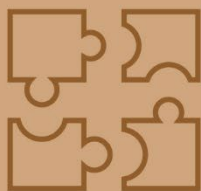




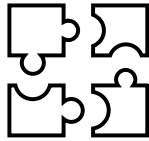
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

TEAMWORK
GOD'S WAY:
COLLABORATION
WITHOUT CHAOS



BRYAN SLOAN

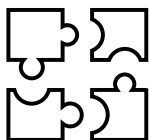
**TEAMWORK
GOD'S WAY:
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BRYAN SLOAN

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INTRODUCTION

“Teamwork makes the dreamwork” (John Maxwell). “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success” (Henry Ford). “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships” (Michael Jordan). “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together” (African Proverb). These and countless other teamwork quotes dominate the leadership landscape. Don’t get me wrong, there is probably much we can learn from these quotes and people. But is there a better source for guidelines on how we should function together as God’s people? I think there is.

When we are thinking about teamwork in the church God’s way, the obvious place to look is God’s Word. Whether you are collaborating as a church, a business, or at home, as Christians, we ought to let God’s Word be our guide and implement Biblical leadership principles. While scripture may not get into the specifics or the nitty-gritty of your team, it is sufficient for all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

So where should we look? Well, Ephesians 4 seems to be a great place to camp out. In this passage, Paul gives the church specific marching orders regarding their unity, maturity, and purity. Each of these characteristics is essential to the health of the church and thus worth considering when thinking about Christian teamwork. While they speak directly to the church at Ephesus and generally to all churches, the principles of spiritual leadership in ministry can be teased out and applied to teams of all sorts. So, whether you are a pastor or ministry leader in the church, a Christian businessman or woman in a secular business, a coach or teacher in a local high school, a parent of little kids in the home, or anywhere in between, I hope you see the importance of these essential qualities in the church and allow their benefits to trickle down into your specific area of teamwork.

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Think of it as your own metaphorical three-legged race. As a kid, one of my favorite activities at Field Day was the three-legged race. That's partly because I had no chance of winning a race on my own. However, with everyone equally handicapped by strapping our legs together, my team might have a chance to win. If we could simply collaborate as one, using our individual gifts to strengthen our team and keep getting better as we go, we just might win. However, if one of us tries to run out in front, dragging the other teammate behind and not listening or working together, chaos is sure to ensue.

The same is true in the church or your team. It's essentially a three-legged race with 10, 70, 250, or 600 people strapped together to run the race of life and faith together. Collaboration without chaos is a must for any church leadership teams. Without unity, maturity, and purity, you are not going to get very far or accomplish very much.

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1

UNITY

Unity is one of those ideals that everyone wants, but few are willing to work for. However, in the church, unity is first and foremost a gift from God, but one that we must work to maintain.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul tells the church to live as one because they are one in Christ.

Remember the Gospel

Paul begins Ephesians 4:1 with “therefore,” which looks back at Ephesians 1-3. Up to this point, Paul has been highlighting all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ and praying that we grow in our knowledge of what is ours in Christ. We are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed in Christ. We have been made alive in Christ by grace through faith for good works. We are one with God and one with one another in Christ. We are partakers of the unveiling mystery of Christ in the church. All these truths and more give us ample reason to praise him!

Interestingly, the only command in Ephesians 1-3 is “remember”. That’s because Paul knows that the only way we are going to live out the commands of Ephesians 4-6 is if we remember the truths of Ephesians 1-3. We won’t walk as one unless we remember we are one “in Christ.” We will not walk in a manner worthy of the calling (4:1) if we have not remembered what it means to be “in Christ.” Sadly, we are all vulnerable to gospel amnesia. We forget who Christ is and what he has done, and therefore, we forget who we are in Christ and how we ought to live. We need to remember that the gospel not only brings us near to God but also keeps us near to him. This is foundational to spiritual leadership development and the church mission.

