

WALKING WORTHY EPHESIANS 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 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.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Tony was 6'3" and could jump out of the gym!

On the basketball court he was a dual threat. He could deliver pinpoint passes - or create his own shot...

Tony could dish the rock, or take it to the rack!

The year Tony played on the CCSM basketball team we won the church league championship. *It did my heart good to beat up on all those Southern Baptists!*

But when our church moved to our new location I lost touch with Tony... I was so excited the Sunday one of the ushers told me that he was in the sanctuary.

I rushed in, anxious to see our star player.

But nothing could've prepared me for our reunion.

My friend Tony occupied a wheelchair. The guy who could jump out of the gym was now a paraplegic. A serious automobile accident damaged his spinal cord.

If I'd asked Tony that day to list all his ailments, it would've been a long one... *pain, skin sores, muscle spasms, brittle bones, bladder infections, respiratory woes, blood clots...* were just a few of his problems.

But they were just symptoms. The moment I saw Tony I knew the exact diagnosis of his problem.

The message center – the nerves running along his spinal column - had been severed. **Tony's body was no longer communicating properly with his head.**

And I bring up Tony to illustrate what's happened to the Body of Christ today. Read about the Church in Acts, and it could jump out of the gym. It had spring.

It was powerful. The Church was all about dishing out, and sharing the Rock - winning victories for Jesus.

But look at us today... *something has happened...*

Visit the Christian bookstore or blogosphere and you'll find all kinds of explanations for what's wrong...

Today, the Church is under a microscope. We're dissected and analyzed... *We're either too old-fashioned, or we compromise with modern culture...*

We're too big to be personal, or not big enough to meet a wide array of needs... We're too formal on the one hand or too superficial on the other... Either we missing out on outreach or - we neglect fellowship...

Our diagnosis is all over the map.

A million cures get prescribed. One thing is certain, the Church's many ailments make for a long, long list.

But here's why I mention Tony. He too had a long list of symptoms... *yet they were just symptoms*. One look at Tony, and I immediately knew his real problem...

His body no longer took orders from its head.

*And this is **the real problem** with today's Church.*

The *Body* of Christ is no longer functioning in sync with the *Head* of the Church. Our connection with our Lord is damaged. *Every other malady is a symptom.*

Most of today's church reformers are dealing with incidentals rather than the core problem. They're *soothing sores*, or *massaging spasms*, or *treating infections*. But they're ignoring the cause behind all of our maladies - *the Body is out of touch with its Head!*

The city of Atlanta is home to a marvelous institution.

Shepherd's Spinal Center is world renown for its work rehabilitating victims of spinal cord injuries.

The love and caring these people show is heroic.

And they keep their eye on the ball. They're all about spinal cords. In fact, they treated Tony after his injury.

And when I open my Bible to Ephesians 4, I want to say, **"Welcome to *THE Shepherd's Spinal Clinic.*"**

For that's what Chapter 4 is all about.

The Good Shepherd doesn't just treat symptoms. He realizes churches get paralyzed and dysfunctional for one reason - *they get disconnected from their Head.*

The crux of Ephesians 4 is verse 15 where Paul encourages us to *“grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ...”* The body grows by strengthening its connection to its Head - *by staying in step with the Chief Shepherd.* This is what Ephesians 4 is about...

Realize, Chapter 4 marks a transition in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. As we move from Chapter 3 into Chapter 4 we go from *doctrine to duty, from wealth to work, from riches to responsibility, from spirituality to practicality, from life in Christ to life in the Church.*

Ephesians 1-3 seats us in Christ *in heavenly places.*

Chapters 4-6 shows us how to live *in earthly spaces.*

The first three chapters are all about *how we see ourselves.* The last three, about *how we live our lives.*

I like to title the first three chapters of Ephesians, *“Membership has its privileges.”* *And indeed it does!*

In Chapter 1:3 Paul said we're blessed with *“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...”*

Then he tries to list them all... He spends three full chapters on *who we are* and *what we have in Christ.*

When it comes to his riches in Christ, Paul is like a kid in a candy store - taste-testing all His blessings!

