

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

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[0 : 00] Ephesians 4:25 through 5:2, and it reads like this. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. 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.

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

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

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.

[1 : 21] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. Well, let me add my applause as well as my gratitude for many.

I think that came out yesterday. There's somewhere between 60 and 70 of us. And it was astounding.

It was astounding. And my heart was strengthened. And our building is a little bit cleaner because of your efforts. So we'll see you upstairs next week.

Let's just pause and turn to the Lord for help. Father, we come to you this morning. And the task before us is not something that we can do on our own.

It is brought by your spirit. And so we pray that as we open your word, that the spirit of God would infuse the people of God with the word of God, that we would be those who are made like the son of God.

[2 : 50] And so go with us. Be our help. Strengthen me for this task. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we return to the book of Ephesians this morning, a letter that's been enriching us and giving us a vision for our future.

What is the church? Well, it's a diverse group of people under a shared salvation brought by the Lord Jesus. There is an image that we, by faith, are born into a new family.

To take the language of the first chapter of Ephesians, we are those who heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, and believed in him.

We are a believing people. But we are more than a people that merely share beliefs. We are a people who share behaviors.

There is a code of conduct, so to say. We are not just about doctrine. We are also about duty. We are a people that have a collective ethic governed by shared convictions and shared moral values.

[4 : 04] They are not arbitrary. They are the highest law. They are the greatest good, and they are divinely sourced. It's found toward the end of our text. We are imitators of God.

We mimic God. We copy God. As a toddler imitates a parent, or a younger sibling imitates an older sibling, or a mentee copies a mentor, we are those who imitate God.

Jesus would do the same in his earthly ministry. In John's gospel, Jesus says the Son, referring to himself, can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

Literally speaking, it's like Father, like Son. And in the same way, it should be of us, Christ Church Chicago, that we should resemble not only the Father, but we should resemble Christ.

That as visitors, skeptics, seekers, scoffers leave this place, my hope is that they have this description.

[5 : 14] If God exists, then he looks something like what they have here. Amen. Sometimes you see children, and one of my children has owned up to it.

Children, the physical genes of a parent are strong in them, strongly visible. May it be said of us that the genes of Jesus are strong in this congregation.

This morning, it is my desire to show you the clothes of Christ, the garments of God.

I'm lifting it directly from the 24th verse that was preached for us two weeks ago. We are to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God.

When you are in Christ, when you become a Christian, you get a brand new wardrobe adorned with Christ-like character.

[6 : 17] We are entering a changing room, so to say. We have been told, generally from two weeks ago, to put off our old selves and to put on a new outfit.

We are to take off the old and commanded to put on or change into what is new. But the contribution of this morning's text is that it gives us specifics.

What should that outfit look like? Verses 25, 425 through 5-2 give us this enhanced commentary on the things that we are specifically to rid ourselves of and discard.

There are certain things that don't look good on you. There are things that you ought not to wear.

There are colors that just simply clash with your complexion.

And there are things that we are to adorn ourselves with, particular characteristics. We are to adorn ourselves with appropriate clothing.

[7 : 24] Paul gives us these details this morning. If I were to title the message, I would simply title it, The Christian's Closet. The Christian's Closet.

The Christian is adorned with conduct and character that is Christ-like. I want you to seize that this morning. The Christian is adorned with conduct and character that are Christ-like.

We are those adorned with conduct and character that looks like Jesus. And to help us reach this conclusion together, I would like to proceed through our text with the following outline.

I couldn't find anything super clever, but I think it'll get us through the text. I want us to see this morning five exhortations and one example.

Five exhortations and one example. I was able to alliterate. Exhortation, example. Five exhortations and one example. This text is packed with consecutive exhortations.

[8 : 30] Densely packed imperatives. Shorter sentences than what we've read in the letter up to this point. There is this rapidity that comes one after another, quickly following in sequence.

The challenge, I'll admit, was finding a unifying strand that runs through all these. First question, it seemed like it's all about speech. But it's not because in there, there's a line about stealing and anger.

Speech is a prevalent theme, but it's not the only theme. And after spending time in these verses, I couldn't settle on anything specifically. Except for this one fact that I think is of utmost importance.

We must realize that these are social virtues. Social virtues. And by that, I mean that from the outset, Paul's concern is for the community of faith.

The church, this gathering, this corporate body, this faith family. This is how we are to behave as members one of another.

[9 : 46] This is how we are to treat one another. This is the household code. This is the family rules of conduct.

This applies to us. There is a mutual understanding that this is how we are to behave with one another. And certainly, it bleeds into the outside world. But what unfolds in these verses are new standards for those who consider themselves to be the new people in Christ.

