

Unity (Part 6): Ephesians 4 (C)

Walking Worthy

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Today we are going to continue right on in Ephesians 4 and we might even get another verse done today. I'm going to begin this with a bit of review, because I feel that is needful since we've had a few weeks pass since I left off with this subject at the Feast.

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called.

In the last half of the sermon that I gave on The Last Great Day, I think that we made pretty good progress in getting through this verse. The key element involved the positioning of this word or conjunction—"therefore." I also explained the phrase "walk worthy."

"Therefore" indicates: *"because of what I [meaning Paul] have just written you, you must do this."* After what he gave in the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians—"therefore..." And so it bridges over into the practical application—from the very inspiring vision-setting doctrinal base for this way of life.

In order to make sense of life, we have to make some kind of conscious effort (meditating upon, thinking about, turning it over and over in our head) of the awesome privilege that's come our way by God's grace. So there is reason or direction—a good, logical, spiritual *reason*—for the direction that we are going to take our lives in.

So therefore, Paul says, "walk worthy." Now this *walking worthy* carries with it the sense of living a good life. But it is a great deal more specific than that generality. It has two specific senses to it. The one is to walk, or to take action, or to make movement in this life in a balanced manner. The implication is **to be balanced between doctrine and application**—or, doctrine and conduct; we might say, doctrine and morality. We can say it any

way we want, just as long as we understand that we are talking about theory and practice (if I can put it that way), even though doctrine is not theory at all; it's fact!

But we need to understand the terms that we are dealing with here. If we don't understand the terms, we are going to get lost. And I think that you will find through this sermon I am going to give you a number of terms and a lot of synonyms—so that we are all on the same page and going in the same basic direction, with the same basic understanding. So we're talking about doctrine and application (or, doctrine and practice—or, doctrine and morality).

Now, in our lives, each one of us tends to emphasize what we enjoy. We like to do what comes naturally. We want to do what we feel comfortable with. Some people, it seems, just like to study. They like to sit down with a book and to be undisturbed—to read and think (meditate upon) what they are reading. And it's something that comes to them naturally. Maybe from the time of their childhood, they've been bent in that direction; or maybe their parents bent them in that direction. But actually getting out there and ***doing something about it*** is less intriguing to them than simply ***knowing about it***. And so the study becomes a fund of knowledge, but it is not necessarily being applied!

Then there are other people where "doing" things (being moral, being a good person, helping out their next door neighbor—those kinds of things) is done. They will get involved without any difficulty at all. They like to do it. On the other hand, sitting down and studying is stifling and boring (and their eye lids get heavy, and they start going to sleep); the Bible is set aside and they are doing something else. We might call these people "activity oriented." There's nothing wrong with that, but the encouragement from Paul is, "*Hey, that is not acceptable; we have to do both of them!*"

And the reason for that is because, doctrinally, human nature tends to get comfortable with what it has. Even though there might be excitement, at first, in having something new—it tends to get "old"—and so the doctrinal aspects have to be constantly refined, and the vision sharpened and given greater understanding. As we are doing that, it creates incentive to apply.

On the other hand, everybody knows that if you never practice the piano, you never get good at it. If you don't practice being a mechanic, you don't get good at it. Both things have to be done.

When I was a welder, every other week I had two days of school where we studied Trade Theory. They constantly kept us up-to-date with what was going on in the trade. The other eight days I was working on the job. Well, gradually that was phased out and I got to the place where they thought the Trade Theory wasn't doing us enough good. But there for a while, it was constant. Every two weeks, we'd have two whole days of Trade Theory.

If that's expected of a welder, don't you think that God expects it of us, too? He expects us to check in every day with His Word to keep "this ol' bean" sharp! That provides the foundation for the actual conduct of our lives. It provides inspiration. It provides motivation. It gives us hope. It keeps His glory before us at all times. So Paul says, "***Be balanced.***" We cannot permit any area to become so important to us that the other one is neglected. So, we don't ignore either.

Now the second sense of this word "walk worthy" has the same sense as the English word "becoming"—as in, that hair-do is becoming for you. It is something that is tasteful, attractive, adorning, or coordinating. I illustrated this at the Feast by explaining that a person does not get all dressed to the nines—really sharp!—and then finish the dressing off by wearing tennis shoes. The tennis shoes do not "become" the rest of the clothing that you have on. And so what God is saying here is that He wants our conduct to be an attractive adornment of the doctrine.

