

Imitators of God

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

The Bible that I use names this section of scripture: Rules for the New Life.

Let me tell you about the first time I got a dozen roses. I was in college and I have never been a very good housekeeper. But getting the flowers called for cleaning my dorm room and keeping it clean for the life of the roses. Getting flowers changed my behavior, for a while, at least.

While I was gone to the World Convention Leroy had the kitchen and dining room painted. Now we are waiting to install our new kitchen and dining room floor, then we will replace our dining room furniture and one of our kitchen appliances. Now I have to clean up. You see, some paint and new flooring will change my behavior, for a while, at least. When circumstances change, the situation calls for new behavior. God is our Father and we are to imitate God's behavior. Paul says that we have been saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and this calls for cleaning up, and replacing some things that we use to do in our lives. Paul calls us to freedom in Christ, but sometimes Paul is willing to give us lists of does and don'ts and this is one of these occasions. Paul had given instructions in 4:1-7 to live lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But Paul was not content to explain a principle and then leave it. He applied principle to the different areas of life that need to feel its power. Paul even dared to name sins. Paul told us to avoid five different sins and explained why.

First Paul instructed the Ephesians on Lying (v. 25). A lie is a statement that is contrary to fact, spoken with the intent to deceive. If I tell you it is noon, and then discover that my watch is wrong, I did not tell a lie. But if I gave you the wrong time so you would be late to a meeting and I would benefit from it, that would be a lie. Sometimes we like to believe that we help people by lying to them, but that is not the case. We may not see the sad consequences immediately, but ultimately they will come. The Christian's life is to be controlled by truth.

Paul gives the reason for telling the truth; because we are all members of the same body. We can live in safely only because the senses and the nerves pass true messages to the brain. If they took to passing false messages, if, for instance, they told the brain that something was cool and touchable when in fact it was hot and burning, life would very soon come to an end. A body can function healthily only when each part of it passes true messages to the brain. If then we are all bound into one body, that body can function properly only when we speak the truth.

Second Paul instructs us on Anger (vv. 26–27). Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (Deut. 9:8, 20; Ps. 2:12). The holy anger of God is a part of God's judgment against sin, as illustrated in Jesus' anger when He cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12–13). Sometimes a person's anger smolders, and this is called malice; but anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and this is called wrath.

The New Testament principle seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people. It is possible to be angry and not sin, but if we do sin, we are to settle the matter quickly and not let the sun go down on our wrath. "Agree with your adversary quickly" (Matt. 5:25). "Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). The longer we postpone mending a quarrel, the less likely we are ever to mend it. The fire of anger, if not quenched by

loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder (Matt. 5:21–26).

We know from listening to news reports that many deaths are by murder, and most of these murders involved relatives and friends. They are what the law calls “crimes of passion.” Two friends get into an argument, one of them gets angry, pulls a gun or knife, and kills the friend. We can try to defend our bad temper by saying, “I explode and then it’s all over with, just like a shotgun—but look at the damage that’s left behind.” If we have been in the wrong, we must pray to God to give us grace to admit that it was so; and even if we have been right, we must pray to God to give us the graciousness which will enable us to take the first step to put matters right.

Then Paul turns to Stealing (v. 28). “You shall not steal” is one of the Ten Commandments. Stealing was particularly a sin in Paul’s day. Paul urged citizens in general, who were addicted to thievery, to no longer steal. Paul wrote to people in the Ephesian church who were gainfully employed (Eph. 4:28) not to take what was not theirs.

Paul added motive to this admonition. We should work, and not steal, so that we might be able “to give to the needy.” You would expect Paul to have said, “Let him work that he might take care of himself and not be tempted to steal.” Instead, he lifted human labor to a much higher level. We work that we might be able to help others. If we steal, we hurt others; therefore, we should work that we might be able to help others. I work with people that are on Social Security Disability Insurance and the goal is for those so can work to do so even if only for a while. Paul believes that if you were physically and mentally able to work, work was your Christian duty.

Paul himself was an example of a hard worker, because while he was establishing local churches, he labored as a tentmaker. Every Jewish rabbi was taught a trade, because, said the rabbis, “If you do not teach your son a trade, you teach him to be a thief.” The persons God called in the Scriptures were busy working: Moses was a shepherd; Gideon was a wheat thresher; Deborah was a job; David was a shepherd; and the first four disciples were fishermen; and Jesus was a carpenter.

Now Paul turns to Corrupt speech (v. 29). The mouth and heart are connected. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). We expect a change in speech when a person becomes a Christian. As a condemned sinner, the mouth is stopped before the throne of God (Rom. 3:19); but as a believer, the mouth is opened to praise God (Rom. 15:6). Change the heart and you change the speech. Paul certainly knew the difference, because when he was an unsaved rabbi, he was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). But when he trusted Christ, a change took place: “At this moment he is praying” (Acts 9:11). His speech changes with his one step of faith!