Five exhortations. The first, lifted from verse 25. Stop lying. Speak the truth. Stop lying. Speak the truth.

The faith family is marked by truth telling. We are to be an honest people. This idea has already come up previously in the 15th verse of chapter 4.

Pertaining to speaking the truth about God. And his speaking the truth primarily about doctrine.

Upholding the purity of doctrine. But now the phrase is applied in a different way.

[10 : 56] We are to speak the truth to one another. To be honest, pun intended, this struck me as unusual. Because perhaps this ethics is already embedded in our culture.

It's quite pervasive. But in the early church, that wasn't the case. It was not safe to presume in the early church that truth telling was a central value. You might remember one of the earliest incidents

in the church as found in the book of Acts.

As the church was growing, teeming with life, needs were arising. And people began to express mutual care and concern for one another. There was a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira. And they began to sell off. They sold off a portion of their property. And they brought the proceeds, the apostles claiming that they had brought it all. However, they had withheld some.

And wanted to make themselves appear probably more devout than they were. It was certainly a flex on their part. It was an act. It was a lie.

[12:06] The apostles called them out. And you remember. Why did the apostles confront him and said, Why did you contrive this in your heart? You have lied. Not to man, but to God.

And as a result, Ananias falls down dead. And the same fate shortly befalls his wife. And the Bible tells us that great fear came upon everyone who heard it.

Why? Because lying has no place in this family. It is self-serving. It makes it appear. It makes you and I appear probably better than we are.

But the primary reason is this. This family is all about looking like Jesus.

He only speaks what is true. He embodies what is true. He self-asserts that he himself is the very truth.

[13:02] We are to look like him. And if you and I go around lying, then we are sons of the devil, whom the word says he is a liar.

He is actually the father of lies. John 8, 44. If we are children of God, we exude his characteristics. We don't lie, for that only demonstrates that we are children of the devil.

We speak the truth because it gives evidence of who our father is. And this demonstrates that God is at work in us.

This is a citation, actually, from the book of Zechariah, foretelling a day when God would assemble a new people. And what would distinguish them? They were truth tellers.

We are to change out of lying and to put on truth telling. Second, exhortation. Beware of danger. And it's anger.

[14:04] Beware of danger, of course. Beware of anger and its destructive powers. You see that in verses 26 and 27. We are a people that are to be aware of destructive powers, the destructive powers of unresolved anger.

These verses are a warning sign. When anger is present, sinful potential exists. There is some discussion on this verse because verses 31, verse 31 seems like a direct contradiction.

Verse 31, it says, put away, let all anger be put away. But here, anger is seemingly permitted on the condition that it's quenched by the end of the day.

There appears to be a circumstance or circumstances where anger is justified. This verse is taken from the fourth Psalm, when David, the songwriter, is actually angry.

And you know what he's angry about? He's angry that worship and sacrifices are being misdirected. That as people are piling praise upon idols and statues and false gods, David is standing on the side, angered.

[15:26] Angered because false worship is taking place. There are appropriate things to be angered about. It is right to be angry at sin that ravages a loved one.

It is justifiable to be angered by injustice that oppresses a particular group of people. But the emphasis of these verses is not to try to give you a reason to be angry.

The emphasis of these verses is to discard anger and resolve it quickly. In other words, the verses are not trying to give you an excuse to be angry.

I think we would all love that. But this is far more about an exhortation for the need to be reconciled quickly. The devil doesn't make us angry.

Anger actually comes from here. We are responsible for our own anger. But Satan can certainly weaponize it. Anger is incredibly volatile.

[16:29] It is playing with fire. It's the ticking time bomb that you hold. Reflecting on my own life, a majority of the factions that I cause in my household stem from words or actions done while I'm angry.

Anger is the devil's playground. If you let anger simmer, it will erupt in destruction. We saw it early in our Bibles.

Fourth chapter of Genesis. The first family. Two brothers. Not even a generation removed from Eden.

And there it is. One offers an acceptable sacrifice to God while the other brews in anger. The account is so vivid. The Bible reads, The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

[17 : 32] So Cain was very angry. And his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?

And if you do not do well, here it is. Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is against you. But you must rule over it.

And so Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him.

Anger. Unresolved. Simmering. Brewing. Erupting. Beware of anger and its destructive powers.

Thirdly, stop stealing and start sharing. There it is in verse 28. Stop stealing and start sharing.

Again, this is an attribute that belongs to the devil.

[18 : 35] Because he is one that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Acquiring things through theft is forbidden. But now, when the new wardrobe is given, the thief is to work honestly in order to share.

I love how one commentator puts it. Imagine this. The thief is to become a philanthropist. The thief is to become a philanthropist.

