



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4: 1-6

Winter 2023-24

"Loving the Unlovely"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Chris, and that's a good exhortation about prayer—and concern for the saints. Well, that's really where we're going now in the Book of Ephesians, in chapter 4, the second half of the book. I'm going to look at verses one through six this morning; Ephesians 4, beginning with verse 1,

"Therefore", *(I'll say something about that in the sermon and that it connects us with everything that has preceded),*

4 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4: 1-6

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and may the LORD bless our time of study, and reflection, and worship in this hour. Let's pray.

Father, what a privilege it is to be with Your people. I know I say that every Sunday, but it really is a great privilege, not simply because we can be together and we can visit and we can see each other after a week of separation, but to be together doing the very things we're doing: Reading the Scriptures, considering the meaning of the text, singing praise to You, and reminding ourselves, (out of some of these great hymns), of the reality of ourselves—that we do wander and that we're prone to do that.

But You're a God of grace and You always have Your hand upon us, upon Your people—and You do not let us go; You bring us back, chasten us a bit sometimes, but we're in Your hand and we cannot be lost. That's Your grace. And we reflect this morning on Your grace, on the things that Paul has written to the Ephesians in the first three chapters, and the meaning of that, the implications of that—and they're very serious.

And so LORD, I pray that You would enable us to think about the things that we've read and what we will consider—and that You would empty our minds of all of the cares and worries of the day and the week that may be before us and help us to put these details of life out of our mind and focus our attention on what the apostle Paul wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is Your truth for us.

And so LORD, use it to build us up in the faith and create within us humble hearts that worship You—and serve one another. This is a great privilege. We thank You for it.

And this moment of prayer is a great privilege. We've been reminded by Chris that we need to be praying for one another, as Mark also urged us some time ago—and we do need to be doing that. So, we do that briefly LORD; You know all of our needs and I pray that You'd bless us, give us patience in the midst of difficulty and may we see Your hand of healing as well.

Bless us now LORD, as we continue with our service. May all that we do this morning be to Your glory and to our edification. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) On the day the Constitution was adopted and the delegates were leaving Independence Hall in Philadelphia, an anxious woman approached Benjamin Franklin and asked what they had decided: 'Would America be a republic, or a

monarchy?' Mr. Franklin answered wisely, "A republic, if you can keep it." It was a reminder that preserving our national liberties requires the vigilance of citizens. Now we've all heard that story. I don't know if it happened or if it happened in just that way—but the counsel is good. Citizens need to be informed and vigilant.

And it's no less true for the vitality of the church. Paul gave similar counsel in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 3, "...preserve the unity..." He even told the saints how to do it. It isn't easy; in fact, it's hard. Basically it's done by, 'Loving the unlovely'.

That's stating the lesson of the passage very simply, and it begins a new section of the Book of Ephesians. The book divides neatly into two sections, chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. Chapters 1-3 are often designated as 'The doctrinal portion of the book'; while chapters 4-6 are called 'The practical portion.'

That's how the older commentator, Charles Ellicott, identified chapters 4-6. I think that's misleading for it suggests that doctrine isn't practical—but it is. Doctrine is like a firm foundation and is 'practical' for the stability of a house or a skyscraper. A case in point: The leaning Tower of Pisa—it was built on an unstable foundation.

A better description of the shift from the first half of the book to the second half of the book is from: 'Principle to practice', or, 'doctrine to duty', or, 'creed to conduct'. Each of those titles have been used by others...but however we put it, our conduct is now the main focus of the Book of Ephesians. And Paul indicated that shift in verse 1: He wrote, "*Therefore* I...entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling by which you have been called..."

The word, "*Therefore*", is important. It marks the transition in the book and it indicates that the instruction he will give is based on his teaching—on 'the doctrine' of the previous chapters. He is saying in effect: 'You have been redeemed by Christ, you've been reconciled into one body and made into God's holy temple, *therefore* walk in a manner worthy of all of that.' Paul has given us doctrine to explain who we are as

Christians and the great blessings that we have. Now, in the rest of the book, he challenges us to walk according to them.