Martin Luther said it this way: Christ is not only the way on which we must begin our journey, but He is also the right and safe way we must walk to

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the end. In that sense, we not only need the gospel vaccine, but we need gospel boosters throughout life. The gospel keeps attacking the sinful beliefs and tendencies we hide under the surface, those viruses of the soul that keep mutating and popping up over and over. Utilizing clear church communication helps keep these truths at the forefront of the congregation's mind.

How to Live as One

So, with that reminder in our minds, how should we live as one? How should we run this three-legged race of faith? Paul, a prisoner for the Lord, first urges us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. He is not only an apostle but also a Roman prisoner, bound in chains for the name of Jesus, and he thinks it's worth it!

Instead of losing heart because of his suffering (3:13), he wants the Ephesian church to also walk in a manner worthy of the calling. If Paul thinks his calling is worthy to suffer imprisonment, then surely the Ephesians ought to think that their calling is worth walking together in freedom. His bonds and chains in prison are not to be compared to the bond of peace we now have with God in Christ and with one another in the church. This mindset is crucial for developing leaders within the church who can endure hardship.

Walking worthy is not an indication that we earn our calling in Christ. Instead, this calling has been given to us, so we ought to live like it. We ought to live up to the calling, name, and identity we have received (Eph. 1:3-4). We are "in Christ," so we ought to walk like Christ (Col. 1:10, also Phil. 1:27 or 1 Thess. 2:12). Effective church organization and structure should support this walk by providing a framework for growth.

So what does walking in a manner worthy of the calling look like? Well, Paul will tease this out in a hundred different ways in the next three chapters. For now, he says, walking worthy requires humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance.

Humility and gentleness are two essential characteristics we need in a three-legged race. We often want others to treat us with these two characteristics, but rarely want to display them ourselves. Instead, we are

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often prideful and harsh, which makes us look more like the world. Not only that, but this behavior is not worthy of our calling and destroys the unity we have in the church. Church conflict resolution becomes much simpler when these traits are present. Humility is the fruit of rightly identifying ourselves as sinners while also understanding our new identity in Christ. Gentleness is our strength in Christ under the control of the Spirit. These are also the two characteristics that Jesus used to describe himself, gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:28–30). These Scriptures on church leadership point us toward a servant's heart.

So if we are “in Christ” and have enjoyed his humility and gentleness towards us, we ought to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, knowing it will maintain our unity with him and one another.

Walking worthy also requires patience and forbearance. These two words highlight that saving faith is persevering faith. Walking in a manner worthy of our calling is not a three-legged 100-meter dash, but a three-legged lifelong ultramarathon. We need patience and forbearance to fight our own sin and flesh along the way. We also need patience and forbearance to love one another along the journey. These are vital pastoral leadership skills for navigating the complexities of a faith community.

These qualities are essential to maintaining unity on any team. I need a patient and forbearing wife, kids, elders, and members to put up with me and help maintain the unity in our marriage, home, elder board, and church. And if that is true of me in my home and in my church, I'm sure that's true for you and your team as well. Strengthening leadership in the church requires these virtues in every interaction.

Of course, all this is to be done in love, not envy. We are not walking worthy to selfishly win, but in love for one another. Paul prayed that the Ephesian church would be rooted and grounded in love (3:17). Now we are being urged to walk worthy in love. It's understandable that if we are rooted and grounded in the truth of God's love, then it will be easier to walk worthy in love to maintain our unity with each other. This is the goal of building healthy ministry teams.

Secondly, we live as one by being eager to maintain unity. Paul not only admonishes us to walk worthy, but he also pushes us to maintain unity. As

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Christians bound together in this three-legged race, we ought to be eager to maintain this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, which seems to be in contrast to the bonds that bind Paul in prison. We are not bound in prison with chains, but we are bound in peace to God and one another with unity in the Spirit. This commitment is central to church administration and the overall health of the body.

The verb 'maintain' means to "make every effort" or 'spare no effort'. It's also in the present tense, which means we ought to continually work to maintain this unity. After all, it's a unity that has been given to us by God himself, made possible by Christ, and instilled by the Holy Spirit. It's not a unity that we produce, but a unity that we enjoy as a gift from God. This requires a dedicated ministry team building effort where every member is aligned. While the unity we have with God and one another in the church can't be destroyed in an eternal, spiritual, vertical sense, it can be destroyed in an earthly, physical, and horizontal sense. So, Paul urges us to be eager to maintain the spiritual unity we have by displaying our physical unity on earth. Such Christian conflict resolution is essential to keeping the bond of peace intact.