We can look at it this way (and I do not feel that this is too far off from being a correct illustration), it's almost as if doctrines are the undergarments that we wear. They are not seen on the outside; but they provide the foundation for what is seen. So the adornment that we wear on the outside is "becoming" of what is at the foundation—so that we present an attractive picture. In other words, our conduct is what makes the witness. And it is the witness that God intends to lead the people to the doctrine, because that is where the hope lies.

Paul's instruction to this point (contained just in those two words—to "walk worthy") is to be balanced. What we do on the outside that people see is to be in harmony—making God's way of life attractive.

Never forget that this whole thing is in the context of **unity**. This paves the way for unity and what else is going to come. It's not good enough just to have the knowledge. It not only has to be done; but God is saying that it has to be attractively done.

There is a difference between a person who is quietly disciplined and self-controlled, rather than being self-righteously rigid, critical and judgmental. And I might also add, inflexible. Jesus was quietly disciplined. The Pharisees were rigidly, pretentiously self-righteous and inflexible. Jesus attracted people—even though He was, without a doubt, stricter on Himself than the Pharisees were. But He made God's way of life **beautiful** by His expression of it.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, actually caused people to fear their judgments. They were critical, rigid, accusative, and censorious. Their presentation of their 'righteousness' was not winsome at all. It did not win people over to them. There was nothing "becoming" about their lives.

In Ephesians 4:1, the word "vocation" appears. This is the only place in the Bible where this word appears; and it is somewhat misleading. In English, the word "vocation" suggests occupation, employment, or profession. That is not entirely wrong—but it is just not as accurate as it could be. It is not entirely wrong because Paul is exhorting us to apply God's way of life as if it were our occupation. That's the way the translators understood it, because they understood the force of that "walk worthy." And that's why they translated this word "vocation" here.

Every other place that it appears in the Bible, it is translated differently. The word literally means "invitation."

Unfortunately in the King James Version, they didn't use the word "invitation" either. Instead, they used the word "calling." "*You see your calling, brethren. How that not many great, not many mighty...*" You see your **invitation!** That's what it literally says, in the Greek.

By that process, we could say, "You see your vocation, brethren." That doesn't quite fit. Even though it's not technically wrong, it misses the meaning, the intent, of the word by just enough of a shade there that it is going to be somewhat misleading. And that's what I think they have done here. It would have been better if they had used the word "*calling*" here, like they did in the other places. "*You see your calling, brethren.*" Or, maybe it would be more impressive if they had just left it as "**invitation.**" "*You see your invitation, brethren.*"

Now, everybody knows what an invitation is. If we lived in a kingdom, and you were invited... That is, if you received an invitation from the king to attend the wedding of his son (the prince) or (the princess) his daughter. Don't you think that you would take that invitation and **get ready**? You'd better believe you would, or you don't believe in Cinderella.

Evelyn and I saw that movie *Ever After*—which is kind of a parallel to the Cinderella story. When the family received the invitation to attend the wedding, it lead the one girl (who wanted to go there, with everything within her) to steal the dress from the other girl—so that she could go there with the better dress on. She took that invitation seriously (but sinned in order to present herself to the king and to the prince).

That's what we are dealing with here. You and I have been invited to the wedding of the King's Son. Not only that, **we have been invited to be the Bride** . We're dealing with serious stuff here! We are dealing with something that is exciting. He says, "Walk worthy *because* you see (you understand), you get your invitation." It's to something more thrilling than has ever happened in our lives before. That's what he's talking about. So, we are invited to do an awful lot of things.

In Ephesians 4:4, I just wanted to point out that you will see the phrase "even as you are called." It's exactly the same word that appears in verse one; but there they translated it "you see your invitation" (or, "you see your calling").

Back in Ephesians 1, I want to rehearse a couple of verses here—to remind us of what we've been invited to.

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.

This is what we've been invited to. We've been invited to be holy—**to be holy, as God is holy**. We are invited to be without blame before him in love. We've been...