‘Ah, but there's the rub.’ That's the problem; that's where the difficulty lies; it's so easy to teach doctrine, much easier than to live out its implications—easier to exhort others than to practice it ourselves. The Pharisees were notorious for that. Jesus called them, ‘Hypocrites who laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders, but didn't move them with so much as a little finger.’ (Mark 23:4).

Paul was no hypocrite. He practice what he preached and indicates that by the way he referred to himself. He didn't assert his authority as an apostle; he called himself, "the prisoner of Christ." (3:1). Well now, that's interesting because in chapter 1, verse 1, he begins the first half of the book, "Paul, an apostle of Christ." (1:1). And here he begins the second half of the book, "I, the prisoner of the Lord." (4:1). And that, really, is a badge of honor, and one here of authority. He was no armchair theologian; he lived the life. He not only studied the Word of God to know it with precision, he also carried the Gospel to people and helped them into the ‘right life’. He was, to borrow a phrase, ‘a man of the cloister and of the open road.’ He was Christ's great missionary.

And armed with the truth he took to the highways across the empire and preached in synagogues and in marketplaces. And he paid the price more than any of us have—suffering beatings and stonings, dangers of all kinds, and imprisonments. As a result of obedience, living that life, he was now a prisoner in a Roman jail.

But he didn't call himself ‘the prisoner of Nero’, rather, “...the prisoner of the Lord...”. In the Greek text it is literally, “the prisoner in the Lord”, which indicates his union and his vital communion with the Lord. His life was consistent, he practiced what he preached—but he also preached, and spoke, and wrote, out of the authority of Christ in whom he was united in a real, vital relationship—that was his authority.

So he instructed us “to walk”, (vs1), a very common word in the Bible for *live*. “Enoch *walked* with God...” for 300 years, “...and he was not, for God took him.”

(Gen 5:25). Psalm chapter 1, verse 1, "Blessed is the man who does not *walk* in the counsel of the wicked"—or, 'whose *life* doesn't follow the course of their evil counsel.'

Walking is not only *living*, it implies progress toward an 'end', or 'goal'—either good or bad. Jeremiah, (6:16), urged Israel to 'walk in the ancient paths and find rest for their souls, but they would not.' Saints are always to be progressing toward holiness, progressing toward Christ-likeness. We never reach the end in this life; but we are always to be advancing toward it, as one 'walking along God's path'; those 'ancient paths.' And our "walk" is to be, "in a manner worthy of the calling..." (vs1b).

"The calling" is all of grace—unmerited favor. God did not 'choose and call us' based on some good deed that we have done, or based on some level of merit that we have achieved. No, just the opposite. And Paul reminded the Ephesians of that earlier: 'They were dead spiritually, unworthy and unable when God called them out of death into life.' (Eph 2:4-5).

That's something we need to emphasize: Death! It's something that caused uncleanness in the Old Covenant. A person would accidentally come across a grave that was unmarked; and they'd touch a bone. They were "unclean", and they had to go outside the camp. —It had made them *unworthy*.

We are unworthy as well. You go back to the Old Testament in Ezekiel 37, and that magnificent passage about 'the valley of dry bones', it's filled with a multitude of dry bones—and Ezekiel calls them "very dry". (vs2). And those bones didn't live until God's Spirit breathed upon them and brought them to life. That's true of us. That's a prophecy of Israel, but it's true of every one of us who've been brought to faith. We can't minimize this word, '*death*'; for we minimize it to our own detriment.

Now that ought to cause something in us—not resentment but it ought to cause in us a sense of *humility*: We've earned nothing—yet, we've received everything! And in verse 2 is the first step that Paul gives in our 'walk that is worthy of our calling'. (And it's an essential first step in order to achieve the goal of our walk given in verse 3, which is

unity, "being diligent to preserve the *unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace.") And that first step starts with "*all humility*".

