**Keeping It Together**

**Ephesians 4:1-3 (ESV)**

January 9, 2022

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You just heard it testified that Jesus is a great Savior. I hope you heard that message, because I heard it. What an amazing Savior we have! We’re going to continue following Him together. We’re going to listen to His Word together in the book of Ephesians. The Apostle Paul writes this to a church of early followers of Jesus. We’ll be in Ephesians chapter 4. We’ll read God’s Word together and consider what He would have to say to us.

We’re starting this year off with a series called *Back to the Basics*. I had the joy of being able to do some sports early on in life. I did some basketball and every time I played with better and better players, I always remembered and was kind of drawn in to think, “I wish I knew the basics better. I wish I had a better grasp of the fundamentals.” The more skilled players were, the more they really had a grasp of just the simple basics. In the Christian life, you go through life and you realize it really does boil down to very simple things and we need a strong grasp of those. So we’re starting the year off with the basics.

Last week, we talked about worship and the calling that we have, an altar that is not a physical place now in Jerusalem. We have access to the Father altogether. Praise the Lord for the way that God has made a way through Jesus and we can worship Him! But we turn now and think not only just of that vertical worship, but now fellowship with each other. What does that love do here in real life, amongst each other? That’s where we’ll turn today. Let’s look at Ephesians chapter 4. Let’s look at verses 1-6. We’ll focus on the first three in the message, but we’ll read verses 1-6.

***1*** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,* ***2*** *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,* ***3*** *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ***4*** *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—****5*** *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ***6*** *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Here’s the headline of an article in the New York Times almost 100 years ago. “Church Fight Brings Troops To Nip Riot. Arkansas Governor Acts After Partisan Attacks Jonesboro Mayor and Police Chief. Evangelist Is In Clash. He Led Group to Protest Arrests After Followers Fought Those of Pastor. Mayor Permits Prayer. Tear Gas Bombs Are Sent. Church Fight Leads To Use of Troops”

It’s a sad story of a church in serious turmoil. There was such division amongst the people that at one point there were actually two services in the building at the same time. There were two preachers and choirs yelling and trying to yell over each other simultaneously. It got so serious that the governor ended up sending in state troops. A conflict like that is radically out of place amongst a people claiming to be followers of Jesus, defined by Christian love. That example may be extreme, headlines though about grievous church conflicts, testimonies of malicious church splits, trauma from even some of our own religious backgrounds are proof that disunity and division are a very real danger to any Christian fellowship.

Sin separates. It always separates. It takes the good things that God makes and it tries to break them. Churches are no exception. Many Christians have some kind of story about what they’ve gone through and the conflict that they have experienced even within a church family. There are disagreements about decisions, arguments over positions, dispute over finances, controversies over how to deal with sin and sinners, quarrels over doctrine, immorality, whether it’s abuse or deceit or gossip or slander or bitterness or resentment or grudges. We know that’s not the way it’s supposed to be. God’s design for the church is to reflect His love. The picture of the church is this group of people united as one. It is people following Jesus together. It’s a family. The church is a body. The body of Christ is meant to be in unity to follow the head, who is Jesus.

Churches will always face spiritual opposition because churches don’t live in some ideal world. They live in the real world. It’s a real world made up of real sinners, and sin does separate. Now, because of this, biblical maturity would cause us to recognize that division is a very real and present danger. Jesus warned that the enemy has sown tares among the wheat. We live in this real world and God doesn’t immediately rip out all of the tares that have been sown. No, to do so would hurt those that belong to Him. There is an endurance during this season and he recognizes, there is an acknowledgment that there are going to be challenges to togetherness, to fellowship, to unity. Paul dealt with the church in Corinth that was so filled with factions and mistreatment of each other that he had to say, “Actually, when you guys are coming together, it’s not for the better. It’s for the worse.” He says

**1 Corinthians 11:18** For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

When you come together, it shows how separate you are. But he acknowledges that it’s not to no purpose. He says

**1 Corinthians 11:18-19** …And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

This is going to reveal those who truly have been transformed by Christ’s love and who are followers of Jesus. Elsewhere, in Acts chapter 20, Paul warned the very elders of the church of this letter, the elders at Ephesus and said,

**Acts 20:28–30** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

He knows there are going to be threats. That’s how it will work. Neither Jesus nor his followers were naive enough to suspect the church would be shielded from real threats. No, they will be there, including and even especially in this church at Ephesus.