Ephesians 1:5 Predestinated...into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

He could have invited billions of other people. He didn't— *but* He invited you and me. That's part of our calling. This is another thing that He has invited us to.

Ephesians 1:9-11 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance [We are invited to inherit the earth.], being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will.

Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ (by grace you are saved;) And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly

places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

It just goes on and on. This is what we have been invited to. And so we've been invited to do what? Let's get practical again. *We've been invited to prepare for the Kingdom of God.* That's why He says, "Walk worthy." Be balanced in your approach, so that you are prepared to live the right way, so that you are motivated by a vision that is sharp and beautiful and so awesome that you make this calling your vocation. It's what you work at. It becomes your occupation.

Now, when He says something like this—that we have been called to be holy, and without blame before Him—I'm going to use another term: We have been called to be sanctified. We are talking about sanctification. Becoming holy **is** sanctification. Sanctification is just a fancy term that means, becoming holy. It's a fancy term that means, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It's a fancy term that means, overcoming. We use a lot of terms. We throw them around, and we might kind of avoid a word like "sanctification" because it's not part of our normal vocabulary; but that's all that it means. *Sanctification is becoming holy.*

Paul said, in Hebrews, that *without holiness no one will see the Lord.* So this is serious stuff! We have been invited to become holy.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.

Here Paul names four characteristics of conduct that are attractively adorning. There are two sets of two. The first two go together very closely—like bread and butter. The second two go together. All four of them are linked. But the single things in the two pairs are most closely related to each other. And don't forget that the overall instruction here has to do with keeping the unity of the faith.

Ephesians 1:9-10 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in

himself: [Now, what is His purpose?] That in the dispensation of the fullness of times...

That is, when everything is done. Most specifically, when everything is done in what the Protestants might call "this dispensation." Or, what we might say—"in the church era."

When everything is done...

Ephesians 1:10 He might gather together **in one** all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

Now here come some more terms. We say that we are "in Christ." We say that there is "one church." We say that there is "one Body." There is "one Family." There is "one Kingdom." What we just read here in verses 9-10 is where God is headed with all this. He is going **to unite everybody** who has ever been born, and makes it into His Kingdom, into **ONE**. One family—the God Family. One kingdom—the Kingdom of God. The church, one church, is simply the beginning of **AN AWESOME PROCESS**—a tremendous project, that is eventually going to cover the 50, or 60, or so billion people who have ever lived on the face of this earth. And we are at the prow of the ship, cutting the water on the way through—right at the very beginning. This is our calling. We are getting in on the ground floor—before all of these great people that we've read about in the past, of all the histories of the nations. They'll get their opportunity, but we are at the forefront of that.

Now, why has He had to do this? Well, it's because of what happened in the Garden of Eden. That's the basic cause. Adam and Eve sinned. Sin is disruptive. Sin divides. It divided our parents away from **the one Family**. And, as Paul says in Romans 5:12, "*All have sinned.*" All of us have sinned—maybe not exactly like Adam and Eve did; but everybody has sinned. And we have done as our parents; and everybody has become separated from God. Sin divides away from God, and it divides man from man. So, the world has been shattered by sin. And the central object of salvation is, in a sense, *to reunite everybody in one* .

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you, who sometimes were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ.

In this context, he is speaking specifically to the Gentiles (when he says, "*you* ."). But in principle, it applies to all of *us* too—because all of us have been far from God. We've been so far that, at the beginning of this chapter, as far as God was concerned we were dead. He quickened us (He made us alive) through knowledge of Himself and His purpose.

Ephesians 2:13-14 Now in Christ Jesus you, who sometimes were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ. [That is, we are brought near to God.] For he is our peace, who has made both one [Jew and Gentile], and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

Now people like to assign this "middle wall" as being the law. The middle wall was **sin**. It was the breaking of the law. It's the law that gives strength to sin—because, if there were no law, there would be no sin. So, it's not *the law* that 'stands between'—it's **sin!** All the law does is tell people how to live. Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter (Israelite or Gentile). And so peace had to be made. And the peace did not exist, because of our sins. We were at war with God. That sin (that gap) is bridged by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace.