Now in spite of this lesson's sermon's title, not all Christians are *unlovely*. Most are the loveliest people in the world; but sometimes all of us have a bad day, or days, and fail to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. I plead guilty. I am the starting linebacker on that team; 'captain' of the team. —And that can put a strain on relationships. So how do we deal with such situations?

Well, Paul explains it here, but it begins, not so much with an act, as an attitude: 'Walk with all humility.' As I said, that's the first step but it's a difficult step to take, (or attitude to embrace), because it calls for us to think and act in a way that, really, is contrary to human nature—contrary to fallen human nature, I must say, because we've been given a new heart and new abilities. But, nevertheless, the sin that's still within us makes this very difficult, makes it an unnatural thing.

Man, by nature in his fallen nature, seeks his own advantage—promotes and protects himself. And so Paul was urging what was for many, (or '*all*' I would say), unnatural. In fact, among the Greeks, *humility* was a vice, not a virtue—a weakness associated with the attitude of a slave. And that was the culture of the Ephesians—they lived in that mindset.

And yet Paul said, 'We are to be humble.' We are to have the same "attitude" that Christ had, (that was the counsel he gave to the Philippians). (2:5f). Christ humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. We are not to seek our own interests first—we are to seek the interest of others. We are not to act from selfishness, but selflessness. We are to be humble. We're to walk with "*humility*".

And Paul adds to that, "*gentleness*". That's the second step in the walk for unity—*gentleness*. Or *meekness* as the King James version puts it: It is "the meek", who the Lord said, "shall inherit the earth." (Mat 5:5). Meekness is not weakness or spinelessness—not in the Bible, at least. Moses is called, 'the meekest man', "upon the

face of the earth", (Num 12:3), but he stood face to face with Pharaoh and governed the rebellious Israelites for 40 years in the harsh desert. That's strength!

Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart", (Mat 11:29), but clearly He was not a weak individual. He cleared out the temple twice, once with a scourge of cords. No man has ever had the strength of character and courage of our Lord. He was "meek", (or "gentle").

The Greeks applied the word '*gentleness*' to animals whose strength had been brought under control—as with a strong horse that is easy to manage. Paul used the word here in that way: With the sense of 'power under control'. —It is disciplined submission.

That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't stand up for our rights or for what is right. Paul did that. When he was mistreated in Philippi he informed the authorities that he and Silas were both Roman citizens and their rights had been violated. They demanded a public apology—and they got it. Gentleness doesn't ignore truth and justice, and what is right. But neither does it retaliate; it forgives. —It is controlled strength.

And that leads into the third and the fourth steps in a walk worthy of the Lord's calling of grace. They are the words, "*patience*" and "*tolerance*". *Patience* has to do with not taking vengeance for a wrong suffered and *tolerance* involves bearing with one another's weakness and failure, which we all have—all of us. We're dust; we're weak—and that's true.

So Paul lists four steps in this walk of faith. It is "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another.", (vs2a), and then he added to that, "...in love", —which encompasses all four. Love is the greatest virtue; it is the highest good. It doesn't seek its own, doesn't get jealous, isn't arrogant. Paul describes it fully and clearly in 1 Corinthians 13. Love seeks the welfare of the church, even at cost to self—because love is selfless.

But again, it's one thing to preach it and it's another thing to practice it. And Paul knew that; he was realistic. We all have different personalities and foibles that, maybe, we're not even aware of, but others are aware of—things that can annoy others.

In *The Screwtape Letters* the master demon tells his young apprentice to, 'Distract a new convert while he is in church from the sermon to the people in the pew next to him.' Maybe the person next to him sings out of tune, (and that's probably me that you might be thinking of), or someone whose boots squeak, or one who wears odd clothes. But these eccentricities can make him, this young Christian, think that Christianity is somehow odd or ridiculous. Well, I suppose we all have some oddities as well as shortcomings—and worse. They can all affect us; they can annoy. They can anger others—they can anger us!