This is the change that happened in Zacchaeus. Wasn't it? Stealing from his own people. Climbing up a tree. Eating with Jesus.

Forgiven and transformed. And what he does is he restores what's taken but fourfold. And we begin to see the radical nature of the Christian community.

We are not to take from one another. But it merely doesn't stop there. For some, it would be adequate to say, oh, just stop stealing. That's good enough. Just stop stealing.

[19 : 40] But the call to the Christian is not just to stop stealing. It's the call of the Christian faith is now to work in order to share. We are to give to one another.

The glorious aim of what happens here is not only to renew a vision that everyone should seek gainful employment and provide for themselves.

But what's convicting about this passage is that the vision for work is not self-sufficiency. Providing for me, myself, and I.

The vision for work is to provide for others. To provide for others in the faith community.

It's astounding. And we as a faith family have what we call the Deacon Fund. It's a fund whereby we are able to distribute to those with physical needs, to meet the needs of those in our congregation with physical needs.

[20 : 40] Whether it be food, housing, transportation. I'm aware that there are community groups that pull together money to support one of their members in need. And it's my delight to be part of a congregation that does so.

But it needs to go beyond my personal delight. It actually needs to become my personal duty. That the Bible here in some way implies if the Lord gives you a job that allows you to stay alive, then you better share what you have with God's people.

It also implies that in this congregation, there will be those with great means and there will be those with lesser means. And the needs need to be met somehow.

And we have to figure out how that happens. We stop stealing. Start sharing. Fourthly, speak up to build up.

Verse 29. The exhortation is to watch our speech. Particularly corrupt speech. The word translated corrupt here relates to kind of like rancid fish, rotten wood, that which is putrid.

[22 : 01] It's literally stinky speech. Rid your mouth of that which gives off a rotten stench. We are not to be ones who speak to one another in ways that are unwholesome.

Later on in chapter 5, verse 2, it's filthy language. It's crude language. Rather, we are to use our mouths to build up, edify, encourage, and give grace.

Our words somehow strengthen the edifice of this building. Our words strengthen the fibers of this body. Our lips are to become these dispensaries of gracious words.

Our tongues are to be fountains of encouragement, building up and edifying. And as we gather in this context, I'm going to challenge us.

Whenever you're with God's people, whether it be at university ministry, at your community groups, or here on a Sunday morning, my challenge to you is seek to say a word of encouragement.

[23 : 11] As you gather, seek to build up, edify, and give grace. How does that look? Receive the visitor well.

Greet the visitor well. Acknowledge those who serve. Those who vacuum tediously. The one who held open the door.

Acknowledge their service. Pray with the anxious. Encourage the downcast. Spur on the faint. Inquire of one's well-being. Offer to help when needs arise. Listen and learn about the plight of the suffering and seek to alleviate it as you're able.

All these are ways. Find a way to encourage another. Through your words. May your mouth be a conduit of the grace and the goodness of God.

[24 : 10] The fifthly. The fifth exhortation. Be kind. Tender-hearted. Forgiving. Verse 31. Our relationship with one another should be exemplified by kindness and tenderness.

We are a kind people. Why? Because according to chapter 2, verse 7. God is kind. We are a tender-hearted people.

Why? Because our Father in Heaven is a gracious and merciful Father. This faith family should be absent of bitterness. Resentment.

We are not a wrathful or angry people. We do not shout in anger or clamor. We aren't those who loudly self-assert ourselves as angry people, making sure everyone hears our grievances.

We aren't those who cause quarrels. We do not slander, marring the reputation of another. We do not speak evil behind another's back.

[25 : 15] We do not mar or destroy another's reputation. We are not those with malice or contrive of ill intention towards one another. We are actually for the well-being of each other.

When we assemble together, how comforting would it be to know that whoever sits in front, behind, or next to me is truly here for my good.

It's noteworthy that these exhortations are rounded off by forgiveness. It's as if Paul is saying, as you and I endeavor all these things, as you and I attempt to do all these things, and as you and I make our best efforts, there will be times where you're going to fail.

But when that happens, forgive one another. When someone's best try falls short, don't shame them.

Don't berate them. Don't humiliate them. Forgive them. And as I grow as a younger pastor, some of you may not think I'm younger.

[26 : 26] I'm the youngest pastor here, incidentally. There are times in these last six years I have not pastored well. And I do the best of my ability, trying to lead and serve only to fall short.

And I've been thankful in each one of those occasions that it's met by forgiveness and tenderheartedness. Five exhortations that shape and form the people of God.

Five exhortations that, when he did, show us the family resemblance. My question to you this morning is, in which of these do you need to do better?

Which of these do you need the strength from the Lord to be better? Because living in such a way is why you are saved.

