

Ephesians Series

10. The Rule of One [Sermon Notes] Ephesians 4: 1-6

Eph 4:1 (NIV) As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

What are you called to be - chosen by the Father to be one of His children, redeemed by the Son, sealed by the Spirit. You've been saved by His grace. You now have now been brought close to God even though you were once a long way off. And last time we saw how immeasurable the love of Christ was.

Eph 3:20 20 (C) Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

And now we see Paul urging them to live life worthy of their calling. If you were here Wednesday we came across the same word in Romans 12:1 - Paul is urging us - passionately pleading. He isn't saying - well isn't it just cute that Jesus loves us, isn't God nice to be our Father. How kind of Him to show us so much grace. Let's just relax and hang loose! No, he's saying; look how much God loves us so let's live like He does!

Here was Paul - a man frustrated - he was chained between Roman guards - he couldn't share the gospel with anyone except them and anyone who read his letters.

BUT THEY COULD.

Paul as a prisoner is saying - you've heard about who God is, who you are, how much God can do. I can't do it - but I urge you to live worthy of your calling.

You are the children of God, you are His redeemed - now start living as though you were.

You know, when people hear sermons like this - like the one on Wednesday I suppose - they say - well it's all very well that he comes up with these platitudes, but what are the implications for my life? Well, come for the next few weeks and your going to find out.

If we are the people of God then we should live as though we are! Because in this world we are so much like the rest of it, people see nothing in us that is desirable. They don't see anything distinctive or different. Yet we are the children of God - chosen, redeemed, sealed. But can anyone tell the difference?

So how we should then live?

*2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

It is so basic - live a life worthy of your calling - he focuses on our basic relationships.

- humility and gentleness
- patience - longsuffering
- bearing with one another in love
- keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

There are many similarities between our societies and the Greeks that Paul was writing to in Ephesus. It was a society of individuals, where self-promotion and self advancement were important. Those in society who were poor or not Greeks were considered of no importance.

If we are living to our calling - if we are to be the children of God then we are called to unity - to be one body - the Church of God. What does that mean - Paul helps us out here.

· humility & gentleness

Lowliness & meekness in AV. What is humility about - regarding others better than yourself. Greeks were not humble people as they regarded themselves superior. We are called to humility so that we attach importance to everyone. It's so easy to despise someone we don't agree with or we think have silly views, or who has attitudes different to ours, or who had a background different to us. Whether we admit to it or not, we all do it. Yet we are called to humility - why - because Christ was humble - well after all, He died for the likes of us. God expects no more of us than Jesus did. The same is true of meekness. Modern translations put it as gentleness. A meek person does not assert his own importance. It's a similar idea to humility. It's a life choice. Even if you are more important you choose not to assert it; to lord yourself over people. I've seen plenty of that in the Church. People who think they are more spiritual than others, because they have more experience or knowledge. Jesus did have more knowledge and ability than anyone, but he was our model of meekness.

Very well you may say, but surely we mustn't be walked over. This isn't what this is about - it is to encourage us not to be the people who do the walking over others.

Let's go a bit further.

· patience/longsuffering

We show each other patience. Patience. Why is it that some people are slower at getting things than others? Why is he or she so difficult. Why should we have to put up with this nonsense? Because we are called to be patient people - patient with one another. The next item puts it into context.

· bearing with one another in love

Bearing or forbearing one another in love. Love. It comes up everywhere and Christ is our model again - he is not just patient and forbearing - he is longsuffering - He has suffered enough of our sin and disobedience. Yet He still shows us His forgiveness and love as we repent. Now we do the same with one another.

That's our calling - we are called to be sons and daughters of the living God so now we must live according to it.

The next phrase is more revealing.

· keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace






What is the unity (oneness) of the Spirit. *1 Cor 12: 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* It's a very similar passage. By the Spirit we have all been made part of one body; the Church. That's what unity is - we have the same status. What's the bond of peace? Peace. When Paul usually talks about peace it usually refers to God's peace through Christ. What binds us is a bond of peace - we're all here by grace because we have peace with God.

This passage is about the fact that we have been made one in Christ. Part of one body - we have the same status, so we should treat one another with that in view and not follow our human desires to think that we are more worthy of being in God's presence than anyone else. Because we're not. If you've been a Christian a short while, you've just as much right to enter into God's presence, to worship and to receive from Him as a Christian who has been around for 40 or 50 years. What's more however lowly you may feel as part of this Church, however insignificant you are, you have just as much right to enter into God's presence and worship and receive from Him as the Pastor, or the Deacons, or the people you think that are more spiritual than you are.

Paul follows it up with this.

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

I call this the Rule of One

-  one body - the Church
-  one Spirit - the Holy Spirit
-  one Lord
-  one baptism
-  one God and Father

What message does this bring. It's a message of unity. The purposes of God are the purposes of God. God has redeemed us to make us one in Him.

One of the greatest characteristics of the Church is that it displays anything but unity. Look at how many different types of church there are - each thinking that the others are not worthy enough to join with them.

Yet why is unity so important. Because God is a God of unity. There aren't different churches - just one - people who are chosen, redeemed, sealed. That is the only Church God recognises. He doesn't recognise a Catholic Church, He doesn't recognise an Anglican Church - and He certainly doesn't recognise a Baptist one. Someone once said to me - I don't know that I can become a member of your Church - I'm not a Baptist! What is a Baptist? Well I'll tell you one thing, it's not a heavenly invention. It's an earthly designation to define what a certain group of people practice - and even they're not sure what that entails. As far as I'm concerned as a local Church, we can only regard ourselves as such if we consist of believers - because there is only one Church - GOD'S!!

The Body of Christ consists of saved people and when they gather together in a local place then they are a local church. That's why we have an open membership - not to make you all Baptists - but to recognise that God has drawn us together as saved people. If you are a saved person, then your brothers and sisters are other people who own the name of Christ - wherever they are from.

If an army moves forward together, it is strong. If morale is good, it's even stronger. God wants us to move together in unity. The foundations for that have already been laid here.

One of the biggest problems I have found since coming to Norfolk is the lack of unity by people who are saved but in different fellowships. I've found very few who meet to pray, to intercede or to do mission together. In fact I've found some fellowships that are hostile towards working with others. They cite theology, they cite incompatible practices. And it keeps them apart - and it hinders the work of God. Whatever may be indifferent or essential may be debatable - but there's certainly no love! Worse, most of the tattle I have heard about other churches is gossip.

And the name of Christ is brought to shame in our towns and villages. It would be my desire to build a group of intercessors and evangelists to do warfare here in Swaffham. Just us isn't enough because we aren't the only saved people in Swaffham.. Please pray about this - the shame of Swaffham must end and we are the people of God and we have the duty, the commission to bring it to an end.

But what of this fellowship? We are called to unity. But what does unity mean in practice?

We are a friendly and welcoming Church - but if we are to go further than that in 2003 then we need to walk in unity. But most of all we need to be prepared to live and die for one another, because that is the path of humility, meekness, patience and oneness. That's what Christ did for us, now we are called to do it for one another. We have the foundations.

But the Lord wants us to draw closer to one another, pray for one another, help one another - need, hurting people, resolve differences. Committing ourselves to walk with one another.