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Ephesians 4:1-6

We Need Grace:
Walking in Grace

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I want to tell you about how God sees **this church**, how God sees **our church**. We've been reading and studying the book of **Ephesians** together, and it tells us how God sees **our community of believers**.

1. When God sees our church he sees holy and faithful people. (1:1)
2. God sees the ones he chose before the creation of the world. (1:4, 11)
3. God sees his adopted children—we're sons and daughters like Christ. (1:5)
4. God sees those he has redeemed and forgiven by the blood of Christ. (1:7)
5. When God sees our church he sees a beautiful temple filled with his Holy Spirit. (1:13; 2:21-22)
6. God sees our church as his prized possession. (1:14)
7. God sees our church as the very body of Christ Jesus himself. (1:22-23)
8. When God sees our church he sees something that was spiritually dead but is now alive. (2:1, 5)
9. God sees our church like we're seated right next to him with Jesus. (2:6)
10. God sees all the good things he's prepared for our church to do. (2:10)
11. God sees the people of our church as citizens of his country and heirs of his kingdom. (2:12; 3:6)
12. God sees the people of our church as truly loving each other and loving Christ Jesus (3:17-18)
13. God sees us the people of our church as perfectly united together by the power of his Holy Spirit. (4:3)

Do you see all the amazing ways God sees us? This is what it means to be "**called**" by God. He has "called" us to be holy and faithful and adopted and forgiven and filled and loving each other and perfectly united with each other. Why **can** God see us this way? Because he sees us through the **lens of Christ Jesus**. When he looks at us he sees the life and work of his Son, who was holy and faithful, the perfect son.

But do we match this? If we look at ourselves as a church do we see these things? How are we doing as children of God? Are we filled with the Spirit? Are we doing the good things he has called us to? Are we loving each other and loving Christ Jesus? Are we experiencing **real unity and peace** with each other and God? In some ways yes. In other ways no.

What then is **the next step** we can take as a church to become more like what God already sees us to be? What can we do to get closer to it? I think the ESV has a better translation of **Ephesians 4:1** than the NIV. It says, "**I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.**" The "**therefore**" is in reference to all the ways God has called and blessed and graced us in chapters 1-3, which we just reviewed. So therefore, because of all of these wonderful blessings, live a different kind of life. The NIV says "live worthy" but the ESV says "walk worthy." Both are fine translations but I like how the ESV **breaks it down into steps**.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

As anyone here walked the **Appalachian trail**? Where does it start? **Georgia**. Where does it end? **Maine**. Did you hike it all at once or in sections? Some hike it all at once or take several years to do so. The Appalachian train goes along the **Blue Ridge Mountains**, the **Appalachian Mountains**, and the **White Mountains**¹ and is **2,174 miles long**.² How many steps does it take to **start** that journey? **One**. Everyone who completes the Appalachian trail starts it the same way—by taking a **single step**. Today Paul is giving us a **handful of steps** we can take to “walk worthy” of the great **calling** and **amazing grace** God has given us.

Step 1 - Humility

The first thing Paul calls us to in verse 2 in humility, “Be completely humble.” When we realize that **God called and predestined us** to salvation apart from any good deed or admirable character quality in ourselves it humbles us. In fact, God calls us to salvation despite our lack of good deeds and admirable character qualities. What’s the opposite of humility? **Pride. Arrogance. Entitlement. My way or the high way. Ancient Greek culture** thought humility was a waste of time.³ But the Bible says in **1 Peter 5:5b** “...All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”** (NIV®)

What does it mean for a church to have a **humble spirit**? How do we build a **humble culture**? It means we’re not here to make **our name famous but Christ’s**. It means we value the ways God has **gifted and called** each other. It means we don’t have to have the **spotlight** but neither do we have to **hide**. It means when someone comes to us with an **idea** we **celebrate the creativity and passion** God has given them as we help them **refine** it. It means we **love teams and working together** even though it’s often not easy. It means we’re willing to **confess our sins** when we **hurt each other and do something wrong**. It means **no one is better** than anyone else. *Step 1 - Humility.*

Step 2 - Gentleness

If your humility is your **right foot** gentleness is your **left foot**. The two go together, “Be completely humble **and gentle**.” What’s the **opposite** of gentleness? Anger. Rage. If you don’t have humility you have **pride**. And if someone steps on your toes what does it cause? **Anger and rage**, which leads to **gossip and division**. But if we start with **humility**, if someone **hurts** us we will go to them with a **spirit of gentleness** and compassion to talk it through.