You are actually, according to chapter 2, verse 8, not only saved to spend eternity with the Lord, but you're saved, created in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 43] What for? For good works. Which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. What are these good works? Well, five of these facets are here.

These are the works you were created to do. If you want to know your purpose within the church, then here they are. Here they are. We will not do any of these perfectly, but we certainly should make progress in all of these.

I need to be a better truth teller. I need to be more sensitive to my angry tendencies and to squash them. I need to share more generously.

I need to speak in ways that build up. I need to grow in kindness and tenderness. It's not a passive process. We don't just sit here and this happens. Rather involves your participation, our effort, our exertion.

This is our sanctification. The process of being made more and more like Jesus. Five exhortations. One example. Five exhortations are followed by one example.

[29 : 01] You see it there. The example is Jesus. Mentioned in 432, reiterated in chapter 5, verse 2. The five exhortations are rounded out with the supreme example of Jesus himself.

We are to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. We are to walk in love as Christ loved us and gives himself up for us.

We are to imitate God as seen in Christ. In other words, we are to copy Jesus. He is, in this text, what theologians call our moral exemplar.

He is the standard for Christian conduct. He is the premier example of Christian character. He is the pinnacle and penultimate depiction of love.

We are therefore to pattern ourselves after him. In chapter 5, verse 1 or 2, we walk out of the dressing room with a new wardrobe. A new fit.

[30 : 06] One adorned with these five exhortations, forming our character and our conduct. But they're all colored by love. All of our behavior ought to be marked by love.

We walk in the dressing room, I think in chapter 4, verse 17. And then we walk out in chapter 5, verse 2, adorned in love.

And as we wind down, I want to call one last thing to your attention about the nature of the family of God. Our one-anotherness.

It's marked by love. And the question is, what kind of love? Is it a generic, well-wishing love? I hope you're good, kind of love.

See you next Sunday, kind of love. And Paul tells us what kind of love. He doesn't go to the lengths of 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient, love is kind, to define love.

[31 : 08] But he points to a short phrase right there. You should underline it, highlight it, star it, memorize it. As Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

What kind of love? It's the willing act of self-sacrifice in the eyes of God that was pleasing and acceptable to God.

The image here is, if you recall, the Old Testament sacrificial system. The offering is consumed on the altar or burned up.

And there's this fragrant aroma ascending into heaven. And here, what Paul is saying, that what pleased God, what smelled good to God, was the self-giving of his own son.

What motivated that? Well, that's the love. Love motivated that. This profound love, this unfathomable love, this lavish love. It is the love displayed by the death of his beloved son, the beloved son of God.

[32 : 26] The love of Christ is a love that's unrivaled. Where a heavenly child would voluntarily go to a cross for the children of God. It is here that you see the motivation of the cross.

He's motivated by love for you. He's motivated by love for me. Compelled by love for us. He went on our behalf so that the children of men might be made children of God.

And what F.B. Myers says this so beautifully. To our eyes, the cross can only present an awful scene of horror. But in love, so measureless, so reckless of cost for those who are naturally unworthy of it.

There is an action that filled heaven with a fragrance. See, the staggering aftermath of this is that those who place their trust in him actually receive the forgiveness of sins and are able to call God Father.

But do you know what this places on you and I? Can you sense the call that it puts on you?

[33 : 49] Imitate Christ by walking in love. What kind of love? What sort of love? The high kind of love. The see you next Sunday kind of love.

No. It's a self-giving love. It's a self-displacing love. It's a self-denying love.

It's a self-emptying love. It is the love that when you and I enter this building, I have to say, Bing, get out of the way. Get out of the way.

Get off. Get out. And love others well. This is the example we are to imitate. This is the model we are to follow.

This is the color of the garments of love, a self-giving love. The implication is clear that when you and I live selflessly with one another, there is a fragrance.

[34 : 50] There is some smell that arises before the Lord. Just as Christ's self-giving sacrifice is aromatic and pleasing before God, you and I, our small copycat actions of self-giving somehow arise to please God.

How do I not make the Holy Spirit? How do I not make the Holy Spirit sad or grieve the Holy Spirit according to verse 30? May we be a congregation that is adorned with conduct and character that is Christ-like.

May we put away our old filthy garments and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we want to look like you.

We want to look like you. We want to look like you. We want to look like you. We want to look like you.

And Lord, with all the strength that we can muster up, we want to give of ourselves like you.

[36 : 14] And certainly, it won't be atoning. But may we worship as we give of ourselves. We want to be a congregation that embraces this one-anotherness and knowing that we are a family.

That we are walking toward home together. So help us. Walk well. Help us to play the part. Help us to look like you.

We pray these things for your namesake. Amen.