



It's been called the greatest rescue mission of World War II. Late in that war, American bombers were sent on dangerous missions over southern Europe to cripple the Nazi's oil supplies. Hundreds of crews soared through storms of anti-aircraft shells. Many American pilots were forced to bail from their shot-up planes. The injured airmen drifted by parachute into occupied Yugoslavia, expecting to be captured or killed. Instead, on the ground rescue teams were already in place. Serbian peasants had tracked the path of the floating flight crews. Their sole mission was to grab the pilots and bring them to safety before the Nazis arrived. Risking their own lives, the peasants fed and sheltered the downed soldiers.

These rescued men were in friendly hands but on enemy soil. They still needed to escape. To travel to the evacuation site, the airmen had to spend weeks following the Serbian freedom fighters, who alone knew the path to the site. Despite a language barrier, the direction, the pace, and the destination were in the hands of their rescuers. The men had been saved from their enemy, but the journey had just begun. They still had to walk to freedom, and they did just that. The story of what became known as Operation Halyard resulted in those Serbian peasants rescuing every single American airman—417 in all.

We Are to Walk In a Manner Worthy of Our Calling.

The story sheds light on an important spiritual reality we see in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: to be rescued **from** something sets us on the path **toward** something. For the airmen it was a journey of survival. For us it's a journey of faith. In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul described the spiritual blessings we have as those rescued from sin and death. He's lavished his grace on us. We've been chosen, adopted, redeemed. We're part of a new reconciled humanity made up of Jew and Gentile.

But in chapter 4 Paul makes a sharp turn. He starts out and says, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* That word "live" is literally "walk." It's a word we'll see a lot in the second half of this letter. The One who saved us and seated us in the heavenly places now calls us to get up and walk. It's nonnegotiable. Though snatched from spiritual death, we learn the Christian life isn't an arrival; it's an adventure; it's a walk. Christ rescues us and then he leads us on a long walk.

One of my favorite things to do is walk. Walking implies several things. First, you have to get up and go. That requires effort. Walking may not be as tiring as running, but it still takes effort. Living the life God wants us to live requires some sweat. It's a long walk we're on. It's one involving many steep hills and sharp turns.

Another thing about walking is you normally have some kind of direction. You have a destination. To get there you must follow a certain path. God has given us some clear guidance in his word about where we're going and how to get there. We don't just wander around aimlessly. Ultimately, we want to become conformed to the image of Jesus and share in his glory. That's where we're going.

Finally, walking means you're making progress. You're not going backwards; you're not moving away from your destination but towards it. In the Christian life we call this growth. Every so often it's not a bad thing to evaluate our progress. How am I doing? Am I growing? Peter said we should be pursuing faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. Then he says, *"For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 1:5-8). That's talking about progress in our walk.

But sometimes we have a hard time measuring our own progress. Honestly, we have an incredible ability to deceive ourselves. Sometimes we think we're further along than we really are. At other times we're actually making progress but we can't see it. We feel like we're going backwards. That's why God has designed this walk **not** to be one we go on alone. The Christian walk isn't a solo journey. We walk with others. That's what the church is all about. Here in chapter 4 Paul calls it *"the body of Christ."* The church is a bunch of people who are walking together, encouraging and helping one another grow and make progress.

But that also presents a problem. We often find ourselves walking out of step with others in this body. Sometimes we even feel the very people who are supposed to help us make progress are the ones holding us back. Many believers have become so disillusioned about the church they've given up on it. They know what the church is supposed to be and the fact that it falls so short of the ideal has caused them to jump ship. As one book put it, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*.

Walking In a Manner Worthy of Our Calling Starts With a Commitment to Christian Unity.

But the word of God doesn't allow for that. This is why when Paul begins to talk about what a walk worthy of our calling looks like, the first thing he does is talk about unity in the church.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:2–6).

We see here that as those who have been called by God, as those blessed with every spiritual blessing, we're to make unity with other believers our highest priority. You can't separate your individual relationship with God from your relationship with his people. Of course, this shouldn't surprise us. This is exactly what Jesus said. The night of his arrest, he sat with his disciples and said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (Jn 13:34-35). You can see this isn't optional. You know when you buy a car there are some things that come with the car and others are extras. Well, if you buy into Jesus, this comes with him.

But as I said earlier, this isn't easy. We see it here. In Paul's words, there's the clear recognition there will be conflict among believers. That's why he says *"make every effort"* to keep the unity of the Spirit. There'd be no need to say that if there weren't differences and forces at work to divide the body. The word "make every effort" is a strong word that implies diligence, effort.

You don't have to look far in the Scriptures to see how difficult this is. It's remarkable how candid the Bible is about the conflict of God's people. It started with Adam and Eve. Remember how Adam blamed Eve for his problems, thinking he could wiggle out of taking responsibility? Soon after, Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy and resentment. Abraham and Lot split their joint venture because of conflict among their servants. Jacob and Esau reached a point of resentment so great that one of them simply skipped town. Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave. The Israelites constantly grumbled against Moses. Saul angrily chased David through the wilderness. I could go on and on and that's just the Old Testament.