As people who sin and disobey God, **we deserve God’s wrath** (Romans 1:18). But instead of pouring that wrath out on us Christ Jesus took the **punishment upon himself** so that you and I can **experience the gentleness of God**. We are redeemed and forgiven instead of destroyed. Let’s each ask, “How can I be more humble? How can I be more gentle?” *Step 1 - Humility. Step 2 - Gentleness.*

Step 3 - Patience

We’re still in verse 2. Paul says, “Be patient.” The Greek word for patience is “**makrothymia**.” One commentary I read said this word is a **compound word** (two words combined, like “redhead” or “softball”) of “**anger/rage**” (**thumos**) and “**a long time**” (**makros**).⁴ The very way this word is constructed tells us **patience is delayed anger**, or long-suffering. It’s not being easily offended. **James 1:19b** says, “... **Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry**,” (NIV®)

In his book *Every Good Endeavor* Pastor **Timothy Keller** tells the story of a woman who came to visit his church. He asked her why she came.

She worked for a company in Manhattan, and not long after starting there she made a big mistake that she thought would cost her the job, but her boss went into his superior and took complete

responsibility for what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed and what he had done and went in to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she was insistent. Finally he told her, “I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for things that I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes the ability to take the blame for others.” She stared at him for a long moment and asked, “Where do you go to church?”⁵

This man’s patience helped lead her to become a Christian. That is a beautiful example of patience expressed to non-Christians **outside** the church. I think it’s easier to be patient with non-believers because we have **lower expectations** for them. But Christ also calls us to express this kind of patience **inside the church** to each other. *Step 1 - Humility. Step 2 - Gentleness. Step 3 - Patience.*

Step 4 - Love

Paul says for us to “[bear] with one another in love.” Part of living a life worthy of everything God has given us is simply loving each other **despite what we put each other through**. The word “bear with” also means “endure.” I think sometimes we expect **hostility** from outside the church, but we often experience it from our brothers and sisters **inside** the church. We are called to “endure” persecution and hardship from the **world** (1 Cor 4:12). But Paul also says to “endure” in the **local church** to “**stick with it**” (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13). Why do we stick with it? Because God endures with us. Despite our sin he loves us. *Step 4 - Love.*

Humility, gentleness, patience, and love maintain unity.

What does humility and gentleness and patience and love do? They **unify** us. They bring us together. They help us stick together even when it’s not easy. **Ephesians 4:3** says, “**Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**” (NIV®) When we encounter conflict in the church it’s easy to say, “I’ve tried everything I can.” Have we? Can’t we try one more thing? Paul says to “make every effort to keep the unity!” Have we humbled ourselves? Are we being gentle? Are we patient? Are we loving? Could we be **more** humble, gentle, patient, and loving than we are already?

Paul is writing this letter to the church at Ephesus while he’s under **house arrest in Rome, physically chained** up, potentially to a **Roman soldier** (Acts 28:16; Eph 3:1; 4:1; Phil 1:13). He’s using this as an **illustration**. “Church, be chained in peace.” Do you know the **story trope** where **two characters** who don’t like each other are **handcuffed** to each other? What ends up happening? Through **adventure and hardship** they end up **loving and caring for each other** by the end because they’ve gone through it all together. When you stick out a relationship with a **friend** or a **spouse** that has hurt you (when you say “I’m not going anywhere”) over time you **discover** a love for that person. Your relationship is actually **enriched** because it’s **seasoned**. So today I brought some **handcuffs** so we can handcuff ourselves to each other... (j/k) **I can’t decide for you** if you’re willing to wear the **handcuffs of peace**. Only you can decide.

Humility, gentleness, patience, and love maintain unity... But they’re not actually the **foundation** of our unity. They’re how we help maintain unity, and live worthy of everything God has given us, but we’re unified by something else. We’ve been talking about the steps we take on a hike. But what’s **the actual trail**? Are we hiking the **Appalachian** trail from Georgia to Maine? Or are we hiking the **Pacific Crest Trail** from **Mexico** to **Canada**? Or are we walking the **American Discovery Trail** from one **coast** to the **other**? We have to make sure we’re all walking the **same trail**.

We are unified by what we believe in.