The word corrupt refers to rotten fruit. It means “that which is worthless, bad, or rotten.” Our words do not have to be “dirty” to be worthless. Sometimes we go along with the crowd and try to impress people with the fact that we are not as puritanical as they think. Peter may have had this motive in mind when he was accused by the girl of being one of Christ’s disciples. “Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, ‘I do not know the man’ ” (Matt. 26:74). The appetites of the old life sometimes show up when we permit “filthy communication” out of the mouth (Col. 3:8). Paul reminds us that our speech should be pleasing to God. To do this we are to fill our hearts with the love of Christ so that only truth and purity can come out of the mouth. Never have to say, “Now, take this with a grain of salt.”

Paul told us to put the salt of God's grace in everything we say. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). And keep in mind that your words have power, either for good or evil. Paul tells us to speak in such a way that what we say will build up our listeners, and not tear them down. Our words should minister grace and help to draw others closer to Christ.

Next Paul instructs on Bitterness (vv. 30–32). Bitterness refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner person. Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill will against them. "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them" (Col. 3:19). Unresolved bitterness leads to wrath, which is the explosion on the outside of the feelings on the inside. Wrath and anger often lead to physical fights or angry words. It is difficult to believe that Christians would act this way, but we do, and this is why Paul warned us and the Psalmist says, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity" (Ps. 133:1).

The story is told of a handsome elderly man who stopped by a pastor's my study one day and asked to have a wedding performed for him. He was asked to bring the bride for a chat to get acquainted. "Before she comes in," he said, "let me explain this wedding to you. Both of us have been married before—to each other! Over thirty years ago, we got into an argument, I got mad, and we separated. Then we did a stupid thing and got a divorce. I guess we were both too proud to apologize. Well, all these years we've lived alone, and now we see how foolish we've been. Our bitterness has robbed us of the joys of life, and now we want to remarry and see if the Lord won't give us a few years of happiness before we die." Bitterness and anger, usually over trivial things, make havoc of homes, churches, and friendships.

Paul gives three reasons why we must avoid bitterness and live in an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace. First, it grieves the Holy Spirit. Second, our

bitterness grieves Christ, who died for us. Third, it grieves God who forgave us when we trusted Christ. Paul says we can change our attitude of bitterness by becoming forgiving people. An unforgiving spirit becomes the Christian's battleground. If somebody hurts us, either deliberately or unintentionally, and we do not forgive him, then we begin to develop bitterness within, which hardens the heart. Rather, we should be tenderhearted and kind. After all, we are not hurting the person who hurt us; we are only hurting ourselves. Bitterness in the heart makes us treat others badly, when we should treat others the way God has treated us. In His gracious kindness, God has forgiven us, and we should forgive others. We do not forgive for our sake or even for their sake, but for Jesus' sake. Learning how to forgive is one of the secrets of a happy Christian life.

Paul reminds us that we are children of God and ought to walk in love. Having been born again through faith in Christ, we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4); and since "God is love" it is logical that God's children will walk in love. The old nature is basically selfish, and for this reason builds walls and declares war. But the new nature is loving, and therefore builds bridges and proclaims peace. We are God's beloved children so we are to imitate God. We can imagine, God speaking of us the same way He spoke of Jesus: "This is My beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). In fact, the Father loves us as He loves His Son (John 17:23). We are born into a loving relationship with the Father that ought to result in our showing love to Him by the way we live.

We were purchased with a great price. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But Jesus laid down His life for His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Our love for Him is our response to His love for us. Paul compares Christ's sacrifice on the cross to the Old Testament "sweet-savor" sacrifices that were presented at the altar of the temple (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; 2:9). The

idea behind “sweet-savor” is simply that the sacrifice is well-pleasing to God (Leviticus 1–3). the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering. New Testament scholars say the burnt offering pictures Christ’s complete devotion to God; the meal offering, His perfection of character; and the peace offering, His making peace between sinners and God.

We are members one of another; we ought to share with others; we ought to build one another up; and we ought not to grieve God. Since we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father. God is love (1 John 4:8); therefore, we are to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:1–2). God’s love is the fundamental factor in the Christian life. If we walk in love, we will not disobey God or injure others because “one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). The Holy Spirit puts this love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).^{1 2}

Above all my brothers and sisters we must imitate the love and the forgiveness of God.”³ My brothers and sisters go and imitate your Father.

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Eph 4:25

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:637

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 154