

# The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*<sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.  
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

## Message 19

### Nitty Gritty Christian Living

October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Last Sunday Pastor Evan walked you through Ephesians 4:17-24 where the Apostle Paul laid out for us the consequences of believing in the Gospel. Because God in Christ did this for you and because you have been chosen for holiness – you need to put off the old way of life that was killing you and you need to put on the ways of Christ which are life. We need to do this because this is the only way that we can be a Gospel believing church and a Gospel DEMONSTRATING CHURCH. It does the cause of Christ no good if we believe the Gospel but LIVE like pagans so the church has to be a place where people BELIEVE the Gospel AND it has to be a place where people LIVE as though they've been born again! It has to be, Paul says and now he comes right down to street level, right down to the nitty gritty of everyday life and he shows us EXACTLY what this should look like. Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:25 and following.

### **Prefatory Comments:**

Before we begin reading I want to say a few things that will help you receive this passage in the way that Paul intended. Think of these as “margin notes” if you want, but I want to deal with them first so that we can walk through the passage sequentially. First thing:

#### **1. Christian morality is NOT new – it comes from the Old Testament**

There is a ton of confusion out there right now in the church and in the culture about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. Richard Dawkins wrote an article that was on the CNN website last week where he said that the way Christians treat the Bible is unintelligible. They ignore the parts that say getting a tattoo or gathering sticks on the Sabbath is wrong but they still get all hot and bothered about homosexuality even though these ideas come from the same book of the Bible. The point he is trying to make is that the morality of God's people has been all over the map and is essentially a work in progress and needs to evolve quickly on the issue that he is concerned with, namely homosexuality. Now, this is definitely NOT the time for a full length treatment of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is true that some parts of the Old Testament have been FULFILLED in Christ. We usually refer to those parts as "the ceremonial or ritual law". We don't sacrifice goats during worship anymore. We don't sprinkle people with blood and our view of the Sabbath and worship time has changed because of who Jesus is and what he did in his life, death and resurrection – that is true. But. The morality of the Old Testament is never questioned in the New Testament and the moral law is often repeated verbatim and if anything is tightened and narrowed time and again. "You have heard it said 'do not commit adultery' but I tell you that anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart." That's tighter, that's narrower and that is generally what you find in the New Testament with respect to morality. Its not new – it is grounded in the OT and frequently narrowed because of the additional benefit of grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit. We should do better – our righteousness should EXCEED that of the Pharisees, Jesus said.

That is how you need to approach this and indeed that approach is suggested by this text. Paul isn't making this stuff up; he is actually quoting from Old Testament texts such as Zechariah 8 and Psalm 4 – sometimes loosely and sometimes word for word. Look for example at Psalm 4:4:

<sup>4</sup> Be angry, and do not sin (Psalm 4:4. ESV)

Recognize that? It comes from the passage we are about to read. New Testament morality isn't new.

## **2. Christian morality is NOT about gaining or losing salvation**

We know that morality is not about gaining salvation because Paul spent three chapters of this letter telling us that so he is certainly not back tracking on that here; he is telling us how to live as saved people. I think we've got that. However, from time to time you'll hear this passage, particularly verse 30 about grieving the Holy Spirit, quoted to talk about the danger of losing your salvation. We need to understand here that this passage is written to a church about how to behave as a corporate body witnessing to the glory of God in the Gospel. Paul told us that back in 4:1-6. The whole point of this extended paraclesis – moral admonition – is to show us how to be a church that is characterized simultaneously by TRUTH and LOVE. If you want to be a church that is ORTHODOX and PEACEFUL you are going to have to behave a certain way and this teaching flows out from that stated purpose. It is not about gaining or losing your salvation.

### **3. Christian morality IS connected to spiritual power and presence**

That is what Paul is talking about with that reference to grieving the Holy Spirit. He tells the people that they have been STAMPED and SEALED unto the day of redemption in the same sentence that he tells them that if they persist in angry and corrupting talk and behaviour in their church they may well lose the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their ministry. The threat here is not the individual loss of salvation – the threat is the corporate loss of power and intimate presence. That is what's on the line in this passage and if you care about that then you need to listen to this teaching as we meet it in Ephesians 4:25 and following.