In Christ we're *selected and perfected...*
purchased and pardoned...
adopted and accepted...
bound together and made to abound...
saved and sealed...
found by grace and grounded in love...
bought back and brought near...
we have access to God and a process of growth..
from law-breaking nomad to law-keeping no more
from vagabonds to the family of God!

As I said, “**Membership does have its privileges... *but with those privileges come responsibilities!*”**

And this is the theme of the last half of Ephesians...

Chapters 1-3 focus on our connection with Christ.

Now in Chapter 4 the emphasis shifts to our interactions with each other. The Body of Christ walks *in harmony and in purity - in love and in light - we walk at home and at work - we even war against the devil.*

And these first six verses are key. They're like a MRI. They map out the Body's spinal column - the attitude and traits that enable the Head to coordinate the Body.

Paul begins in verse 1, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord...” Notice again, Paul *belongs* to Jesus! He could’ve said he was *prisoner of Rome, or of Caesar, or of the Jews...* but he is “*the prisoner of the Lord.*”

Christians are never “a victim of circumstance.”

God is sovereign. *Nothing is able to get to me, but that it doesn’t first pass through Him!* If you belong to Jesus, God has a claim on your life. Don’t interpret the pot-holes and detours as a derailment of His plan.

Wherever you’re at - no matter the situation - He has a purpose for you! Paul was a “*prisoner of the Lord.*”

Imagine Paul in prison....

Chains dangle from his wrists as he writes of his freedom in Christ... He’s outfitted in prison stripes as he pens about the righteousness he wears... A string of Roman numerals are stitched across his shirt, while he records the innumerable blessings he has in Christ.

Here’s the point, rather than see himself *in prison*, Paul deliberately chooses to see himself *in Christ*.

And this is the choice we all make... Do we focus on our *physical surroundings* or keep our eye on our *spiritual blessings*? In your heart, where do you abide?

Are we in pain or in Christ?

In bondage to sin or in Christ?

In hock to the pawn shop or in Christ?

In the hot seat on the job or in Christ?

In fear or in Christ?

If you're *in Christ* don't be surprised if at times you end up *in trouble*. Followers of Jesus are promised *blessings in Christ*, and also *tribulation in this world*.

I've heard it put this way, "Jesus promised three things to His disciples. **First**, they would be *ridiculously happy*... **Second**, they would be *completely fearless*... And **third**, they would be *in constant trouble*..."

Yet even *in trouble* our lives are hid *in Christ*.

And we can return again and again to the secret place to retrieve the hope, and love, and help we need.

I've actually been to the tiny cave Paul occupied in the heart of Rome. The maritime prison is a small subterranean holding cell - carved out of the stone.

I envision Paul pacing... *He's worried*... but not about his plight, or his predicament... **It's not where Paul walks that concerns him - but how he walks.**

He says to the Ephesians... **"(I) beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called..."**

Paul *belonged to Jesus*, and was called to live like it. He walked, or carried himself, in a deliberate fashion.

Understand, we've done nothing to deserve God's blessing - it's all a result of His grace - but now that we've received it, we need to walk in a worthy manner.

As a young princess growing up in Buckingham Palace, little Victoria was sheltered from the fact that she would become the next Queen of England.

Her handlers didn't want to spoil her.

But one day she saw the genealogy of the royal family, and noticed she was next in line to the throne.

Initially Victoria wept. Then, after gaining her composure a seriousness came over her. She looked up at her tutor, and said simply, "Then I must be good."

And this is the reaction Paul hopes will hit us.

"*In Christ*" is a high calling. *Mr. President, Prime minister, Premier* - pale in comparison to **Christian**.

In light of our calling we too "must be good."