Sometimes the saints let us down, and the temptation is to dismiss them, dismiss him or her, reject that person. Paul says, 'No. You must bear each other's weaknesses.' You have to put the saints ahead of self—that's love. It's the outworking of the doctrines Paul taught in the previous chapters, which we could summarize as, '*grace*'.

Since God has forgiven our sins and taken us into His family, we, who were formerly sons of disobedience, shouldn't we be patient with others who fail and fall? Of course! It's not easy—still, that's the worthy *walk*. It begins with *humility*; it results in *unity*. That's what Paul urges in verse 3, "...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Now you'll notice, we don't create *unity*—it already exists. Paul says, "*Preserve the unity.*" It's kind of like the republic..."If you can keep it." We are to "preserve" what Christ has created and given us. That's what Paul taught in chapter 2, verses 14 & 15, 'Christ has unified us, He Himself being our peace, who made both groups into one, Jews and Gentiles into one new man.' And we are now responsible to "preserve" that unity.

And there's an urgency in Paul's appeal here. 'Be diligent!', he said. 'Make haste!' 'Make it a priority'. —It calls for effort on our part. And the condition for unity is peace

which comes from love. There are so many differences among us that can cause annoyance, or can spark conflict, but love seeks to establish peace.

The Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." (Mat 5:9). Peace is the bond that holds things together. Peace results in unity, and unity is a testimony to God's grace—and to Christ, the Prince of Peace. In a world of conflict among nations, broadly, and even within homes, particularly, the world sees God's grace in the changed lives of the church—a place of peace. So God is to be glorified in the church.

That's what Paul said at the end of the first section in verse 21 of chapter 3, "To Him be the glory in the church...". Glorified as our love is turned toward one another and we bear up with each other as we seek the best for one another. And we do that with humility and patience, which should be turned outward to the world as well. Paul wrote that to the Romans; "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." (12:18). That's a true testimony of the grace of God. But first, the world should see the bond of peace in the church; that's Paul's first concern, the church. That's God's household, His temple. We are to be unified.

Paul then demonstrated the unity we have with a brief doctrinal statement in verses four through six, (so, we don't completely get away from doctrine, ever!). Now this gives the basis for maintaining this peace and this unity; he lists seven spiritual facts that unite us as believers. Three of the seven are the Persons of the Godhead. The other four are Christian experiences related to each person of the Trinity. —And to each person and experience he attached the word, *"one"*. So seven times, Paul repeats the word, *"one"*. It runs throughout the whole section, laying special emphasis on our *'oneness'*—on our *'unity.'*

The first three spiritual facts are listed in verse 4 where Paul features the Person of the Holy Spirit. *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;"* So first there is *"one body"*—one church. There are many members; all kinds of people, Jew and Gentile, male and female. That was the case when he was writing this letter—but today there are people from all different countries

and continents in the church. Just look around. The church is not monochromatic—it's variegated. It has many colors, like a magnificent tapestry with colors and intricate shapes and figures. It's an exciting place. —It should be!

But, 'All kinds of people' have the potential to split the body into, 'all kinds of churches'. In Paul's day the potential was to split the church into the Jewish churches and the Gentile churches. But there is only one church—"one body", Paul says. So we are to maintain our unity; we are to function with the coordination of a physical body; we are to work together in harmony. We're to do that in the local church.—This church is to function in that way.

But Paul is describing here 'the universal church.' That's indicated by "one body". So, we are to see ourselves as unified with believers all over the world and receive them as part of the *one body*. And what makes that possible is the Holy Spirit, 'the one Spirit'. He is the life of the body. He provides us with love—the fruit of the Spirit. It's not something we generate, (though we do act on it, we do produce it). But we only do that because it's the fruit of the Spirit; it's what He produces; He promotes. He provides unity within each member of the body.

