

## Unity (Part 5): Ephesians 4 (B)

Balanced Doctrine and Application

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We are going to review the previous sermons in this series before moving on. I think that it is a pretty good teaching technique to review and to refresh our minds before continuing. The previous sermon *Unity (Part 4): The Voice of God* did fit into the overall theme of my series, but it was only intended to be an inset, filling a gap by briefly showing how God communicates most frequently, under most conditions.

Today we are going to get more directly back on track.

I think that I mentioned to you in the sermon I gave on the Day of Atonement 1999, *Reconciliation*, that this was actually the first of this series, although it is titled differently and does stand alone. The subject that day was reconciliation and is connected to the *Unity* series because there can be no unity without reconciliation with God and that reconciliation has to be effected first.

In the sermon *Unity (Part 1): God and HWA*, I began by asking you the question, "Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong?" Now I did that for a couple of reasons. The first reason is based on the principle that is established in Zechariah 13:7 where it says,

**Zechariah 13:7** "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow," saith the Lord of hosts. "Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn my hand upon the little ones."

The "*turning of his hand upon the little ones*" applies to you and me. His hand is turned back to spank. So the shepherd was smitten, and then we began to get a pretty good spanking. I wanted to go back to that because I wanted to establish the fact that the smiting of the shepherd has been very successful. The attack on him has pretty much blinded quite a large number of people to the evidence of his apostleship. Herbert Armstrong did bear the message. To me that is beyond dispute.

Now if you will turn to the book of Acts, chapter 9, I am going to show you a couple of scriptures that John Reid reminded me of in a sermonette that he gave. In Acts 9:15 when Paul was being converted there on the road to Damascus "the Lord said unto him, 'Go your way. For he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear My name before the Gentiles,

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and kings, and the children of Israel"

Now did Herbert Armstrong do that? **He did.**

**Acts 26:16-18** But rise [This is what Jesus said to him], and stand upon your feet. For I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.

Now Herbert Armstrong fulfilled those objectives as well. He was not an apostle to the Gentiles as directly as the apostle Paul was. Most of his ministry was to the people of Israel, but he did also go to the Gentiles. He also went to kings. He also went all over the entire earth witnessing. People may criticize and/or question his approach and effectiveness but this is just another way of justifying their position while smiting his reputation.

The fact remains that he did these things, and we need to think about that because he was bearing the message in our age. So he is important, in that regard, to the faith that we exhibit before God and before the world at this time.

Now the second reason I gave *Unity (Part 1): God and HWA* was to more firmly convict us regarding his apostleship, because this is a major plank in the foundation of our faith.

The result of changing the doctrines has produced the scattering of the church by making us uncertain of what we believe. Those changes altered the vision. It altered the vision of all of us, to some degree—making us split into many organizations—because certain things seemed more or less important to us individually. The changing of the doctrines caused us all to wander in Egypt for awhile, just as Abraham did. Egypt serves metaphorically as a "type" of the world. So, like Abraham, we have had to go back to a beginning (in order to make sure of our bearings) so then, hopefully, we can rapidly move on.

But there is another plank in the foundation that must be reestablished—"How does God get doctrine into the church?" I began covering that in the sermons: *Unity (Part 2): God's Pattern of Leadership* and *Unity (Part 3): Ephesians 4*.

So, "Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong?" And then "How does God get doctrine into the church?" This is why establishing Herbert Armstrong's apostleship is so important.

God clearly reveals a consistent, unchanging pattern in His word. He delivers doctrine to the church through the highest-ranking representative of His government available at the time. In the Bible, the representative might be "a prophet," "an apostle," "an ambassador," "a messenger," or "a preacher." It doesn't matter which—the title of the man is less important than the office held.

Under the Old Covenant the office used was that of a prophet. Under the New Covenant it was apostle, and God consistently communicated His will, His doctrines, His teachings, His pleasures, through those offices.

Beginning with Abel, God names those men. And when we get to the New Testament church, it was clearly Peter who was first among equals. Then, as the responsibility of the office that Peter held became too great (considering the times and the lack of technology that they had), God divided that office between Peter and Paul. So the thrust of Peter's ministry from that time on was solely to the Israelites, and Paul's to the Gentiles.