Paul tells us "*to walk worthy.*" The Greek word carries the idea of "equal weight." Think of a scale - "two sides proportionate to each other." In other words, *our calling* and *our character* need to sync up.

The *daily life* I live should be a reflection of the *eternal blessings* I've received. The two go together...

And what is the type of character our calling requires? Paul bestows on us our marching orders...

Verse 2, walk "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love..."

Obviously, *a high calling demands a lowly walk.*

But understand the context of this chapter. The Church is the body that's growing up "*into the Head.*"

We're tied to the Head. It's all about Jesus.

This means the goal of the Christian is not just to be moral - or *show off a quality character* - it's to *show off Jesus!* Now that we've *received His blessings* let's *reflect His glory.* We're *in Christ* now let's *show Christ.*

Here's what concerns me... anytime we try to be moral for morality's sake we become self-righteous.

Seek virtue for virtue's sake and you end up proud.

Recall the rich, young ruler... he kept all the rules, but there was still something missing, *and he knew it...*

Jesus didn't die just to make us moral, He wants our fellowship. You can keep your nose wiped, and your hands clean - and still not be connected to the Head!

Sadly, this is a trap that snatches some Christians.

They make *lowliness* their goal, and become proud of their humility. Real humility is an elusive trait. *The moment you think you're humble... you're not.*

When *gentleness* is the objective you turn to jelly.

When *tolerance* is sought for tolerance-sake it ends up spineless. *Gentleness* and *tolerance* aren't traits to strive for - they're ways to share the love of Jesus.

Here's why we walk *lowly*? **Because people get down...** and you can't lift them up, or ease their load, until you get *underneath* their burden with them.

Why be *gentle*? **Because people are fragile.**

Why be *longsuffering* and patient toward one another? **Because people take time** - lots of time.

Why *bear with one another*? **Because not everybody is just like me.** And aren't we all glad!

When I seek to be *lowly, gentle, patient, tolerant* - I'm not showcasing an exemplary Christian character...

I'm not pinning a badge on my lapel that I can wear proudly and pompously... *I'm just being like Jesus...*

As the Body of Christ I want to reflect the Head - Christ Jesus - and be a demonstration of His love.

Jesus walked in all "*lowliness.*"

The feet that kissed the halls of heaven kicked up earthly dust. God put on our sandals. He got down on our level. Like a dad kneeling to ask an injured child, "**Son, show me where it hurts?**" The Body of Christ works in harmony with its Head when it walks *lowly.*

I hope you're not a condescending Christian - good at shaming folks and stirring up guilt? *Do you point out inconsistencies in others to make yourself look good?*

My wife is a great cook. She's learned to cook Southern. She feeds me well, and her specialty... *is humble pie*. Recently, she asked me, "Why do you always feel like you need to prove that you're right?"

Well, immediately I recoiled. "*It can't be! Not me!*" But after I turned it over a time or two, I saw the truth.

It's so easy for **haughtiness to replace lowliness**.

Realize, proud Christians do great damage to the Body of Christ. When a Christian assumes it's his or her job to point out everyone else's flaws - without ever acknowledging their own - it crushes a vertebrae.

Some of the Body's feeling and sensitivity gets lost.

There's no longer a spring. A paralysis sets in.

There's now a disconnect with the Head. And it all started because we stopped walking in lowliness.

When I played football our coaches had a saying, "**Low man wins.**" The player who got under the other man's pads had the leverage. Even if he was smaller, if he hit lower, he could move his opponent. And this is what the Holy Spirit is saying to us, "**Low man wins.**"

You don't help folks who are down from the top of a soap box. You either *intimidate* or *infuriate* from there.

You have to approach them in lowliness.

As Paul told the Galatians, "**considering yourself lest you be tempted.**" That's walking *lowly* - in humility.

Paul also tells us to walk in “*gentleness.*” *And why?*

Because people are fragile. They’re breakable. The human psyche is very impressionable. It dents easily.

