

22. WALK IN LOVE

(SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2020)

Scripture Reading: 10 Commandments; Eph. 4:25-5:2

INTRODUCTION

As far as I know, you don't see many "watch out for cliff" signs in Florida like you would see in Colorado or other mountainous states.

The book of Ephesians is not filled with a lot of specific rebukes like 1 Corinthians or Galatians. It is a more general letter.

But when you look at the commands, you see Paul was not just giving theoretical statements.

The issues that are raised in this section are not like cliff-warning signs in Florida.

These are real issues that must be faced.

What we see here at the end of Ephesians 4 and the start of Ephesians 5 is a summary of the Christian life.

You can find similar passages in a number of places in Scripture.

The repetition is important.

The way that we are called to live and walk is not natural.

What is natural is bitterness, anger, self-centeredness.

Only in saving union with God through the Lord Jesus Christ can we truly seek to put off the things of the flesh and then live as imitators of God.

And how important that the words love, kindness, and forgiveness are defined by Scripture and the message of the gospel rather than the false ideas of the world.

Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us!

We will look at Eph. 4:31-5:2 in two parts – the final two verses of Eph. 4 and the first two verses of Eph. 5.

1. MORE OF PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON, EPH. 4:31-32

As you look at this section starting with verse 25, you see a number of key matters addressed connected with putting off the deeds of the flesh and what must be put on in terms of our union with Christ.

Verse 25 – Deception and truth

Verses 26 and 27 – Anger

Verse 28 – Theft and giving

Verse 29 – Corrupt words and edifying speech

Verse 30 – Summary command – Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Verses 31 and 32 complete this instruction.

Verse 31 focuses on other destructive attitudes and actions that have not necessarily been covered.

Verse 32 provides a contrast and a beautiful call.

And then the first two verses of chapter 5 connect with the end of the chapter and provide a rich and strong theological foundation for this instruction.

I think it was in 1995 that I memorized verse 31. The reason I can give this date is that I believe it was on a trip to South Africa that I memorized this verse.

And to help me memorize it I took the first letters of the six things that must be put away – BWACE.

These words for the most part are easy to define, but let's briefly review them.

Bitterness – a continuous attitude of anger, hostility, perhaps even hatred to another person.

Bitterness is the poison you would give to someone else, but instead you take it yourself.

Wrath and anger – these two words appear together in other places like **Col. 3:8**.

John Calvin says the two words are very similar. Wrath he says speaks of **power** and anger the **action**.

That might be a helpful way of thinking of these two.

Obviously, we are speaking of sinful forms of wrath and anger here, when the motive is our own self-interest rather than God's truth and glory.

Clamor is a related word. We don't use this word very often today and it is not common in the NT.

Clamor we could define as a shouting match.

Or another definition is the "loud self-assertion of the angry man, who will make everyone hear his grievance."¹

Evil speaking is a translation of the word **blasphemy**. We often think of this word with respect to God.

You can blaspheme other people by your words of attack, slander, and the like.

And then the word malice, evil, completes this listing.

The meaning here of malice is a **mean-spirited or vicious attitude**.²

Verse 31 says that all of these things must be **put away** from you.

This is not the same word as used for example in verse 22 – put off, but it is a parallel command.

Remove it, take it away!³

The fact that we have this listing here shows that these attitudes and actions can sadly too often be present in the life of believers.

As you think of this listing, can you say, oh, these things are never present in my life?

Of course, not!

So, the warning and command of Scripture must frequently be heeded.

We consider the great contrast of verse 32.

This is what we must be in union with our Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Be **kind** to one another.

¹ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 142-143.

² BDAG, s.v. "κακία," 500.

³ BDAG, s.v. "αἴρω," 28. 102x NT; 1x Ephesians

The word kind is not a superficial smile. The idea is of being useful, good, benevolent to others.

This kindness must be combined with a tender heart.

Tenderhearted is a word only used two times in the NT, here and 1 Peter 3:8.

The word shows that the kindness we are to demonstrate is not to be a show or an act. It is motivated by something deep within us.

The third fruit of the Spirit's work here is forgiving.

The word forgiving is related to the word grace. To be forgiving is an aspect of being gracious to someone else.

There are a number of parallels in the NT.

Col. 3:13 bearing with one another, and **forgiving** one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ **forgave** you, so you also *must do*.

I think Jay Adams gives a very good definition of forgiveness.

He states that forgiveness is not a feeling but a promise.

It means that you will not seek to dwell anymore on the particular matter, you will not seek to use it against the person, nor will you share the issue with others.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

Forgiveness doesn't mean something never happened.

If you forgive a debt, you no longer seek to collect it.

When you forgive, you no longer are trying to deal with that issue any longer.

Bitterness is the inverse of forgiveness.

Verse 32 ends with a very profound theological statement – **even as God in Christ forgave you.**

Even as is a good translation here.

Verse 32 is not just giving a reason, though certainly that is connected.

The word **even** means there is to be a likeness between God forgiving us and then how we are to deal with and forgive others.⁴

⁴ Francis Foulkes, 144.

I could share with you if you are interested a portion of a book entitled, *Unpacking Forgiveness* by Chris Brauns.

In this book he seeks to Biblically define forgiveness, gives some powerful examples of it, and provide a contrast with humanistic ideas.

For example, in 1984 Lewis Smedes wrote a very influential book called, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*.

A title like that screams, watch out for bad teaching!

Smedes describes what can be called therapeutic forgiveness, a feeling-based idea of forgiveness.⁵

Biblical forgiveness Chris Brauns points out is connected with both repentance and reconciliation.

If someone harms you and never seeks your forgiveness, can you simply forgive him or her when there is no attempt to reconcile?

I don't think so.