So God established the doctrines for His end time church according to the same patterns that He always used in the past so that we might have faith in an unchanging God. God doesn't shift gears in the middle of something, throwing us into confusion, because what God wants to lead us to is not merely believing something intellectually, but actively trusting Him through our application of those doctrines. So He did this through the apostle and only one was needed (rather than the number that was given to the New Testament first century church) because of the technology available today. There is rapid transportation and rapid communication and one man was able to hold that office.

Those doctrines given through him are to be the base of our faith and our operations. Paul wrote II Thessalonians 2:15 to a congregation that was having some problems. They were having problems with division and disorderliness.

**II Thessalonians 2:15** Therefore, brethren [There's that word *therefore* again], stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Hold fast the tradition.

**II Thessalonians 3:6** Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

The disorderly walking, brethren, was that they were not working. They were going to wait it out until Christ returned. Paul called that a deviation of the traditions. God's children *work* and these people were not working, they were simply waiting it out.

I should interject something here that shows God's desire (regarding what I have just read to you there in II Thessalonians 2:15 and II Thessalonians 3:6). This word *tradition* is broader than some would like. I am going to read you a note from my study Bible that I use all the time because it contains a little bit of information regarding this word. It says,

"Traditions" refers to more than customs. In view here is the totality of the apostolic doctrine as it was given to them. All of the teachings, not just what we would think of being the foundational teachings that appear in Hebrews the sixth chapter or things directly pertaining to the great goal in life that gives us the vision of being born in the kingdom of God.

These Protestant people see that word applies to the whole "shebang" that was given through the apostles. Traditions reach out to include policies and what we might think of as practices or procedures that the Bible does not specifically speak to. The apostle has the authority to establish them while he is God's apostle.

I want you to see an application here in I Corinthians 11:2. Remember this is a badly divided congregation. (At least it was internally divided). People had all kinds of different ideas, and as I showed you I Corinthians 1:10 that phrase about the mind actually has to do with the way we see things (the perspective). And he said that we should not be even divided in our perspective and the way we look at things.

**I Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

This word *ordinances* is the same word that is translated "traditions" in II Thessalonians

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2:15. It is the same word that is translated "traditions" in II Thessalonians 3:6. Here they have given it the term *ordinances* making it look as though it refers to law. But, consider the issue here in I Corinthians 11. The issue concerned the way—the manner—in which they ought to keep the Passover, the procedures that were to be followed. And in this particular case, he told them to eat at home first before coming to the service. There were other things included there, but the reference has to do with what we would call church service procedures. It reaches out into those things.

During our lifetime in the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert Armstrong established things like three songs, a prayer, a sermonette, some announcements, special music (if it's available), the sermon, followed by the final song and the closing prayer. This is ingrained within us. That is the kind of thing the apostle has the right from God to establish.

So he has the right then to make adjustments even to what he establishes. The adjustments may mean that in the Philippines or in Hawaii members don't come to services in a suit. They might wear a real formal nice white or colored shirt of very light material. But for those of us who are not subject to the kind of heat and humidity that those people have, and because of formality and the established "best" within our society, Herbert Armstrong established that the suit is proper for us and dresses and suits for women.

He has the right to establish things like that. Holy Day offerings might be a good one to consider. There's a possibility that an apostle might say that there will be only three Holy Day offerings. Herbert Armstrong determined seven holy day offerings based upon the principle, "you shall not appear before the Lord your God empty handed." Now he was quite constrained, because that principle could have been interpreted in the same way the Protestants and Catholics have understood it—to take up offerings every time there is service. But he stopped short of that and he set it at seven. The traditions include those kinds of things.

Now I am not sure (this might be a little bit of a digression) that many of you are aware that there is a constant thrust for variety coming in out of the world. Actually I'll trace it right to its source—it comes right out of Satan's way of life. But I want you to think about some things. The reason I mention this is because this thrust for variety makes us want to think of changes that can be made. We may think the order of services or dress codes established by HWA are unimportant, but we must remember another important principle that is involved here.