Of course, this ought to be applied first and foremost to our individual local churches, but this can then be rightly applied to other kinds of teamwork as well. As a Christian working on a team at work or school, you may not enjoy a Spirit-given unity with others on your team, but you ought to still be eager to maintain the oneness you have on the team as a fruit of the unity you enjoy with God and other Christians. Integrating Biblical principles of management ensures that even in secular spaces, your work reflects your faith. This will then display to your team and others watching that something is different about you, and that you have an otherworldly foundation. To succeed in this, effective meetings for church teams and other groups should be focused on this shared purpose.

It's also worth noting that we are not pursuing our maintaining unity for unity's sake. We are actually pursuing Christ and enjoying the unity he has given us. In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer explains:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one

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accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become "unity" conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. (A. W. Tozer in *The Pursuit of God*)

Not only that, but consider that just one musical note struck off-key is the one most easily recognized. This unity that has been given to us is maintained as we eagerly look to Christ, remember Christ, read Christ's Word, live by Christ's Spirit, pray for Christ's unity to continue, and walk in a manner worthy of Christ.

Why Should We Live as One?

That's all well and good, but why? What is the motivating reason we ought to walk worthy and maintain unity in our churches and teams? Well, simply put, because there is one God and one church.

This unity that we enjoy is not only for our good; it is pleasing to God (Ps. 133:1). It is the fruit of the oneness of God and the oneness we have with God in the church. Not only that, but this unity is a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth. I know at times our unity and oneness in the church might be overshadowed by a host of other things, but that doesn't mean it's not real. It's there, and it's worth uncovering to glorify God and display his glory! This is why volunteers in the church play such a vital role; their service is a tangible expression of this spiritual reality.

Paul gives us a statement of faith and summary of the truths he has detailed in Ephesians 1-3 by laying out seven "ones" to highlight our unity. We see both the root of our unity in the Trinity and the fruit of our unity in the church.

There is one body, the church, because there is one Spirit given to every believer who unites us together. We are also called to the one and same hope that we first received in Christ when our eyes were enlightened (1:18). As Christians, we have one Lord, that is Christ, our Savior, King, and Master. Of course, since there is only one Lord, there is only one faith, one way to follow him. One faith that leads to one baptism, which Jesus modeled for us and commanded us to follow him in. Finally, there is one

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God and Father of all. He is the same Father that Paul blessed in the beginning (1:3) and the same Father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named (3:14). As a result, he is over all, through all, and in all. Why should we live as one? Because there is one God and we are one with him and one with one another in the church. Providing Christian mentorship for church leaders ensures this theological foundation is passed down through generations.

However, we must remember that while our unity glorifies God and displays our unity with him, it's not meant to terminate on us. Just as we all ought to be tuned to Christ for the sake of unity, we also need to be tuned to the same note for the sake of the lost around us. We need to be tuned to Christ and unified in the church for the sake of those who have yet to believe, so that they can enjoy this unity with God and us as well. To do this effectively, we must focus on how to build a ministry team that prioritizes external outreach alongside internal health.

Consider Jesus' prayer in John 17. Notice that God's oneness and our oneness can potentially bring others into oneness with us.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20–21)

When we walk worthy of our calling and maintain unity in our three-legged race in the church, we will not only glorify God by doing what he says but display to the world what they, too, can have in Christ. As others are tripping and fumbling around in chaos, they will look over and see you walking in unity. All of a sudden, they want what you have. So you bind them together with you and show them how to walk in unity in our three-legged race as you all look to Christ.

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Reflection Questions:

1. What gospel truths about your unity in Christ do you need to remember before considering your unity with one another?
2. What aspect of walking worthy is hardest for you, humbleness & gentleness or patience & forbearance?
3. How eager are you to maintain the unity you've been given in the church by sparing no effort?
4. Knowing there is one God and one church, how might you live as one so that others might know and believe?