Now that is the power that makes unity more than a possibility—it insures the actuality of it. As difficult as it may be, we have power within, that is of God. We are bound together by the Holy Spirit. He has called us into one body—and called each one of us to "one hope". (vs4b). We all share the same future which is: The resurrection to come, the kingdom to come, the world to come, an eternal inheritance—world without end.

And so we should live together in that hope. We should work together and minister together toward that common hope. As Dr. Johnson used to say, "We're all going to spend eternity together, so we should be getting along together now."

In verse 5, the emphasis shifts from the Spirit of God to the Son of God—He is our "Lord". Throughout the Roman empire the word, *Lord*, was in common use before this letter was written—and it was used for the many gods that were worshipped. Nero

was called, 'Lord of all the world', and emperor worship was common throughout the empire. But Christ is the only "Lord": The only object of faith, the only Savior, the only God-man who is to be honored and obeyed as Lord. And that, too, is proof of our unity—that we all recognize Christ as Lord, as God and Savior.

In those early years of the church, many, many Christians suffered and died together in unity because they refused to confess Caesar as Lord. "One Lord", Paul wrote, "one faith, one baptism." (vs5). Now, "one faith" could refer to the one body of doctrine that we have, the 66 books of the Bible, (or what was unfolding at that time as the apostles were writing).

But more likely it refers to, 'One act of believing.' In other words, 'Only one way of salvation: Through faith alone, in Christ alone.' Unity must be in that; for there's no unity outside of that great doctrine.

So Paul could write in the Book of Galatians that, 'there is only one Gospel'. Anyone who preaches faith *plus* circumcision, (which was the issue when that book was written), or faith *plus* ceremonies of any kind—or faith *plus* works of any kind, preaches "a different gospel", and, "another gospel", (Gal 1:6), 'which is not a gospel at all'. And to that, Paul added most seriously, 'and whoever does that, man or angel, he is to be accursed'—"anathema"! Damned! (Gal 1:9).

Here he says in verse five, "There is...one faith, one baptism..."; or, 'When we believed, at that moment we were baptized into Christ.' This isn't water baptism; Paul isn't writing of the ordinances of the church, (water baptism and the Lord's Supper). This is 'spiritual baptism'—baptism 'into Christ': Which Paul writes in other places, such as Galatians 3, verse 27, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." And as a result of that he wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28).

Now there are Jews and there are Greeks—and there are males and there are females...and all; but we are all on the same footing, the same ground. We are united and equal before the LORD. That's the ground of our unity, being baptized "into Christ".

So at the moment of faith, we were baptized "into", placed in, the body of Christ and made members of His church.

Then, in verse 6 it's our unity with the Father that Paul extols. "There is...one God..." he writes, and He is, "Father of all." He created the church—He made us into one family. And He cares for each believer equally, like a Father.

That's an amazing thought. He cares for you as much as He did for the apostle Paul. He cares for you as much as He did for Augustin—or the great reformers, or the great missionaries. Go down the list of great men and women who have served the LORD...He cares for you just as much as he cares for them. He is equally your Father. He is "over all...", Paul said, "...and through all and in all." (vs6b). He is sovereign—absolutely sovereign, omnipotent, and omnipresent.

Well that's the work of the "one God", the Triune God, the 'Trinity'. The Father creates the one family, the Son saves the one family, the Spirit draws and unites the one family. So, we are to stay 'one'—we are to stay *united*.

Now this is not a call for '*ecumenicity*'—for denominations to unite into one world church. There can only be unity in these central truths; there's no unity outside of the purity of the Gospel. There's no unity outside of any of these truths that Paul has mentioned—and that clearly is what Paul is saying. He was not saying, "Unite!" He was saying, 'Christians are already united!', in these truths: In the doctrine of the Trinity, in the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone...and not works! That's, (Eph), chapter 2, verse 8.