This is a church body that is filled with diversity and it is stained, if you read it, with a dark background of sin. It is threatened by intense spiritual warfare. Now this is partly because of their diverse background as an assembly of two vastly different cultures; Jews and Gentiles. The reasons for conflict and disunity would abound. So Paul sends them a letter. In his zeal, you see his passion for unity, for togetherness. It’s one of the key reasons Paul writes this letter. He loves the church. He wants them to love each other. So here this letter arrives from a prisoner in Rome.

Paul is in prison. They knew him well. He had been there for years, teaching day by day. This Paul was a former Pharisee. He was this religious zealot who once supported the imprisonment and execution of people who followed Jesus and taught that non-Jews could share in God’s love through Him. He was against those kinds of people. But now, he has been a convert and a teacher of that same message of Jesus himself, and it has gotten him imprisoned. This man who had invested years of his life with them in this pagan city of Ephesus, he writes them a letter. He is passionate about love, the love of God and love for one another as an essential aspect of what it means to follow Jesus.

He knows, like we talked about last week, that the vertical worship that we have of God through Jesus is directly connected to our horizontal fellowship with one another. Bringing groups together into a common faith and family is exactly what the Gospel message has the power to do and the purpose to accomplish. It’s exactly how the Gospel message had transformed him. The very reason he was suffering was for this message that we can actually join together, transcending some of the things that would seem to separate us, bringing all kinds of people together because of Jesus. Paul knew in spite of their present diversity, past sins, and future battles, that this Gospel had brought them such blessing that their wealth was immeasurable. This church was dearly loved by God and Paul wants them to never forget it. He emphasizes the love so intensely because he knows what is at stake. In fact, later on, when Jesus speaks to this church in Revelation chapter 2, we realize that this issue of love is paramount. Paul is on target, here. Love is key.

This church is not so unlike ours. It’s a church committed to sound doctrine, to good teaching. It’s a church fighting to honor God’s truth in a world of lies. But as recorded in Scripture for many churches, including ours, this is a church that needs to remember there is a danger of losing sight of one of the most simple, basic things: love. If we are to be a people following Jesus together, we cannot lose our grip on that word “together;” the fellowship, the unity that we have. How does togetherness, how does biblical community last in a world where sin separates? How do we keep it together? The brokenness is all around. It happens amongst us. How do we keep it together? Is it possible? Paul says, “Absolutely!” Love and fellowship is absolutely possible.

Actually, lasting togetherness of true followers of Christ is a guarantee. We’re called into it and the key is that we have to keep hold of this essential basic of love. The love is the love of Christ. That’s how togetherness lasts. The love of Christ is what makes togetherness. It makes biblical community. What makes fellowship possible is the love of Jesus. It is possible, but what does it look like in action? We hear that. We think about that. We sign the doctrinal statement. We read it, but what does it look like in real life? What kind of commitments might we find in a church family that is following Jesus together? Truly together, where Christ’s love is present and their togetherness is lasting. What kind of commitments might they share? Let’s look at three this morning. First, is a commitment to

**Honor Christ’s Love (4:1)**

We commit to honor His love together. The kind of love that Jesus has shown is worthy of honor. In fact, it compels a response. It compels us to respond in honor. To honor is to respect, to esteem, to cherish and treasure something. It’s to appreciate how significant and meaningful it is. That’s what we’re to do with Christ’s love. We’re to cherish it. We sing about it. We read about it. We talk about it. We contemplate it. We pray over it. We think about how precious is the love that we have received in Christ. We are deeply impacted by it in a personal meaningful way because that’s what it is. It is personal and meaningful. It’s the most personal and meaningful display of love ever shown. It’s worthy of any kind of honor that we could give and it brings us together in a way that transcends normal differences.

Back in 2006, there was a U.S. army soldier, Ross McGinnis. He was with a couple other soldiers seeking to defend national security. They’re going and this grenade appears. In a split second decision, instead of diving for cover to protect himself, he chooses to press himself onto the grenade and smothers it with his body. It goes off and he is killed. But with his sacrifice, he was able to save the lives of four of his other fellow soldiers. These surviving soldiers, when they speak about the sacrifice he made, they do it with sobriety and with a profound appreciation of the way that his act impacted their lives. One would say, “Anytime I have something good in my life, a family gathering or anything, I think about his family and how his family doesn’t have that anymore, and how he could have had that. It hurts.” They have a profound respect and appreciation. In fact, many others gathered after his death to have him be awarded the Medal of Honor. It’s a sacrificial act of love that compels a response. A sacrifice was made.

It can be a powerfully unifying factor when a sacrifice is made. When a group becomes a common beneficiary of that kind of generous and costly love, they unite and honor in a way that transcends normal disagreements. To divide over trivial matters in the face of such love and sacrifice is to dishonor the generosity that had been bestowed. You can’t receive a gift of such magnitude and then fail to be moved out of honor for what had been given. It’s a kind of love that we see is sacrificial love, but it is exponentially so in Christ.