2

MATURITY

After unity, the second essential characteristic of teamwork is maturity. Specifically, a maturity that arises from a diversity of people and gifts.

In Ephesians 4:7-16, Paul tells the church: unity amid diversity produces ministry for maturity.

The Beauty in Diversity

It's a beautiful thing to see unity on display among a diverse group. Just imagine the two slowest kids bound together in a three-legged race out in front of everyone else. Although they weren't fast on their own, they came together as one! Or imagine a beautiful mosaic. All those broken, mismatched, diverse colors come together in the hands of an artist to make a beautiful table, floor, or piece of artwork. There is beauty when diversity comes together in unity.

The focus on unity in 4:1-6 is now contrasted with the beauty of diversity seen in the church among its members and gifts. Our unity in Christ, amid the church's diversity, produces both word and work ministry until we attain maturity in Christ. When you behold this kind of unity amidst diversity in the church, it points to an outside source, an intentional purpose, and a glorious result. This dynamic is a central part of spiritual leadership in ministry.

Immediately after highlighting the unity and oneness we have in the church, Paul says, "But..." We have unity in Christ, but we still have diversity. Unity is not uniformity. Unity is not our collective sameness. The beauty of unity is seen most clearly in its diversity. This beauty is seen in our diversity of persons, but also in the diversity of grace and gifts God has given to each of us. This is the essence of Christian teamwork.

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We are not all Christian robots that some AI unity bot is producing. No. We are all made in the same image of God, but we are each made different and distinct. We are each saved from different and distinct circumstances by the same grace of God. In addition, we are each gifted in different and distinct ways by the same Spirit of God. We have unity in the church because we all receive his saving grace, but we also have diversity in the church because we each receive different gifts of grace.

This is obvious when you consider the needs of a church or a large team. We don't just need preachers and quarterbacks. Similarly, we don't just need greeters or linemen. Instead, God has gifted each of us by his Spirit with different abilities and passions to be used appropriately in the church.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and explains that Jesus descended to the earth on a mission and then ascended back to heaven when the mission was accomplished. What was that mission? Well, to live the sinless life we couldn't live, die on the cross that we deserve, rise from the dead to conquer sin and death, appear to many, and then ascend back to his throne in heaven. Jesus went from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows and back to the highest of highs to accomplish and attain our salvation and sanctification. Having received gifts in his victory, he now gives those gifts to his people in the Spirit's saving grace and gifts of grace.

We see this clearly in Acts 2:33:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:33)

This means that Jesus is the source of both our unity and our diversity. If we stopped to consider that for a minute, we might not focus so much on winning earthly races in the church, but being faithful and unified in an eternal race with the diverse people the Lord has put around us.

Having seen that Christ is the source of our unity and diversity, we now see the purpose of both.

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Word Ministry that Equips Work Ministry

The purpose of Christ's unifying saving grace and diversifying gifts of grace is to build up a word ministry that equips work ministry.

Paul mentions that a few of the gifts Christ has given to his church are the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds/teachers. It seems that what all of these have in common in the New Testament is a focus on Word ministry—preaching and teaching. The apostles and prophets clearly laid the foundation for the early church (Eph. 2:20, 3:5), while the evangelists and shepherd/teachers continue to build on that foundation today.

What a gift it is to have evangelists sowing the gospel in our world so that others might believe and enjoy the unity we have with Christ and one another. What a gift it is to have shepherd/teachers pastoring us with the word each week so that we might be conformed to the word of Christ. If you happen to fulfill one of these roles in your local church, I praise God for you. What a humbling privilege it is to speak the truth in the world and preach the Word to God's people.

Notice, though, this word ministry does not terminate in itself. The gifts of word ministry are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. They are to equip, to restore what's broken, or mend the nets of the saints for the work of the ministry. The effect of Word ministry is faithful and fruitful works of ministry. Works of ministry is translated from the Greek word *diakonos* or deacon, and could be translated as works of service. So pastors/teachers are to equip the saints to serve. The Word ministry ought to equip the work ministry.