**Proverbs 24:21** My son, fear you the Lord and the king [in other words, look

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to authority. God above and the king or civil ruler]; and meddle not [or associate not] with them that are given to change.

We could stretch that all the way out to those who are given to change—revolutionaries. Now there is a warning there because this desire to change things, to make it more convenient, or whatever we think is better, is always within us and its source is Satan. It comes from the world and we bring it into the church. Now I'm not pointing the finger at anybody in particular, because it's in me too. And so there has to be a measure of restraint within us to stick to what we have been given until or unless we find a really good reason why it should be changed.

Now let me give you a couple of examples just to show you a little bit about the mind of God in regard to this thing about change. I want you to ask yourself a question: "What kind of variety did the children of Israel receive in the wilderness from God in the way of food?" He doesn't care that we have a lot of variety. Why? Because stability is more important to Him than variety. Now manna represents something. What is it? Jesus compared it to eating the word of God. He said, "*I am the manna that came down from heaven, the true manna.*"

What are we supposed to eat intellectually? What is supposed to feed our minds? A lot of us like a tremendous amount of variety. We read all kinds of novels. Going to movies is an endless series of entertainments. Television comes right into our homes. That variety is impacting upon us constantly, filling our minds with what is nothing more than a lot of junk food that does not build spiritual health. Do you get the principle?

The same principle is at work in other areas as well. I don't know whether you realize this, but the only thing that keeps capitalism working—American capitalism—is constant change. They have to continuously produce new things in order to spur us to buy—to spend money—and so they keep changing the fashions in clothing. The shape of automobiles is changed and you are convinced that because they put this chrome here, and that chrome there, this year's model is tremendously better than last year's.

Hair styles change; ties go wide, ties go thin; pants have pleats in them, pants don't have pleats in them, pants have cuffs in them, pants don't have cuffs in them; suspenders; belts—you name it—they just keep changing, and every change produces a little bit of instability, a little bit of doubt, a little bit of insecurity. And because this thrust is also working in us, we've got to follow it in order to feel acceptable.

We've become ignorant victims of this devilish system. But God's pattern is consistent.

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"I am God. I change not." "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, the same today, and forever." The most stable Being in all of the universe changes not. We change daily, almost, and we have a long, long way to go. It is this restlessness and instability that lead to the kinds of changes that we had within the church doctrinally. Rather than continuing in faith, holding firmly to the doctrine that was delivered through the apostle, Herbert Armstrong, the Tkach's began to change those things. What did it produce in our little universe? We went splat in every direction.

Change always produces instability and that's why Solomon gave that mild warning: "Don't associate with those who are given to change."

One thing that I also want to clarify before I go on so that you understand where I am coming from—I am not saying that church government *is* perfect Godly government. I am saying that church government should, by faith, strive to follow the patterns of God's government in heaven, those things that are so clearly laid down in His word. There are always going to be areas where we're not going to look at things quite the same, but God gives the apostle (of the time) the authority to establish church policies and procedures.

So I mentioned before that God has apparently appointed me to head this little work, in Church of the Great God, and there is a direct connection between Herbert Armstrong and me, so I have to be extremely careful about changing anything. There is a scripture in I Corinthians 4:14-16 that I want to read because this applies to all of you as well. Paul wrote,

**I Corinthians 4:14-16** I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be you followers of me.

That principle is applied in so many places. Paul said, "Follow me, the apostle." John said that in I John 1. Peter said it. Jude said it—wording it slightly differently. But it is so hard for us to hold the course because of this desire to change things, to make them more convenient, to do it the way we think is right.

Now even as there is a direct connection between Herbert Armstrong and me, there is also a direct connection between that same apostle and you, because he also is your "father in the faith," You are subject to the same responsibility that I am and you must also be very careful about making changes.

Those of you who are parents know very well that you don't want your children setting their own rules. You get upset when they do. And it is very likely the whole household gets upset, creating instability through democracy—with the bottom making the rules. It is wrong for those with the least vision, the least understanding, and the least wisdom to make the rules.

