

## Precious Unity; Vulnerable Unity (4/3/22)

Sermon Description: Jesus prayed for his followers to experience the same unity that he had with God the Father. This unity within his followers would then show the world that God loved the church just as much as the Father loved the Son. That shows the great value of unity in the church. It is precious. But it begs the question then, why is there so much division in the church?

Main Passage: Ephesians 4:1-6

Title: **Precious Unity; Vulnerable Unity**

Topics: Church

Tags: unity, division, trust, brokenness

Questions to consider:

- Do you agree with the statement, “Unity is so precious and so vulnerable”? If not, why not?
- The hope of unity for the Christian is Jesus Christ. How would you differentiate Christian unity from various forms of unity found in the world?
- Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, can you see the opportunity for the church to walk (even shine!) – with all humility, gentleness, and patience – in dramatic contrast to the pattern of this world?

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Week #12

Introduction: Entropy, Disorder, Chaos, and Polarization

Henri Nouwen: *Our society is so fragmented, our family lives so sundered by physical and emotional distance, our friendships so sporadic, our intimacies so ‘in-between’ things and often so utilitarian, that there are few places where we can feel truly safe.*

What makes this quote so compelling for me is Nouwen was Catholic not Protestant, European not American, and he shared these words more than 25 years ago (he passed away in 1996). Yet how prescient his words about the times we live in today!

Today’s passage: **Ephesians 4:1–6**

<sup>1</sup>As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Most commentators split the book of Ephesians in to two parts: chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. It has been described that chapters 1-3 are God's work or God's story and 4-6 are our work and our story. It's a misnomer. It's a mistake. Why? Because that would mean God is the star for half the book but then he clears the stage so that we might receive the spotlight. By the end of the message I hope we can see that this is still God's story, even as imperatives (commands) to us replace indicatives (factual statements) about God. Even as we are told what to do, we need to be reminded of our frailty, vulnerability, and weakness. In other words, we need God! We don't leave him behind in chapters 1-3. He is the star and remains the star.

Let's flip the order of the passage. Why? Because verses 4-6 are more indicatives comparable to chapters 1-3. And they serve as the basis for the commands that will be directed toward us in the first half of the passage.

### **The unity within God. The unity within us.**

#### **Ephesians 4:4-6**

<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

A few considerations.

1. **One.** The word "one" occurs seven times in these three verses. Repetition within the bible is important. Repetition within the bible is important. See what I did there? The author is making clear the oneness that is present.
2. **Father Son Spirit.** God is one. And yet he eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. All three persons are in view here. There is unmatched oneness which exists within the godhead.
3. **Oneness with God.** Previous Scriptures (John 17 and Eph. 2) speak to our new oneness with God through the gospel. Jesus describes us as having oneness with God that is comparable to the oneness he experiences with the Father. !!! That's phenomenal!!
4. **Oneness with each other.** This passage goes on to say that there is one body, one hope, one faith, and one baptism. This means that all who have oneness with God are rightly to view themselves as having oneness with each other. To be clear, we are given this. It's in our possession because of the work of Christ. The dividing wall of hostility is torn down. Scripture says we need to uphold or maintain this, not build this.

Consider the challenge of living out this oneness with each other. From a pastor:

*I challenge the staff to aim for spiritual impact and transformation in people's lives and that's a good thing. But I think the average attender at a church—the greatest thing they're looking for is unity. They don't see unity in any area of life. And [in the past] I didn't work towards unity. I assumed it—because we were Christ-followers, then we were united (which isn't always the case). So since then we've really worked to guard our unity, to expand our unity, and to not do*

*things that would let us get so complex that it would threaten our unity... **Unity is so precious and so vulnerable.***

Do you hear that? Unity is so precious and so vulnerable!

Because we are one, because unity is so precious, because fragmentation/polarization is ever present in our world, how do we live in light of these things?

