

Ephesians: The One Body of Christ

“Walking in a Manner Worthy”

Ephesians 4:1-6

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter four, verses one through six, or continuing on in our reading of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter four. And so now we're moving to a time he's leaving behind the prayer of the first three chapters. And now he's moving to some teaching directly for the church in Ephesus.

As you all know, there has been a heaviness over the last couple of weeks with the violence that we have seen around our country as, say, unmentioned. The terrible tragedies in Minneapolis and in Evergreen, Colorado, the horrific murder of Aretha Rutskoi in Charlotte, of course, the very public assassination of Charlie Kirk. All of these are reminders to us that we live in a world where darkness and chaos still have a foothold. But I want to encourage you that even when the darkness seems to advance, we must remember it only gives occasion for the light of the world to shine that much more brightly. And the light is winning. Brothers and sisters, the light is winning. To revival comes when the name of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. And so as we see a world that's struggling with questions and looking for answers, we have to be reminded that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed, even though the gates of hell might rage against this church, they will not prevail because the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. And that is why every Sunday we gather together and we sit down with this ancient book, and we hear its words for us, because we recognize that God has spoken into the world about a much greater story than what we see going on just around us, in our families and in our daily lives. God has much bigger plans for this earth, and so it is good and right for us to stop and to listen to the words that he has for his people.

So please read with me Ephesians chapter four, verses one through six. The Apostle Paul, turning his attention to the Ephesians, writes this...

I, therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

This is the word of the Lord. Please now be seated.

So as we continue, we do notice, as I just mentioned, Paul is now changing. There's something that he's been doing in the letter and he's now doing a different thing. He started with a prayer. I remember how he began. I bless our God. And then he went on and said, and therefore I, I ask the Lord on your behalf that you would be strengthened in the spirit.

You remember that. Now notice he's turning his attention to his audience. He's doing something that actually apostles and prophets do throughout the Bible. They both pray in front of us and then they preach to us. They pray in front of us, and then they preach to us. As a matter of fact, a good question to ask of any prophet or apostle. We can ask this of Amos tonight. We can ask them, are you preaching or are you praying right now? Are you talking to the Lord, or are you talking to us? And Paul, like all good apostles and prophets, does both now. But I would point out, even when Paul is praying to the Lord, even when Paul is praying to the Lord, he's still teaching us, isn't he?

Think about that. Chapter one, that opening prayer. He says, I bless the Lord who has washed, adopted us, redeemed us. given us the remission, his heirs and given us the assurance of the spirit. Right. So right there, even as he's praying, he's teaching us. And the same is true of the Old Testament prophets. They will pray to the Lord.

And yet, as we're hearing the prayer, we realize, oh, you're teaching us. But then the opposite is true too. They will turn around and start preaching to us, telling us things, educating us. And as soon as they do, we start thinking about all the prayers that we need to be praying. Today Paul is going to say, now I want to urge you in this walk in a manner that is worthy of your calling.

How, with all patience, which is me, he's gonna say, with all humility, with all gentleness and patience, bearing up one another in love and being united in the faith. And then he says, let me unpack what I mean by being united in the faith. Now, as we're hearing him teach us right away, we're just responding with, oh Lord, help us. Help me to be humble. Help me to be patient. Help me to bear up one another in love. You see the praying of the Apostle teaches us in the teaching of the Apostle gives us substance for our prayers. Well, look how Paul goes with this. He turns, he says, now, I urge you, he's talking to the Ephesians. Now I I'm talking to you. Now listen up. If you if you were letting me just pray and you're kind of passively participating, that's okay. But now I need you to listen up. I'm talking to you. And then he says, Paul, I a prisoner of the Lord. Notice how he begins with this. It's kind of like how he began his prayer of supplication last week. Remember that, he says, I appeal to God the Father. Why? Because that gives me grounds for this appeal. I can come to the Lord and make a request, because I'm a child coming before the father. And now. Now notice that what he says, he turns to him. He goes, now I'm going to urge you, but I want you to remember who's urging you.

It's me. It's Paul, a prisoner of the Lord. Notice for Paul his circumstances always point him to the hand of the Lord in his life. Do you ever notice that Paul doesn't get wrapped up in thinking about, like, Roman Empire and Caesar and what's happening in the kind of politics of the Roman Empire? He couldn't. He'll say things from time to time about them.

