (he says), "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How are we going to have unity in the church? Paul gives us a few things that should be found in the lives of those who are walking worthy of the calling that God has called us to - beginning here with the word "lowliness." This word "lowliness" means to have a humble opinion of oneself, a deep sense of one's littleness. Don't you like that? I love that description. "Lowliness." It's to have a deep sense that you're little in the scope of things; and especially in the aspect of what the church is, that we're made up of all these different individuals serving one awesome God. That's the lowliness that God calls us to. Humbleness can be kind of an elusive thing, can't it? Right when you think you've got a hold of it, you don't. You might live your life not so humble, proud in some areas. All of us have different gifts. We're good at some things and

are gifted in some areas of our life. But the times when you kind of find yourself being humble - I've had those times once or twice (Laughing), and I find myself saying (looking back and going), "Wow, look at me. I was pretty humble over there." Yeah, it's gone. Just like that. Like a vapor, it's gone into thin air. "Oh, I thought I had it." And it's gone. There it went. So how do you get this humbleness? Like any good thing that we receive, it's got to come from the Lord. The Lord has to do these things in our hearts and in our lives. When we're finally free of this kind of idea of works-dependent Christianity, when we're dependent upon, rather, God's grace and His mercy, we begin to walk in humility, in lowliness of heart. When you realize that God blessed us not because of our diligence, not because of our faithfulness, but because of His love and His grace, it's nothing that we could have ever earned. I don't care what we've done in our life or what we have planned or what path we have charted out so we might serve the Lord, His grace and His love and His mercy have been given to us abundantly just because God loves us, just because He desires to see us do well, and He wants to gift us. "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Lord" (James 1:17). And this humbleness comes as we realize that, when we see our littleness, as we hold ourselves up to the great gift that God has given to us.

Have you ever just sat and thought about your salvation? Maybe you just were alone one day, maybe at times you're reminded that you're a sinner (it happens to me now and then, as well), but then you remember those verses about God's grace and His love and His forgiveness. You go back and look at the account of Christ's suffering and His sacrifice for us, and you just realize how little you are in the scope of God's love, how little your good works are, how little your faithfulness is in the scope of God's faithfulness. It's amazing to just sit and to ponder how awesome this gift is that God has given to us. Certainly circumstances bring that to our remembrance as well. Peter had that experience. Back in Luke 5, you remember, as Jesus was there teaching, He asked if He might step into the boat and get a ways, a little bit, from the crowd so He could teach, and He instructed the people there. And when He was finished, He looked at Peter, who had been out fishing all night, and said to Peter, "Let's go fishing." He said, "Let's go out and let down your nets for a catch." But Peter was the expert. He was a fisherman. That was his job. That was his career. And he was good at it, though that night they had fished all night long and hadn't caught a single thing; no fish at all. But he recognized Christ as his Lord and his Master, but he still thought, "Well, I know better than You." So, putting those things together, he said, "Well, we've fished all night. We've come up empty. But nevertheless at Your Word, I'll let down the

net." Jesus said, "Let down the nets. Let's go out for a catch. We're going to pull in a lot of fish." But Peter, with his expertise, said, "No, I'll let down the net because You've said so." And you guys know the story. As they let down this net, they went to go pull it in, and it was a huge catch - so big that the nets couldn't hold all the fish, and they began to break, and Peter needed help. But when Peter saw this, he saw himself in that lowly way, as a little guy. He wasn't a big expert anymore, and we read that he fell down at Jesus' feet, and he said to Him, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" That's humbleness, that's lowliness. It didn't just come because he said, "Wow, this guy knows more about fishing than I do." But he realized who Jesus was and that he would be able to stand there before his Lord just drove him to his knees, and he said, "I'm a sinner, and You're holy. I shouldn't be here." That's the place where we'll find our humbleness, where we'll find our lowliness; that place we'll be far less likely to look down on our brothers and on our sisters; less likely to see ourselves better than others. If you really want to compare yourself to somebody, just stand up next to Jesus. It'll take care of the situation right there. But that's what God is looking for, isn't it? That's what Paul's saying. "Hey, in the light of everything God has done, we should have unity within the church. There shouldn't be any room for pride there, anywhere. But we should love one another, and be united with your brothers and sisters."