### **Ephesians 1:1**

<sup>1</sup>As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

A better translation for “live a life” is “walk.” The NIV translates this “live a life” but “walk” is reflected in other bible translations such as NASB and ESV. And “walk” is rich with imagery throughout the Scriptures. Consider this quote:

*The first occurrence of walking in the Bible is the picture of God’s “walking” in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8). After the exodus, God promises the nation of Israel, “I will walk among you and be your God” (Lev 26:12 NIV; quoted in 2 Cor 6:16). God also visits and walks around the camp of the Israelites (Deut 23:14). These examples of God’s “walking” on the earth picture the active divine presence among the people God has created and called.*

*In keeping with his tendency toward heightened contrasts, Paul portrays the Christian life in terms of contrasting walks: Christians are to walk in newness of life rather than death (Rom 6:4), in good works rather than trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1–2, 10), as children of light instead of darkness (Eph 5:8), with moral self-control rather than in sensuality (Rom 13:13), by faith rather than sight (2 Cor 5:7).*

~Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G. Reid. In *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. P. 922-923.

So, it’s incomplete to think that *our walking* is foremost in view. God walked amongst his people. Jesus walked amongst his disciples and the people of his day. And the Spirit is to fill the church so that God’s people might walk in light. It is not so much our walking which is foremost. It’s God’s walking and working, serving and saving. This is made abundantly clear in the next couple verses.

### **Ephesians 1:2a – Walk in a humble manner**

<sup>2</sup>Be completely humble...

As a pastor and preacher, I just want to admit to you that I know how to be INcompletely humble. Do you hear that? Incompletely humble. This is why I don’t think Jesus clears the stage at the start of chapter 4. This is why the spotlight needs to remain on God and not me. This is why you and I need to be reminded that Jesus is both entryway and pathway. We come to God

through Christ. And we live or remain or walk with God through Christ. He is entryway and pathway. Why? Because I'm called to be completely humble and I readily admit that I'm incompletely humble.

If chapters 4-6 are about us, then this command is about me. It's about how humble I am. And then the witness of the church is restricted by whom? By me! My limits. My depths. My inability to demonstrate the character of Christ.

Thankfully, it's not. It's about God. It's about his capacity, his depths, his resourcing, his example, and his making up for every shortcoming.

Consider this from St. John Chrysostom (347-407), archbishop in Constantinople, (aka golden mouth).

*How is it possible to "walk worthily" with "all lowliness"? Meekness is the foundation of all virtue. If you are humble and are aware of your limits and remember how you were saved, you will take this recollection as the motive for every excellent moral behavior. You will not be excessively impressed with either chains or privileges. You will remember that all is of grace and so walk humbly.... "With all lowliness," he says, not in words only or even in deeds but more so in the very manner and tone of your voice. And not meek toward one person and rude toward another but humble toward everyone, whether enemy or friend, great or small.*

M. J. Edwards, ed., Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 158–159.

"All is of grace." Do you hear that? Humility. It is of grace. It is God at work. It's his gift. It's his kindness to us. To protect us from viewing ourselves more highly than we ought. To show us that we are not center stage, that it doesn't all depend on us. It greets us in our high times and low times.

### **Ephesians 1:2b – Walk in a gentle manner**

<sup>2</sup>(Be completely) gentle...

Dane Ortlund in his book *Gentle and Lowly* considers the gentleness of Christ.

*Meek. Humble. Gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms...For all his resplendent glory and dazzling holiness, his supreme uniqueness and otherness, no one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus Christ. No prerequisites. No hoops to jump through...This, according to his own testimony, is Christ's very heart. This is who he is. Tender. Open. Welcoming. Accommodating. Understanding. Willing.*

Oh, how I hope we can receive this. How I hope we can hear of how truly gentle is the Lord toward us. Please, read those words again. Take note of how tender, how understanding is Jesus

toward sinners and sufferers. And may his gentleness come to the church. And may his gentleness be shown through the church as she walks in and amongst this generation.

### **Ephesians 1:2c – Walk in a patient manner**

<sup>2</sup>be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Dane Ortlund again:

*God's forgiving, redeeming, restoring touch reaches down in the darkest crevices of our souls, those places where we are most ashamed, most defeated. More than this: those crevices of sin are themselves the places where Christ loves us the most. His heart willingly goes there. His heart is most strongly drawn there. He knows us to the uttermost, and he saves us to the uttermost, because his heart is drawn out to us to the uttermost. We cannot sin our way out of his tender care.*

Do you hear of God's patience? Do you hear how he has bore with us in love? My patience has limits. It gets emptied and exhausted. But not so of the Lord. We goes far beyond your and my limits. It says here that he goes to the uttermost. The uttermost! The darkest crevices of sin and brokenness. Those places that we are most ashamed of, most defeated, he goes there. With all patience. All kindness. All goodness. He bears with us in love. His heart is drawn to the uttermost.

