

Prayer

Lord God, our strength and our protection, give us courage as we walk into each situation we face and help us to remember that you are with us. Your care and protection never fail; for even when we feel at our most vulnerable, You never leave our side. Build us up in courage, trust and love, we pray, so that we may become more like You. Praise You, Lord God: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Find a news magazine you do not usually read, and pray about the topics covered within it

On-going prayers

- ***This week, pray for prisons.*** *Pray for any prisons near to where you live, and the categories of prisoners kept there. Pray for the safety of all.*
- *Pray for the needs of countries in the 'Pacific Rim'*
- *Give thanks to God for peace and for justice and law*

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
For all Your good gifts are undeserved.

Bible Study - Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ I urge you therefore, I who am the Lord's prisoner, to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience and having consideration for one another in love, ³ sparing no effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one Body and one Spirit, for you were summoned in the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Thought for the day

Text

Ephesians 4:1

¹ *I urge you therefore, I who am the Lord's prisoner, to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,*

Thought

At this central point in his letter, Paul urges the Ephesians to live up to their responsibilities. He had done so to the point of being imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, so no-one could fault him for not living by what he taught.

God has called every one of us for a purpose, yet astonishingly, many Christians think that only a few people have a 'call' in order to do special tasks for God. I urge you; pray to the Lord until you know the call placed on your life, and then live exclusively to that call. This is the life of faith, nothing else.

Review

This is indeed a remarkable passage, and for those who enjoy memorising a few verses of Scripture, this may be one of the best to remember from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Each phrase is succinct and challenging, urging the faithful to reach further and higher in aspiring to the true qualities of godliness summarised here and witnessed to within innumerable Scriptures both in the New Testament and the Old.

In the first verse of this passage, we find that Paul mentions his imprisonment for the second time (3:1 and 4:1). In both places, Paul mentions this dramatically in order to highlight a powerful truth. One who follows the Lord may find themselves led into extreme circumstances, but within this, their faith is confirmed and their work for the Lord is fulfilled. This is not as easy message to hear, and it was not easy for Paul to give; for when he wrote this he was living in prison circumstances unimaginable to us today. In chapter 3, he speaks about being imprisoned because he brought the Gospel to the Gentiles; here, he speaks about it shamelessly to encourage God's people to live 'in a manner worthy of the call ...' (4:1). In this way, Paul challenges us to accept that the call to Christian life is radical, dangerous, true and world changing. If our faith has become soft and ineffective today, we have perhaps failed to read and understand these words.

On the basis of his glorious exposition of the Gospel (chapters 1 and 2) and his defence of his right to proclaim it (chapter 3), Paul turns the challenge of faith on his readers in this powerful way. However, his words are uplifting and full of encouragement, and from this point to the end of the letter, his writing retains this sense of support and enthusiasm. His words in verse one of our reading recall the opening chapter in his letter (1:4,5,12,18) where he spoke of the amazing privilege of being chosen by God, not just to be one of His people, but to be personally loved by Him, to have a place in the Kingdom and have a task given by the Lord. This is the full meaning of being 'called', and Paul urges God's people to grasp this and live it (4:1). Moreover, he confirms in no uncertain terms the manner in which this should be done, listing the qualities of 'humility ... gentleness, patience ... consideration' (4:2).

These qualities are remarkably 'Christ like', and they stand in contrast to the manner in which people conduct themselves today, even sometimes at church. It is no wonder that Paul concludes his list with the one word that characterises the Gospel, which is the word 'love' (4:2 – see also 1 Cor 13 etc.). It is also no wonder that Paul says that these qualities 'preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (4:3). Each of us knows the heartbreak of division, and can recall the anguish of words said and deeds done when people have been offended and walked away from Christian fellowship. Hopefully, we have also witnessed the extraordinary power of God to work through people of great kindness, patience and consideration to bring those who are lost back to the Lord. Herein lies a powerful challenge; what kind of people do we wish to be?