Now the sermon, *Unity (Part 3): Ephesians 4* was heading toward more practical applications of the process that produces unity and peace, because up until that part of that sermon, we were considering things that some might call theoretical. They are important, they are foundational, but those things have to be made practical in a person's life.

When I left off I was speaking about sanctification. Sometimes we are confused by the Bible's terminology. **Justification** and **sanctification** are *not* the same things. Justification is a legal state or condition which God, by His grace, declares us to be in as a result of our repentance and faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. It is righteousness (right standing with God), but it is imputed, accounted or given to us and is not based on any of our works. Justification clears the account of debt with God and frees us from the death penalty. It gives us peace with God, and access to him and the Holy Spirit. All these things come as a gift from him through justification. With justification, Christ's righteousness is merely imputed to us. It is accounted where it really legally ought not to be.

But with sanctification, Christ's righteousness actually, literally becomes ours through the process of obedience, overcoming, prayer, study, producing fruit, sacrificing ourselves, serving, being led and enabled by God's Holy Spirit, as He purifies our heart and infuses within us His divine nature—thus producing His image and holiness. I know that was an earful. But it is a process. This is where the works come in—in sanctification. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And our part is activated, motivated by faith. This faith is not merely believing, but trusting what His word says enough to act on it, or to sacrifice because of it—yielding to God. And sanctification requires work—not to save us—but to ensure that God's creative process moves on.

God cannot create character by fiat. It requires the willing cooperation of free moral agents who choose to do the right thing because it's right, because they love God and His way of life, and they love each other. They are willing to sacrifice themselves by faith to pay the price, to work.

It is sanctification that works to guard the unity of the Spirit.



**Ephesians 3:14-19** For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named [We are the church of God. We are part of that family and we are named after Him. Now here is Paul's prayer for you and for me.], that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend [to get it, to understand, to see it the way Christ does] with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

What a prayer! What a goal to be so filled that we are exactly like our Father, blazing with glory and power! Is that worth yielding to? Is that worth sacrificing for? Is that worth having unity about?

**Ephesians 3:20-21** Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

**Ephesians 4:1** I, *therefore*,

Now this rousing prayer by Paul concluded the doctrinal section with an appeal to God that we might understand and be filled with faith to apply the doctrine in a practical way.

I'm going to repeat another scripture that we read before in the book of Psalms because it is so pertinent to the times. David says,

**Psalms 11:3** If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Isn't that up to date? And so he comes back with an encouraging statement.

**Psalms 11:4** The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.

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We were scattered when the foundations—the doctrines of our faith—were changed, and confusion was produced because our doctrinal foundation was so badly disturbed. But David is reminding us that the reality is **nothing** has changed because God is still on His throne. We can still have faith in that. He hasn't changed. Men may attempt to change the doctrines, but God hasn't changed. God's truth hasn't changed. God's purpose hasn't changed. David is saying we can keep right on as before and that we are **not** to turn aside.

A companion scripture to this is in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 where He speaks about the false prophets. It says that He is going to use those false prophets. They are going to be in the congregation. In fact, Paul said in I Corinthians 11, "there *must* be also heresies among you" (verse 19). I mean it is *ordained*, that's what the word *must* means there. It is going to happen.

Paul goes on to say that this is in order that those who are approved—those who are sticking to what has been given to them—may be made manifest, or known to the others and also to God as well. So God tests the sons of men, and we are being tested. He wants to see who is going to hold fast, just like Paul said—"*stand fast in the traditions which you were given.*"

Now we lost a pretty good measure of motivation there for awhile. Almost all of us lost the motivation to go in the same direction because we were not so sure what to believe any more. Now understand this: Sanctification will keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" because it is the process of becoming holy, as God is holy. God is not divided. Is Christ divided? Those two are like this [fingers crossed] and as we become like Him, our unity with Him grows as well and that's what sanctification is. It is the process of the mind of God being built (created) within us.