And it doesn’t matter who it is that’s handling them roughly – whether it’s the boss at work, or the spouse at home, or the leader at church – people fracture..

Recall Peter in the garden...

How dare that jerk frisk Jesus. He grabbed a sword and tried to part the guy’s hair right down the middle.

At the last second the servant of the High Priest moved, and Peter clipped off his ear... Notice, the last miracle our Lord performed before His crucifixion was to heal a wound inflicted by one of his own disciples.

And sadly, that’s the miracle He’s had to repeat over and over since. *When will we stop sword-slinging?*

We need to be gentle. And understand why this *gentleness* is so vital. *Gentleness promotes growth!*

Harsh environments and abrupt behavior are not conducive for saplings to take root. A living thing about to bud needs to be treated carefully and cautiously.

Kathy enjoys plants. My son, Nick, loves his mom.

So one year for her birthday Nick gave Kath a tiny tree for our front yard. Sadly, I wasn't privy to my wife's sentimental attachment to that tree... *until it was too late...* She planted it right in my mowing pattern.

I saw it, but the sun was hot. It was humid. I had work to do. It didn't register with me what it was.

My yard is full of trees, why do I need one more?

So you guessed it... I ran my lawnmower right over her tree. Crushed it... Bulldozed it to the ground.

If I lived in a state like Oregon the tree huggers would've thrown me in jail. And it would've been a light sentence compared to what I got from Judge Kathy.

But how many church members commit the same crime? A younger believer, trying to sink his roots, gets in your way. It's hot. The pressure is on. You've got a job to do. You're not thinking it through. **And you run him over...** treat him harshly. You're curt. He gets hurt.

Fragile people need *gentleness*, not *pushy-ness*.

Church leaders especially, should always remember **the ends never justify the means**. It is not just *what we do for God* that matters - it's *how we do what we do*.

Don't run over someone else just to get the job done and think you've served the Lord. When that happens a numbness occurs in the Body. We've lost touch with our Head. And unless corrected, a paralysis will follow.

Also be *“longsuffering.”* Believers in the church need lots and lots of patience - *why? Because people take time.* Christian discipleship takes lots and lots of time.

A year or so ago I baptized a lady who said she'd been coming to CC for 15 years - a decade and a half.

I was tempted to ask her, *“What took you so long?”*

But for 15 years she'd been coming - learning the Bible, growing in faith, falling more in love with Jesus. I'm glad someone didn't press her and say, *“If you're not baptized you can't possibly be pleasing to God.”*

This gal knew the importance of baptism, *but she was shown grace...* Rather than be forced into a mold, she was given room to grow at her own pace.

And in time - not *my time*, or *your time* - but in *her time* she made the right decision. But it took patience.

I hope you know Christians are not Jihadists.

In Christianity, conformity isn't obtained at the edge of a sword - even a *sharp insistence* or *strong rebuke*.

Don't mistake discipleship for canned compliance.

Christianity is voluntary. We love, invite, shine - *even persuade* - but we don't force folks to respond. God loves a cheerful giver. *Our Lord wants to be wanted.*

And sometimes it takes time for people to reach the right decision. *Often they make the right decision only after they've made the wrong decision multiple times.*

That's why it's wrong to wash your hands of somebody - write them off. There are folks our church had to disciplined that I still hope come back one day.

We walk worthy of Jesus when we show patience.

I'll never forget a comment I heard from a CC pastor named Louis Neely. Louis *pastors in Sacramento, CA*.

On that occasion he was talking about prodigal kids.

Louis said, "The denomination I was a part of had it's prodigals - so does CC. But in Calvary Chapel they come back because the kids know they'll find grace."

I've been a pastor now for 31 years, and there's one truth I've learned. "It ain't over till it's over." *Yogi Berra was a prophet!* The hound of heaven is tireless and relentless. He'll chase you down even if it takes some time. That's why the rest of us need to have patience.