Jesus would as well. But he knows when he looks around and he sees the world around him, he sees the Lord moving forward. His gospel ministry in Paul's life and the Roman Empire is almost like incidental. It's a secondary thing. He says, I know I've been thrown in jail because of Caesar. I know I've been thrown in jail because of what I've done as an apostle, but I'm really just a prisoner of the Lord.

This goes all the way back to my apostolic calling. I'm doing this because I'm preaching the gospel. It's good for us to think of Paul's autobiography when we consider him. And remember, you know, Paul could have he could have been doing all kinds of things. He could have just stayed in Jerusalem. Now a Christian, he could have taught the Old Testament because that was his expertise, you know, kind of like me.

You could just preach out of the Old Testament and show how it points to Jesus and leave a nice, quiet life in Jerusalem. He could be just sitting on the shore somewhere, you know, in the middle of his missionary work. He could have said, okay, I've had enough. It's now time to go on retirement. He could be sitting on the shore in Greece somewhere and enjoying whatever classical version of a margarita there is, and just kind of enjoying life.

But notice he's not. Why? Because he says, I am not free. I am a prisoner of the Lord. He is, of course, ultimately referring back to that calling that happened to him on the road to Damascus, where he had these visions, and he heard a sound and he saw the Lord. And you remember what he asked? You remember his question on the road to Damascus.

He said, who are you, Lord? Who are you? And we see that Paul is still learning the implications to the answer of that question. Even up to this day in which his writing, the implications of what it means to follow the Lord who had drawn him out of unbelief and given him this calling as an apostle. You see, by starting out this way, Paul is reminding them of his imprisonment for the gospel, and as in doing so, he's providing them kind of a model for what he's going to urge them to do, which is to walk in a manner that is worthy of their calling.

I want to be careful about the way I say this, but I mean it. Paul will do this from time to time. He is not afraid to lay a little bit of a guilt trip on his audience. He's not afraid to say, wait a minute, guys. You're having a hard time walking in the calling. That is the way that is a manner that is worthy of your calling. Have you considered where I am right now? Surely if I can walk in a manner worthy of my calling, leading me to jail as a prisoner of Christ? Surely you two can

walk in a manner that is worthy of your calling. So he starts off with, let me be a model to you. As he says elsewhere, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

Okay, don't imitate me because I'm the goal or the object of your worship. Imitate me as I point you to Jesus. That's my job. Like the job of the spirit. What do we do? We point you to Jesus. That is the job of the apostle, of the Christian, of the pastor of the mentor of the disciple, or. So Paul says, having considered who I am, I urge you now walk in a manner that is worthy of your call.

And then he lays out three let me just kind of give you the logic of the passage, and then we'll talk through it. He lays out three gospel characteristics. We could call them as you walk in a manner that is worthy of your calling, your three gospel characteristics. You should walk in humility, you should walk in gentleness, and you should walk in patience.

But he says, to what end? To love to bear one another up in love. And that was goal one. What's goal? To be united as a church. And then Paul does something that he is kind of has a tendency to do when he says something that he thinks is very theologically interesting. He'll do a little sidebar. So he has a little sidebar on unity.

So that's the logic of the passage. Let's just walk through it right now and kind of unpack what he's talking about here. So he says walk in a manner that is worthy of your calling. What he must be talking about there when he says calling, he must be talking about what? Elsewhere in theology, we call the effectual calling.

You've heard about this since you've been at Brier Wooden. You've said under wonderful teaching. You know what effectual calling is. It basically means this, though. It means a calling that works. And what it's doing is it's talking about the work of the spirit in the life of every Christian. Okay? This is the work of the spirit in the life of every Christian, where the spirit attends to the teaching or the preaching of the word.

And that can happen on Sunday morning. That can happen when you are evangelized as a child. That can happen when you saw something going on TV in the background and you heard the Word of God preached. I remember one gentleman telling me he was a he was a Trotskyite thug. His dad was. This is back in the mid 20th century, and he was standing outside with a bunch of his other buddy thugs smoking cigarettes, and they heard the gospel preached through a tent across the street.

And as he was talking to his buddies, he listened to the gospel, and he found himself. He found himself converted. That is the effectual calling, okay? The effectual calling of the spirit. And Paul says, if you've been saved, then that means you've had the spirit attend to the teaching of the word, and it's made your heart alive. Your heart was dead, but then you heard the call, and it was an effectual call, and it made you alive.