The God Family is perfectly united in holiness, and sanctification begins from the moment that we receive God's Spirit. That's one reason why early in this book of Ephesians, Paul mentions the sealing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the beginning of spiritual life within us. Jesus taught us that the words that He speaks, "they are Spirit and they are life." I just want to pick up a principle in Matthew 13:3-9. This is the Parable of the Sower of the Seed, and we're going to drop down and read verse 3.

**Matthew 13:3-9** And He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when He sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth. And forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they

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were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The *seed* is the word of God. We won't go into that interpretation, but the seed hitting the ground is not the end of the story. A variety of things can happen that will affect the growth of that seed. Some might fall on stone. Others might be buried too deep. Rain may come and wash away some of it as well. Birds may come and devour others. But because life is in the seed, something will happen.

Now there was pretty dramatic proof of this fact in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Archaeologists found seeds in some of the pyramids that were broken into. They brought out wheat seeds, wheat berries and cotton seeds. Those seeds (which were probably anywhere from 2,000-,4000 years old) grew when they were put into the right soil. The spirit of life was still in them, even though they laid there dormant for thousands of years.

That's why I say that if the seed is sown, it is going to do something when it lands in the right kind of soil. Now Jesus shows in this parable, that the environment that the seed lands in affects its growth. When we make the proper application—people are the ground, and the environment and what we do after receiving the seed, that is—the word of truth, containing the doctrines—is what affects the growth. Growth in this analogy represents sanctification. Sanctification is the inculcation of God's image in us by living His way of life empowered by His Spirit, and what we do with the seed is the "*working out of salvation with fear and trembling.*" (Ephesians 2:12) It is the equivalent of rain, sunshine, weeding, fertilizing, so that the potential for fruit is the greatest. Sanctification is worked out through application, by living the doctrines and the truths of God.

Now I'm rather laboriously and ploddingly going through this because unity will not just miraculously appear, but it will appear, it will be a reality, because people have made themselves ready for it. Jesus said,

**John 17:17** Sanctify them through Your truth. Your word is truth.

It is the extent to which we grasp and believe the truths of the doctrines that determines our desire to be holy. It is by this holiness (that is created within us) that we become sanctified. The gospel's power *is* "*the power of God unto salvation.*" The gospel's power lies (resides) in what its words (that's all the gospel is—WORDS. "The words that I

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speak unto you are Spirit, and they are life") produce in our minds.

Those words lead us to the faith of Christ and there is nothing mysterious about this. There's nothing mysterious about the faith of Christ. When we believe what Christ believes, we have His faith. It may not be to the same intensity, but we have His faith and that's why Jude said, "*you've got to get back to the faith once delivered,*" because that was the faith of Christ. It came through His apostles and the apostles gave it to the church and the power resides in the words, if we will only use them to live by.

Those words are Spirit and they are life, and putting them into practice sanctifies us because it is the truth. We will be sanctified by the application of those words. And because we are doing it by faith, God will empower us by His Spirit so that the power to actually do what He says in the gospel comes from Him. We just make the choice and begin to do it and He pushes us over the hill. That's what grace is. It's the gift to overcome.

So we all had "*our conduct in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*" If we really believe that God quickened us—that He not only rescued us from death, but gave us the seed of His Kind (the God Kind), and with that, the quality of life (that's what eternal life is, it is a quality of life, it is the way that God lives), and if we believe what He is offering us (in the doctrines that are given in the first three chapters of this book), the sheer awesomeness combined with logic drives us to submit to becoming holy—sanctified.

The apostle Paul felt this so powerfully that he said in another place, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He felt he had to do it because it was burning in his mind—this was what the people needed then, and this is what the church needs *right now*. The gospel must first go to the church in order to get us back on our feet and moving in the right direction, and when we start moving in the right direction, God will empower us to go to the world.

But I'll tell you that I don't think that the church of God is fit to represent God in this scattered condition. We are an abomination to Him, although He still loves us. We're like teenagers who have rebelled against our Father, and with a little bit of tough love, He kicked us out of the house. But He's willing to welcome us back if we'll make the change in our attitude and in our conduct.