In all honesty, don't we tire of people? Don't we grow impatient by their problems? Don't we want to avoid going to the uttermost?

How patient, how loving, how gentle, how humble is the Lord Jesus.

### **Ephesians 1:3 – Unity is so precious and so vulnerable.**

<sup>23</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Can we see how much we need Christ to have any hope of unity??!! In our fragmented world. In our polarized world. In our world of condemnation. In our world of anger and hatred and slander and violence. We've been given a gift of unity, a bond of peace, because of Christ. The dividing wall of hostility is torn down between us and God, between us and one another. Unity is so precious and so vulnerable.

In closing I want to ask what a church might look like who is able to internalize this, to live in light of these things? Where Jesus is in view, where he is the source, where we are secondary as the vessel, as the one in whom he is working today, now, here?

### **How will we walk in light of these things??**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

Because God has invited us to walk with him...Because God has invited us to walk together, to walk within our small groups and families and workplaces and classrooms and communities...

**How will we walk in light of these things??**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

Because of God's forgiving, redeeming, restoring touch reaches down in the darkest crevices of our souls...

Because in those spaces where we are most ashamed, where we feel most defeated, even in those places Christ loves us...

**How will we walk in light of these things??**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

Because he doesn't just aim to save a little but to the uttermost...

Because we cannot sin our way out of his tender care...

**How will we walk in light of these things??**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

Because our society is so fragmented and our family lives stressed by physical and emotional distances and our social discourse so polarized...

Because our friendships can feel sporadic and our intimacies so in-between, so up and down, so hot and cold...

**How will we walk in light of these things??**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

Because there are so few places where we can truly feel safe...

**How will we walk in light of these things?? Will Hope Community be one of the few places where people truly feel safe?**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

In a nation ripe with fragmentation...condemnation...cancellation...will our congregation extend God's invitation? God's consolation? God's revelation?

**Who will we walk in light of these things? Why not us? Why not here? Why not within Hope Community? With unity so precious and so vulnerable...**

The world grabs for anger, ridicule, hatred, slander, violence. Not so with us.

In view of Christ. In view of his meekness. In view of his humility. In view his gentleness.

**How will we walk in light of these things?**

Because we are so safe in his grace, what if we too were not trigger happy?

Because we are so safe in his grace, what if we too were not harsh? Or reactionary? Or easily exasperated?

Because we are so safe in his grace, what if we were viewed as one of the most understanding communities in the universe?

Because we are so safe in his grace, what if our most natural posture was not a pointed finger but open arms?

Because we are so safe in his grace, what if the church, our church, was the most approachable community? No prerequisites. No hoops. Tender. Welcoming. Understanding. Willing. Loving.

**How will we walk in light of these things?**

Because unity is so precious and yet so vulnerable...

What if we remembered how we were saved?

What if we returned to the cross?

What if we gazed into the eyes of Jesus?

His eyes and his cross and his salvation. So vulnerable as he hung upon the cross. So vulnerable. And yet so so precious as he hung upon that cross.

