

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

So then, putting away falsehood,
let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors,
for we are 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.
Thieves must give up stealing;
rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands,
so to have something to share with the needy.
Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,
but only what is useful for building up,
as there is need,
so that your words may give grace to those who hear.
And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.
Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander,
together with all malice,
and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
as God in Christ forgives you.
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.

Let us pray:

Forgive us for all the times we take our eyes off of You,
for when we do we have become such poor imitations.
Anything that is not in imitation of You is a sin.
We have grieved your Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts.
We have not imitated your words of grace.
We have not imitated your unmerited forgiveness.
We have not imitated the sacrifice of Christ for the sake of the world.
Change our perspective.
Keep our eyes on You.
Help us become clear imitations of You. Amen.

“Imitators of God”

I look at the world around us and I know that we are not living as God wants us to live. We do not even come close. We have become imitators of the world and not imitators of God. We are so sharply divided by party lines, each side is so self righteous. We are divided racially, ethnically, politically, the division between the rich and the poor is larger than it has ever been. We have imitated, it seems anything and anyone but God, that author and perfecter of our faith. We are not the first to take our eyes away of God, and the Apostle Paul reminds us how we are to live and what we should imitate.

First we are to put away falsehood. We live in a time of misinformation and half truths. There are people who

do nothing all day but make up lies to tell and post it on social media. It is called click bait, and the more outrageous they are the more people will click and the more money they will make. There are foreign communities who have found this to be a great way to make money. And in our current environment of distrust, we are ready to believe any lie that helps us make a point against our neighbor even when it is not true. And it is only going to get worse. We now have the technology to edit any picture so that it can show us anything. We can make any person say with their own voice to appear to say anything we want them to, even when they never actually said it. So if you cannot believe your own eyes and ears, how can we know the truth? You have to watch your sources very closely. Is the motivation to arouse anger and outrage, or it is to inform? Does it seem too outrageous to be true, maybe it is.

When we are already believing the worst about others, we are easily misled. God would rather we believe the best in people, and to be slow in our judgements of them. It must be from more than one source, in fact the more confirmation the better.

The word Satan means accuser, and he is the father of all lies, and seeks only to destroy. Why are we listening to the accuser? Why are we quick to believe lies and tear our nation and even our church apart? "Let us put away falsehood, let us speak the truth to our neighbor, for we are members of each other."

"Be angry, but do not sin." Paul says. We need to be angry about injustice. We need to be angry about racism. We need to be angry about looting. We need to be angry about excessive use of force. We need to be angry about children taken from their parents and placed in cages. We need to be angry, but it does not give us licence to sin. Sin is any act that is not loving, that does not bring joy, or peace. Sin is an act of impatience, roughness, or is unkind. Sin is any act of unfaithfulness or is out of control. Sin is anything that grieves the Holy Spirit by going against the Divine nature.

There is a danger in being anger for too long, because the longer strong emotions flood our system the more room we make for the devil. We have less control when we are filled with passion. We are more prone to say what we should not ever say and do what we should never do. And once we have said and done them, we are filled with regret at the damage we have cause. For every negative word we say, it take over a hundred positive words to heal the damage. This true in marriages between spouses, parents and children, and churches and the community. Anger can be a motivator, and signal that something needs to change in our life. Anger awakens in us a need to speak out against injustice and to come to the aid of those who are being harmed by others. If we are apathetic then the injustice is not addressed and the harm will continue. Anger can be a prophetic call to action. But anger is not enough. Anger is not an end to itself. Anger should lead to confession and a deep look at how we are living and how God wants us to change and become a better imitation of God. Festering anger, fills our brains with poison and can fill us with resentment and bitterness and even hatred, pulling us farther and farther from God.

The God whom we are to imitate is not a thief. God does not seek to take from anyone but to give to everyone: just and unjust. God does not look for ways for others to serve him but has always looked for ways to be of service to creation. "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy." It is interesting that God sees the very reason for our labor to be for us to able to have something to give to the needy. God believes that to not meet the needs of the poor is to rob them. Those who do not pay a living wage, are thieves. Those who do not respond to the needs of others are thieves. Robbery is not so much what others do to us, as much as what we might be doing to others, by our lack of compassion. In fact Jesus tells us to give to whoever asks, and if someone wants your shirt you are to give him your coat as well. God wants us to imitate divine generosity, and not to be a den of robbers.