We are seeing a little broadening of verses 9 and 10 of chapter 1. We are seeing that the work of Jesus Christ is what accomplished this. It made it possible for us to have access to God. Without access to God, we have no right to the tree of life. Without the tree of life, we are going to remain as we are. "The nature" will never change. That tree of life represents God's Holy Spirit, which is the imparting of the divine nature (the mind of God) to you and me.

Ephesians 2:16 And that he might reconcile both unto God [Israelite and Gentile] in one body [the church; or, His own] by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

Because God accepts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (and our faith in that sacrifice, and our repentance) then His anger against us is dissipated; and He allows us to have access to Him.

Ephesians 2:17-19 And [he] came and preached peace to you which were afar off [the Gentiles], and to them that were near [the Israelites]. For through him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

There's another one of those "ones." **The household of God** that He is gathering everybody into—and we are *forerunners* in this process that He is working out.

We saw that one of the major keys to **the unity that God is creating** is understanding that it is through Christ that we are reconciled to God. Much of the responsibility for *maintaining* that reconciliation with God has fallen upon *us*. Christ is still involved, because He is our High Priest. So He is working with us to maintain the reconciliation that He made, so that our contact with God is not broken through disobedience. And so each must contribute to the maintenance of this reconciliation by working on himself to become holy—by living a life worthy of our calling.

Now, I'm going to throw in another term here. I am doing this purposely so that you will understand, when you read the book of Ephesians, that Paul, in a sense, is constantly repeating himself but he changes the vocabulary a little bit. That's a very good teaching mechanism, if we just understand what he is talking about.

Ephesians 3:4-7 Whereby, when you read [What? Read the epistle of Ephesians], you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men [This is why I am saying that **we** are at the forefront of this.] as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I [the apostle Paul] was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God...

Paul would have never become an apostle if God hadn't done what He did. He made Paul an apostle. God converted Paul, an enemy of the church; and turned him into the hardest worker, probably, that the church has ever seen. He converted him, changed him.

Ephesians 3:7 ...according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Now, I mentioned this thing about Paul so that we will understand that Paul does not stand alone in this. We are not all apostles like he was, but every single one of us has gone through exactly the same process in that all of us were enemies of the church, enemies of God, enemies of His law. And God has converted us, turned us around, and pointed us in the direction that He wants us to live. But once He has done that, then sanctification becomes our responsibility. That's where "the work" comes in. (We'll touch on that a little bit more, later.)

Ephesians 3:8-11 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly

places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul said virtually the same thing there that he said earlier, in chapter one. He just changed the vocabulary.

What have we been called to, invited to? If I can say it simply: **TO BE ONE WITH GOD!** To be in His Family, to be in His church, and to be in His Kingdom—because all of those things are nothing more than a progression of the same basic thought. God is drawing everybody to Him, to be **one** with Him, a unity that was broken in Adam and Eve's sin in submitting to Satan and sinning rather than submitting to God.

We are going, now, to take a look at the nature of this **unity** and why things must follow the course that Paul is giving us here in the book of Ephesians. Paul is not appealing to us for a general sense of brotherhood, of camaraderie, or of friendship. This can be found in virtually any social club. You can belong to the Elks, or to the Moose, or to the Kiwanis. You can belong to an athletic team. And you can have some very fine, firm, friendships in those kinds of organizations. But that is not what Paul is aiming toward here. This is a unity that is different from anything that can be created in the world.

He is not aiming merely for us to have a common aim—as if we were fighting a common enemy. That's what armies do. That's what nations do. And it unifies them for a while. Now, we do have a common enemy; but our warfare, in that sense, is not really the reason for our unity. The reason for our unity—the nature of it—is entirely different from that. And so nations will ally together in order to fight a common enemy, or a common disaster. School students have a unity (that is combined with spirit) that is *for* their team and *against* somebody else—the other team. That is **not** the nature of this unity that Paul is talking about here.

Paul is teaching about *a spiritual unity* that flows directly from the Father and the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit. You can tie this directly into I Corinthians 2:10, because it explains how this process begins in us. God has

revealed these things by His Spirit. Paul is teaching of a unity that flows from what he has been writing of in the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians. That's why the "***Therefore***" appears where it does. It ties the doctrines with their source. What's the source? It's the Father! Even the Son said, "*I only speak those things My Father told me.*"

It ties the doctrines with *their source* (which is **the pleasure of our Father in heaven**), with *what they will produce* **if** they are believed and obediently used. That will lead to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace—a unity that flows out from God to us, and then out from us to each other and back to God.