Those are the truths that define 'the family of God'. In fact in 1 John, the apostle called those who deny those truths, "antichrists". "They went out from us," he said, "but they were not really of us." (1Jn 2:19). We have no fellowship with those who deny the Father and the Son, or the Spirit.

So what Paul is calling for is the practice of love and unity among genuine believers; because in that way God is glorified in the church. He is not glorified in disunity, not glorified in a lack of brotherly love.

Years ago I read a story in the Wall Street Journal that was a bit humorous. It was about two brothers, Ed and Berny. One was chief executive of Sears, and the other was chief executive of Montgomery Ward and Company. The article told of their rise to the top, "A story," it said, "that was without precedent in business." And yet went on to say, 'It is also a bit weird. Despite working a mile apart, they rarely got together. No one was quite sure they even liked each other. There was rivalry between them, and as a result, an unfounded rumor circulated that they might actually be half-brothers.'

Well the church can resemble that. It has all kinds of people from all walks of life, each of us with different levels of understanding and maturity. There are Armenians ... (I hate to say that. *[Laughter]* It's true.) There are Armenians, and there are Calvinists, and there are Amyraldians, four point Calvinists. But where we agree in the fundamentals of the truth just stated in this book—where we agree in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, faith alone in Him, and His sacrifice as the only way of salvation—that makes us all 'brothers', not 'half-brothers': And rivalry has no place in that relationship. The LORD has bound us together in a relationship that is challenging, (and it will always be challenging this side of glory). And it requires *humility* on our part, *tolerance* and *kindness*—and this is a test that the LORD gives us all. And it's difficult—that's our situation.

Now, we're to be *tolerant*, as I say; we're to be *patient*. But that doesn't mean, 'Be accepting of error'. We cannot be accepting of error. But we can be disagreeing in and with brotherly love and gentle correction. Look, we all are debtors to mercy alone. We are all debtors to God's grace. We who know the truth only know it by the sovereign grace of God. And all who are in Christ, regardless of maturity, are serving the King of Kings.

Leon Morris told a story about a visitor to the site of St. Paul's cathedral in London, designed by a great architect, Christopher Wren, (who built 52 churches in London alone). Well, the visitor spoke to a workman there, (this is as the building was being constructed), and asked what he was doing? The man answered, "I'm shaping this piece of stone." He put the same question to another. "I'm earning my pay." And then he asked a third who responded, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build a cathedral."

All of those answers were true—but the third answer showed that that man worked with vision; he worked with purpose; he worked with joy, for his service was done with the great architect.

And that's true of every Christian; we are partners in the greatest enterprise in the universe: 'Building up the church with the Great Architect!' That should unite us in a common work and walk, together—and "worthy of the calling."

But, "...to walk in a manner worthy of the calling...", (vs1), you must know that you have been called. And you can only know that by believing the Gospel of Christ: That He is God's Son—and our Savior. Only those who recognize their sin, (that they are dead in sin and trespasses), and have put their faith in Christ alone for salvation can know that they are saved because they belong to Christ and that they are in His body.

So, if you've not done that, turn to Him—and live! He gives forgiveness; He gives life that's forever—eternal life. May God help you to do that.

And help all of us to understand the great truths that characterize us—and then live according to the implications of those great doctrines and truths: To love one another and serve with one another.

(Closing prayer) LORD, that should be our prayer—and it is our prayer that You would be glorified through us in all that we do, all that we say, all that we think. Well, that will never be completely true of us until we are in Your presence and in glory, but that's the path we're on and that's the goal we should seek.

And every child of God does that—they have that desire and seek to do that.
May that be seen moreso increasingly in each of us, that we would serve You.

We are debtors to mercy alone. We are debtors to Your sovereign grace. You've given us everything—for all eternity! In this brief life that You've given us, may we seek earnestly to serve You and be a blessing to one another. These are the things that we pray. In Christ's name.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)