

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

Psalm 130

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

WALK IN LOVE, AS CHRIST LOVED US

A pilgrim's journey from this world to the kingdom of God has been described as a long road, a crossing over, a move to a new home, and a change of garments. Always there is faith, effort, change; "...the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17)¹. At times the journey is easy, at times exciting, at times peaceful, at times dark and painful. The Bible says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Eccl 3:1).

We have discussed how Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians give all the assurance you need that completing this journey is not only possible, but inevitable in the power of God. The cost of the trip has been paid, the plans have been made, and there is help all along the way. *In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory* (Eph 1:13-14).

Last week we began to discuss Chapters 4-6, which concern our response to what God has done in terms of how we ought to behave and get along with each other. We said these chapters are important because our fallen world has always taught one kind of behavior toward ourselves and others, and the Word of God always teaches another kind, and we must learn to follow the latter. Review Eph 4:1-3 and also Rom 12:14-21, "*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" Verses like these are prophetic in the sense that God is speaking to you through Paul. God is *appealing* to you to walk with him.

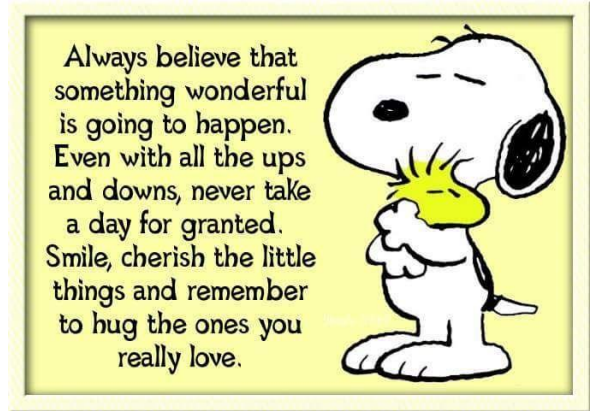
Review Eph 4:17-24, which says in part, "... *You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds ... Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*" Again, the Word of God calls for a significant change in the hearts and minds and actions of believers.

Is all this up to you? If not, who does what in these things? "Putting off the old nature" (v.22) and "putting on the new nature" (v.24) sound like things you and I must do or at least allow to be done, but "being renewed in the spirit" (v.23) and "created after the likeness of God" (v.24) sound more like acts of God. It really isn't all up to you. Discuss what the following passages say about "who does what:"

Eph 2:8-10. "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"

Phil 2:12-13. "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*"

As you read these instructions for Christian living, keep in mind that you are never alone. When you feel overloaded with life's problems, let God lift the burden. It gives God pleasure when you rely on him.



¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

Eph 4:25-5:2. *Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

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

- *Therefore ... (v.25)*. Last week's passage also began with this word. Here the word is used on account of v.17-24. God says we "*must not live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds ...*" (v.17); *therefore* there are specific steps we must take in v.25ff to stop living this way, which is the way of the world today, as it was in Paul's day. The world doesn't change in this respect. *You and I* must change. The remainder of our lesson lists specific ways in which we are called to live differently, not as the world lives.
- *Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another (v.25)*. Telling a lie is never a good idea. There are ways to tell the truth, even when it hurts, with love and compassion. The Bible says truth is the *only* way. Jesus said, "*Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*" (Luke 12:2). There are also lies of silence, where something is left unsaid in order to cause harm. Discuss examples of these things: harmful gossip, untruthful bragging, not mentioning a hazard, etc.
- *Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. (v.26-27)*. How different the world would be if we could obey this instruction! As long as anger remains, the devil has an opportunity to nourish the seeds of hatred and make you more like himself. An old man in a hospital bed once admitted reluctantly that he had not been to church for fifteen years on account of an argument with a vestry member! Cases like this are tragic, and not the will of God. The Bible says, "*Good sense makes a man slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.*" (Prov 19:11).
- *Let the thief no longer steal ... (v.28)*. There are many reasons why people steal things, but stealing usually involves *greed*, which opposes *charity* and is against the will of God. It is really *greed*, not stealing, that God wants to cure in us. The multitudes asked the Baptist, "*What shall we do?*" John answered, "*He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise*" (Luke 3:10-11). And Paul recalled how Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).
- *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (v.32)*. Discuss how this verse presupposes the preceding verses. If we are *kind to one another* there will be no *evil talk* coming out of our mouths. Our speech will *fit the occasion* and *impart grace to those who hear* (v.29).

When we are *tenderhearted* and *forgive one another* we please God and do not *grieve the Holy Spirit, in whom we are sealed for the day of redemption* (v.30). And all the things in v.31, *bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and all malice* will find no place in hearts that are set in obedience to v.32.

We are to have this mind in ourselves, which is ours in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5ff) on account of God's forgiveness. God has given you far more than a set of rules to live by. In his unfailing love, he has sent his Son from heaven to sacrifice his life so you can be forgiven. The unbelieving world doesn't have this reason to be kind and forgive others, but you do. Nor does God's kindness end with forgiveness. In the words of Psalm 103, for example, he *forgives all your iniquity, heals all your diseases, redeems your life from the Pit, crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfies you with good as long as you live*.

The benefits of God's mercy, which the world does not comprehend, give us every reason to be kind to others. The final verses of our lesson express again the main thought today: *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Eph 5:1-2). Obeying v.32 is a tall order, but in Christ you can do it. Ask God to give you a tender and forgiving heart, let him take your hand, and you will discover that he already has done so.