What we believe is extremely important! Please do not diminish that in your mind. When the doctrines began to be changed, the value system changed right with it. The direction of our lives changed right with it—depending upon whether or not we *believed* the doctrinal changes. Don't ever let that slip from your mind! If doctrine did not mean anything, God would have given us a Book without doctrine. **Doctrine makes all the difference in the world, because we all act according to what we believe.** That's what drives us.

Satan knew how to do his part. All he had to do was change the beliefs. God was using him; and he knew very well that some people would believe one thing, and other people would believe other things. Then those birds of a feather would begin to flock together; and it would split the Worldwide Church of God right open—and it did.

We turned away from the unity that we had—because there was a time when almost all of us believed the same things. But that unity has been broken now. And so this **unity** that Paul is talking about must be theological. That is, at its foundation—it must be theological; and it is based in a correct understanding of truth.

Our job (your job and my job, individually) is to yield our lives to these truths—both in study and in application. And if we do, **unity with others**

(who are doing the same thing) will be its fruit. There's nothing complicated about that. This unity naturally flows out from the combination of *what we believe* and *what we are*. And it is not a forced unity.

This kind of unity that Paul is talking about cannot be forced. You cannot get out of 'a political union' the kind of unity that he is talking about. You cannot join two corporate bodies together (We'll say: The Global Church of God and the Church of the Great God, United, or one of the other corporations)... You cannot take and make a corporate union out of those groups and expect it to produce unity. It won't work. It can be forced. That is, a deal can be brokered. It can be made. But it's not going to produce **the unity of the Bible**.

Don't misunderstand me. That kind of a unity can be produced. Two corporations come together and they unite. But that's not **the UNITY of the Bible**. This is something that comes from the inside out.

I sometimes receive questions from people who say, "*Why can't we all just get together? We all believe the same things, don't we?*" "No!" I tell them, "We don't believe the same things any more." And that's the problem! There are not only doctrinal differences; but there are attitudinal differences, there are philosophical differences, and there are policy differences.

The kind of unity that Paul is talking about is something that is generated from within with others who believe exactly the same way. They have the same ideas. They have the same concepts. They agree on policy. They agree on attitude, etc., etc. etc. It's coming from the inside out, and not being forced (from the outside, in).

This is why we've been saying all along that we will never be united as a church any more until God raises up a man that we will give ourselves, voluntarily, to. That's the *unity* that God shows in the Bible. **That's the way He produces unity!** He raises somebody up; and then He puts it into the minds of His people: "*This is My man. Follow him.*" And we do, because we hear His voice in that person. Christ said, "*My sheep hear My voice;*" and they will respond to it.

We are dealing with a spiritual thing here. And we have Christ's assurance that, when that happens, He will speak through His apostle (or, whomever it is that He raises up). He, by His Spirit, will trigger the minds of His people to understand "*There's My man. Follow Me.*" And by giving ourselves to him, we follow Christ. You understand that it's not really the man that we are following. It's really Christ. But there's always a man in the mix. And so God's people will understand that. They will submit to the person—knowing that, by submitting to him, they are submitting to Christ.

Do you understand that this is the way marriage is supposed to work? That is the Biblical instruction regarding a successful marriage. The woman, let's say, submits to the husband because she is submitting to Christ. That is, she's submitting herself to His instruction in the Book. She hears His voice; and she submits. The husband does the same thing—in submitting to the wife. It says, "*Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*"

Now the same thing will happen to the church. When God, **in His good pleasure** decides to pull it together—decides that the scattering has accomplished what He wants—He will pull it together. In the meantime, He expects us to make the best out of this that we possibly can. And I want you to understand that **this scattering is GOOD!** It's for our good! God never does anything except out of love. He always does what is righteousness. And what He has done is *for our good*. So it's good that we've been scattered like this. There are a lot of good things that are being accomplished as a result of it.

I mentioned down at the Feast that **the unity of the Spirit already exists!** Have you noticed that it says in Ephesians 4:3?

