

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. *Ephesians 4.1-3.*

When we began our look at *Ephesians*, I said that the key to this wonderful NT letter is the simple word 'one'. Did I say 'simple'? The whole of life is summed up in the words 'one' and 'two'. The Latin word for 'one' is 'unus', and for 'two', derived from Greek, is 'duo'. If you want to make the opposite of a word, you just place 'duo' in front of it. 'Easy' is 'facilis'. Put 'duo' in front of it, and you get 'di-fficilis', 'difficult'. 'Dis-abled', 'di-vide', 'dis-cord', 'dis-agree', 'dis-rupt' - you get the idea. Jesus 'unites', the devil 'di-vides'. And the whole point of *Eph* is that God wants us, living in this sad, divided world, to know that he has a plan to unite everything, all this brokenness, in Christ. Not only does he *plan* this, but he has shewn us he is *able* to do this by doing the impossible when he raised his Son Jesus from the dead at Easter. Indeed, the Almighty God is able to do immeasurably *more* than we ask or imagine.

So *Eph* is about that deceptively simple little word 'one'. God is going to take us from 'two' - from division and brokenness and walls and separation - to 'one', 'unum', 'unity'. Why? because God himself is one. There may be three Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - but there is only one God, just as you are one being, but can be a father, a son, and a brother all at the same time. Just look on p1175 at 4.4 and count how many times the word 'one' appears in just one verse! Seven 'ones'! Isn't this what we all long for? Do we really

want a world where Protestant and Catholics are attacking each other in NI? where Palestinians and Israelis loathe and fear each other? where Muslims seem apart from, and even against, our society? (What many people do not grasp is that though we fear Islam is against *us*, what is happening is really a civil war *within* Islam). I could go on, but it's division everywhere.

As individuals we experience division even *within* ourselves, with our better nature fighting against our lower, base instincts. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak. And so often we hate ourselves and are consumed with guilt and shame at what we know we are and have done.

Well, the good news from *Eph* is that God sees all this. He knows all about it, and he has a plan to take us from 'two' to 'one', from division to unity, from the rule of the devil to the sovereignty of Christ, who alone is our peace.

And that is the life to which we have been called by God. Just look at 4.1... We didn't apply to be Christians, or pass a test. God *called* us, just as he once called the former bigot and Christian-murderer, Paul. And so we need to practise what we preach, to be Christians not just from the teeth outwards, but from the heart, 'to live a life worthy of the calling you have received'. Nothing does Christianity, the Church more harm than hypocrisy, being, as they say in Ulster, a town saint and a home sinner! Being a Christian is a 24/7 thing. It's a whole way of life - the way you run your business, do your work, treat your wife and children.

And to get into step with God, we need to take our beat from a drum different from the world's. Just look at v2... 'Be

humble, gentle (actually the word is 'meek), and patient'. These things are so different from the world's way of doing things. 'Being humble' was despised in ancient Rome. It was a sign of weakness. Nietzsche in the 19thC saw humility as being pathetic and cringing, the religion of losers. He was the first to write about 'Superman'. You can see why Hitler liked Nietzsche, can't you? It was just one step to the master race! But today, we don't do humility. We swagger and trumpet our achievements. Stick up for yourselves! No-one else will. Ours is a culture of assertiveness, of rights and entitlements.

Who today would tell their child to be 'meek'? You would be frightened that the other children would walk over them and duff them up in the play ground. Yet just see how the Bible describes Moses. Turn to p148, *Numbers* 12.3... 'Very humble'; actually, the word again is 'meek', 'more meek than anyone else on the face of the earth'. Moses was one of the greatest leaders of all time. He faced up to Pharaoh and took the quarrelsome Israelites through the dangers of the desert to the Promised Land. He might have been meek, but there was nothing wimpish, feeble or cowardly about him. The word 'meek' means gentle giant, strong but controlled. Moses didn't throw his weight around and insist 'Do you not realise who I am?'

If people were able to control their aggression like Moses, and stop chucking their weight around, there might be fewer accidents on the road. There might be a lot less political posturing and showing off. Women are beaten up because men have to prove how tough they are. Ours is a pushy,

aggressive, assertive culture. We should learn humility, and the meekness which goes with being a gentle giant.

Christ's way is loving. It yields. It doesn't insist on its rights or have to show off or prove a point. His way is very different from the testosterone ways of the world which haven't really got us very far, have they?

And here's another instance of how God's ways are completely different from the world's ways. If he is bringing us all together, what is the common ground that we all share? It is our *feebleness*, our weakness, our moral failure, our sinfulness. The fact that we are all in our different ways moral failures, less or more, is the one thing we all share. And so we all share our absolute need of Christ to save us, to cleanse us and to heal us. Of course, the world doesn't understand this at all, because all it understands is assertiveness, success, and always 'being right'. But this is all delusion, because assertiveness leads only to wars and strife. The reality is that we are *not* the successes we think we are, and we are rarely 'right'.

We are actually united, brought together, by the very things the world does not understand - non-assertiveness, confessing our failures rather than boasting of our successes, and Jesus Christ who didn't get to the top of the greasy pole but was hanged on a Cross as a common criminal, a failure in the world's eyes. Today's chant is 'No-one's going to tell me what to do. I'm free to do what I like'. But Paul urges us as a 'prisoner of and for the Lord'. He is *not* his own. He belongs to Jesus Christ who is Lord of the universe and of our lives.