We should remember the spirit is always at work in the preaching of the word. We also see that there are instances where the spirit either makes you alive or hardens your heart. As a matter of fact, there are some who would listen to Jesus himself preach their stories in the Gospel of John particularly, but elsewhere will John or Peter.

Jesus will be speaking to a congregation and we won't be able to say, Jesus, you weren't a good preacher. You didn't. You didn't handle the text properly. Right? We can't say that. We can say, Jesus, you didn't understand the audience well and contextualize it for them like he knows their hearts as he's preaching that to them. Can you imagine?

We can't say that he didn't do it right. And you don't say that. Everyone turned away. Everyone hears it. They hear it from the best preacher of all, and they still turn away. And guess what that is? Sometimes the work of the spirit. You'll have people come through the doors of Briarwood Presbyterian Church looking for answers. They will sit down.

They will hear the word preached or taught in a Sunday school. They'll hear it appropriately articulated to them, and it will make them angrier than they were when they came, before they came and sat down, because their heart will be hardened to it. That's also the work of the spirit. But if you are in Christ, says Paul, then you have been effectually called.

And that means that the spirit is at work in you, and you are. The word is unto life.

And so you are to walk in a manner that is worthy of that effectual calling. So notice what he says first. He says first, if you are living out that gospel disposition of the effectual calling, then you should be marked by humility. And what is humility? Just briefly, humility is, really our disposition towards ourselves in light of this gospel call that we have.

It's our disposition to who I am and how I think about the rest of the world in light of who I am. You see, if you've received your life from the spirit, you will inevitably grow towards humility. Why? Because you know that you were dead and that it was this alien force, the Spirit of God, that gave you life.

So, you know, I have nothing. It's not because I was better than anyone else. It's not because I was smarter, I was dead. The spirit gave me life. Therefore, it's only natural for you to be a person who is marked by humility. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, talks about biblical humility, and I love the way he describes it.

C.S. Lewis always has just such a way of describing profiles of people and behavior. And so I want to read this. It's a little bit longer, but just bear with me. Lewis is writing here about how biblical humility is different from often from what the world thinks of as humility. Lewis writes, do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call humble

in quotes nowadays, he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person who's always telling you that.

Of course, he's just nobody. Probably all you will think of him or think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you just like him at all, it'll be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility because you will not be thinking about himself at all.

Lewis goes on to say, if anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud, and that's the biggest step to at least nothing can be done whatsoever without it. If you do not think you're conceited, if you think that you are not conceited, it means that you are very conceited indeed.

Condensed in this way, you could say humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking about yourself less. We live in a world where reflection and introspection is kind of a prized value. And it's usually for the sake of therapy and for dealing with wounds of the past and being open and honest about what has happened to us.

And I want to say very clearly, that is a very important thing for Christians to be honest and truthful about who they are and about what has happened to them in the past to leave, what kind of wounds and offenses have been committed against them, and to be aware of that so you can understand how those things are shaping you today.

But we must remember that kind of introspection must always be for the goal. As a believer of being more others directed at that, that that goal of that looking within the self should always be pointing us to a kind of biblical humility, not to think little of yourself, but rather to help you think well of and to desire to show love to those that the Lord has put in the world around you.

You see, that's gospel humility to have the mind of Christ who do not consider his, fellowship in the Trinity, something to be hoarded, to be grasped at, but rather emptied himself, taking on the form of a man ly, so that he might bring us to salvation, disadvantaging yourself to the advantage of others. That is the essence of gospel humility.

But Paul goes on from there. He says, not only is it humble, you're supposed to be marked by humility, but you're supposed to be marked by gentleness as well. Now gentleness is our gospel disposition towards others around us. If humility is about our disposition towards ourselves, gentleness is our gospel disposition towards others. What are we being called to?

We're being called to not have a harsh and critical spirit, but rather to be humble, loving, looking for ways to build one another up. Having a harsh and critical spirit is a great temptation

in the church. I trust me, I deal with this temptation myself and I come from a long line of people who deal with this temptation as well.

I remember my grandfather, a man who was just a real “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” kind of guy. He was a great American. He's a war veteran, both World War II and Korea. He was such a strong man, and he was also a man with a sharp mind and a quick wit. And he could be very critical. And I remember him becoming a Christian late in life and seeing the gospel gentleness take hold of him, a man who had lived his whole life one way and then he got and began to become a different kind of person, because now the gospel is taking that quick and that smart mind and that penetrating intellect, and was now strengthening it with gentleness.