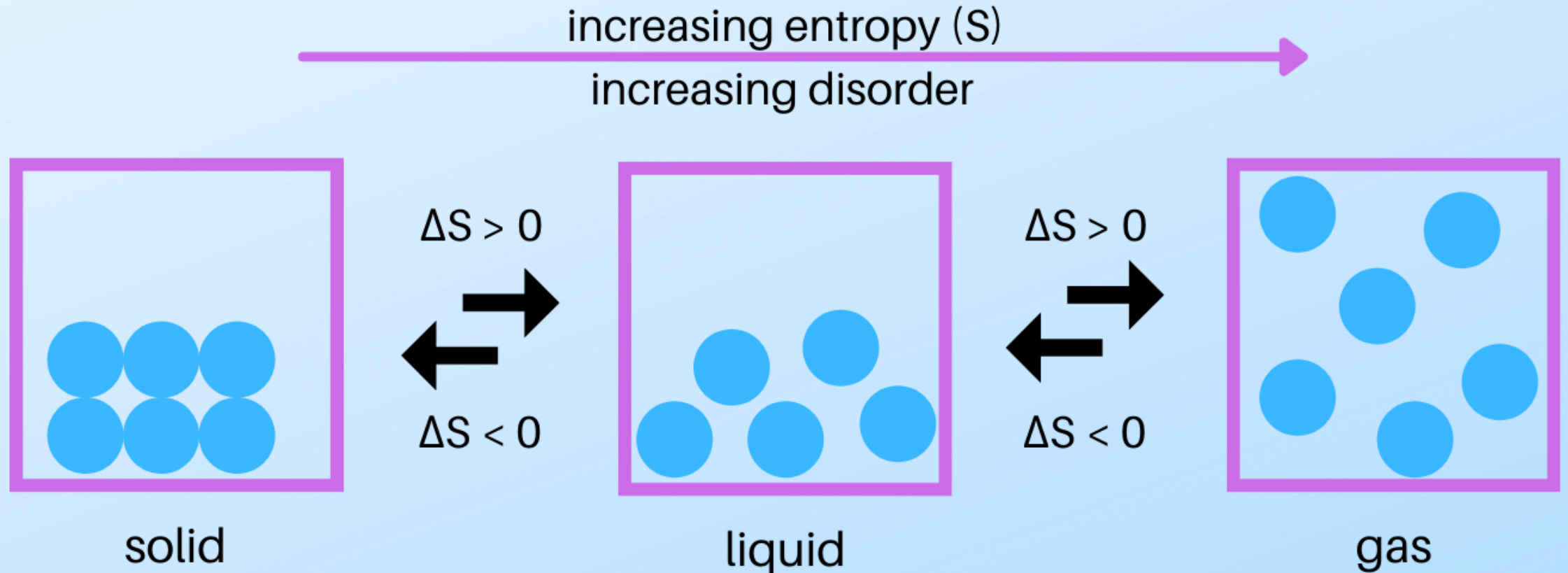
**How will we walk in light of these things?**

<sup>1</sup>As a preacher for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Amen

Amen and amen!!

# What Is Entropy?

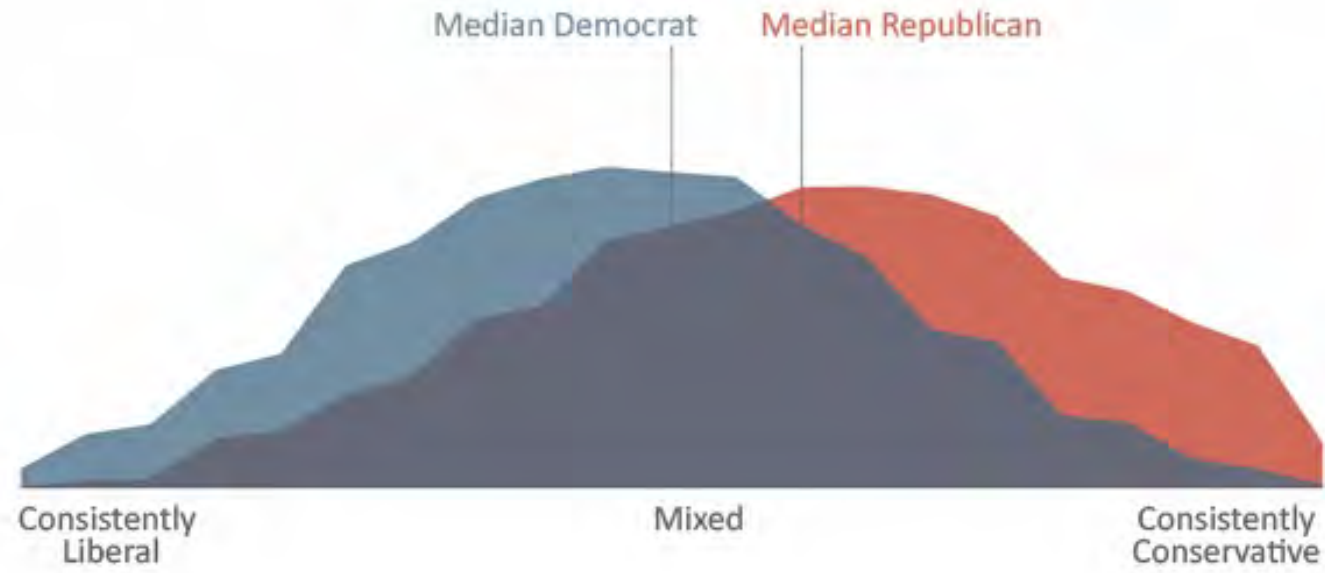
Entropy is a measure of the disorder of a system or energy unavailable to do work.