So the first thing that God does, through Paul, in developing His theme of how to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is to reveal of the privilege we've been given

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and create a vision for us of a great future. At the same time he encourages us with the knowledge that God Himself is directly involved. Proverbs 29:18 in the *Living Bible* says, "Where there is no vision, the people run wild." Now the people who translated that did not mean that those without vision were "screaming meemee's" running around trying to tear their hair out or something of that nature. It simply means that those without the revelation of God, those without vision, live purposeless lives. Their lives are lived lawlessly and in vanity—without direction. Therefore in order for a group to be unified, all must have the same vision of where to go with life. We cannot do that until we all believe the same things.

A very dramatic change took place in the Worldwide Church of God. It was cunningly snuck in without any fanfare. They were changing the direction of the gospel, preaching **about** Christ rather than preaching Christ's message **of the kingdom of God**. Well, even as dumb as I am, my wife Evelyn and I realized that this was it—we could no longer remain in the Worldwide Church of God. This was what precipitated my resignation as minister. The Worldwide Church of God had announced that they were very clearly going to walk a different path than we had under Herbert Armstrong.

It was as if we were starting from the same place, but they were going off to New York City, and Evelyn and I wanted to go to Philadelphia. There might be some roads we'll both travel, but we were going to end up in different places and unfortunately, brethren, this is true of many other groups who broke away from WWCG. We are gradually drifting away from one another rather than coming together and walking the same path, because we no longer believe the same things.

Now what Paul does in Ephesians 4 is to first lay down some broad directions—general goals—that every one of us has to shoot for. He says that we are to walk worthy and to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." When he gets to verse 17, we run into another "**therefore**" indicating another slight change of direction. What we find when we read beyond verse 17 is very specific instructions. He gets into the nitty gritty—the real nitty gritty—from that point on.

But step number one in affecting unity: **We are to walk worthy**. It is very likely that "walking worthy" (especially the word *worthy*) does not mean exactly what you think it means. I think all of us understand that *walk* indicates motion in a direction, and so the apostles generally used this word in order to show us that we were heading (as pilgrims) toward a very specific end of our life. But, *worthy* does not mean what you normally think it does. Our first impulse is to think worthy means "*to live a good life*"—that concept is included within this, but it is much more specific than that. The basic concept is "*to give equal weight to;*" we might say, "*to be balanced.*"

Now you're going to see as we get into this that Paul was exhorting us to do something that is a long process. It is a continuous operation. It doesn't take place in one step, rather it is something that is required of us, really, for the remainder of our lives. So he is first exhorting us, "*Don't be lopsided, but give equal weight to...*" ...to what? Well, the answer to that is doctrine and practice—what preceded the "**therefore**" and what follows the "**therefore**."

Now some people virtually stop studying, concluding that all they need is to be a moral person. Others think that book knowledge is all one needs and practical application is neglected. But, brethren, our vision must be kept alive, and ever-growing, with greater understanding otherwise our zeal will wane. In other words, just reading through the gospel one time and getting the picture is not enough. It has to be constantly refreshed. It has to constantly be expanded upon. It has to constantly receive more and more distinct and specific concepts within the vision. That's why God has the Feast of Tabernacles every year, and we go over basically the same things. But we always add a little bit more as we are growing. So the vision is kept alive and growing.

Why does this have to be? It's because our mind can adapt to any blessing and when we receive the blessing we are thrilled at first and filled with enthusiasm. But, because of human nature, our will does wane, and the first thing you know it is "old hat" and we are just simply comfortable with it. When that happens we begin drifting, attracted by something new. Here comes that change thing again. The human mind is always looking for something new to excite it.

Now God is telling us, "*Excite yourself with new vision, new understanding. My word is so deep that you will never penetrate the bottom of it in this human life.*" But effort and work has to be made in order to get the excitement and the thrill and the vision out of it. Without such effort, we're going to drift. We'll be attracted by something new—usually something out in the world.

And in regard to practice, the area that I personally find is most often neglected, is making the most of every opportunity to do good. It's not that we dive into evil, rather we let opportunities to do good slide by, usually because we don't want to be bothered. But, "*to him who knows to do good and does not, it is sin.*" Even if he didn't actively do something evil in the eyes of God, it was sin because he didn't do what he knew to do—something that was good.