My plan this morning is to read the text and divide it as we go. Paul speaks very plainly in pairs of negative and positive admonitions. He says do this and don't do that as you imitate God and live the life of love. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

<sup>25</sup>Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

The first nitty gritty moral admonition therefore is this:

#### **Nitty Gritty Admonitions For Christian Living In The Church:**

##### **1. Put away falsehood and speak the truth to one another**

The Apostle Paul appears here to be referencing two important Old Testament passages. The first is Zechariah 8:16:

<sup>16</sup>These are the things that you shall do: **Speak the truth to one another**; render in your gates judgments that are true and **make for peace**; <sup>17</sup>do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.” (Zechariah 8:16-17. ESV)

According to the Old Testament there is a type of peace, loved by God that comes ONLY from speaking the truth. Of course there is a type of peace that comes from never speaking the truth – that is the type of peace sought in Canadian culture and in most Canadian churches – but that isn’t the type of peace loved by God. God loves a ROBUST, TRUTH TELLING peace and that is the peace we seek in this church. It also seems that Paul is referencing Leviticus 19. Most of us know this chapter because it contains the oft quoted verse “Love thy neighbour as thyself”. However, most of us are unaware of how that love is defined in Leviticus 19. Let me show you:

**Rebuke your neighbor directly**, and you will not incur guilt because of him. <sup>18</sup>Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:17-18. HCSB)

The neighbour in Leviticus 19 was a member of the covenant community. The neighbour in Ephesians 4 is also a member of the covenant community. We don’t go around rebuking our unsaved neighbours – Paul reminded us of that in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; but we DO rebuke fellow MEMBERS of the covenant community. We do. Carefully, Paul says in Galatians 6:1 – but directly as Jesus said in Matthew 18:15. Part of what it means to love your neighbour in the Old Testament and New Testament church – is to speak the truth lovingly and directly. That is the sort of unity that is loved by the Lord.

## 2. Be angry but do not sin

Secondly Paul says:

<sup>26</sup>Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and give no opportunity to the devil.

Here again we have a positive and a negative side of this issue. We are allowed to be angry. Telling someone not to be angry would be like telling someone not to be hungry or like telling a

teenage boy not to find pretty girls attractive. We have natural, visceral reactions to external stimuli FOR WHICH we are not condemned according to the Bible. What we are not to do is nourish and cherish and STEW IN those visceral reactions. Martin Luther said it this way: “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head; but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” That’s what Paul is saying here! You can’t help but get angry in a church – particularly a TRUTH SPEAKING CHURCH! It is no accident that number 2 follows number 1. The Bible says that in a truth speaking church you are going to get angry. Let that settle on you. People are going to say things that ruffle your feathers a wee bit. As soon as you open your mouth you run the risk of offending other people. Sometimes that is because the person is a bit too tender and prone to offense, but sometimes it is because the tongue is a raging fire that no one can control and it says stupid and harmful things seemingly all on its own. This is going to be a particularly acute problem for the professional talkers – the Apostle James said that.

<sup>1</sup>Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup>For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:1-2. ESV)

This passage simultaneously terrifies and comforts me. It comforts me to know that even the Apostle James - James The Just - stumbled with his tongue. Praise the Lord!! That means that it isn’t just me saying goofy and stupid things, James did it too! That comforts me. What terrifies me is the promise that I’ll have to stand before God one day while he flips through my sermons with a highlighter. That terrifies me. That makes me want to quit the ministry and drive a Coke truck. I like to drive and I could listen to sermons on my phone without being on the hook for the content of those messages – that’s my fantasy. Being a preacher is a TERRIFYING proposition. It is impossible to speak for 4 minutes let alone 40 minutes without hurting somebody’s feelings – it can’t be done! So what do we do about it? Do we make the switch to 20 minute encouragement sessions? You’re ok I’m ok? Christian Soup for the Christian Soul? Is that what we do? No. We cut each other some slack and we keep very short accounts. The Bible says that if I say something that offends you today you have until 6:30 p.m. to talk to me about it and after that you have only one remaining option: LET IT GO. That’s what it says – DO NOT LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON YOUR ANGER. You have till sunset and then if you haven’t talked to me directly – LET IT GO.

Now, that doesn't let me off the hook – if what I said was truly stupid, or mean or crass I will have to give an account to ALMIGHTY GOD for that. You not reaming me out is not letting me off the hook. God is going to review my comments and hold me accountable, after I think about that I find I'm not too stressed about meeting with you. If you think what I said is Biblically inaccurate OR if you think it might cause another Christian to stumble YOU ARE OBLIGATED to make contact directly with me immediately – and I want you to – but if it isn't in that class of concern, if you just thought my wording was clunky or my joke wasn't funny, just let it go. I'm not getting off the hook, but the bigger issue is that if you hold on to that stuff you are leaving yourself WIDE OPEN to demonic oppression.