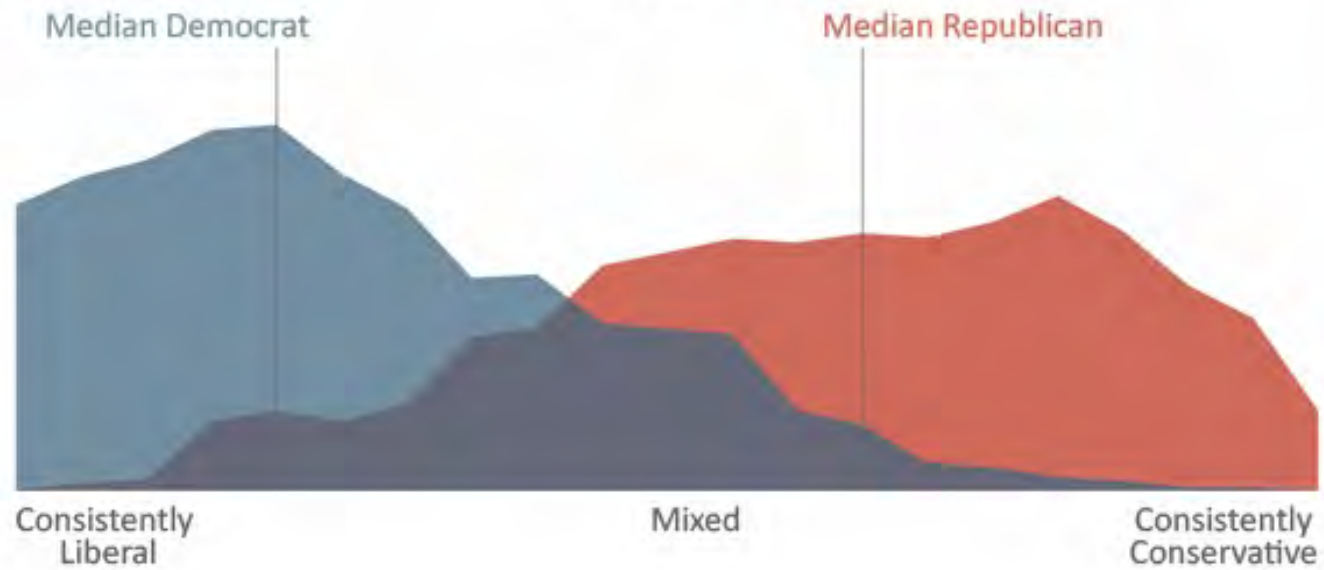




**1994**



**2017**





Our society is so fragmented, our family lives so sundered by physical and emotional distance, our friendships so sporadic, our intimacies so 'in-between' things and often so utilitarian, that there are few places where we can feel truly safe.

HENRI NOUWEN



*Ephesians*



## Ephesians 4:1–6

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# The unity within God. The unity within us.