Pastors should not hold all the ministry to themselves but should joyfully and responsibly equip and enable the members to do the work of ministry. After all, they have been graced by Christ himself with different gifts to engage in different aspects of ministry for the building up of the body.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Pet. 4:10)

It would do a church no good for a pastor not to hand off ministry to others whom God has gifted in the church. It's good for me to hand off singing,

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finances, kids classes, women's discipleship, hospitality, set up and tear down, and so many other jobs, to those members in my church who are not only gifted, but also enjoy serving the Lord in that way.

The Result of Our Diversity

With Christ being the source of our diversity and ministry being the purpose of our diversity, we now see, thirdly, that maturity is the result of our diversity.

The diversity of gifts in the church is to produce a Word ministry that equips a diverse work ministry, which builds up the growing body of Christ to a healthy maturity. We know how important it is to diversify our financial portfolio to achieve a healthy maturity. How much more so in the church?

We "ALL" need to serve in the diverse work of ministry till we "ALL" attain this maturity. "ALL" is emphatic in Greek and reminds us that the Christian life is not a solo act, not an individual sport. It's a three-legged race, a team sport, a group project. We all need to attain this standard and move towards the finish line together in this three-legged race of faith. So, where is the finish line? Well, remember, it's not a hundred-meter dash. It's a lifelong ultramarathon. So, while we can't see the finish line, Paul lays out some mile markers along the road to know we are going the right way on our journey to maturity.

First, we serve to build up the body till we attain the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. It's as if we've been given the seed form of unity that grows as we maintain it (Eph. 4:3), till one day it bears fruit and we fully attain it (Eph. 4:13). Notice that this unity in the faith comes when we all grow in our knowledge of the Son of God, not simply knowledge about the Son of God. We must know him, not simply about him.

Secondly, the works of ministry build up the body until we all attain mature manhood. This isn't a manhood/womanhood argument. The focus here is on maturity and being full-grown, not simply as individuals, but corporately as a church. We are serving and growing towards a solid and full-grown maturity that will be contrasted with that of infants later in the passage.

Thirdly, the work ministry builds up the body till we attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This won't happen unless we let the

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word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16). Of course, we will strive for this our whole lives, knowing that we will never fully attain this until we are glorified with Christ in the new heavens and new earth.

We keep the word "ministry" central in our churches to equip the work of ministry until we all attain the unity and maturity of Christ in full capacity. Then and only then will we stop living like children. But I thought Jesus said we should be like children (Luke 18:17). Well, we are to have childlike faith, but NOT childlike maturity. Remember the charge in Hebrews to eat meat, not milk (Heb. 5:12-13)?

If our maturity is like a child's, we will be tossed by every cultural wave and wind. Imagine you were at the beach with a toddler, and little junior was by the water, toddling around. When all of a sudden a huge wave came and knocked him down and dragged him back. He wasn't fully grown or mature enough to withstand the waves. That's why parents don't let toddlers toddle in the ocean alone. They go with them, bound together hand in hand, so when the waves come, they simply stand their ground in their full-grown maturity and pick up the toddler by one hand!

Well, in the church, we need that kind of full-grown maturity so that, when the cultural winds and waves come, we can help one another persevere. The wind and the waves come in the form of false doctrine, human cunning, and craftiness in deceitful schemes. Sounds a lot like Satan. He was crafty and cunning in Genesis 3:1. He is the deceiver of the whole world in Revelation 12:9. And later in Ephesians 6:11, we're told to put on the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

We don't want our churches or teams to be tossed around by Satan in the world. We have enough of that. We want our churches to be mature, fully grown, and reflecting Christ, and sadly, there's not enough of that. Proper church administration is not just about logistics, but about ensuring the body is protected and nourished through these seasons.

We grow to maturity by speaking the truth in love. Here again, we see the Word ministry at work, growing us up as we speak the truth in love to one another. We can't simply speak the truth or be loving. We need both. We must speak the truth in love if we want the body, the church, to grow up

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into Christ and enjoy a healthy maturity. Only then will the church, the body, work properly as it was meant to.