On the basis of being called and chosen, and living in unity by the standards of Christ, Paul succinctly describes a simple statement of faith that can be made by God's people; 'one body, one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God' (4:4-6). This sevenfold formula is so clearly a basic statement of faith, it is surprising that it is not in common use by Christian organisations to this day! These words are memorable; they say a great deal at first reading and much more as soon as we examine them deeper; they are classic scripture from the letters of Paul.

There are many passage of scripture worth remembering; but surely this is one of the most appealing and yet challenging for those who wish to live the life of faith to the uttermost.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does Paul mean by 'the call you have received' (4:1)
- How does 'consideration for one another' (4:2) work? Is it the same as compromise?
- How can we 'preserve the unity of the Spirit ...' (4:3)?
- What does Paul mean by speaking about 'one Lord' (and 'one Spirit' etc. – 4:4-6)?

Notes on the text and translation

V2 *'and being tolerant of one another.'* You may be used to the more famous phrase 'bearing with one another in love'. The Greek verb here indicates having patience with others, but because patience has already been mentioned in the verse, every translator attempts to use a similar or related word to indicate something similar. I feel that the word 'tolerance' comes closest to the meaning of this Greek word for people today.

V4 *'for you were summoned in the one hope of your calling'* In Greek, the phrase reads like this 'and you were also called in the one hope of your calling'. The word 'called' could also mean 'invited or summoned' whereas the noun 'calling' has the more specific meaning of 'station in life', which is close to the way we use the word 'call' in Christian circles today. This translation makes the difference clear; this is an important phrase, as the study notes make clear.

Going Deeper

What does Paul mean by 'the call you have received' (4:1)

Many Christians today believe that the 'call' means God's call on their life to follow Him. This is indeed the case. However, if we go no further than this, we imply that there is little more for most Christians to do than respond to this call, accept Christ, and live happily ever after; and this is not the case. Many churches today are filled with people who sincerely believe that they have done all God requires of them by becoming a Christian and going to church. Often, they live as best they can without any sense of their place in God's creation other than to live and work where they are set in the world, and hopefully enjoy life a little. This is not what Christ died to offer us, just as 'follow me' is not the sum total of the Christian call; responding to the Lord by faith is the only starting place for the life of discipleship.

If we read the beginning of Ephesians, we discover that amongst other things, we are chosen (1:4), destined (1:5), appointed (1:11) and called (1:18). Each one of us is loved of God and He does not simply call us along with everyone else in the world, He has a special place in His Kingdom for each of us and work to do that we alone can do. We are not saved to do what we want and live as we like, we are saved to live for the Lord and find fulfilment in doing what we were created to do. This is why the Holy Spirit gives gifts to everyone, each according to the will of God and the good of all (1 Cor 12:1-7). We are not made as mere fodder for mass worship of God in a great choir, but each of us with our own song to sing and praise to offer.

So when Paul says 'live in a manner worthy of the call you have received', this means that He has called each one of us for a purpose, and we cannot be fulfilled until we have understood this, accepted it, lived it, seen its fruits and given glory to God. I am not talking about great preachers and ministers of the Gospel here, but people who do what God requires of them in every walk of life and every kind of church because they are content in themselves that they know what the Lord requires of them and act on it. This is the path of Christ and the pathway to godliness.

How does 'consideration for one another' (4:2) work? Is it the same as compromise?

In almost every conversation I have had about Christian character and living, I have heard people both accept the godly qualities mentioned here in verse 2, but add some harder and more worldly characteristics. Surely, it is argued, one has to be 'as wise as serpents' as well as 'gentle as doves' if we are not to compromise our faith and standards. This quote is scriptural, of course (Matt 10:16), but these words come from Jesus' advice about dealing with a world that has rejected God, not about the affairs of the church. Unfortunately, Jesus' words have been used as a cover for stubbornness or insensitivity, and sometimes an excuse for retaining more worldly attitudes.