Ephesians 4:3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Did you notice that Paul did not say, "*Endeavoring to create unity*"? The only unity that we can "create" is the kind of unity that the world has. We can get together, you see. Paul did not say "create" it. He said, "**Keep it!**" Preserve it! Guard it! Do you understand that he is telling you that *the unity*

already exists? We can be scattered corporately and still be unified. That almost sounds like it doesn't make sense; but it does make sense—once you understand that what we are doing here is that we are operating by faith. And we are being guided, and lead, and directed by the Holy Spirit—not a corporate body.

This is one of the reasons why I have been unconcerned about numbers. God knows where His people are. The same things, in one sense, that can be accomplished in the Church of the Great God can be accomplished in United. They can be accomplished in Global. I don't care where it is. God knows how to deliver His people. So I am unconcerned about that, because my faith is in God and what He says in His Word. And those people (whether they are in United, or Global), **if** they are truly following the Spirit of God, they are just as **united with God** as I am (even though they are in another group at this time).

Did you ever notice that those churches in Revelation 2 and 3—some of them don't look very good in the writing there, but Christ considered every one of them to be His church. All the finger pointing, and accusations and so forth accomplish nothing. That is, nothing towards the purpose that I feel God is working out. We needed this scattering in order to concentrate our attentions on *Him*—rather than on the ministry, rather than on Herbert Armstrong, or rather than on the corporate body that we were or are a part of. It's the relationship with *Him* that counts! This kind of unity cannot be forced externally.

Why did I say that this unity already exists? It's because this unity is of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and the source of that Holy Spirit is the Father and the Son. They are perfectly united! There's no division between them. Didn't Paul say, "*Is Christ divided?*" Christ isn't divided. The Father isn't divided. And the Spirit that emanates from both of them is exactly the same. They are perfectly united. Deuteronomy 6:4 says that ***God is one*** .

Now, look at it this way. This is another illustration that might help you to understand it. We are taught, by illustration, that we are the Body of Jesus Christ. In I Corinthians 12, Paul compares the church to the human body, does he not? Just think about your body. Is your body divided? No, it's not

divided. Every part is in place and every part is contributing to the wholeness of the body.

This is why the Bible says that the church is the Body of Jesus Christ. The Body of Jesus Christ is not divided. Now think of yourself as being, let's say, just a single cell in that Body. You have the power of choice, do you not? And it is possible that you can be a weak cell in that Body, because you haven't been taking care of yourself spiritually. There are other cells in that Body that might be very strong, because they have been taking care of themselves spiritually. But you are still not separated from the Body. The weak cell and the strong cell are still functioning as a part of that Body, and it is not divided. There is strength. There is weakness. But it is not divided. There is **one Spirit**.

We are getting back around to something that we have been mentioning from time to time. That is, that we cannot force unity upon the church (by a corporate merger of some kind); but we can take care of this individual cell's relationship with God. And we can work to make ourselves a healthy part of the Body. That's our responsibility!

That's why the church is going through what it is going through. God wants us to examine ourselves and to work to make ourselves a healthy portion of the Body. The Body of Jesus Christ is whole; but it is "peopled" by people—some of whom are weak, and some of whom are strong. I hope that is understandable. We have the power to make ourselves healthy or unhealthy. Just as surely as we have the power to ruin our health with a lousy diet physically, we also have the power from God to make ourselves strong spiritually. We can make ourselves strong or weak, depending upon whether we believe the doctrines and, in faith, yield to Him—thereby making ourselves stronger. If we fail to yield, we make ourselves weak. The analogy is so clear. So we are not divided away from the Body; but we may be weak or strong.

Ephesians 2:11-14 Wherefore remember, that you being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of

promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus you, who sometimes were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

There was a time when all of us were Gentiles spiritually. We might not have been Gentiles physically; but every single one of us (regardless of our race, or ancestry) were Gentiles spiritually. And, at that time, we were uncircumcised. We hadn't gone through the circumcision of the heart—the spiritual circumcision—that made it possible for us to be united with God. All of us went through that and we became part of the corporate body (and, hopefully, the spiritual Body). The corporate body being the Worldwide Church of God; and the spiritual body the CHURCH OF GOD, or the Body of Christ.