When the body functions in this way, it really is a beautiful thing to behold. When the unity of the church, amid the diversity of gifts, produces word and work ministry that results in healthy maturity, people will notice. Hopefully, they won't simply notice the beauty of our unity, but also the beauty of its source, Christ himself.

Reflection Questions :

1. How should we respond when we think about our diversity in the church as God-given, not accidental?
2. In what ways have you seen the word ministry equip you for work ministry?
3. What are some specific cultural winds and waves your church is facing, and how can a growing maturity protect you to stand your ground?
4. Where have you seen the beauty of unity amidst diversity displayed in your church?

3

PURITY

Purity is the third essential characteristic in Ephesians 4, vital to the health of the church and to doing teamwork God's way. In fact, unity and maturity are unattainable without purity. That's why it's so important that we stop walking in the impurity of the world and start walking in the purity of Christ.

In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul tells the church: *the purity of our Savior demands the purity of our behavior.*

Dress Appropriately

Have you ever been invited to a wedding and the invitation says those dreaded words: Black Tie or Formal. Maybe you've been invited to a party with a theme like Hawaiian or 80's. Or maybe you've had an interview or meeting with your boss in which you ought to dress appropriately.

Now imagine you showed up to the wedding wearing casual shorts and a t-shirt. Or imagine showing up at the 80s party in your work clothes. Or imagine you showed up to your interview in your workout clothes. In every one of these situations, we realize how important it is to dress appropriately. We all know the feeling of shame and regret when we are not dressed appropriately.

That is the picture Paul paints for us in Ephesians 4:17-24. If Christ has brought you from death to life and invited you to his wedding, you can't go dressed in your burial clothes. You have to put on new clothes. You have to dress appropriately. Thankfully, this is not "Dress to impress." You can't impress God with your behavior. So, rather than buying new clothes to dress appropriately for Christ's wedding, the good news of the gospel is that, in addition to the invitation to the wedding, he also blessed you with every spiritual blessing and sent you a set of new clothes. He doesn't expect you to buy or earn your way in. He invited you as you are and sent you the clothes you need. You simply have to put off the old impure burial

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clothes and put on the new pure wedding garments of Christ, because the purity of our Savior demands the purity of our behavior.

In our passage, Paul introduces the idea of purity and lays it out in general terms. However, the rest of Ephesians 4-6 contains numerous specific examples of what it means to walk in purity in speech, emotion, labor, love, sexuality, wisdom, marriage, parenting, and serving. For now, he gives us two directives: stop walking in the world's impurity and start walking in the purity of Christ.

Stop Walking in the Impurity of the World

We must first stop walking in the impurity of the world. We can't keep walking in our old ways. It's pretty obvious how detrimental this would be to the three-legged race we've been talking about.

Paul begins by saying, "Now this I say and testify IN THE LORD." Paul is not simply speaking and testifying in his authority as an apostle and ambassador of Jesus Christ, but with Jesus's own authority. He is demanding and declaring, with Christ's authority, the way Christians ought to behave in the household of God, especially leaders. Sadly, our news and social media feeds are filled with stories of prominent Christians and leaders getting caught in some form of impurity. Not only does this tarnish the name of Christ, but it also destroys the church's unity and maturity.

"You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do." Even though they are Gentiles, they are now saved Gentiles. They are now Christians, which means they can no longer walk as they once did. They were dead, separated, alienated, strangers, without hope and without God, but now they are made alive, brought near, made one, given peace, reconciled, and made fellow citizens. How could they continue to walk in their old ways? They can't keep walking the same road they used to walk and expect to get somewhere different. They have to walk a different path. They have to walk in a different way. The path they were on was a dead-end cul-de-sac, going nowhere. Now they are on Christ's way, which leads straight to the Father (John 14:6). We can't continue walking in our old ways if we've been bound to Christ and one another in this three-legged race.