I would point out that we see gospel gentleness show up even in our doctrines about the church. You know that in our book of church Order for the Presbyterian Church, when we talk about discipline, which is one of the marks of a true church, that you have godly discipline taking place within it. When we talk about discipline, do you know what the goal of our discipline is?

This is to make sure that people get punished, to make sure that they get their comeuppance. No, it's restoration. It's always restoration. We go to the abuser. We go to the one who sinned. We go to the ones who feel alienated from the church or have acted in ways that alienate them from the church. And we say, let us walk with you so that you might be restored.

Parents, gospel gentleness should come out in the way that you care for your children. Your goal as a parent is to build them up, not to tear them down, not to make them feel insecure about who they are, but rather to bolster them in the gospel of Jesus Christ in this great calling to which they have been called.

Friendships, likewise, are meant to be marked by gospel gentleness, pointing one another to Christ, setting aside gossip or coarse joking or whatever the other things might be to come in and think about how am I? Am I gently drawing one another? How are we gently drawing one another in our friendship to faith?

We live in a world where there is a propensity in ever presence of public forums, and in those public forums, as your advertising folks amongst us in this congregation will tell you. Public forums tend to hold conflict in high regard. Humans love conflict. As a matter of fact, it says that we are more motivated. This is the advertising part of it. We are more motivated as humans by what we oppose than what we are for. And as a result, an effort to seek clicks and endorphin hits. We live in a conflict addicted world. And in that kind of world, gentleness can look like weakness. But it's not. I want to assure you, gentleness is not weakness, and we have no greater model of strong gentleness than what we find in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Think about Christ going through his life. The second person of the Trinity, the one through whom the world was molded, and even the glue through which it is still sustained at any point. At any point, he could have exposed his religious opponents to open shame. He could have exposed them to ridicule in front of those that they sought to gather against him at any point he could have.

I mean, not even he didn't need to snap of his fingers. He didn't need a word. He could just thinking in the Roman Empire would be laid waste as if it was hit by a nuclear bomb. And yet, notice, at no point does he have that strength that is easily at his fingertips tips. And at no point does he say, now, opponents, I'm going to wipe you out.

But rather, what does he do for our sake that we might be saved? He responds with gentleness to those who oppose him, even asking that the Lord have mercy upon him as he hangs on the cross made of wood, that he himself created as the creator of the universe.

You see, as I watch this model of Christ, it's hard for me to imagine it because I would have given in to the temptations of Satan and all of these temptations. Notice all of these temptations are use your power to bring about the kingdom in another way, without humility, without gentleness. Show them who you are. Jesus. That's the temptation I would have given into it.

But he showed his greater strength, his greater power, that even in light of his creator, his creator, divine character and power and authority, he still shows only gentleness. It's a great model for us in a world that tells us our gentleness is weak. Thirdly, let's look at patience. Paul points us to points us to patience. He says you should act in a way that's not just humble and not just gentle, but one that is patient.

And patient is kind of a it is sort of an obvious or a natural progression of these first two attributes of humility and gentleness. Because we are humble, because we are gentle. Patience should rule our disagreements. Be patient. Paul says. Be careful about acting quickly. Be careful about that knee jerk, passionate emotional response. Be careful about the hot take.

Paul's telling us. If you look at Paul's letter to Timothy and elsewhere, where he describes what it means to be an elder in the church and what kind of credentials we ought to be looking for. Do you notice how he says, if you want to be a leader in the church, one thing you should be marked by is sober mindedness.

What is he saying? He's saying that if you want to lead the church, you want to lead the church. You should show that you are able to have patience in speech and in action. But why is patience a part of this manner of walking that is worthy of our call? What? Why include patience in here? And I think it is coming out of the earlier two attributes.

I think Paul is saying being humble means you are open to being wrong. Therefore you can be patient, you can wait, you can discuss, you can hear, you can grow because you're humble, you can be patient. But it's also true of gentleness because you are gentle, you know. Right? You know that mercy was shown. You when you didn't deserve it.

Because you are gentle. You can also show mercy to others. You can be patient. Let them give them time to come around to understanding. Give them time to grow. I tell you in my own relationships how often in a disagreement when I feel like if I need to, you just show them the right way. I need to help them understand and then you stop and you give it to the Lord, and you pray about it, and you watch the Lord just go to work and you see a person grow.