You can see this call to honor that is issued in verse 1. Paul has been talking about Christ’s love in this whole first half of the book. Here’s what he says.

***1*** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,*

Do you feel that sense of urging to honor this calling? To honor this love that has been shown? We’re supposed to be inspired by what it is that makes Christ’s love so compelling, so worthy. There are a few reasons I can draw out here for what makes His love so compelling. The first has to do with what His love has achieved. We honor it because of what He has done.

Look at your undeserved calling. Paul highlights your undeserved calling. Here, we’re looking back at the first half of the book, summarizing three chapters. But this is the calling that you have received. This is where unity begins. He speaks to the Ephesians and then we also about this calling that none of us deserved. It is an undeserved calling. It’s a calling that wouldn’t have even been imaginable without the love of Christ making it possible. It’s a calling that is shockingly undeserved.

In the first couple chapters, Paul highlights the audacity of this calling that we have received. That’s what has Paul so worked up. This is outrageous that God would do this! He describes it and unpacks it for us in terms of looking at who we were and what God has done and why. He talks about who we were. Chapter 2 is where he hits it the strongest. Listen to who you were. This is who everyone is outside of Jesus, not just the Ephesians, but us. This is who we are outside of Jesus. You can see how dire our hopelessness is before Christ.

**Ephesians 2:1-4** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

We had no spiritual life. We were condemned and destined for wrath. We were headed for spiritual disaster. We were detested, alienated, cut off from any solution. In fact, you were doomed. You were without hope and helpless to escape your fate. We were distanced far off and completely separated from God’s people and favor. That’s who we once were. We were in this hopeless situation, undeserving of love of any kind.

What brings us together begins with this shared understanding of who we are outside of Christ. No, we don’t deserve anything and certainly not the love of Christ. We were sinners who rejected God. We wanted to do things our own way. This is the story of Scripture, the story of life. This is who we are outside of Jesus. We don’t deserve any kind of calling. We’re helpless and hopeless. He says that is what makes so shocking what God has done. He describes sinners in desperate need of saving. This is who we were outside of Christ. But that hopelessness only serves as the dramatic backdrop for the extravagance of God’s grace. Our hopelessness is contrasted with God’s graciousness.

Grace means God’s favor, His kindness that is undeserved. It’s a gift. You don’t deserve it, but it’s given. God’s love is given to a people who don’t deserve it. It’s a free gift that is a total surprise. You can see Paul describe our need for God’s love and he says the people who were hopeless and outside of Christ, through Christ, this is what God has done.

**Ephesians 2:4-6** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—…and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

We who were once condemned and destined for wrath, detested and alienated, doomed without hope, He saved us. We were distanced and far off and He brought us near.

The essence of this message that he describes here is what moved Paul to write this letter and open with the passion that he does. If you look back at chapter 1, you see this guy and he is so excited that it’s hard to follow him. It’s like what has this guy so excited? He can’t even finish a sentence. He’s like, do you even understand what has happened? Can you appreciate who you were and what God has done? He can hardly contain himself. When you look back at chapter 1 and you start to unpack it he says

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

You might say “What? I don’t feel blessed.” Paul says He has blessed us spiritually. How much spiritually? He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. How did He do that? He did it in Christ. When did we get in Christ?

**Ephesians 1:4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,

Okay. What exactly was decided there?

**Ephesians 1:5** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ,

Well, how did He do all that? He shed His blood. What did His blood do?

**Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses

I’m forgiven? Really? How much? Like, of what I’ve done recently? How much have I been forgiven? To what extent is this forgiveness?

**Ephesians 1:7-8** …according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us,

How do you know all that? Because He has shown it to us.

**Ephesians 1:9-10** making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set for in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time.

There is a plan for more than forgiveness? Yes.

**Ephesians 1:11** In him also we have obtained an inheritance,

He has brought you into this great position. How did He do all this? What is it that caused this?

**Ephesians 1:13-14** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Paul is so excited about what is happening! You were hopeless and you received grace. This is where you were. Have you seen what God has done? This is what Paul describes elsewhere in Romans chapter 8. Yes, life is hard. He understands this is tough. Paul is in prison. He gets that. He knows suffering, but he says this truth that you believe is so amazing. Listen to what we know.

**Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

He describes that you can’t escape this.

**Romans 8:29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God is bringing this about.

**Romans 8:30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

It’s so sure it’s as if it has happened. This is where you’re going. You’ve gotten on this train and this is the destination.