Look again at what Paul says in verses 26-27:

do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and **give no opportunity to the devil**.

According to the Bible, the devil is not the author of our anger – that's just our humanity – the devil comes into the picture when we CHERISH our anger and STEW IN IT. If you make the decision to hold on to your offenses for more than a few hours you are hanging a sign on the door of your house that says to the devil: "Come on in and make yourself at home". Its not worth it. Even if the person who said the thing was TOTALLY in the wrong – they're not getting away with anything! God will hold them accountable, that's not only true for pastors and elders, that's true for everybody. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 12:

<sup>36</sup>I tell you, on the day of judgment **people** will give account for every careless word they speak (Matthew 12:36. ESV)

Nobody gets away with anything – SO LET IT GO! If you cherish offense for more than 6 hours you are asking to be led into spiritual bondage. Thirdly Paul says:

### **3. Give up stealing and work hard so as to have something to share**

<sup>28</sup>Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

In the worldview of our fallen culture, its all about self preservation and personal accumulation. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. As a converted person, Paul says, you need to

forget about that and make it your life's ambition to WORK HARD SO AS TO OVERFLOW INTO NEED. He says that here and he says that in Galatians 6:

<sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10. ESV)

The phrase here in Ephesians 4 “doing honest work with his own hands” is an untranslatable idiom. Paul isn't saying only manual labour is good; he's just using an expression that means “work hard”. We have expressions like this in English which could not be translated into Greek. Put your nose to the grindstone, roll up your sleeves, burn the candle at both ends – what in the world do those things mean? Who puts their nose to a grindstone? If you burn a candle at both ends you are going to get wax all over the table – those expressions are ridiculous but we know what they mean. They mean WORK HARD. Get a job, shut your mouth and put your back into it! That's what Paul's saying. Remember, he already told us in chapter 2 that we were created for good works – this isn't new theology; he's just getting practical. The church can't DO good work unless you get a job and burn the candle at both ends, put your nose to the grindstone and SHARE. That's how it gets done.

Let me make a couple of sidebar comments on that before we move on. Obviously this line of thought would indicate that wealth is not bad in and of itself. The Bible is clear on this:

<sup>18</sup>You shall remember the LORD your God, for **it is he who gives you power to get wealth** (Deuteronomy 8:18. ESV)

God gave you the ability to make money. Maybe he made you strong, maybe he made you smart, maybe he made you savy. Maybe he caused you to be born into a family business that was already making money long before you came along. He gave that to you. Some of you seem to make money just by falling over. You're just good at it, you have the knack. You didn't make the knack, you were given the knack by the Sovereign God of the Universe and it wasn't because he liked you better than the guy sitting next to you and it wasn't because he figured you needed a bigger house a nicer car or more frequent vacations than that guy. He gave you the money because he prepared good works in advance to be your way of life. So let's be clear; wealth is not bad; it is the ordinary means by which extraordinary things are done for the glory of God in this city.

Secondly I think its important to note that this passage would also seem to indicate that benevolence in the church is not intended to replace personal industry and responsibility. In 2 Thessalonians Paul says:

<sup>10</sup>For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10. ESV)

No work = no eat according to the Bible. Few things cause strife in the church faster than freeloading – whether we’re talking about people who take from the common pot when they really could be working and contributing to the common pot or just people who come, put their kids in the nursery and expect 24 hour pastoral care but don’t serve and don’t tithe. Both kinds of people tend to create problems in the church. Generally speaking the people in the church who complain the most usually give and serve the least. But something happens to your complainy spirit when you start putting skin in the game. We all need to work hard in here so that we can contribute to the ordinary means by which the Lord is glorified in all the earth.

#### **4. Permit no corrupting talk but only that which is useful for building up**

Fourthly, Paul says in verse 29:

<sup>29</sup>Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

The word that is translated as “corrupting” is the Greek word *sapros*. It doesn’t refer to dirty jokes or potty mouth – though that is condemned elsewhere – here Paul is talking more about abusive speech and slander; the sort of talk that cuts people down. We are not to allow ourselves to do that. On the contrary, we are to use our words to build up or to EDIFY one another. We instruct, encourage, guide – or we shut up. That’s speaking to me this morning. I have recently been feeling convicted for USELESS speech more so than for abusive speech. I’m being convicted by the words “only such”. I have far too many conversations that go nowhere and serve no obvious purpose. Too many jokes and too many stories from the 80’s and too many “how you doing, I don’t know, how you doing” conversations about NOTHING!! My speech too often lacks urgency and utility!! Paul says speak ONLY WHAT IS GOOD FOR BUILDING UP



– that slays me!! I’m hoping and assuming that this is slight hyperbole. I assume we’re allowed to tell the odd story about our kids or one or two funny jokes from the 80’s but the principle here is convicting to me. Our speech should be selective and useful for building up.