Or maybe you grow. You see, it's a gospel virtue to be patient. Lastly, I would say, because we know that our God reigns and that he ordains whatsoever comes to pass and that we know that he is a just a judge and he is a judge who will judge, and that all sin will be judged at one point, either on the cross or in the final judgment, all sin will be accounted for.

I now know that it is not left up to me to bring God's justice all over the world, because God is a just judge. We can see. We can sit back, we can be patient. Doesn't mean to be passive, but we can be patient. So for those who are walking in a manner that is worthy of their effectual calling, they should walk with these gospel characteristics marked by humility and gentleness and patience.

But unto what we might say. Paul. Okay, so this is the way that I ought to act. Why? What are my goals? And notice he gives us two goals, says bear one another up in love. Let's go one. And then secondly, he says, and be united, right? United in Christ, be one people in Christ. So let's just briefly look at what it means to love.

And if you ask the question, what does it mean? How do I know if I'm loving? Well, I think you can actually take the earlier part of this verse, and it would explain to you pretty easily what it means to love. Well, what does it mean to love? It means are you being humble with each other? Are you being gentle?

How about patient? Are you being patient? You see, remember, gospel love, as we talked about last week, is different than the kind of love that we hear about in the world around us, where love is kind of an emotion that comes and goes, but I'm just a passive recipient of love. I can fall into love. I can fall out of love.

But love is something that happens to me. Notice in the gospel, that's not what love is. Love is an act that you are called to, and you're not just called to do it, you're called to cultivate it, to nurture it, to be disciplined so that you grow in love and a great way of testing. How am I doing in love?

A great thermometer is to say, am I being humble? Am I being gentle, and am I being patient? How am I treating those who are in need of love? Am I walking alongside those who are grieving as people are seeing the darkness in the world around us? Am I am I helping them? Am I showing them to Jesus?

Am I ignoring them? One of the greatest ways that we can love is to actually listen. This isn't just in marriage. This is good marriage advice. Husbands and wives, this is good marriage advice. Listen. But it's not just in the marriage, it's in the church. It's when you're talking to people. Because so often when we're talking our fears and our our concerns and our cares come out, we say it in a subtle way, but if you listen, you can see where a person is in need.

Are you listening? Are you bearing up the week? Are you doing, as the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:12, where he's talking about suffering together, he says, what should we do as we suffer together? He says we should strengthen your feeble arms and strengthen your weakness. We should be looking for the brothers and sisters in our midst, and coming alongside them and taking them by the hand and lifting them up, sometimes physically, but more often spiritually, relationally, coming alongside them and helping them.

I remember I was at a church that I served in years ago in North Carolina, and I remember being in a community group and we were talking and just going through prayer requests. And one of the women in the group said, I just feel like I'm absent from God. I feel alienated from him. I read the word and it just feels like a book. And I pray to him and I feel like I'm just shouting into the void, and I just don't feel like he hears me and I don't feel like he's responding to me. She'd been going through this for a period of time, and I remember at the very end, another woman in the group spoke up, and what she said, I thought was brilliantly wise and deeply biblical. She said, is it possible that sitting here with us tonight and telling us what you're struggling with and letting us put our arms around you and pray for you and come alongside you and help you, is it possible that that is how the Lord is being present with you today? That is deeply biblical. I just want you to know that that is deeply Pauline.

Paul would say, how is the spirit active in your life? Yes, it happens, kind of, you know, mystically in your own meditation on the word. And there's a kind of direct way in which the spirit is active in our lives. But Paul would say just as easily that the spirit is active in your life. When you are surrounded by believers who are loving you and bearing you up, that is the work of spirit.

The spirit to draw you to Christ and to strengthen you for the journey. So you see, love is crucial when we experience Christ's love, when we meditate on him and we feel his love, when we hear his words, and when we care for one another, we feel God's love. If you feel like I'm not really sure what it means to feel the love of God, let me.

Let me encourage you in something. Pray for it first of all. And then secondly, go out around Brier Wood and find out where you can help bear up one another. You might just find that it's through that experience that you start to understand and experience the love of God for you. But notice, love is just go one go.

We still have a second goal. Paul talks about. It is very important. It's our unity. We're called to be unified in Christ. And notice he uses the rest of the passage to unpack this sidebar about how we are to be unified. So I just want to look at this in brief. But notice what he says in verses four, five and six.

He says, we are called as a church to show unity, working out our calling in the life of the church around us. And we're meant to see unity. Why? Because we have these shared experiences. And notice what he lists here. He lists seven things. These are our shared experiences of the truths that we all share. One body, one spirit.