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Paul reminds them and us of how we walked before we were saved. It's a dark path with a downward trajectory for sure. Even the tense of the verbs has an ongoing effect: if Christ did not save us, we would still be walking in these ways. Like the psalmist, we ought to invite God to search us and try us and see if there are still any of these grievous ways in us before leading us in the way of everlasting (Ps. 139:23–24).

They thought they were full in mind because of their education, prosperity, and spirituality, but Paul says they were actually futile. Think Ecclesiastes: vain, fruitless, useless, worthless, ineffective, unsuccessful. Why? Because they worshiped creation rather than the creator (Rom. 1:21). Their futility was the product of their darkened understanding. This darkness came as a result of being alienated, separated, and strangers from the life of God! This left them ignorant because of their hardness of heart and stubbornness in unbelief (Acts 19:9). A hard heart was the result of becoming calloused in the flesh by giving oneself over to sensuality and greed for every kind of impurity. They didn't just sin; they were hungry for sin and stopped at nothing to enjoy sin, yet sin never satisfied them.

This constant sinful lifestyle and denial of the gospel allowed plaque to build up in their spiritual arteries. This led to the narrowing and restriction of the life-giving flow of truth to their heart and to all their vital organs. This caused a hardening of their hearts, which would inevitably result in a spiritual heart attack or stroke while they ignorantly sat in the dark.

But God! Praise God, he had other plans. Christ had saved them. How could they continue to walk in those old ways that are contrary to Christ? As Christians, we must remember...

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)

As Christians, we must remember we were ransomed from the futile ways with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). We must remember the Spirit of God enlightened us to the Gospel of Christ (Eph. 1:18). We must remember we were called out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). We must remember we were alienated and far from God but have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). We must remember

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our heart of stone has been removed. We have been given a new heart of flesh and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26). The more we remember what Christ has saved us from, the more we will want to stop walking in the world's impurity, because the purity of our Savior demands the purity of our behavior.

If you've ever taught a child to walk, you know how glorious those first few steps were! What a joy for them and you! Unfortunately, many toddlers go back to crawling because it's easier, faster, and safer for the moment. We have to encourage them, "Use your big boy legs. Stop crawling and walk!" We have to show them that it's actually harder, slower, and more dangerous to crawl, while also showing them all the blessings of walking uprightly. Yet, without this admonition, we'd likely have teenagers crawling around the house on all fours.

The same thing can happen in the Christian life if we are not careful. This is why Paul says, "You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do." If we keep walking as Gentiles, in our old ways, we are like spiritual teenagers still crawling on the floor of faith, albeit still bound to others in the three-legged race.

Start Walking in the Purity of Christ

Having stopped walking in the impurity of the world, we are to start walking in the purity of Christ. They are to stop living in the old burial clothes and start living in the new wedding garments he has provided. Remember, we are not dressing to impress; we are simply dressing our best.

He begins verse 20, as in verse 7, with "but..."! There it is again. That major conjunction we've seen in some of Paul's most pivotal passages. You were dead in sin, BUT made alive in Christ. You are one body, BUT grace was given to each one of you. You used to walk as Gentiles, BUT that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming you have heard about him.

If we have received Christ's invitation, heard his calling, and responded in faith, you can't keep walking in your old burial clothes. We must dress appropriately because the purity of our Savior demands the purity of our behavior. Paul now lays out three key aspects to dressing appropriately: put off, be renewed, and put on.

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First, put off your old self, as in, take off those old, dirty, grimy burial clothes. The tense of the verb is a one-time decisive action. So, if you've learned Christ, then you were enabled to put off and repent of your old, dead, sinful ways once and for all in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Do you remember when Jesus went to Lazarus's tomb and said, "Lazarus, come out"? Lazarus came to life and walked out of the tomb. Then Jesus said, "Unbind him and let him go." Can you imagine the absurdity of the scene if Lazarus ignored Jesus' command and continued walking around in his burial clothes? Unfortunately, the same thing happens when someone refuses to put off their old self and keeps wearing their old, wretched burial clothes.