Notice that Paul connects this principle to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your church:

<sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The “and” connective there serves to link these two ideas conceptually. Paul is not saying that we risk losing our salvation – we already covered that, he is saying if we cut each other down in the church and if we fail to use our words in an edifying manner in the church we run the risk of grieving the Holy Spirit and forfeiting his presence and power in the church. PAUSE and consider that. Isn’t it interesting that according to the Bible, if you want more spiritual power and presence in your church you don’t need to crank up the sound system, you don’t need to roll around on the carpet or repeat that chorus a 15<sup>th</sup> time – you need to manage your mouth and you need to speak words that edify the body of Christ.

Fifthly and lastly Paul says we must:

## **5. Put away bitterness and clamouring and be kind, compassionate and forgiving**

Verse 31:

<sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

The topic here is anger again but with a slightly different nuance than in verse 26. In verse 26 the concern was about offense and retaliation, here the concern is about an attitude and culture of conflict. Some churches seem to breed a culture of clamour and disputation. The word translated as “clamor” in the ESV is the Greek work *kraugei* and it literally means to shout or cry out loudly. Paul is saying: “Don’t be one of those churches where people fight and shout and fall out of fellowship with each other over petty disputes and differences.” That kind of thing destroys harmony and fellowship. We don’t need that kind of drama in the house of the Lord. Instead of

that, foster a culture of kindness, compassion and mercy, as God in Christ has forgiven you. The idea here is exactly like that expressed in the parable of the unmerciful servant. It is unseemly, it is inappropriate in a church full of people who have been forgiven MUCH and who have been granted unspeakable riches that we should fall out with each other over comparatively minor issues.

Look on each other with pity, with realism and with mercy. People in here are not perfect. They're in process. They say dumb things, they forget to be as caring as they should, they can be insensitive, they can express their ideas imperfectly – GET OVER IT. It amazes me how often people check out of their spiritual walk because of some minor offense from a Christian brother or sister. So and so didn't use my professional services when they built their home, so and so said something on Facebook that offended me, so and so never called me when my mother died, so and so put my son on time out during Sunday School – I'm not making those things up – those are the reasons people disappear from our church! We need to work together to build a culture in here where we don't simmer and retaliate over those things – that was the message of verse 26 and where we don't fight and slander and sever fellowship over those things. Remember that you are a great sinner and that God showed you great mercy and you ought to be more inclined to let these little things go.

### **Summary and Motivation:**

Look at chapter 5 verses 1-2 as we close. Scholars generally agree that the first two verses of chapter 5 should really be the last two verses of chapter 4. They are a summary and a statement of our motivation and means. Paul is concluding this section by saying 'this is what I'm telling you to do and this is why and how you should do it.'

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (ESV)

“This is what it means to imitate God; all of what I've been telling you; this is what it means to walk in love as a church of redeemed people!”

I love passages like this because we live in such an oppressively subjective and sentimental culture. We talk about love and “godliness” in the church but those things are rarely defined and when they are the definition sounds like it was written by the Hallmark people. Love in the Bible has CONTENT, it has SUBSTANCE, it has GRAVITAS. To walk in love and to imitate God MEANS SOMETHING. It means to tell the truth; it means being merciful and slow to anger. It means giving generously, thinking corporately and investing sacrificially. It means teaching, instructing and building people up and it means forgiving and persevering and nourishing an enduring fellowship. That’s what it means to imitate God and that’s what it takes to build lasting and loving fellowship in the House of God.

We do this, Paul concludes, through the contemplation of Jesus Christ who gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. We do it through worship. Once again we meet this strange idea that is all throughout the Bible that people over time become what they worship. If you worship idols, you will become like them – dead, cold and powerless. If you fix your eyes on the TV screen and soak up that world then you will become just like what you watch. Their values will become your values, their ambitions will become your ambitions. But if you fix your eyes on Jesus – if you, if we all with unveiled faces behold the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror – we will be changed. That’s a promise, that’s a miracle – that defies rational explanation, but it will happen. It is the work of the Spirit. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.