**Romans 8:31-32** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Paul is excited and if you really get who you are outside of Christ and what God has done in Christ, you can’t help but be, too. This is the undeserved calling we share. It brings us together in a way that transcends any normal limitation. When you grasp that, it doesn’t matter. Different generations? No factor. Different ethnic backgrounds? No factor. Different nationalities? No factor. Different economics? Different health statuses, life stages, culture, languages? No factor. If you’ve had the privilege to go around the world and spend time in other countries around other languages and other cultures and you experienced the common bond you have in Christ, no factor. We are together. That is a unified love. Nothing brings people together like this message, this calling that is undeserved. It is summarized in the word “gospel,” which means good news. It is good news that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, died in our place. He bore our sins and suffered the wrath of God so that we could enjoy the life of God in Him.

Paul knows that the key to their ability to honor this love is understanding it. It is understanding it in more and more complete ways. It’s not moving beyond it, but diving deeper into it. That’s why in chapter 3 he says

**Ephesians 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

This is what I’m praying for. Do you guys want to know what I’m praying for? I’m sitting here in prison and I’m getting on my knees and I’m praying for you. Here’s what I’m praying. I’m praying

**Ephesians 3:17-18** …that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength

Strength to what? Strength to keep going to church? Strength to read your Bible more? I’m praying that you would have strength

**Ephesians 3:18-19** …to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I’m praying. I know that your mind and your faith and trust in God and believing the goodness of God is limited. I’m praying that you would trust God and believe He is that good. He is that loving. It’s a love that is showcased when we remember who we once were, what God has done in Christ, and why He did this, so that we could see who He is. He is amazing! Paul wants you to go, “God is awesome!” God is gracious. He is loving. There is no one like Him. He is holy, holy, holy. There is no one like God and you’ve been called to see that and share that with others. There is no greater calling. That is the great call.

The question is, have you heard that call? Have you believed that call? The question is not, do you deserve that call? None of us do. We don’t deserve it. But here is the hope that has been offered. Do you hear the whisper of God that would say, “I am powerful enough, strong enough, merciful enough and gracious enough to save someone like you”? That is shocking! That’s the audacity of God’s calling.

If you knew me better, you would think, how could God save someone like that? You can almost imagine God in heaven speaking to the angels, looking down and saying, “Do you want to see me really do something? Do you see that guy, Josh Beakley? I’m going to save him.” They’re like, “No way!” He’s like, “I can do it.” It’s shocking that someone like me would be able to come and say I think God is gracious enough to fulfill His promise through Christ and to forgive someone like me. Have you embraced the beauty, the wonder of that calling? There is nothing more basic than that. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. God is awesome and that’s the audacity of our undeserved calling. It’s spoken by Paul and you see there the credibility of Paul’s sobering example. I’ll just touch on it there in verse 1. Paul says

***1*** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you*

You can see the rawness of the situation. He is a prisoner because of following Jesus. It’s because of this message of the love of Jesus that he is in prison. He’s speaking and he leverages his credibility and makes an appeal to them. He says, “I’m urging you. You hear me from prison writing you.” This is intense credibility. Look what this love has cost. Paul says it’s totally worth it! That’s the credibility that Paul speaks with.

So the audacity of our call is that it’s undeserved. There is the credibility of this example in Paul. It builds us towards what I’ll call our rightful duty. Because of what Christ’s love has achieved, what God has done, here is what it deserves. This is the gravity of our duty. We need to respect the audacity of this call and the credibility of the example in Paul and others and then the gravity of this duty. He says in verse 1 that we’re to

*walk in a manner worthy of the calling*

What Christ has achieved impresses upon us what His love deserves. If we understand how audacious and how shocking it would be that God would call us, then we can’t help but respect the gravity and we feel the weight and the seriousness of our rightful duty before Him to walk worthy.

The simple description he uses for how we live out this duty is that word picture of a walk. It’s an analogy that he is continuing from earlier in the letter. It’s how you just do everyday life, all of who you are. It’s just encompassing how you live. It’s a simple picture. Paul describes in Ephesians 2 that this is how you enter the world. This is what you do. You live and you walk in sin. You walk guilty. That’s how you lived before. You did what you wanted without regard for God’s call and His law. But in chapter 2 he also describes that you’ve been now rescued and changed. You’re being transformed. He has forgiven you and now is transforming you. He has set before you a new path. He has given you life and now you’re to walk differently. You have a new path to walk, to walk rightly in a way that is worthy. In chapters 4 and 5 he describes what that looks like in action. He describes all of the ways that we are to walk in unity, in purity, in love, in the light, in wisdom and then stand in prayer.