An example of this comes from my training for ministry. In a lecture about pastoral care, I was advised that I should care for people, naturally, but to keep all those who wished to see me waiting for me, by using an appointment system. It was argued that this would enable me to keep my sanity amidst the pressures of life and prevent people taking advantage of me and my time. I recall suggesting that this might come across as uncaring, and was told that if I wished to be 'meek and mild' then I would suffer the fate of being walked on by others, and this would do the church no good. Since that day, I have preferred to follow the example of Jesus and accept the consequences. I know that I have not managed to do this as well as Jesus Himself; but how can a minister of Christ do anything other?

Paul's advice at the end of verse 2 is that we 'have consideration for one another in love', and this phrase aptly concludes two essential features of Christian living. Firstly, we do not live for ourselves, we live for Christ and for others. Secondly, the underlying motive for what we do must always be love, because love is at the very heart of God. This is the consistent testimony of God's Word, and we find these same points made in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

'As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.' (Colossians 3:12-14)

How can we 'preserve the unity of the Spirit ...' (4:3)?

Just as we find in the similar verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians (above), the thought of living in a Christ like manner leads Paul to speak of the unity of God's people in Him. This series of Bible notes have often

highlighted the theme of the unity of God's people as found throughout the New Testament. Here, however, Paul declares this openly; he says that God's people should '*spare no effort*' to preserve their '*unity of Spirit*' (4:3).

Our main difficulty today, of course, is that worldwide, there is little or no unity amongst God's people to preserve, and for this reason, most Christians speak readily about the unity of God's people being a 'spiritual matter', and not something that should be sought here on earth. This sounds very neat, and it appears to be a reasonable interpretation of this text here in Ephesians, but it contains a major misunderstanding of the word 'spiritual'. People tend to think of things 'spiritual' as being heavenly and not earthly, but this is not what the word 'spiritual' means in the Bible. Something spiritual is indeed found on earth, for we are 'spiritual beings' (Gen 2:7), worship is 'spiritual' (Romans 12:1f.), we receive spiritual gifts from God (1 Cor 1:7, 12:1f.) etc. Moreover, Peter says that God's people are being 'built into a spiritual house ... offering spiritual sacrifices to God' (1 Peter 2:5), and he does not mean that we only do this in heaven! There is no reference to the word 'spiritual' in the Bible meaning 'found in heaven but not on earth!' The word 'spiritual' refers to those things on earth that are full of the Spirit of God.

It seems only right therefore that we must accept the challenge of Scripture that appears to lie beyond the sight of many Christians today. The call of all Scripture for God's people to seek to be one in their Saviour, as He Himself said, 'so that the world may believe' (John 17:21). This is only achieved through the Holy Spirit and through being obedient to Him, and it is the only proper way to interpret Ephesians 4:3, whatever our feelings about Christian unity amongst the churches today.

What does Paul mean by speaking about 'one Lord' (and 'one Spirit' etc. – 4:4-6)?

The great sevenfold statement of faith made by Paul in this letter (4:4-6) is first and foremost a list of those things that unite all God's people; or perhaps we should say today, those things that should unite all God's people! Each of these seven uniting principles is witnessed to throughout God's Word:

- **One Body** This phrase uses Paul's description of the church as the 'body of Christ' (Rom 7:4, 1 Cor 10:16, 12:27) and reminds us of the interdependence of all God's people on one another, the fundamental principle of 1 Corinthians 12.
- **One Spirit** The whole world was made by the 'breath' of God (the Hebrew word for 'breath' being the same as 'spirit'); it is continually sustained by the same Spirit, who came at Pentecost and empowers us to do God's will.
- **One Hope** Uniquely, Paul uses the word 'hope' to describe the call of a Christian; 'the one hope of your calling'. This refers to the ultimate and sure hope of all God's people to be united with Him in glory. Salvation means nothing less than this.
- **One Lord** The 'Lord' is what is said when the holy name of God ('JHWH') appears in the Old Testament. We frequently use this name for Jesus, but it was an extraordinarily bold move of the early Christians to use it for Jesus. Paul's statement here says boldly that there is only one God who is known through Jesus, our 'Lord'.
- **One Faith** Christians will often speak of 'one faith' when singing hymns or saying the great Christian creeds. It is challenging to speak about this because it suggests there is something wrong if it is represented by Christian factions who do not have anything to do with each other! But this is surely true; Christ is not divided.
- **One Baptism** Throughout the church today, baptism is performed in many ways and there are furious divisions about the age at which this is appropriate. Mostly, these divisions focus on the practice of baptism and not its true meaning. For Paul, there can only ever be 'one baptism' because there was only ever one sacrifice for the sins of the world, done by Jesus.
- **One God** Here, Paul's great statement of faith ends by confirming the great affirmation of the Old Testament that stands to this day; 'the Lord our God, the Lord is one ...' (Deut 6:4), and 'You shall have no other gods before me ...' (Exodus 20:3). Mostly, the people of the world are content with the idea that there are plenty of different gods. However, the Christian must ever proclaim that there is only one God, and there are no others.

Application

This passage tells us much, and I have already explained a great deal of what is meant by the word 'call' in this text. Here, I will add that in accord with all Scripture, this passage describes the life of faith as characterised by love; 'with all humility and gentleness, with patience and having consideration for one another in love' (4:2). Too often, we think of love as weak and ineffective, because things like humility, kindness and patience don't appear to 'get things done', so people look for ways of appearing to be godly but

keeping a tougher interior. To some, humility means accepting things between gritted teeth only to give out about them later, gentleness means 'kid-gloving' people with false assumptions about their abilities and needs, and patience means holding on to grudges until one is fit to burst! This is not the spiritual outworking of a heart of love for others! When we meet those who are truly humble, kind and patient, we know the difference between these spiritual qualities and the world's perceptions of them. In the Church of God, the humble, kind and patient should be able to do God's will effectively simply because they know that these qualities have been given them by God, and they are universally accepted as being appropriate.

I will refrain from saying more about church unity here except to say that I recently came across some information about a lively and very active church in a nearby town. It said; 'we are part of the Body of Christ in ...' My spirit shouted out 'Alleluia!' I have come across at least one church that unashamedly describes itself as a part of Christ's body, and does not pretend or try to be all of it! This church recognised that they were part of a fellowship of believers witnessing the one Gospel to their local town. How refreshing!

Our passage is truly encouraging; it asks us to make sure we know our call, respond to it in a godly way, and live exclusively to that call. This is the life of faith, nothing else.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do humility, gentleness and kindness mean to you? What does the world think of them?
2. Discuss with each other how patience helps us express love. Give examples.
3. Can we express the unity Paul speaks of here without having fellowship with other Christian communities in our own cities, towns and villages?

Discipleship

Discipleship issue found in this text

- *Christian call*
- *The characteristics of Christian love*
- *The unity of God's people*
- *A Statement of Faith*

Personal comments from the author:

I find it enormously encouraging to write about such a passage of scripture. It is full of advice, it can be understood simply and yet it has so much more to say. It speaks about hope as well as faith and love, and it speaks about our unity in Christ by giving us a list of those things through which we are unified. The more I read Ephesians, the more I am convinced that the whole letter is intended as a means of encouragement.

Ideas for exploring discipleship issues

- *Read through the passage several times, and consider how God is trying to encourage you. Attempt to memorise the one phrase or verse(s) that you believe to be most helpful to you.*
- *Pray about the unity of God's people, and ask the Lord to help you gain a fuller perspective on this much argued about subject.*

Final Prayer

Give me, Lord a heart that is open to Your guidance, so that I may always be prepared to go wherever you may call. Give me the wisdom to discernment evil and the courage to stand against it; and help me serve others at all times as an expression of the love You have placed in my heart. Thanks be to God.