Now there was a time when virtually all of us in the Worldwide Church of God believed—to a greater or lesser extent—the same things. We were so much alike that anybody who did any extensive traveling, all over the world... It didn't matter whether they went to Australia, or England, or France, or somewhere in the United States. They'd all come back saying, *"It doesn't matter where you go, God's people are all the same."* And we were! I don't mean that we all had exactly the same personality, but there was a **family identity** that was uniform regardless of where you went in the world.

I even heard one minister claim he could tell if people who were riding beside the road on a bicycle were in the church, or not. I'm just kidding you, but something like that did come out in a message. He was joking, but he had guessed correctly one time. He saw two people riding on the side of the road; and he said, *"I'll bet you they're church members."* And they were. They were Ambassador College students.

That's taking it much further than I want to with this. I just want to get across this concept—that families look alike. Those who are **of the same Spirit** act alike. They have the same sort of demeanor. They have the same kind of attitudes. They have the same kind of disposition. They look at things in very similar manners. It's all because the same Spirit is going through every one of them and they are using that information, and guidance, in their life. They

have THE FAMILY SPIRIT. It was not a physical thing. We were not related physically at all. We were simply *related spiritually*.

Now, what's happened? That **spiritual unity**, that we had then, was because the people were accessing the Father. They were following His guidance, and they were yielding to Him. Then worldliness... We call it Laodiceanism, because of the times that we live in, because of Revelation 3, and because of the "era" concept. But Laodiceanism infiltrated, and we became turned aside. And the unity that we had was gradually weakened. Many, many people became weak cells in a united Body.

I want you to notice, here in Revelation 2:4. Remember that these are messages for the whole church—not just for this group. It's for the whole church, for all time.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love.

Here was a church that was slipping away. We firmly believe that this message here, in Revelation 2:1-7, is detailing what happened to the church in the first century.

We have a habit, I guess you might say, of reading into this something that is not there. I have done it myself, many times. We say, "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have lost your first love.*" It doesn't say, "lost." It says, "*left.*"

Do you understand what Christ is saying there? He is telling us, without saying it directly, that even people who are slipping away...these people had gone so far, and I firmly believe the book of Hebrews was written to them; and it is a rousing exhortation to "Get with it!" Sin, *per se*, was not their problem. The problem was attitudinal. This tells us specifically what the problem was. They had **left** their first love. It was not that they had "lost" it. It was not that it was not there. They simply weren't using it!

They knew better, but they were simply not making themselves *do* what they were supposed to do. Love is *keeping* the commandments. Love—the

biblical love—is not an emotion; it is an *action*. It's what people do. And these people were sliding away, because they had stopped loving their brother. They had stopped loving their Father. But they were free to pick it up and start *doing* it again as they had at the first.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.

Now, there is hope for us. In fact, we are invited by God to go back and do the first works—what we seemingly have lost. I'm talking about that **family love** that we used to have for one another (in which we humbly submitted to God and to each other, and accessed Him constantly, and were guided by His Spirit). Laodiceanism has turned us *what?* Lukewarm! Worldliness has intervened so that our attention has shifted away from our love for God and our love for our brother—toward love for the self.

Christ is reminding us that the power to *do* so is still there. We have just **left** it. It's like we dropped a **powerful tool** and went on to something else, but we have to go back to that tool and start using it once again. It can be revived! So go back and do the first works.

And what are *the first works* ? Well, the doctrines and walking worthy of our vocation. So, in a broad sense, the solution to our scattered condition is to go back and do the things that united us in the first place.

So far, there hasn't been any movement to do so within the greater Church of God. And God hasn't raised up a new leader to replace Herbert Armstrong. But we still can, individually, do it. That's our responsibility until Christ returns or until God raises somebody up.

Because of time, I think I'd better stop here. I'm sorry that I am so windy; but I feel that it is so important that we get a right sense of what is happening to the church *and* WHAT WE CAN DO to help its cause. Regardless of where we are, we can *do* what we can do. At least, we are ending this sermon on a positive note—that God has invited us to go back and do "the first works,"

and He will accept us. And we will be every bit as good as (and maybe better than) we were back there in the '60s. That's what I recall. To me, anyway, that's the time that I recall as being the peak of the church's spiritual power.