Now, I also don't think it is possible to seek to resolve every single issue and fault that might come up.

We must follow the words of Scripture.

When an offense to you comes, you have to make sure that the matter is handled Biblically.

This means that you don't seek to be bitter, you don't seek revenge. You handle the matter as you have been called.

If an offense is serious enough, **you can't just let it sit there and call it forgiveness**. You will need to seek out the person and seek to resolve the situation.

If that person recognizes the sin and confesses, then forgiveness is to be extended.

Ideally, we can also say this, a person that has sinned against you should seek to be proactive in seeking your forgiveness.

Listen to the words of Jesus from Matthew 5.

⁵ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 64-65.

23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

We never want to reduce the Christian life to just a few little steps to follow, life-tips.

No, the Christian life is far deeper than just try to change a few things here and there and all will be well.

However, these two verses ending chapter 4 are vital in terms of warning and encouragement.

The sins of verse 31 are closer than we like to admit.

The calling of verse 32 can only be obeyed as we sincerely seek the grace of God and remember how much God has forgiven us.

Let's move to the first two verses of Eph. 5.

2. AND WALK IN LOVE, EPH. 5:1-2

Our word mimic comes from the Greek word translated as imitator.

This word **imitator** is used 7 times in the NT.

1Cor. 4:16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

1Cor. 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

Heb. 6:12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Consider this command that we be **imitators of God**.

How can this be?

Well, we recognize two things.

One, all men and women have been created in the image of God, but because of sin this image, though not entirely removed, is completely distorted.

Second, God's saving and gracious work restores us to that image. We now live in terms of the new man.

Look back to Eph. 4:24.

Eph. 4:24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Isn't this such a profound calling?

And we must not miss the final part of verse 1, **as dear children**.

This is not about being cute and cuddly and sweet as pie.

Verse 1 is about God's incredible love for us.

Some versions read "dearly loved" or "beloved."

It is God's love for you that calls you to respond.

We know that in much of Christendom, there is a misunderstanding of God's love.

There is probably in some cases a neglect in considering that a holy, righteous God loves us.

Do you give attention to thinking how deeply and perfectly God loves you?

Thinking of God's love should encourage you, to follow that example of love, grace, and concern for others.

And then we have another great summary command - And walk in love, as Christ has also loved us...

Here again we have another important usage of the verb to walk.

Eph. 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

A Greek grammar notes that the verb in verse 2 is in the present tense. **This is something you don't just do once.**

It is a calling that you have to seek to follow every single day.

Again, we know just how vile the twisting of the precious word love is.

But rather than focus on how this word is twisted, we should consider the standard of Scripture.

Love as Christ loved.

Love in a sacrificial, God-directed way.

The verb **given** is the same verb used in **Eph. 4:19**, given themselves over to lewdness.

It is the verb used for the betrayal of Christ.

Here though we find the active nature of what Christ did. He gave Himself for us!

The commentator Francis Foulkes points out the significance of the final part of verse 2.

There is not a single place in Paul's writings, nor in the New Testament generally, where the death of Christ can be spoken of as only an example to be followed, without the further expression of its atoning significance.

He gave Himself **for us**.

For us means two things.

1) He died for our benefit and blessing.

2) He died in our place.

We call this precious doctrine substitutionary atonement.

The name is long, but the truth is easily expressed.

We must never lose sight of this truth.

I like to point out sometimes before we sing the very old Hymn, "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," (#365) that the word **victim** does not mean someone who was simply overpowered by another and harmed in the process.

The word **victim** in Hymn 365 comes from Latin and means in this case that which is offered in sacrifice.

The last line in verse 1 is very powerful.

Christ the Victim, Christ the Priest.

That line is a beautiful expression of what we see in verse 2 – Christ has given Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The words offering and sacrifice are similar in meaning.

Offering means that which is **given voluntarily**.

The word **sacrifice** is a more common word in the NT and has the idea of that which is given as a sacrifice.

The words **sweet-smelling aroma** are used only two times in the NT, but if you search in the Greek translation of the OT, you will find the same words used 47 times.

Gen. 8:21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

Ex. 29:18 And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It *is* a burnt offering to the LORD; it *is* a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

How do we understand this phrase?

It speaks of God's acceptance of the sacrifice.

And we understand clearly from the book of Hebrews that the only reason why these animal offerings could be viewed as sweet-smelling is that they prefigured the offering that Christ would give.

Study the first part of Hebrews 10 to see this powerfully explained using both Psalm 40 and what the author of Hebrews explains.

I think we can also make a connection.

Think about this.

Everything you do, even on your very best day, comes from your heart, mind, and will still affected by sin.

Don't you realize that sometimes it is in doing that which is good and right that you realize how easy it is to do with a self-centered attitude?

You give and you think, wow, I am really generous or special.

You help someone, and you are tempted to pat yourself on your own back.

So how could we ever give unto God and it be found acceptable?

How can we serve others and that be considered a sweet-smelling aroma?

Only in Christ.

Your own acts of love and service in terms of who you are not acceptable to God.

Your acts of love and service, when they are done in recognition of what Christ has already done, then they can be also sweet-smelling aromas before God.

Phil. 4:18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

CONCLUSION

Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us!

Connection with the Lord's Supper.

Our focus is always first to be directed in what God has done for us in Christ.

Forgiveness of sins.

God's love for us.

The sacrifice of Christ, that sweet-smelling aroma, for us.

Let this be your focus.

It is good then that we also consider how God does set this meal as a reminder of how together we are the body of Christ.

We know that we fail in loving others as we should.

We so easily can fall into bitterness, anger, and the other sins.

Let the sacrifice of Christ ever be present in our hearts and in our actions.

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 365

Benediction: Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.