He gives this picture. Everything you do, all-encompassing, how you’re supposed to live day in and day out, every part of your life, the most basic and everywhere else, you walk in a way that is worthy. That’s the expectation that is given. Walk worthy of this great calling. It’s intimidating that this grace is so extravagant. It’s calling us to live it out, to walk it out with the utmost honor in a way that is worthy, that is suitable, that is appropriate, that is becoming of being in a part of God’s household as a citizen of His kingdom.

Early on, when I was younger, we hadn’t gone to church. I think we went a couple of times around the Christmas season. I remember my mom laying out these clothes. I put them on and I was like, what is this? It’s choking me! What is this, mom? She said, “That’s called a turtleneck.” A turtleneck? What? This is the worst! Then she’s like, “You need this.” What’s this? “It’s a belt.” What? I have to put on a belt? What is all this about? She’s like, “We’re going to church. You have to dress up.” Whoa! Okay. We’re going somewhere different and this is what we do. I act different because we’re going to church. Sometimes it was like that. There would be certain occasions or events or restaurants and we have to be different, now. This is a different setting. It’s not appropriate to do what I normally do. I have to wear a turtleneck. (Laughter!)

But when you understand actually walking worthy, going to church is not about dressing a certain way as if it’s only being in this building. When you think about the true message and truly following Jesus, the walk is not just in a building wearing certain clothes or an occasion at Christmas. He’s saying all of life is to be worthy. It’s not really about just wearing one thing or the other. Everything you do is to be worthy, to be in honor of Christ. That same understanding of the weight of what God is calling you into, that is in every sphere of life. That’s a high calling. That’s something serious. That’s what Paul wants them to understand. If you know the love of Christ, you will honor it by walking in this rightful duty. You will understand what God has done and it’s going to change the way that you live. In fact, I want you to know what God is calling you into, not just in a church building or some kind of dress code. In fact, the dress code that God gives in Colossians 3 is a dress code of the inner heart.

**Colossians 3:12** Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

This is actually the dress code everywhere, for all of life. He wants you to understand. Here is his prayer in Colossians chapter 1.

**Colossians 1:9–10** And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,

In 2 Thessalonians Paul says

**2 Thessalonians 1:11** To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

He’s saying, “I’m praying for you to be able to do that, to walk in a way that is worthy.” But we have to keep going back to the motivation for why we live out this duty. It goes back to that word at the very beginning of verse 1: “therefore.”

The motivation for why we do this is building upon the first half of the letter, all three chapters there. Those three chapters don’t have a lot of commands where it’s “here’s your duty and here’s what you do.” No, he talks in the first half of the letter about all the things that God has done. What did you do? You were dead! Here’s what God has done. That is the basis. That’s the motivation. It’s the gospel motivation for why we live out this duty. It’s because of how amazing God is! That’s the beginning, the therefore.

Practical is important. Application is important and we understand that when it comes to a sermon and teaching. Practical application is very important. But it is all built on a foundation of understanding who God is and what He has done. So the applications in Ephesians, he is going to start machine-gun firing all the applications. They’re going to start coming faster than you can write them down. Whoa! There are a lot of implications, here. Paul says, “I’m praying that you would understand those, but it all starts with you understanding Christ’s love.” Everything is really just a response of honor unto what Jesus has done.

So when you’re thinking about a good Sunday School lesson or teaching or a good sermon or a good church, if you’re a college student and you’re going to look for another church, yes, you want to find practical application. But there is a serious priority to saying I don’t just want to know what I should do this week in my life and practical advice. I want to go to a place that helps me know God. That will change my life more than any five tips I could ever find anywhere. If you know God, if you know Jesus and His love and you live in honor of that, it will transform your life inevitably. Then you’ll look and dig to find out what does that look like, and He will start to flesh it out. Now, we’re going to do that, but that motivation is critical. It’s a response to what God has done.

Now, if we honor Christ’s love, we understand, we cherish and believe Jesus has done that, what kind of commitment might that look like then for us as a church family? How does it look in real life? This kind of love now would look like a commitment to embody it.

**Embody Christ’s Love (4:2)**

Jesus’ love compels a response, and that response is one of embodying that love to one another. It’s embodied through a grace that we live out in the messiness of real community. This is where grace is put to the test. When we put flesh on it, when we try to live it out here in our actual church family, it’s real life. What does it look like? That’s what we see in verse 2. Walking worthy looks like living

***2*** *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,*

That’s Christ’s love in action. It’s what it looks like. It’s what is revealed to be genuine and it’s revealed in the heat of real life with real people. That’s where it’s authenticated.

