

Rules for the New Life

In my study Bible, today's passage from Ephesians is given the subtitle is used as today's sermon title. This epistle is written to a mixed group of people who have heard the gospel message and accepted it as a truth for their lives. The letter begins by presenting a cosmic view of God's plan of redemption for the whole of humanity through the work of Jesus of Nazareth who has been resurrected. His life and ministry revealed God's love for the world and plan to redeem and unite all of humanity into one body; eliminating the barriers of traditions which separated and caused hostilities between groups. This plan is breathtaking in scope as presented in Ephesians 1:10: "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." Having looked at these earlier passages we come to Ephesians 4: 25 which begins with the Greek preposition $\Delta\iota\ \delta\iota\o$ (*dio*) which like most prepositions be translated with many English ones. The translation used in our reading was "so then", but as I found in some older translations there is another preposition which seems to carry more weight...more emphasis..."Therefore" is another equally acceptable translation for "*dio*". Thinking about this introduction to the instructions the writer is giving...therefore seems to be a more fitting connection to the gift of grace which has been received by those who have accepted God's plan of redemption for the world. "Therefore, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another." We are now in the third week looking at the narrative of the 6th chapter of John's gospel which began describing how Jesus fed the 5000 with those 5 loaves of barley and two fish; the second week the crowd followed Jesus and the disciples back across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum looking for another meal, seeking a sign that he could feed them like Moses had fed their ancestors in the desert. Despite God's trying to establish a relationship of trust by molding the people through the daily provision of manna in the morning and quail in the evening; the people failed to understand who truly their provider was. Now as Jesus tries to explain that he is the true bread which will not perish or spoil that has been provided by God to provide for their redemption; there are those in the crowds who refuse to listen. When Jesus tells them he has come down from heaven to do the will of the Father, some of them bring of knowledge of him as one who grew up in the neighborhood, son of Joseph. These doubters say, "How can you be from heaven?" This makes Jesus different from them, it doesn't make sense. But really, can you say that anything that we know of God makes sense to the human mind? God literally does not make sense to the world that God has made. That is why there are two types of revelations by which we understand God and God's interactions with us. There is the general revelation and the special revelation; of natural and revealed theology. There are things we come to know about God by the way the world works, but then there are things we can only come to know about God if we receive them from God through revelation because God stands both within the order God created and outside of it. And God is the one who can raise us up out of all that we know of this world and teach us about the miraculous and the eternal. Throughout this passage what is revealed is what God does: the Father sent the son; the Father makes us drawn to the Son; the Son will raise us up; the Son came down from heaven; the bread comes down from heaven; God teaches and speaks to us; and Jesus, as the bread of life will give his flesh for the life of the world. These are seven actions of God in this passage...God makes it all possible. God is the active agent throughout. These are God's revelations to us about God's ownself. These are the

things Jesus tells the crowd they need to accept, including the fact that they may not make sense in the context of the world. This struggle to accept what does not make sense in the context of the world does not go away...human reason often has trouble with some but not all aspects of God. There is much to our knowledge of God that is rational...the wonders of the ecosystems...the vastness of the cosmos...the intricacies of our own biology, for example...but the wonder of God's amazing grace and love...that revelation is where we struggle most. The tenses of God's actions listed in this passage are informative. In verse 43: when Jesus says the Father sent him, that describes a specific occurrence—a one-time event in history. In verse 50, the tense Jesus uses changes when he says that the bread (him) comes down, he is implying that he continues to feed us even though he is no longer bodily present anymore. Finally as this passage ends, with verse 51, both present and past tenses are employed for the present tense living bread that came down in the past. This brings us back to that opening word of the Ephesians passage and the rules for the new life we are to live in response to the gift of God's grace. "Therefore, putting away all falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another." This was written to a group of newly merged folks...some raised as Jews, some who had been belong to various pagan cults, some who were slaves, some who were not...probably few had really been "neighbors" in the sense of even knowing one another before becoming believers in Christ. Now they are told they are to be members of one another. "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil." Think about how often we allow anger and hurt feelings caused by the events around us to make "room for the devil" in our thoughts and actions. And in our society, these thoughts and actions are so easily spread and spilled out...far beyond just one day. "Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up." What a wonderful rule that would be...if it could be applied...if only those things which were helpful were said or posted on the social media. If you think about how much a kind word means...you can see what a difference it would make if those were the only types of words which were spread. All of these things are summed up for these believers as to be a new way of living so not "to grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which they have been marked as a sign of their redemption. The indwelling of the Holy Spirits is to create a new life with in them with these characteristics so that they can be forgiving of one another, as God in Christ has forgiven them. These changes should mark our lives as well as we seek to be faithful disciples and witnesses. The final verse of the Ephesians passage states it this way, beginning again with that word Dio—Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The revelations of God's love and grace are always a mystery our logic will never unravel, we can only give praise and thanks. When reading a commentary on the 1st Kings passage about Elijah's flight from the wrath of Queen Jezebel, it rang true about so much of what our scriptures reveal—despite our stubborn refusals to accept and follow the guidance or abundance of God's grace—God was not done with Elijah at that point in the narrative, and God is not ever done with us....God was so persistent God sent his only Son to be the Living Bread and the Cup of Salvation...we can never truly comprehend but we can respond with love and witness to the grace we receive by sharing and spreading the love as we allow our self-centeredness to be transformed by imitations of caring for others found in the ministry of our Lord. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