And again that principle—can anyone be truly skilled in any area of life without both? I wonder if you realize that this is the problem that the people who were addressed in the book of Hebrews had. They weren't diving into sin. As early as chapter 2, the author of

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this book hit the nail right on the head. The first three verses tell you there that they were drifting away. They were "neglecting so great salvation." They simply weren't doing what they knew to do.

**Hebrews 5:11-14** Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing you are dull of hearing. [That's what was happening to them.] For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of *use* [exercise, work] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So later on Paul exhorts those people to remain faithful to the end. They were drifting away. They were not balanced. While they were not openly sinning, they were neglecting their relationship with God.

Now don't lose sight of what we are doing here. These are things that are important to unity. The Hebrew people were drifting from the church; separating themselves from their brethren because of their neglect. I don't know whether or not you realize it, but the word *sin* only appears three times in the book of Hebrews. They weren't going off robbing, raping, pillaging, plundering or any of those kinds of things. They were just very quietly drifting away, because they weren't keeping the vision alive. Being moral is not enough, because merely being moral will not capture the heart.

That is one concept that is included within this word *worthy*. There is a second one that is also very interesting. This word has the sense of *becoming*. Now we might say to one another, "That suit [blouse; hairdo; dress] *becomes* you—it compliments you." There is no conflict or clashing. It is appropriate. It is tasteful. It is perfectly balanced.

Now to be unbalanced would be to be "dressed to the nine's"—beautiful gown or tuxedo on, hair combed, nicely shaven, bathed, perfume or cologne applied—and then you go to the ball in your tennis shoes. You see, it doesn't fit; it is tasteless. There is imbalance in the dress.

**Philippians 1:27** Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it *becomes* the gospel of Christ

*Becomes* is from the same Greek word that appears in Ephesians 4:1 —translated there, *worthy*. What Paul is saying is that their conduct should be consistent, match and not clash, with the gospel. There must be no clash between **doctrine** and **practice**. What we believe, we do.

**Titus 2:9-14** Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may *adorn* the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For [Here comes a conjunction—this is why conduct must adorn the doctrine] the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us . . .

Conduct is *becoming*, it *adorns* the doctrine if it is done properly. Now doctrine is the basic garment of life. Our conduct is its adornment and it is our responsibility to make the adornment tastefully matched to the doctrine so that people are led to the doctrines because that is where the great answers and hope for life are contained.

Now, who would you rather be around? Jesus or the Pharisees? Jesus was perfect. The Pharisees were "moral people" at least on the outside. But, Jesus *never* sinned. Now using that measure of righteousness, I think that we would have to conclude that Jesus (despite how strict the Pharisees were on themselves) was stricter on Himself than they were. But, unlike the Pharisees, Jesus made Christianity attractive, appealing, winsome, beautiful and powerful, all at the same time. The Pharisees were inflexibly rigid and a fearsome personality. They made people afraid of them in their rigid morality. I get a picture of them being moral, but self-righteously critical of everything and everybody. They repelled people. There was nothing compellingly beautiful about their lives.

Well, we've gotten all the way through verse 1. I think that I'm going to have to stop there, reminding you that doctrine and application have to be balanced. We cannot neglect one or the other. Paul says we have to keep right on studying—sharpening the vision and adding to it, filling in the picture with more details—so that our minds are excited by the things that are in God's word. His word must be there motivating us—driving and impelling us to push ourselves in applying it—in a way that is becoming and beautiful to behold, thus making an appealing witness to others.

Others ought to be drawn to you as you witness to them, not necessarily by anything



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that you say (though that might be included) but because of the way you live your life and that of course includes the way that you speak. Perhaps people can then be led to where the great answers are contained (within the doctrines) and then they too might be convicted and convinced of them as they begin to apply them into their lives.

When we do that, we are walking worthy of our calling. We have, I think, a long way to go in this. Some may need more diligent study, while others may have gotten sloppy on the application end of it. But both have to be done—study and application.

This hopefully laid the foundation for the next sermon, *Unity (Part 6): Ephesians 4*.