## Ephesians 4:4-6

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**Unity is so precious and so vulnerable.**



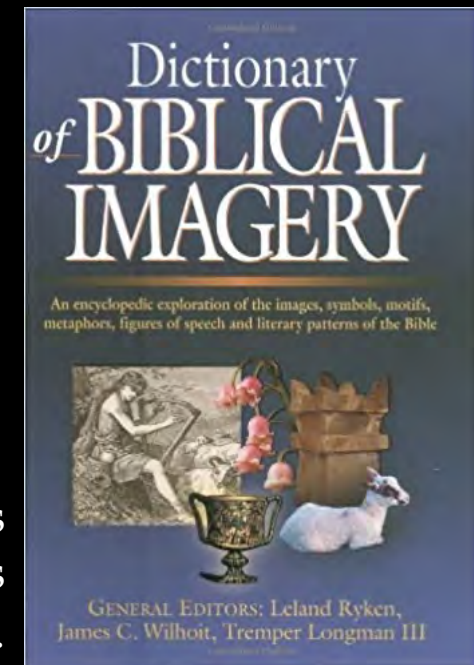
# *Walk in a worthy manner*

## **Ephesians 4:1**

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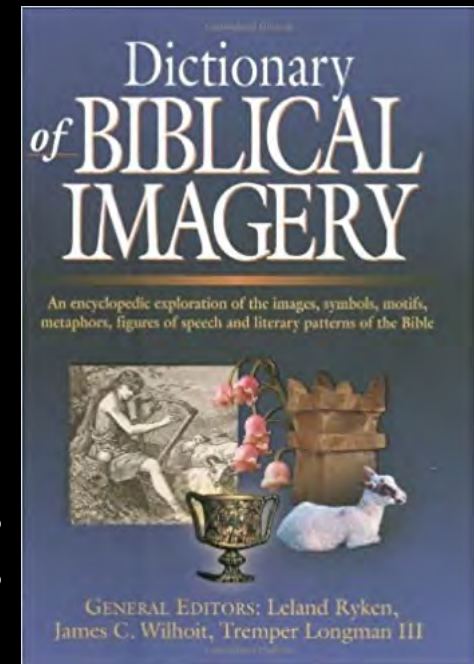
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# Walk in a *humble* manner

## Ephesians 4:1

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How is it possible to “walk worthily” with “all lowliness”? Meekness is the foundation of all virtue. If you are humble and are aware of your limits and remember how you were saved, you will take this recollection as the motive for every excellent moral behavior. You will not be excessively impressed with either chains or privileges. You will remember that all is of grace and so walk humbly... And not meek toward one person and rude toward another but humble toward everyone, whether enemy or friend, great or small.

**ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM**

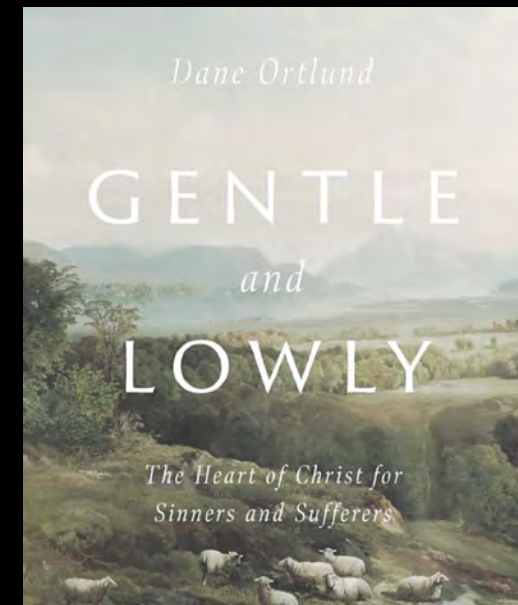
# Walk in a *gentle* manner

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Dane Ortlund; senior pastor  
Naperville Presbyterian Church in Naperville, Illinois;  
*Gentle and Lowly*, p. 19, 21