Secondly, we read here that we should walk in gentleness and meekness. Meekness toward God is an attitude of the spirit, that we accept the dealings of God in our lives as good. So therefore, we walk without disputing, without resisting God. That's meekness. Meekness is one of those things that comes to a person's life when they're wholly relying upon God, realizing that everything that God brings into our lives is for our benefit, that He loves us. I may have mentioned before to you - the very first verse I ever memorized as a believer was Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." That's the thing and the truth that brings you to this gentleness or meekness in your life, that you don't have to struggle against what's going on in your life because God's the One that's directing it. We just simply need to walk with Him and follow Him. The meek are those who wholly rely on God rather than themselves, their own strengths, their own abilities. Gentleness and meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness or self-interest. It's the opposite of self-defense. We have a God who cares so much for us that we don't have to worry about anything. We don't have to worry about what we eat or drink or the things that we need in this life. We don't have to fear man or what man can do to

us because God is on our side, and He's greater than all those things. "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). That brings us to that place of gentleness or meekness. We're able to walk and live our lives with those attributes that show that we're submitted to our Lord and our God; to Jesus, who said (in Matthew 11:29), "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." That's meekness, that's gentleness, that's the result of those things. You find peace for your souls. That's what God is looking for within His church, that we might live together in peace. You don't see Jesus getting angry at the wrongs that were done to Him. You can read all through the gospels, even as Pastor Jack's been going through the gospel of Mark, about the religious leaders that came against Him, the testings that came His way, the way they tried to discredit Him and lead people away from Him. You don't see Jesus being angry about those things or frustrated with them. He knew that His Father was in control and that He was guiding His life. He was trusting in Him. I love Jesus' words when He says, "I only do the things that the Father tells Me to do, I only say the things that the Father tells Me to say" (John 8:29 and John 12:49). He was wholly dependent on the work of God's Holy Spirit and the Father's leading in His life. You don't see Him getting angry and upset about all those things. The only time you see that is when the people are leading people away from God, like when Jesus was there in the Temple and saw the money changers there and the business that was going on and how the Sadducees and Pharisees were leading people away from the worship of God. They'd come to the Passover excited about coming and giving their sacrifice, and instead they'd just get their pockets picked by these people. And Jesus came and turned over the money changers' tables and drove out the sheep and oxen and said (Mark 11:17), "You've turned My Father's house into a place of merchandise. It's to be a place of prayer." But the rest and the peace in the church among us come as we walk in meekness as Jesus did - He's our example - reaching out to one another with God's love. I know that that's what God desires for us because that is the mark of people who have been touched by their Lord.

And to that meekness, he says, add "longsuffering, bearing with one another in love." Not just being meek in the moment but also when the situation lasts longer than you expect. That could be the difficult part, right? The longsuffering, the patience that we need. Patience is one of those things that has to be learned. It's something that you kind of have to learn through circumstances or situations. I remember when I first got saved, I needed patience. Boy did I need patience! And I remember sharing with a brother, "Hey, pray for me. I need patience." And

he said, "Oh, if you pray for patience, you better put your seatbelt on." I was a fairly new Christian. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, if you pray for patience, God's going to put you in situations where you need to be patient, and you need to rely upon Him to give you that kind of patience." Though that isn't always the case, I think nine times out of ten it is, and that's what I've found it out to be in my life. That's how Paul learned. "I've learned in whatever situation I'm in to be content" (Philippians 4:11). He said, "It's things that I've learned as I've walked with the Lord," and that patience is one of those things. I wouldn't tell you not to pray for patience. I'd tell you God desires that for you. And, as we bear with one another and love one another (as we read here in these verses), we can trust that God's going to accomplish those things in us as we trust in Him. God's love in us is the only way to accomplish that calling of meekness and patience with one another. You see, the love of God is not only patient with us when we do wrong, but God's love actively reaches out to us. That's where the patience and the longsuffering come from, I believe, as we don't just sit back and say, "Lord, I need to be patient." We need to reach out with that kind of love, that we might seek to be patient with others and then see God's work being accomplished in us. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God doesn't simply just count to ten and wait for His anger to subside. He moves to bring us to unity in this relationship with Christ, and through that relationship - forgiveness of our sins and how He remembers them no more - we find God's longsuffering with us.