In the New Testament there's frequent squabbling among the disciples. While Jesus is on his way to the cross, they're arguing over which of them is the greatest. There's the debates among the early Christians. The Jerusalem church fought over the allocation of funds for the relief of widows. Peter and Paul had it out in Antioch because Peter refused to eat with Gentiles. There were

all the different factions in Corinth, each one identifying with a different Christian leader. In Philippians we meet two ladies who couldn't get along: Euodia and Syntyche (or, better, Odious and Soontouchy). Finally, there was the dissension between Paul and Barnabas over whether to bring John Mark with them on the second missionary journey after he couldn't cut it on the first. Barnabas wanted to offer him a second chance; Paul felt he was disqualified. They couldn't work it out and they parted company. How could two godly men who were so close allow their partnership to be dissolved?

Do you see why Paul says *"make every effort..."*? I remember learning this the hard way as a new believer. I was very idealistic in my relationships with other believers. I thought conflict should never happen. In my third year of college I had two roommates. We were committed believers. We chose to live with each other for that very reason. But somewhere along the line one of the other guys began to resent me. He'd lash out at me and then just ignore me for days. I tried to figure out what I did wrong. All he'd say is I left my stuff laying around the apartment. I tried to change that but he never really let it go.

A year or so later I got married. Now I had a new roommate. We came from very different families. I had just one brother. Our home was quiet. It's not that there wasn't conflict, but it was usually swept under the rug. When it came to conflict, I had learned a strategy of avoidance. When I became a Christian I convinced myself this was the Christian way; followers of Jesus should always seek peace and be loving. And then I got married. My wife is from a family of five girls. Conflict was always right out in the open with them. Honestly, it was a lot healthier. They dealt with it and they moved on. But our marriage was really the clashing of two family systems when it came to dealing with conflict. And it made for a very interesting first year of marriage!

So I had to learn through all of this it's unrealistic for Christians to pretend we have no differences. One of the reasons for this is there's no group in the world so diverse as the church. Its beauty is it's made up of different kinds of people: rich and poor, slaves and freemen, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, black and white, Republican and Democrat, Giants fans and Dodger fans. The church crosses all the boundaries and all natural distinctions and gathers all kinds of people into one body. And often because of that friction arises. There's a little jingle I learned from Ray Stedman:

To dwell above with saints we love,
O that will be glory
But to dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

The question to ask, then, is how can we pursue unity? What will it look like for us to *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*? Our passage suggests two

things. The first is something to do and the second is something to remember.

Christian Unity Starts With Our Own Character.

First, there's something to do. We see this in v. 2. There are four qualities (graces) Paul mentions we're to pursue: humility, gentleness, patience and mutual forbearance in love. It's interesting Paul doesn't start with organizational structures or programs as the key to unity. He doesn't say you need to reorganize your systems as a church, or you need to have this or that program in place. Those things might help, but if these four things aren't being practiced you won't have unity. No organization of bad eggs will make a good omelet! Let's look at these.

He starts out and says *"be completely humble and gentle."* These two go together. The idea of being humble was despised in the ancient world. The ancient Greeks never used this word in a good way. To them it meant servitude, as in slavery. It wasn't until Jesus came that true humility as a virtue was recognized. Jesus humbled himself. He said he didn't come to be served but to serve. The word Paul uses also involves the humble recognition of the worth and value of others. Humility is essential to unity because pride and self-interest lurk behind most conflict. In Mark 10:35ff two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, approached him and asked for the honor of sitting next to him in his glory. Jesus refused their request, and when the other ten disciples found out about it, they were angry at James and John. "Who do you think you are...?" Pride and self-interest always lead to dissension. Deep down they each probably thought, "Hey, I want one of those seats!"

Hand in hand with humility is gentleness. A better translation of this word is translated as meekness. We need to realize that meekness isn't weakness. This was actually a word used to describe domesticated animals. Think of a glistening, well-trained race horse. We don't think of that as an example of meekness, but it is. Meekness is strength under control; the gentleness of the strong. Jesus was both humble and gentle, but he wasn't weak, he wasn't a coward. You can be strong and be a gentle, humble servant.

Next he mentions two more qualities that go together: patience, bearing with one another in love. *"Patience"* means being long-suffering towards aggravating people. It means to have a long fuse. *"Bearing with one another in love"* means not just that you put up with one another or just tolerate one another, but that you actually do this in love.

There was a couple who'd been married for 60 years. They'd shared everything and loved each other deeply. They hadn't kept any secrets, except for a small shoebox the wife kept in the top shelf of her closet. When they got married, she put the box there and asked her husband never to look inside and never ask questions about its contents. For 60 years the man honored his wife's

request. In fact, he forgot about the box until a day when his wife got very sick, and the doctors were sure she wouldn't recover. So, putting his wife's affairs in order, he remembered that box in the top of her closet, got it down, and brought it to her at the hospital. He asked her if now they might open it. She agreed. They opened the box, and inside were two crocheted dolls and a roll of money that totaled \$95,000. The man was stunned. She told him that the day before they were married, her grandmother told her if she and her husband were ever to get into a fight, they should work hard to reconcile, and if they were unable to reconcile, she should just keep her mouth shut and crochet a doll. Her husband was touched by this, because there were only two dolls in the box. He was amazed! Over 60 years of marriage, they only had two conversations they couldn't work out. Tears came to his eyes and he grew even more deeply in love with this woman. Then he asked about the roll of money. "What's with this?" he asked. His wife said, "Well, every time I crocheted a doll, I sold it to a local craft fair for five dollars." That's forbearing in love!