A lack of it will paralyze the Body.

And Paul even talks about "tolerance." As he puts it, "bearing with one another in love..." This doesn't mean tolerating a moral impurity, or doctrinal heresy - it just means putting up with another person's humanness.

All of us have peculiarities, quirks, idiosyncrasies.

One night, my wife and I accepted a dinner invitation from a couple new to the church. Afterwards, we were driving home, when I made the comment, "My, those were some really strange people." And Kathy agreed.

But a few minutes later she started laughing.

She said, “I’ll bet they’re sitting at their table right now saying, “*My, those Adams are some really strange people!*” If the truth be known we’re all a little weird!

It’s easy to love the lovable, but Jesus loves the hard to love. He’s not embarrassed by our awkwardness, or ashamed of our sleazy past. He’s quick to call us *child*.

Jesus **bears** with us even on our **grizzly** days.

And a Church Body connected to its Head shows the same tolerance. We’ll be slow to criticize. We’ll assume the best in each other. We’ll get the log out of our eye before we worry about the splinter in our brother’s eye.

Paul writes in verse 3, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Another way the Body can stay connected to the Head is through *unity*.

And spiritual unity isn’t man-made.

It’s not something we can produce. Harmony in a church is always a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

Here at CCSM we enjoy amazing diversity...

Young, old - rich, poor - urban, country - transplants, natives - grits, granola - African, Anglo, Hispanic - Republican, Democrat - Yellow Jackets, Bulldogs - even red-necks and rappers... *we got it all*.

I don’t know of another place where you could gather together a crowd like ours, *and a fight not break out*.

No Church can manufacture this type of unity. It's a gift of the Holy Spirit... but a church CAN mess it up.

We can let hurt feelings fester - hold on to grudges - fail to resolve conflicts - grow proud, jealous, bitter...

If we're not careful we can disrupt what God creates.

Several years ago the Clemson Tigers lost to our beloved Georgia Bulldogs 30-0. *Oh, for the days!*

But one play typified Clemson's night...

On second and 9 near midfield, the center lost his pre-game meal just as he snapped the football - barfed all over the ball. It slipped through the quarterback's fingers... Georgia recovered - and went in to score.

And there are church members guilty of the same crime. The Holy Spirit creates a sweet harmony among us, but they up-chuck criticism, skepticism, negativity all over the church and we fumble away our unity.

Paul tells us to “*endeavor*” - or strive - work hard to preserve “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”

God creates a spiritual affinity among us - *it's like a living thing* - but now it's up to us to *water it, feed it, nurture it, weed it* - just make sure you don't kill it.

Church life is like married life. You roll up your shirt-sleeves. It takes lots of effort... And you don't tuck tail and run at the first sign of conflict. *Unity sticks it out.*

The Church is like a family of porcupines huddled together on a cold, cold night. *They need each other, but oh, how they needle each other.* When contention arises it's easier just to go our separate ways.

To allow the Body of Christ to fracture and splinter.

But if the Body of Christ is connected to its Head that won't be an option. Instead we'll work to preserve our unity. *We are stronger together than we can be apart!*

Paul encourages our unity in verse 4-6. He spotlights seven commonalities that transcend all our differences.

He writes, *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

On a human level we're all different, *yet examine the commonalties we have in Christ...* the blood of Jesus that cleanses me, cleanses you. *We're blood brothers...* We're joint-heirs to the same treasure...

And we're all connected to the same Head - Jesus. This is why Paul points out, *“There is one body...”*

When God looks down from heaven He doesn't see a league with lots of teams. There's only one team.

He sees one true Church made up of believers from a variety of congregations, denominations, affiliations.

Let you in on a secret... we're not the only ones!

But I do love how God keeps us all spread out.

If all Christianity bunched up under one banner it'd be fairly easy for Satan to defeat us. He'd have an easy target. That's why God runs the spread offense.