Instead, Paul demands, put off your old self. Not only Paul, but many of the New Testament writers repeat this charge to put off, put them away, lay them aside, or crucify the old self. (Rom. 6:6; 13:12; Col. 3:8-9; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1). Crucifying sin gets close to John Owen's idea of killing or mortifying sin.

A man may beat down the bitter fruit from an evil tree until he is weary; while the root abides in strength and vigor, the beating down of the present fruit will not hinder it from bringing forth more. ...Be killing sin or it will be killing you. (John Owen in *Mortification of Sin*)

We must put off, crucify, kill, and mortify sin and the flesh. We can't just attack the fruit; we must cut down the root. We must put off those old, dirty burial clothes so that we can be renewed and put on the new wedding garments of Christ.

Secondly, we must be renewed. "To be renewed" is in the present tense, meaning it is a repeated, continual action. So, while conversion is a one-time decisive action, this renewal involves continual reliance on God's Word and God's Spirit, day in and day out. This renewal in the spirit of our minds is what keeps us from being conformed to the impurity of the world (Rom. 12:2). Owen says this is the only way.

Killing sin is the work of the Holy Spirit. By Him alone is it to be done and by no other power will it ever be done. (John Owen in *Mortification of Sin*)

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Like a branch, we need to be constantly renewed by the life of the true vine. We must be bound to Christ if we are to run the three-legged race well. He alone will renew us, strengthen us, guide us, and help us along the way.

Having put off the old self and been renewed in the Spirit, we are to put on the new self. Tragically, I am well known in our house of seven for showering and then putting on lightly worn clothes. I have good intentions to be a good steward and save laundry. Whether that is good or bad hygiene, Paul says it's untenable behavior in our faith. Unfortunately, we often put on our lightly worn burial clothes, thinking it's not that bad. Paul says, by no means!

We are to put on the new self after the likeness of God. Of course, all mankind is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Nevertheless, because of Adam's sin, our inherited sinful nature, and our own sin, we don't bear that image rightly. So, we need God's grace in Christ to put off the old flesh and put on the new. Having become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), we can now put on the new and walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

What does this newness of life look like? True righteousness and holiness. Essentially, we are to put on and walk in the righteousness and holiness of Christ. We are to be holy as he is holy (1 Pet. 1:16, Lev. 11:44). We are to walk in the way of Christ, walk the way of the Word. The way we walk ought to cause people to recognize that we have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

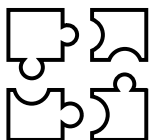
Of course, all this is possible because Christ walked perfectly for us and then died in our place. Though he had no "old self" to put off, he renewed himself in the Spirit of his mind constantly, so that he would continue to put on the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. He walked all the way to the cross for us and then rose victorious over our old ways to offer us new life in him. Having received this salvation by grace through faith, why would we not commit ourselves to walking in this new way?

The purity of our savior demands the purity of our behavior. However, if we are unwilling to dress appropriately in the wedding garments of Christ and walk in the purity of our Savior, we have no chance of ever enjoying good teamwork.

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Reflection Questions :

1. How has the purity of our Savior not been reflected in the purity of your behavior?
2. What old burial clothes of sin do you need to put off today?
3. What are some ways you could grow at consistently renewing your mind?
4. What new righteous and holy clothes do you need to put on as you walk in the purity of our savior?



CONCLUSION

God's Word is the best place to look if we want to know what God's idea of teamwork is. Ephesians 4 has helped us see some essential characteristics vital to the health of the church and teams of all sorts. Our marriages, our homes, our business, and our churches are counting on us walking worthy in the way of the Word. If we are going to run this three-legged race faithfully, unity, maturity, and purity must be present. At the end of our lives, we want to be able to repeat Paul's words:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim. 4:7)

In our church, we sing an adaptation of an old Isaac Watts hymn from Psalm 119. Our worship pastor added this chorus, which I think would be a helpful closing commitment, reminder, and prayer as we aim to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, in unity, maturity, and purity.

*I will walk in the way
of your Word, O Lord
Heaven's light, I delight in You
Blessed Man to the cross
walked before for me
Spirit, help me that I may, too
Humbly turn and follow You
In the way of your Word*



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

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