There are some products that will be developed and they go into testing. They go into elevated temperature testing. They put it in and they’ll heat it up to like 1800 degrees Fahrenheit. The product is changing colors. It’s super heated to make sure this is quality, that it’s a good product, that it can go and it can do what it’s designed to do and it’s worthy of use. Embodying Christ’s love, the quality of our faith, the genuineness of His love at work in us is going to be tested in the heat of community with other sinners. This is where true Christian love is going to reveal itself. It will be in the heat. Have you felt the heat of circumstances in life of being in community with other sinners? Here’s what Christ’s love looks like. He mentions a few qualities.

First is humility. It is being selfless, putting others before yourself. Humility is the opposite of pride. It’s the opposite of selfish self-seeking or boasting. The world doesn’t often consider humility a virtue. They didn’t here in this day. This word is actually not highlighted outside of biblical literature as a virtue. It’s sort of something to be avoided. But here, Christ and the apostles are highlighting that humility is key. This is what Jesus’ love looks like. In fact, it’s the first quality listed.

It’s not just humility, but he says “all humility.” Oh, that word! All humility? Yes, you can be humble. You’re in a conversation and someone is like, “Could you have been more humble?” Well, yes, I could have been. “Okay, do that next time.” He says all humility. That’s what we’re to embody with one another. That’s the foundation here of our unity and togetherness. When we receive grace, we live it out. You see, unity and humility go together. That’s how Christ is manifest among us. Look at what Paul says to the church at Philippi.

**Philippians 2:1** So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love,

You get that love. You believe the Gospel. You believe the basics. If you have

**Philippians 2:1-5** …any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

This is the love lived out in humility. It’s that you look not to your interests, but also to the interests of others. Now, this is not a false humility. It’s not the false humility where you say, “I’m so bad. I’m no good.” We’re often still thinking about ourselves. The quote that was said that I have found helpful is that humility is not thinking less about yourself but thinking about yourself less. You’re thinking about others.

False humility is saying, “I’m so bad. I’m no good.” True humility says, “What do you need? Who needs to be served? What needs exist to be met? Who needs grace and love?” It’s looking to serve others. It’s where we’re downgrading our own preferences. We naturally enthrone our preferences. We naturally go, “Hey, do you know what I think? Do you know what I think about this situation? I heard you guys talking about such and such. I have some thoughts about that.” Humility downgrades our own preferences and says, “What are you facing? What’s going on with you? Are there ways that I can serve and help and love?” Extend grace.

How do we embody humility towards each other? It’s by downgrading what we want and what we’re demanding for ourselves, and then trying to emphasize our love and care for others and what they’re going through. There is so much that we can talk about with humility. Let’s jump to the second thought here. It is gentleness. Christ’s love is humble and it’s gentle. It says

***2*** *with all humility and gentleness,*

Christ’s love embodied is going to look like humility and gentleness. Gentleness is kindness. It’s the same word as meekness. So it’s not weakness. Meekness is power under control.

Moses was mentioned as a very meek man who had a lot of power. He had a lot of authority. But when he was wronged, in many of the circumstances, he was self-controlled. He was humble and meek. He turned to the Lord, but He didn’t retaliate. Now, he wasn’t perfect. There were times, or at least one specific occasion where he failed. Yet there is another man who is exceedingly meek, we’re given as example and understand Christ. There is no one more gentle, more meek. He is the one who was gentle or meek and lowly in heart, it says in Matthew 11:29. It doesn’t mean that He was never passionate. But it means that He was never passionate at the wrong times or about the wrong things. He was always passionate at the right time and about the right things. So here is Christ who yes, has power, but it is power under control. Specifically, meekness or gentleness is shown in relation to other believers and it’s highlighted when they are either being weak or in sin. Galatians chapter 6 tells us

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

That’s the spirit that should mark that kind of a conversation. Who do you want to talk to you when you are in trouble? Is there a person that you think about? Or do you hope no one ever talks to you? I think all of us recognize that there are some times where I need a little bit of help. I need to be reminded of what’s true and maybe corrected. Who is that person? Hopefully you want someone who is going to love you enough to actually step into that, but you do want someone who is gentle, don’t you?

Or when you think about the physician that is going to care for you, you want someone who yes, has the discernment, the skill, and they genuinely care for you, but you do want someone gentle.

The person who is like, “Hey, I think we need to talk.” When they’re like, “Hey, do you have time to talk?” if they’re gentle, you’re like, it will be okay. If we’re going to talk, we’re going to have that conversation, can you please try to be like Jesus? I think I can handle it if you’re going to be gentle like Jesus.