God's word is creative. God's word brings forth new life. God's word builds up. God's word is imaginative and able to make something out of nothing. God's word brings hope. God's word brings peace. God's word brings reconciliation and harmony. This is why God does not want any evil talk coming out of our mouths. Evil words are the work of the Destroyer. Evil words tear down. Evil words bring death. Evil words create hell on earth. Evil words bring discord and division. Evil words create despair. Evil words seek to negate the life affirming Word of God.

God wants the words out of our mouths to be gracious and kind. God wants our words to cause hearts to rejoice and fill others with hope. God wants our words to be filled with life and to bring salvation and resurrection. God wants our words to be healing and re-creative. God wants our words to change the world around us for the better. And if we cannot say God's good word, God wants our silence. God does not want us to imitate evil and to amplify evil. But to imitate his voice with words of grace alone.

What God does not want to see in our lives is any bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, nor any malice. This is because this is not who God is. We have been known to project these human traits upon God and believing God is on our side when we do, but we are wrong. God is love. God is above human pettiness. We are invited to be on God's side and to love our enemies and to pray with God for those who persecute us. But God cannot be on our side against other parts of God's own beloved community. God does not love the murdered more than the murderer. God loves them both and grieves for them both. God wants the best for them both. God wants salvation for them both. Bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice keeps people apart and unable to fully love each other. God will not participate in such acts because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Instead God wants us to imitate divine qualities of kindness, tenderheartedness, and being forgiving. This is how the Holy Spirit directs us to interact with others. And when we refuse the Holy Spirit is grieved. When we do not imitate God, we only bring grief to God and to the world around us. These are powerful life giving traits. Studies have shown that locking children up in correction institutions does not help them, in fact it retraumatizes them and makes them worse and a greater danger to themselves and others. What transforms them is someone who shows them kindness, a tender heart, and forgiveness. This gives them the support they need to change the course of their lives. You may not be able to beat them into goodness, but time and time again it has been shown that you can love them into goodness.

In my own life, it is God's kindness to me, God's tenderhearted mercy towards me when I failed him, God's forgiveness of my sins, that has transformed my life. It was not fear of punishment or being in the hands of an angry God that moved me, it was the fact that God loves me and wants me to live a life filled with love, joy and peace. God has never hurt me, but God has embraced me, taught me, helped me, provided for me, and has been present for me. And this is how God wants us to be with each other.

We all are the beloved children of God. There is no person outside the love of God. Where ever we are in our lives, God is there. God's desire is for all of us to live in love, to love everyone around us with the same love that God has shown us every moment of our existence. God wants us to love our enemies even when it is a sacrifice, choosing to make it a fragrant offering in imitation of Christ. This is not like the world. God does not want our side to win and theirs to lose, God wants us all to help each other to win and be blessed. Whenever we get a feeling it is us against them, we know we are not imitating God, but are working against the will of God, who recognizes no division in his family. We are all beloved. God wants us to work out our differences not by bullying and by force, not by domination nor power, but by mercy, grace, forgiveness and understanding.

Let us remember that we are members of one another. Let us seek to treat all as God is treating us.

Let us pray: Our nation is hurting and divided, and not acting like Your loving family, forgive us. Black lives matter because they are hurting right now as they grieve. Law enforcement also is hurting and feels betrayed by their own. Politically we grieve, because our nation is so divided that we struggle to feel like one nation under God. As a church we grieve, because we have forgotten how to love each other. Help us to imitate only You. Help us focus our behavior on You. Help us join You in repairing the breach in our world and allow us to extend Your peace. Amen.

I encourage you to share your prayer needs in the comments.

I encourage you to send in your tithes and offerings as you are able to keep our church healthy.

I encourage you to call each other and look out for each other.

I encourage you to join us for bible study, a new study is posted each Wednesday, but you can even scroll back and join in anytime.

Now may the God that we pattern our lives after,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

lead and guide your life so that all the world might see the love of God in you. Amen.