

Prisoner of the Lord – Ephesians 4

Intro: Somebody seems trapped. Maybe her trap isn't our trap, but we can relate. Everybody has what God calls a besetting sin – a sin or a set of circumstances that traps us. It all begins with a confusion of allegiances: who do you belong to?

I. A Prisoner of the Lord

- A.** Paul began chapter three the same way he begins this chapter. He has chosen who to belong to. He has pledged his allegiance.
 - 1.** In chapter 3 that allegiance required him to go to the Gentiles and welcome them in. His world – the Jewish world – thought that was insane, doctrinally wrong, and dangerous... but he had given his loyalty to Jesus, not the world.
 - 2.** In chapter 3, love was required of all who swore allegiance to Jesus.
 - 3.** In chapter 4, the consequence of being a prisoner of Jesus – of having declared who we now are in Jesus Christ – is that our love for each other must be real, sincere, and effective – just like Jesus' love for us.

II. Unity in Love

- A.** Vv. 1-6 is often used to give us reasons to separate from each other (your baptism isn't like my baptism so one of us is wrong and I think it's you!).
- B.** Fact is, it was given to us as a reason NOT to divide from each other. We have been called to stay with each other because we have all these things in common. A lot of work has been done to bring us together. Do not let lack of love undo what Jesus has done.
- C.** Church problems are almost always personal problems based on a lack of love. Doctrinal reasons are added in later as reasons for a split, or for stopping our giving, or for staying home but the real reason is we declared allegiance to our own desires or to the world and NOT to Christ and his family.

III. Leaders and Reasons

- A.** Leaders of the church are put in place by God (vv.11-13). Why?

1. To bring us onto solid ground. (14-16) My job, and that of the rest of the staff from the front office to the eldership, is to bring us closer together to each other and to Jesus.
 2. It is also our job to make sure that none of us swears allegiance to any other master than Jesus Christ.
- B.** This is why we are warned against thinking like the world thinks.
1. Hardened hearts, lack of sensitivity (why is it Christians who give their own money and time to the needy rather than demanding others give?).
 2. While the world loves to lampoon Christians when some subset of them acts in bizarre ways (Jesus Camp, Kansas Baptist protestors) it is impossible to overstate how dark, how self indulgent, and how lustful the world is today – and has always been. (the Sundance Film Festival)
- C.** The leaders of Rochester Church are here to help us all put off our old way of thinking and acting and to get a new attitude. (22-24)

IV. Our Responsibility to Each Other

- A.** Citizens of this country have rights and obligations. Those who have pledged allegiance to Jesus have laid aside their rights and voluntarily taken on obligations.
- B.** In the church, we are to be kind to each other, lay aside our anger, and not give the devil any territory that rightfully belongs to Jesus. (25-27)
- C.** The purpose of our work now is not self enrichment or empowerment. We work so that we can share with others. We work so that we can do something useful. (28)
- D.** We limit what we say, making sure that only words that build each other up come out of our mouths. St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the gospel continuously. And sometimes, use words.” We are to model the grace of Jesus Christ to each other, treating each other as He has treated us (and the way we WANT him to treat us).

Everything has changed. We have left one country and pledged our allegiance to another. We have dropped our loyalty to the ways of the world

and have put our loyalty to Jesus on display. We have dropped the way we dealt with people in the past, the way we talked, the way we handled our money, the way we handled our time... and put all of that on the altar as we gathered around the throne of Jesus.