Christian Unity Arises from the Unity of God.

So those four graces tell us what to do. But there's also something to remember. This is what we see in verses 4–6. Paul uses the word *"one"* no less than seven times. He lists seven things that are *"one"* or a unity. Notice three of them relate to the three persons of the Trinity: *"one Spirit"* (the Holy Spirit) is mentioned in v. 4. *"one Lord"* (Jesus) is mentioned in v. 5 and *"one God and Father of all"* is mentioned in v. 6. With that there are four things relating to our Christian experience. Each of these is associated with one of the members of the Trinity.

First, there's *"one body"* because there's only one Holy Spirit. The one body is the church, the body of Christ. When God's Spirit fell on the early believers at Pentecost the church was born. When a person puts their faith in Jesus the Spirit of God enters their life and they're immediately incorporated into the worldwide body of Christ. The Spirit is also the One who distributes spiritual gifts to each member of the body (more about that next week). Though we each have a different function in the body, we're still one.

Second, there's *"one hope"* we've been called to, *"one faith"* and *"one baptism"* because there's only *"one Lord."* This is talking about the Lord Jesus. He's the object of our faith. Regardless of our differences, there's no other way for any of us to be saved. And it's into him we're baptized. Romans 6 says we were all *"baptized into Christ Jesus."* Some Christians dunk you in water, others sprinkle you on your head. Some baptize babies, others wait until later. But there's only one baptism. And there's only one hope. Our hope is in the promise he'll one day return for us. Christians hold to many different views on how and when that will happen. There are pre-millennialists and post-millennialists. There are a-millennialists and pan-millennialists (they're

the ones who say “it will all pan out”). But regardless of all that there’s just one hope. We all look forward to the day when we’ll see him and be with him forever.

Finally, there’s *“one God and Father of us all.”* We who are his children all look to the same Father. We look to the same Father who is *“over all.”* The same Father sovereignly superintends each one of our lives. He is *“through all.”* The same Father works through each one of us. He is *“in all.”* The same Father lives in us.

So in order to live in unity, we need to remember the unities that already exist. We don’t create unity; we just maintain and keep a unity that’s already there. We’re all part of the same body, filled with the same Spirit, bolstered by the same hope, devoted to the same Lord, possessing the same saving faith, baptized into the same cleansing waters, and dependent on the God and Father of all.

I’ve seen this unity as I’ve traveled around the world. I’ve been with dear believers in Africa, Cambodia, the Philippines, Russia, Romania, Italy, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Brazil. Though we come from many distinct traditions and represent a wide range of theological viewpoints, there’s a mutual life in Christ that’s immediately evident. There’s a sense of belonging to each other.

A number of years ago some friends and I met with an orthodox priest in Russia and spent an hour in fellowship with him talking about the Lord. We were Protestant and he was Orthodox. There’s been a long-standing history of disagreement between our traditions. I’m sure, if we went into all that, there would be differences. But with this priest there was an immediate sense of our oneness in Christ. We talked about him. Our organizations weren’t one, but we were one because we’d experienced together the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How do we live that out? One of the things that keeps us from living in this unity is pride, and with pride comes an unwillingness

to take responsibility for our part of the mess we’re in. A lot of counseling I do deals with conflict in relationships. Someone comes to me and often what I hear is a lot of blame directed at someone else. “My husband does this,” “My wife never will do that,” “My friend let me down.” Sometimes I sit there thinking, “This counseling isn’t going to be very effective, because the person who apparently needs to change isn’t even in the room.”

A wise man suggested I try something: Get a pad of paper, draw a circle on it, and say, “This is a pie that represents all the chaos in your relationships. Now, 100 percent of the blame is in that pie because that’s where all the chaos is.” Give them the pen and say, “I want you to draw a slice of pie you think represents your responsibility for the conflict.” The piece of pie that person will draw won’t be very big, but tell them, “Okay. Let’s you and I talk about just this. Let’s talk about this piece that’s your responsibility. Let’s talk about your slice.”

I want you to do that this week: As you experience relational conflict at work, at home, with your friends—any conflict of any sort, big or small—stop and think about your own slice of the pie. Ask yourself, “What’s my slice of the pie? Have I taken responsibility for my part in this, or am I enjoying the blame game so much that it’s allowed me to ignore what I’m ultimately responsible for?”

The Christian life is a walk. As those who’ve been called by God, as those blessed with every spiritual blessing, we’re to walk in a way that’s worthy of our calling. And that starts with the people around you. Your unity with other believers is your highest priority. Because we’re all fallen, broken, damaged human beings, each with our own baggage, that will never be easy. But there’s something we need to do: put on the humility, meekness and patient long-suffering of Jesus. There’s something we need to remember: we share in common with other believers everything that’s important to us.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2012 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1372–9