Not everyone can walk this pathway. There's only one trail. It's called the "straight and narrow." And there's only one entrance, through Jesus Christ. Paul tells us a whole bunch of things about this trail all at once.

1. **"There is one body..."** This means you **don't go it alone**. In fact on this trail you can't go it alone. You need a church family to walk this with you. Paul calls the church family a body. That means each person is a valuable and important **part**. Together we make the **whole body work**. But so often what do we do? One knee looks down at a foot and says, "Why aren't you a **knee**? Why are you a **dirty foot**?" Or an **thumb** says to a **bellybutton**, "You **smell** and serve **no purpose**." But without a foot and a knee and a thumb and a bellybutton we wouldn't be a complete body. We're all vital.
2. **"one Spirit..."** The Greek word for "Spirit" is **pneuma** which also means **"breath."** See each part of the body can be present, but without the Holy Spirit we're a **corpse**. We need the Holy Spirit to fill our church **lungs** so that we can walk this road together. Verse 3 tells us we don't actually create unity. We simply **maintain** the unity the Holy Spirit creates. It's from him.
3. **"one hope..."** Have you heard the song "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness"?⁶ Paul throws in how he is feeling and we can feel no matter our **circumstances** (he's in prison after all). Who does he hope in? Jesus!
4. **"one Lord..."** This is Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9). Our unity as a church body is found in Christ Jesus, who is actually called the **"head"** of the body (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18). What does a head do? It **directs** the body. It leads us forward. The person who unites the church is Christ Jesus. He died and rose again to save the church, to make a broken people into a holy and faithful people, to make us into the kind of people God already **counts** us as.
5. **"one faith..."** This doesn't mean believing in something for the sake of belief. All belief systems are **not equal**. The **radically offensive claim of Christianity** is that we claim to know the truth. None of us claims to know the truth entirely, but we believe the Bible itself presents the truth. And so as we discover **truth-claims** about life and reality in its pages and believe them and align our lives to them that's when we suddenly find ourselves unified in "one faith." **Doctrine matters**. Our statement of faith matters. What we believe matters.
6. **"one baptism..."** When we become Christians one of the things we do is get **baptized**. Baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ Jesus. It's a public testimony that God has gotten a hold of my heart. Paul isn't saying that only **one church** has the right baptism or that **dunking** is better than **sprinkling** but that Christians together go through the **initiatory rite** of baptism as a **public declaration** of their **faith in Christ**. **Sharing a common baptism** is part of what unites us as a church family.
7. **"one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."** The true beauty of Christianity is that the God who is **all powerful, all knowing, and all present**, completely **holy** and completely **unsafe**, makes himself **safe** for us. In fact, if you're willing to confess your sins and believe in his Son you can call him your "Father."

Notice that Paul speaks of "one Spirit... one Lord... and one God and Father." This is the **Trinity**, one God in three persons. Yes God calls us to come and take this long hard journey. The trail has **ups with beautiful mountain vistas** where we can sense God's presence and all is right in the world, but it also has **downs, low valleys full of backbiting and frustrations**. But through it all we're not hiking this path alone. **God is with us**. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They're all with us calling us into **deeper relationship** with God. Together we walk this path with **God** and with our **church family**.

So what's the **next step** you're going to take? Are you willing to take a step of humility or gentleness or patience or love tonight? Do you need to **refine** what you believe so that you're sure you're walking the **same pathway**? I want to challenge us to examine our hearts tonight. If you feel convicted that you have **not** been as **humble** or **gentle** or **patient** or **loving** or **unified** as you want to be, confess it and after the service have the conversation you need to have or send that text or make that phone call. Take a **single step**.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (NIV®)

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

- ¹ <https://nps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6298c848ba2a490588b7f6d25453e4e0> (Accessed 11/2/2018)
- ² Moon, Tim. The 15 Longest Hikes in the United States. <http://www.adventurestrong.com/adventure/the-15-longest-hikes-in-the-united-states> (Accessed 11/2/2018)
- ³ Archeological Study Bible. NIV. Ephesians 4:2 footnote. Page 1920.
- ⁴ Exegetical Commentary: Ephesians 4:2b.
- ⁵ Every Good Endeavor by Timothy Keller. Page 218-219. books.google.com (accessed 11/2/2018).
- ⁶ Cornerstone song lyrics. <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/hillsonglive/cornerstone.html> (accessed 11/2/2018)