

Christian Virtues that Give Life

I wanted to begin this morning by saying I believe in evolution.

Let me explain. I don't believe in Darwinism type of evolution but I do believe that humanity has the opportunity to evolve, actually transform with the power of God, into a higher being or to devolve into a lower animal type of being.

Unfortunately what we see happening in the world today is more of a devolving from a human being into something that represents more of an animal. It is easy to see that as a whole it seems like more and more people are being driven by feelings, impulses of the flesh and other behaviors that resemble animals more than the higher beings we were created to be.

There is no longer a check on how people are to behave. So I am glad that Paul takes us back to basics in his letter to Christians in Ephesus.

In Ephesians we move into a section that builds on what Paul has been saying about the new life we have been given in Jesus.

The word therefore in verse 25 calls our attention back to verses 17-24 which speaks of our life before we accepted Christ. The old life that was motivated and lived by our humanistic side before we knew Christ.

But since we have accepted Christ and in a spiritual way the old self has been crucified with Christ we move into the challenge of being renewed in our mind, putting off the old self and putting on the new self which is created in the likeness of God, in righteousness and holiness.

In this passage Paul is sharing with us a few of the vices or behaviors of our old nature that has been crucified with Christ and hopefully we live as dead to and he shares with us some of the virtues of the Christian life that we are to put on.

Let's begin by reading through this passage.

Ephesians 4:24-32, “put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Virtue #1 Always Speak the Truth

Paul begins this teaching by telling us that as new creatures in Christ we are always to speak the truth.

This is more challenging than most people think. Now I doubt that any of us are out and out liars. I have a grandson who is the biggest story teller I have ever heard. He is 15 and if he thinks you don't know better he will share a story about something that he has done that is bigger and better than life. I remember him telling me that the owner of a drag strip car took him on a ride down main-street of Concordia Kansas at over a 200 miles per hour.

I knew he was not truthful because the car he was talking about has sat in a museum display and has not been moved for over 20 years and besides, something like going 200 miles an hour down the main drag of a little town just wouldn't happen.

I have spoken with him about this several times about his story telling but for some reason he does it without even thinking. I pray it will come to an end as he grows a little older. But with his imagination he could become a good fiction writer.

Again, I don't think most of us have learned that it is not good to out and out lie but there is little ways we can be dishonest isn't there?

Like...I really like that new hairdo...that was a really good dish...have you lost weight? That's a great dress when really, it looks like she's wearing a shower curtain.

Saying things like this when you don't truly mean them is called flattery and really, let's be honest, it is speaking a lie. I know this is something that is so easy for us to fall into because we want the person we are speaking to, to feel good about themselves and we want them to feel good about us as well. In reality though, isn't silence is the best option?

Do you remember what Thumper's mom told him? If you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all. The same truth applies here in a bit of a different way. If you can't say truth don't say anything at all.

We are so blessed to be filled with the Spirit of truth. The one who is called the Truth is in us and He hopes that all we will speak is of His nature, truth.

While we are on this subject of the words we speak we might as well jump down to verses 29-32. Look with me at them again.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Virtue #2 Do not let any unwholesome word come out of your mouth.

When Paul is speaking of unwholesome words I believe he is speaking about a number of different ways this can happen.

I think the first thing we think of is foul language. As a pastor I have always been amazed at how easy this can be turned on and off by people. You get people in a church sitting and their language is void of any cursing but you get them out in the world and these same people’s language can get pretty colorful. I think Paul would tell us to leave the off button engaged. Its not becoming of someone who has the holy presence of God inside of them.

A little bit later in Ephesians Paul says a little more about this. **Ephesians 5:4, “and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting which are not fitting but rather giving of thanks.”**

Paul takes it a bit further than just cussing doesn’t he? He goes into filthy and silly talk and even coarse jesting. It seems to me that this should go without saying for Christians.