# Walk in a *patient* manner

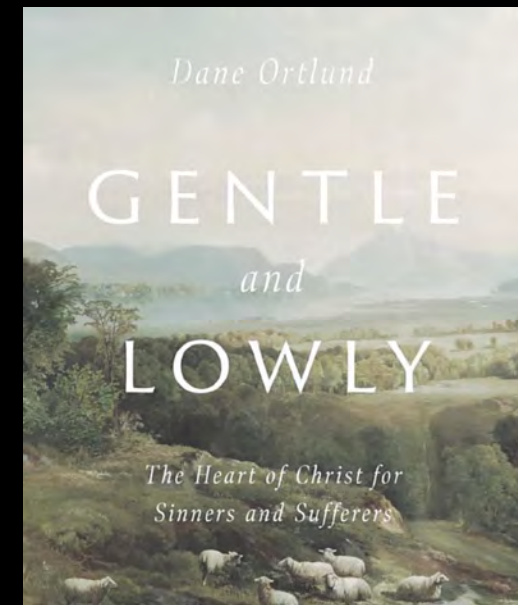
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Dane Ortlund; senior pastor  
Naperville Presbyterian Church in Naperville, Illinois;  
Gentle and Lowly, p. 83



# Unity is so precious and so vulnerable

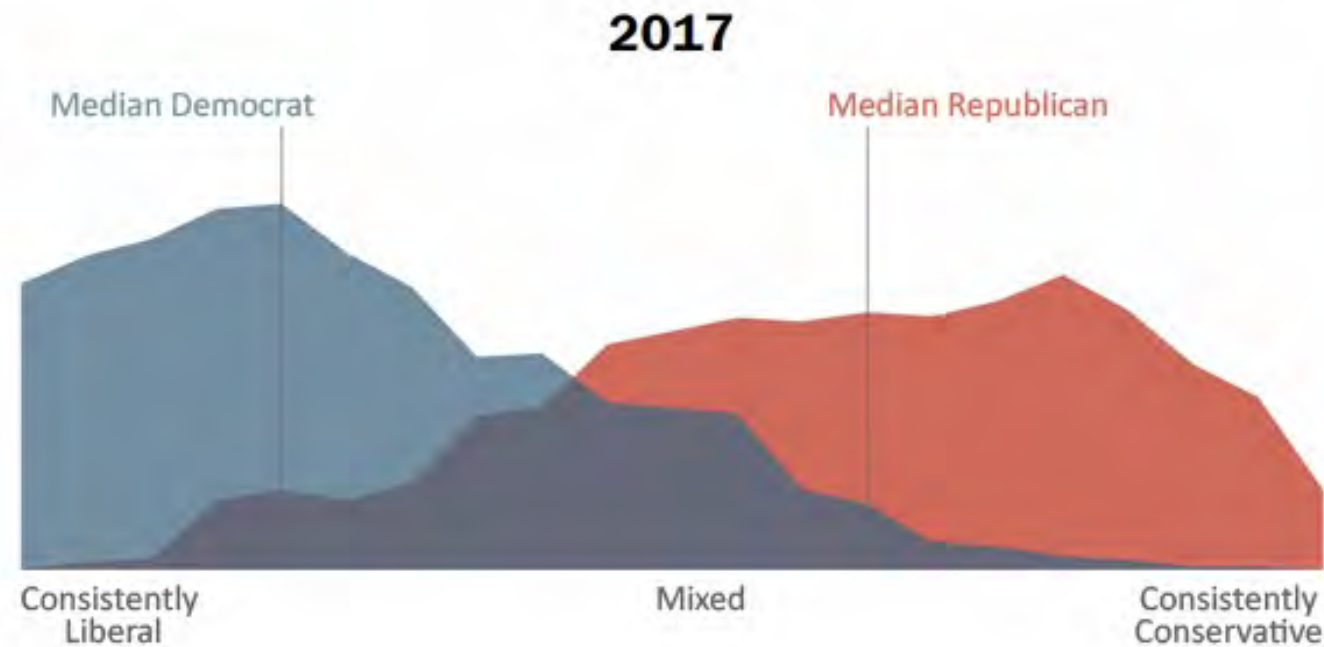
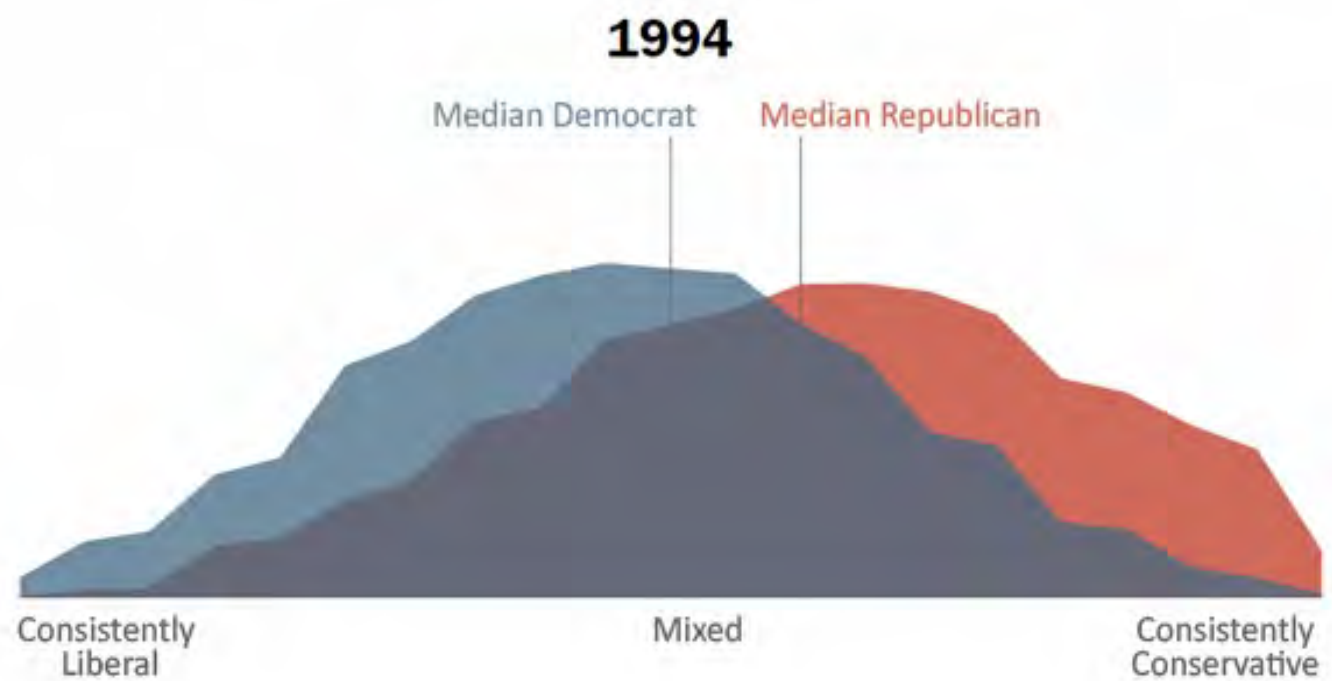
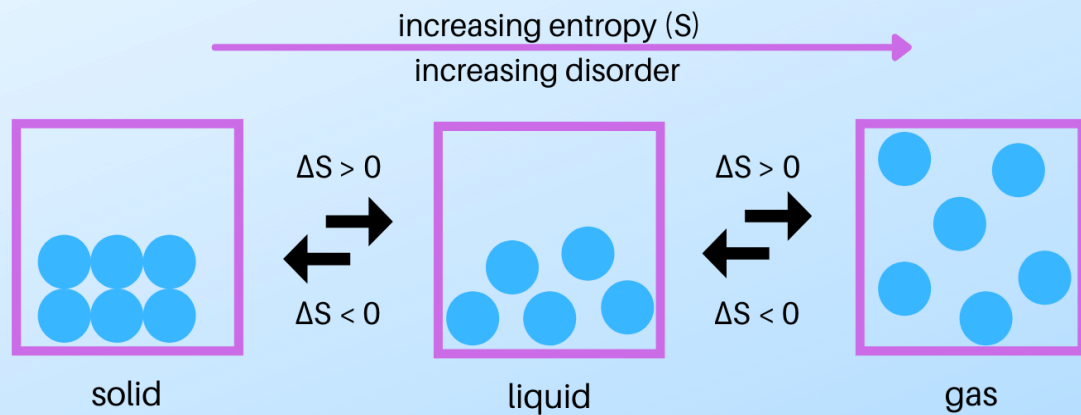
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## What Is Entropy?

Entropy is a measure of the disorder of a system or energy unavailable to do work.







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can you see the opportunity for the church  
to walk (even shine!) –  
with all humility, gentleness, and patience –  
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