This is the new wave in football. Split guys out all over the field, so opposing teams can't stack their defenders. *God's been running the spread for years.*

He's got believers in lots of different churches attacking the enemy from all sorts of angles. We're **“one body”** - with many members in that one body.

There's **“one body and one Spirit.”** The same Spirit who indwells me, and moves me, and empowers me also works in you. We share the same spiritual DNA.

There's **“one hope of our calling”** or **one heaven.**

There'll be no avoiding each other in heaven. God's plan for our eternity is for us to live *forever together.*

In the light of the glory of our Lord Jesus all the stuff that splinters us now will ultimately get resolved.

Here's a great poem, **“God came to me the other night, and heaven's gates swung open wide. With kindly face an angel welcomed me inside. There to my astonishment, stood folks I'd known on earth. Some I'd judged and labeled ‘unfit, of little worth.’ Angry words rose to my lips. But never were set free. For every face showed stunned surprise, no one expected me!”**

We also say “*Yes Sir*” to the same boss. There’s only “*one Lord.*” This is why we rise or fall on the opinion of One person and One person only! My goal isn’t to please you - or you me. We all will answer to Jesus!

This is why we should be careful about instructing other people on God’s will for their life. Share biblical truth, but keep your personal preferences to yourself!

There’s only one Lord... *and He’s not you!*

A pastor might lead, but everyone in the church reports directly to Jesus. It’s scary enough that I’m accountable for my own decisions, why would I want to take responsibility for other people’s choices as well?

There’s “*one faith*” - one true body of belief. This means theology isn’t arbitrary or ambiguous. It’s not up for grabs. *Somebody is right and somebody is wrong.*

But I like what Paul says in verse 13, “*till we all come to the unity of the faith.*” There’s “*one faith,*” but to get there you don’t come to me, and I don’t come to you.

“*We all come.*” No one has perfect doctrine. We “*see in a mirror dimly.*” We all need to move toward truth.

There’s “*one baptism.*” Man, I love baptisms! And I love CCSM baptisms. We warm up the pool, sit on the lawn or hang off the balcony - then we clap and celebrate and welcome believes to the Body of Christ!

A baptism provides a unifying sense - the person being baptized is following in the footsteps of everyone present. We followed in the footsteps of believers past.

The Ephesians were baptized. Paul was baptized. People were baptized at Pentecost on opening day.

Different times, different places, different ponds, different water temperatures... but *“one baptism!”*

And last, but not least, *“one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

Every child of God has the same Father. *We're brothers of another mother* - but there's *“one Dad.”*

And if you're a father yourself try to see this through God's eyes. How much does it mean to you to see your kids getting along with each other - living in unity?

Does it grieve you when their last name, and joint heritage isn't enough to stop their squabbling? *Let's stay united, for no other reason than our Father's sake!*

Once, a visitor to an insane asylum noticed only three guards in charge of hundreds of dangerous patients. The visitor asked one of the guards, *“Aren't you afraid these people will overpower you and escape?”* He answered, *“No. Lunatics never unite.”*

Never forget that just before His crucifixion Jesus prayed not only for our *orthodoxy*, but for our *unity*.

That night, *He prayed for it*. Next day, *He paid for it!*

Which makes us *crazy* not to draw strength from one another, and come together to do God's will. Nothing pleases God more than to see us side-by-side united.

As the Body of Christ we need to stay connected to our Head... *And here's how...*
Remember your calling...

Low man wins... Be gentle, people can break... Show patience, people take time... Bear with folks, for everybody, including you, is just a little bit weird...

Don't throw up on our unity and fumble it away... And don't let *our differences* eclipse *our commonalities*...

The worst thing that can happen to your church is for it to suffer a spinal cord injury. To fulfill its mission, the Body has to stay intact and grow with the Head. We're all due an adjustment at [THE Shepherd's Spinal Clinic!](#)