Paul says to live like that. You’re going to need to be faithful. You’re going to need to have those conversations, but be gentle. Show kindness, especially when you’re wronged. This is what Christ’s love looks like. Paul talks to a younger pastor and says

**2 Timothy 2:24–25** And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Do it with self-control. I don’t know if you have someone in your life that is an example of that. I praise God that I can think of an example in my dad. There were times where anyone in the family and I wronged him. He is so gentle and so patient in response. I don’t deserve that gentleness, but he gives it to me. He is so gracious. May we be a church family that embodies that kind of love with a humility and a gentleness.

That means that we have to really be careful of assumptions about people and about describing stories or people and saying, “So and so believes this or does this,” in ways that they wouldn’t even describe themselves as having believed or done. It means that we have to stay away from the gossip and slander that can happen whether it’s in a hallway, in a home, on a text or over internet. We have to be careful about words like always and never. We probably could ask a few more questions and leave a little bit more space to listen. Gentleness also looks like being truthful and not letting someone just keep going down a path and then suffering the consequences. No, I’m going to be bold and love you enough to be gentle to actually say what is true. There is a lot that we could flesh out, but let’s keep moving. Walk

***2*** *with all humility and gentleness, with patience,*

So we’re downgrading our own desires. We’re emphasizing the care and concern we have for others and what they’re experiencing, and we’ve suffered long with others’ differences. Patience is the ability to tolerate difficult situations and to suffer without getting angry or fighting back. It is being longsuffering. It’s where we’re restrained and patient even when we’re wronged.

There was no one more patient than Christ. You see God’s patience unveiled all through Scripture. Then Jesus, here He is. He has come and sinners are just sinning against Him. He is being wrongly testified and lied about and accused and condemned and then crucified. In patience, He is fulfilling the love of God. He uses self-restraint, not retaliating, entrusting Himself to God. His patience was tested.

Do you think that the Ephesians’ patience would be tested with each other? They were Jews and Gentiles in a pagan city with all kind of cultural differences, political differences, practical differences, convictions and stages of life and interpersonal and misunderstandings. With all the things, do you think they would have tests of patience? Talking about the heat, do you think we’ve experienced tests of our patience in the heat? Absolutely! If we want to embody Christ’s love, we need all humility, all gentleness. We need patience and it’s going to show itself through loving forbearance. We’re to bear with one another.

*bearing with one another in love,*

We sacrifice our rights and sometimes even waive our rights when we’re wronged, out of love and care. Before I touch too much more on this, I just want to say that in a few weeks we’re going to talk about how do you deal with the issue of sin when there is sin? Do we just ignore it all the time? No, there are actually some things that we need to do as a church family and we’ll talk about that. But here, he is emphasizing this idea of forbearance. It’s that we’re going to lovingly be gracious to other people when they don’t deserve it. You say, “They don’t deserve it. They don’t deserve love.” Exactly! Be gracious.

Isn’t that the kind of church family you want to be a part of? The kind where people bear with? Have you ever forgotten a text that someone sent you or an email? You circle back and you’re like, “I totally forgot.” Or have you even missed an appointment? You’re like, “Oh, I forgot.” Then you kind of hope someone is going to bear with you. But then someone does it to you and you kind of look back at that text. “They never texted me back. It’s been five days. (Laughter!) Maybe I’ll…” You know, I’m going to try to extend grace because I hope someone is extending grace to me. Let’s bear with.

There are different kinds of bands you could be a part of. We just had a funeral for my grandma. Someone got up and shared and they were talking about how she played the piano. She did a really good job playing the piano. She would add all these flourishes. There was a lady who came and said, “I sang and Jane would play the piano. Then I went to this other church and I realized Jane would always add these flourishes and cover up all my mistakes. I go to this other church and they don’t cover up the mistakes. It’s a lot harder and I sound a lot worse.”

You want to be in a church family where people are harmonizing and playing with each other. There’s a mistake or there’s an issue, but hey, we’re working together. We’re going to try to sound good together. We’re trying to glorify God together. We can bear with. We don’t want to be like the band members who say, “Whoa! It wasn’t me.” When you come into a church family where someone is like, “How is this church?” you’re like, “Well, the drummer is like this. Or that person is like this. Or this person serves like this.” Rather, be like, let’s glorify God together. Let’s bear with grace. You might say, “But that person doesn’t deserve it.” Exactly! That’s grace. Understand what you’ve received in Christ. Embody it out to each other.