I think most of us were raised not to cuss, not share dirty or colored jokes or get into coarse jesting. But I also know the world we live in and it can be easy for a Christian to be lured into this behavior, into speaking words that are not fitting of the new life of holiness in Christ they have been given.

I would also say this behavior is not just words spoken but words that are written and shared on Facebook. It is easy to let ourselves slide and share somethings on Facebook that are not fitting.

Look again at verse 31, **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**

The behaviors mentioned here encompass the words we can speak don't they. Slander, malice, bitterness, rage and anger.

James, the brother of Jesus was pretty blunt in the book he wrote. If you want to be challenged spend some time in the book of James. He had a lot to say about the words we speak. Look at what he wrote.

James 3:5-10, “⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”

There is much that can be said about the words we speak. Malice, slander, bitterness, gossip and all kinds of ways we speak that as James said, this should not be. It is not fitting of someone who has God's holy presence inside of them.

When Paul spoke about unwholesome words he followed it with the statement that unwholesome words grieve the Holy Spirit. Some of you might have heard in marriage class or a book the analogy of an air hose.

Your spouse or those around you are breathing and living through the air of an air hose. When we say something that is not just unwholesome but is said in anger, slander, gossip or just tearing someone else down, it is like you stomping on their air hose. It deflates them, takes the life right out of them.

I can give you one instance. In my twenties I went out on a date with a girl and it was not a good fit. The next day I made the mistake of telling some details of the date to someone else and guess what? It got back to girl and she called me and confronted me. She was not happy and hurt. Talk about awkward and put on the spot!

But that is what happens when we let unwholesome words come out of our mouth. It hurts people, it hurts those we speak about, those we are speaking to and it hurts our own soul as it grieves the Holy Spirit inside of us because He knows the damage that is done.

This leads us into another part of this passage and our next virtue.

Virtue #3 Don't let the sun go down on your anger

Be angry and yet do not sin. The way this passage reads is that we can be angry but there is a form of anger that is unhealthy. We can be angry about sin, abortion or ...

How do we keep from sinning when we get angry? First of all do not let any unwholesome words come out of your mouth when you get angry. Secondly, work on forgiving the offense and offender before the sun sets.

Giving the devil a foothold means that you stew over whatever it is that happened.

Now I can tell you and I am sure you will agree that being forgiving the same day the offense happened is very difficult if not impossible for you to do. Only the power of Jesus Christ who dwells in us can do this.

The best way I know how to tap into Christ and His power to forgive is to pull away from the person or situation and spend time with Jesus and that takes some great intentional effort.

Its either that or stew about the offense and let it grow and get worse, creating a greater divide between you and the one whom the offense came through.

This is just the foothold that Satan is looking to have in your life. He is looking to create division between you and that person and also division between you and your God.

Jesus had some pretty strong words about forgiveness. Words like if you know your brother or sister has something against you, go to them and work it out before you come to the house of worship.

Anger happens but we are encouraged to control it, not letting it get out of hand and to deal with it before the sun goes down.

Again, spending time with Jesus is best way to soften your heart and enter into a spirit of forgiveness.

After telling the Christians in Ephesus not to let any unwholesome words come out of their mouth he tells them to let only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. At the end of the chapter this is what Paul suggests that we, as Christians,

Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

By focusing on the forgiveness we have received in Christ is the key to keeping a tender and forgiving heart isn't it?

In the world we live in this takes an intentional effort on our part. Spend time remember and dwelling on the forgiveness we have received and in turn we can be kind and forgiving of others.

Jesus said this in **Luke 6:45, “A good person brings good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and an evil person brings evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”**

The evil person who speaks evil because they have evil in their heart is the old you that Jesus took care of on the cross. The good is Jesus inside of you.

Jesus speaks of the new you in **John 7:38, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, from their innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”**

In closing I would say...**Don't give life to the old you, live and speak as the new person you have been re-created to be...in holiness and righteousness, in the likeness of God.**