Just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. And these are the things that Paul says we all have shared together. And that's why we can be unified as one body of Christ. But do you notice that the things that he draws out, the absolutes that he draws out and points us to, which are so important, the ones that he draws out are all related to our salvation, our shared experience of our salvation.

The things that he's already been talking about in the letter, it talks about one body that's getting at our shared union with Christ, he says, are one spirit. That means we, the spirit is the agent of our shared experience. We've all been made regenerate. We've all been born again in the spirit. We have one hope. That's our shared destiny that we just talked about in first Corinthians 15.

Our resurrection bodies. We have one Lord. And I would argue that where he says, one Lord, he's talking about a shared source of salvation. He's not just talking about God. We have one God. He's saying one Lord. That term Lord kurios, is the term that's used in the Old Testament to talk about God as our covenant God versus Elohim, or us in Greek, which is used to talk about God as a transcendent God.

Here he says one Lord, in other words, one Savior, Jesus Christ. Then what does he say? One faith, the shared instrument by which we are saved. Notice, by the way, he didn't say one faith in works. It says one faith. This is something all Christians have in common. You're saved only by faith. One baptism notice, one shared sign and seal of the covenant.

As we just saw this morning. And then finally, in terms of our shared object of worship, one God and Father. You see, for Paul, it is the unity of the Trinity in our salvation that provides the foundation for our unity as a church. Does that make sense? I want to just make sure we're

getting his whole lot logic, the unity of the Trinity, the Triune God, father, Son and Spirit in our salvation to bring about our salvation.

Here's what unifies us as a church. No member of the church is saved in any other way than the way that Paul just laid out. You must be regenerate. You must be called by faith. You must be baptized. You must be a part of this covenant community that is the one formed by the Triune God. You see that throughout the Bible we see these calls for unity.

We might even start to get the impression after reading the Old Testament, where Israel is called over and over to be one, to be unified, not to be two kingdoms, north, north and south, but to be one united monarchy over the church is called over and over again to be one. As Jesus prays for us in John 17, just as you and I, father, are one, let them also be one, I in them, and they in us.

We might start to get the impression that the church has a difficult time with unity. One way it's reminded of a joke I heard about a man who washes up on a desert island, and he's happy to find that there's one other person there, a man who had crashed there long before, and he meets the man. The man comes down. He's so excited, and he pulls away. He says, I'm so glad you're here. Let me show you. I've been here for a long time. There's great materials. I've built this whole town. I've built this whole village over here. Come on over. Let me show you what I've made. And so he takes him to the village. And the guy who's been there for a long time says, look, this is my house and he shows him a house. It's quite impressive. It's a well-built house. Bamboo with palm fronds all over. And he says, now let's walk over here across the street, and it's just across the little dirt pathway there. And he takes him across and there's another bigger building on the other side. He says, this is my church. This is where I worship the Lord every Sunday. I worship the Lord, and it's a faithful church he says. The new guy who just wrecked there looks right, because this is really incredible. But then he looks down in the distance and he sees there's another building far away. And he says to the man, well, can you tell me what's that building over there? And the man says, oh, that's the church I used to go to.

See, there's a tendency, isn't there? We're going to read a passage by Paul. Just a second. He says this. This is kind of what it means to be human. We have a tendency towards division, and I think there are all kinds of obstacles to unity in the church. But ultimately, I think they do come down to confusion about what is an absolute versus what is a conviction versus what is a preference.

So just bear with me for a moment and let me just kind of lay out what I mean by that. We have absolutes. These are the core teachings of Scripture. These are the things that are the subtle truths, the clear things, the things that we say. You know, if you're a reasonable Christian, you must recognize that these things are true.

There's one God. Jesus is his son. You're saved by faith alone. Scriptures are inerrant, right? We would say these are core foundational absolutes, but then we also have convictions. Now, convictions are not less important, but we can put it this way. There are things about which Scripture is less clear, things that we can say, you know, reasonable Christians can disagree and we can argue about it and have lively debate all day long.

It's great to do that. I welcome it. And yeah, we recognize that if you disagree with me, it doesn't mean that you're not a Christian. You can talk about church, government, administration of baptisms for children or for adults, the continuing gifts of the spirit, things that we would say these are important, but they don't decide whether or not you're a believer.