What are people most likely to struggle with? We think about many things. People struggle with leadership, decisions, style of music or sermon, room set up or the service structure or traditions or how people are treating us or who gets together in what groups or how much time or money or energy is spent on a thing. Can these traits mark us? This is being tested. Think about this. Is this the kind of love you’ve seen on the news or in schools or in family gatherings? Think about 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

**1 Corinthians 13:4–7** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I pray that would be the kind of love that we embody here. Maybe you don’t find it anywhere else in the world, but that you would find it here. That’s the love of Christ. May we be the kind of church that would be very hard to offend, very hard to rile up against each other. May we be a church of love. This love, we honor it. We embody it. It’s tested in the messiness of real community. Then third,

**Uphold Christ’s Love (4:3)**

We uphold it because it doesn’t thrive on accident. It must be upheld. We seek to maintain it, to keep it. Paul says you live these out

***3*** *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

This fellowship, this unity, you need to uphold it.

When I was 16, I was able to receive this car. It was not brand new, but it seemed like it was brand new. Even though it was many years old, it was so well-maintained. I kind of took it for granted. Later on, I’m in the market for used cars and then you realize there can be a used car that is only a couple years old, but it is not well-maintained and it looks really old. There are people who do the effort to uphold, to upkeep, to maintain and you think, wow! This is beautiful!

We understand that unity is under attack all the time and we have to invest. We are either investing in building into a culture of togetherness, of unity, of love, or we are pushing against it. If we’re not investing in it, then we’re one step back from it. What kind of posture do we assume to uphold this love? Here are a few I’ll give you here at the very end. First is a posture of spiritual dependence. He says this is where unity comes from. It’s

*the unity of the Spirit*

It comes from the Holy Spirit. It’s not something that we manufacture. Oftentimes, human manufactured togetherness is a uniformity. It’s a pressure from the outside. But unity from the Spirit is something that comes from within. It’s produced by God. So we need a posture of spiritual dependence to say it’s not on us to try to force it upon other people. No, we pray and appeal for it and remember that God is the one who creates and produces and provides this peace and this unity. It’s exactly what He is doing and you can read about it there in chapter 4. You see what is going on and the oneness there.

Think about Jesus. He has His disciples and you think, how vulnerable is unity and togetherness? He’s sitting there. He’s about to go die and they have argued over who is more important. One of them is going to betray Him. Another one is about to deny Him. What does Jesus do? He takes a posture of spiritual dependence and He prays. He prays for oneness and He acknowledges this is actually Trinitarian love. “This is the oneness I had with you, Father.” Father, Son and Holy Spirit had enjoyed God as one and yet three. This is the love that He knows and He says, “I pray that they would be one with us.” He prays that this oneness would be something that they enjoy. That love is exactly what He understands is about to take place. In John chapter 13 He says

**John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

That kind of love is what is going to mark you, but it comes from God. We need dependence and second is personal diligence. Uphold it with a posture of diligence. Make it a priority. He says to be eager to maintain it.

***3*** *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit*

This is personal diligence that you put zeal towards and that you spare no effort to strive for this. He says in Romans 14

**Romans 14:19** So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

They were arguing about eating and drinking and he says that’s not what the kingdom of God is about.

**Romans 14:17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 14:19** So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

There are things that we can argue about. Don’t pursue those. Pursue what makes for peace. Be eager. Make every effort. Make it a priority. Then last, the posture would be one of relational peace. He says do this

*in the bond of peace.*

Uphold this in the atmosphere of peace. Champion what makes it thrive.

**Colossians 3:15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

Let peace rule. The peace of God comes from within. War on the outside is because of war on the inside. James 3:4, you can look at that. Peace rules. Like I said, we’re going to talk about the issue of sin in others and the challenge that that brings. But peace and purity, you don’t have to choose between the two. They go together. That’s described in Hebrews chapter 12 where the author says

**Hebrews 12:14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Peace and holiness.

**Hebrews 12:15** See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many are defiled;

They go together. You need both peace and holiness. True peace comes from a pure, holy love, an undivided love. James talks about that. Otherwise, it’s a fake kind of peace, a fake kind of wisdom. We’re going to talk in a few weeks about how do you do that together. But for our sake here, probably the simplest passage is Romans 12.

**Romans 12:18-19** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves,

**Romans 12:21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We uphold this love.

There’s a room of one hundred pianos. How do you get them all in tune with each other? You don’t start tuning them one to another or in different groups. You tune them all to the same tuning fork. Just one! They are in tune with each other automatically. There is no closer unity than one hundred worshipers with hearts all tuned to the love of Christ. You want to enjoy togetherness? You want to be together? Tune yourself to the love of Christ. Yield in submission to the control and influence of His Spirit. The different instruments and personalities that we all bring to the table, but the glorious song to the praise of God will come as we harmonize with this gospel message in love of Jesus.