Read verse 3 here with me again. He says, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This word "endeavoring," here, in the Greek is a funny Greek word. It's the Greek word "*spoudazo*." Doesn't it sound like something you'd order in an Italian restaurant? Can I have some of that "*spoudazo*"? I don't know, it just sounds like that. But it means to make haste or to exert oneself. So when we're "endeavoring," as we speak here, "to keep unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," this unity amongst the saints is something that we seek not just when the situation comes up. I think that's the way we do it many times. We don't think about it, we don't seek after it. We just wait, and when those situations come up when we have to have patience, when we have to have longsuffering, then we say, "Lord, give me that!" But that's not how it works. He says we should "endeavor" toward these things. That means we should be working toward them, moving out toward those things; not just when the situation comes up but it's something that we should be actively seeking out in our lives. Because that's how God's kingdom works. It doesn't work like that in the world. Unity is something that we should be striving toward in the body of Christ - working and looking for, driven to, to love

one another, to be patient with one another, to bear one another's burdens, walking in the Spirit, joined together in His peace.

Like I said, that doesn't work in the world. The world has a different idea of unity. Unity isn't compromising. It's not tolerance. Unity in the church isn't doing anything just to get along in the church. Unity is based on one thing. It's based on God's love. Do you see that in the world much? Or do you see the opposite things? You see people just saying, "Well, we should be tolerant with each other. We should just compromise just so we can get along." It isn't based on love. It's just so we might get along. But God wants much more than this. In the world, unity is based on reason - to ignore differences to get something accomplished. You may have run into that at your work. Maybe you have to work with some other people to get your job done. And you've heard people say, "Well, yeah, I know he's a jerk. But if we're going to get the job done, we'd better work together." That's the world's idea of unity. Does it sound right? Does it sound like something that would work within the church? "I don't know about that guy over there. I don't really like them very much, but he's here in church. I guess I gotta love him while we're worshipping here. But outside the church, I'm not gonna do it." That's the way the world works.

It's not the way we work. The world seeks unity through experience. "We've all had difficult times. We all have struggles in this world. We all have this one common struggle that we can be united behind." I don't want to unite behind people because of their struggles. I want to unite with you people and God's people because we're sinners saved by grace, because we've all experienced God's love. And when God's love works in you and in me, we find those things just naturally happening in our midst. For the believer, God calls us to unity based on one Person. We should be united behind one Person - Jesus Christ. That's where our unity comes from. Biblical unity can only come through a relationship with God through Christ's sacrifice. And imagine the power that is available there to us, the power of sacrifice that we've experienced through Christ - if we apply that to one another, to being united together behind Christ - for His purposes. That's the call to unity that God has given to us. This unity that God desires among His children is only accomplished that way. It'll never be accomplished through worldly means. We can try all we like, but it won't happen. But we can take the place of one another. We should bear one another's burdens. We should love each other because God dwells in our hearts. And as it overflows - this love of God - as we walk and live and deal with one another, the world sees the unity that we have, and

God uses that to bring others in. In John 13:35 Jesus says, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." And really that was Paul's prayer for these people and for the church there in Ephesus. He prayed for them back in chapter 3. Turn back one page. Read verses 17-19 there with me. This is what Paul prayed for the people there in Ephesus, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, and that's God's prayer and desire for us today - that we would be full of God's love, that we would walk in unity, that we would seek it out and seek to accomplish that, not by worldly means but by following Jesus and using Him as our example.

We had some pretty bad news this morning about our Pastor; and then some great news that he's doing well, and they're expecting great things for his recovery. But this is the place where the love of God comes in, where we're united together - not behind Pastor Jack but we're united together behind Christ, knowing that God's purposes for him and for us are that we would bear one another's burdens, that we would pray for one another, that we would trust God's Word and know that He's for us and not against us, and that God is working out His plan in the body of Christ to reach a world that needs Him so badly. And we know how badly the world needs Him because we were in that need as well. But God reached out to us. He endeavored to come and seek us out so we might be sitting in this place today. I'd encourage you, I'd beseech you (as Paul does) - answer the call that God has put upon our lives. Love one another. Sit and remember all that God has done for you, and then go and walk with Him. Live your life according to the knowledge that you've gained in the love of Christ. And God'll do amazing things within us. I'm convinced He's not done with us yet. I hope you are, too. Let's pray.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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