And then lastly, we have preferences. Preferences are things that really believe the Bible doesn't speak about. Or if it does, it's kind of in the distance, and you have to do a logical argument to get to where your preferences for these might have to do with what kind of clothes do we wear on Sunday morning? What kind of worship do we do?

Worship is a big one, right? What kind of worship do we do? Do we have instruments in worship? Do you know that historically in the church this has been a thing? Do you have drums in worship? Maybe you have other instruments, but do you have drums in worship? This is a thing. If you haven't heard that before. This is the things that rise in the church.

And yet it's really hard to go back to the Scripture and argue out of the Scripture an absolute finding on those. These are more preferences. Sadly, it's the preferences that often are the cause of most church disagreements. It's not convictions, it's not absolutes.

Some convictions we might even agree upon as ways that we form our gatherings together on Sunday morning. What I mean by that is this we have denominations, and those denominations are actually built around these convictions. They're important, but we also don't believe that they're the kind of things that keep you out of the kingdom. As a matter of fact, there's kind of an irony to this, because I know a lot of times we point as Protestants to all of our denominations as a sign of our divided ness.

And yet, I would argue there's a sense that as Protestants, with our with our honesty about our denominational differences, are actually creating the grounds by which we can have better unity. As a Presbyterian, I can be friends with my Baptist neighbor. I just met with a bunch of Baptist pastors last week down in the city. And we can be great friends.

We can pray together. We can clap each other on the back and shake hands and share ministry resources, because we know that we're not going to have to fight about how we handle that. Sign and seal of the Covenant. On Sunday morning. Sudan's nominations can actually give us opportunity for more unity. But what Paul is driving home here and in many places throughout

his writings, is that the followers of Jesus Christ are called to be united around the Triune Lord of their salvation.

These are the absolute truths that are unchanging and undeniably taught in Scripture. As a result, I would like to just make a brief comment about the use of terms like Reformed or Calvinist that you'll even hear in this church. You've heard me say them before, and I just want to be clear about what I mean when I'm using them.

Briarwood is a church for followers of Jesus Christ. You do not have to be reformed to come and worship here or to be a member here. We but we do want you to understand what being reformed means. When I use those labels, I'm using them as kind of a shorthand, because I can't always explain all of the different solos...In Christ alone, through grace alone, by faith alone, Scripture alone for the glory of God alone. I can't explain all of those every single time. So sometimes we'll put a short hand on and say, reform or Calvinist or something along those lines. But I want to be absolutely clear. We are a church that is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

When we do this baptism. That's not a brier wood baptism. That's not a PCA baptism, that's our denomination. If you don't know, that is a Christian baptism. That is because Christ has ordained this for us. And this is important to be said because we never want to give people the impression that you have to be from a particular tradition to be a part of this church.

We welcome those who are followers of Jesus Christ. This is his church. It's his baptism. It's his Lord's Supper. This is his word. I love how Paul tackles it with the Corinthian church. He's dealing with exactly this problem. And here's a church that was struggling with division. Some were saying, I follow this apostle and others were saying, no, I follow this apostle.

Another said, no, I follow this apostle. And Paul comes to them and he says this. This is first Corinthians chapter three, verses four through nine. And I just want to read this, and then we'll close. He says, for when one says, I will follow Paul and another I will follow Apollos, which is another apostle. Are you not being merely human?

I think he's actually kind of these chipping away at them a little bit. He's saying, you're just acting like humans, not acting like Christians, acting like humans. What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through which? Whom? To whom you have believed? As the Lord assigned to each of them I planted, Apollos watered. But God gave the growth.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth, he who plants, and he who waters are one. And each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You, however, are God's field and God's building. Whenever we are tempted, actually put it this way, whenever we are reminded of the faithful ministers and voices who have drawn us back to Christ, which the proper and right response is to say, thank you, Lord, praise God.

Whether it's Augustine or Martin Luther or John Calvin, whether it's Frank Barker or Harry Reeder, it's only been eight months. I don't think anyone saying that about Scott read right now. But what do we do when we're reminded of those ministers? The right and proper response, the response that they would want us to have is this Glorify Christ, point to Christ.

That's our proper response. As sinners who are saved by grace, let's magnify together Christ and Him alone. If we do this by faith, we can truly respond to Paul's urging that we walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, we do lift up to you the reading of your Word. I pray, Lord, that you would bless us as we consider these things. Strengthen us in the spirit, that we might be rooted in love, dear Lord, that we might, in humility and gentleness and in patience, seek you and find you, because we seek you with all of our hearts. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.