

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Imitators of God

The Apostle Paul now moves from the indicatives of the gospel of Christ to the specific, concrete imperatives of the law of Christ. Paul has gone to great lengths to tell us how through the Spirit-union with Christ God has put off or put to death our old life in Adam and has raised us up or put on a new life by clothing us in Christ. As the Apostle told the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me (**Gal. 2:20**).

Paul explained to the Galatians that that old life has been crucified with Christ and therefore I, who habitually used to live for myself, no longer lives. Rather "now" the life I live is the life of Christ by faith. We have a new walk in Christ that is worthy of the calling with which we have been called. Notice as Paul lays out the specifics of our new life each aspect is lived outwardly, directed toward others in selfless service of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our new life is radically different from our former life in Adam which was ultimately self-centered, seeking our own glory and pleasure in the life (**4:17-22**). That life was ultimately deceitful because it promised happiness and joy by getting our needs met by our own abilities, but our new life in Christ can only bring true happiness because it is a life of denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following after Christ in love and service of our neighbor. God has put off our old man and put on a new man. We have now been clothed with Christ. Daily we are being renewed by God's Spirit, who is making the life of Christ more and more real to us. Moment by moment, the Spirit of Christ is renewing our mind so that we are being transformed from a life of selfishness and idolatry to a life of good works which are pleasing to God and which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (**cf. 2:10; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 2:10-16**).

We have seen over and over again that the basic ethic of our new life in Christ is that we love one another as Christ loved us. We constantly give up our life for the sake of our brother and sister in Christ that we may lose our life in service to Christ. Paul sums up the ethic of the Christian life in **5:1-2**: we are to imitate God by walking with one another, joined arm in arm, in love (**cf. 4:24** where putting on the New Man is the likeness of God – i.e., imitation – see **1 John**). What is the measure of that love? Just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (**cf. 1 John 4:7-14**). This is your new life, transformed in Christ and Jesus Christ is not only the means by which your life is transformed but he is the measure or manner into which your life is being conformed. The standard of Christian ethics, the law of Christ, is your giving up yourself for one another in love as an offering and sacrifice to God (**cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 2:14-15**). He is the Captain of your soul; he has purchased you for himself with a high and costly price. You have lost your life, which in no way leads to sorrow or grief, because you have now been found having a new life in Christ. You have exchanged the poverty of a life leading to death for the inexhaustible riches of eternal life and joy in the presence of God.

We are to love one another as Christ loved us. But what does that look like? If we were fully grown up and mature in Christ then we wouldn't need any other explanation other than simply loving as Christ loved us (how we learn Christ – **4:20**). The Spirit works in and through our life to conform us to that love and produce that love toward others in the fruit of the Spirit. However, because we are still very weak and immature Paul must spell out in more detail how

exactly we show that love one to another. As we now turn to the specific, concrete exhortations of the law of Christ note two aspects of how Paul presents them to us:

First, note how each one is directed outwardly towards others in selfless service to our neighbor. Clearly, Paul is focusing upon our unique relationships to one another in the body of Christ (v. 25). We are to do these things because we are joined to one another as members of the body of Christ. But surely as we live this way in the darkness of the world to our neighbors who are outside of the body of Christ then we give a testimony to the world of a life transformed in Christ. It is our witness before the world that when Christ transforms your life then your life is characterized by serving others as Christ came to serve his own. In doing this we not only give an example of Christ's salvific sacrifice towards our brothers and sisters in Christ but also to those who are outside the household of faith in hopes that God's Spirit will give light to the elect and bring them into the household of God. Paul told Timothy:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. 10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:8-10).

Second, note how clearly and carefully the imperatives of the law of Christ are grounded in and flow from the indicatives of the gospel. This is the law of Christ that is to guide the new covenant believer to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called in Christ. But notice how even the imperatives (the law of Christ) in the new covenant sound so different from the old covenant law under the covenant of works ("do this and live" "cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them" -- **Gal. 3:10-14; cf. Deut. 30:11-20**). The law of Christ comes to us very differently under the covenant of grace/gospel. As John's Gospel reminds us, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (**John 1:17**). As new ethic for a new kind of life, the law of Christ doesn't even sound like law. It is not that the new covenant comes to us without instruction on how to live, but that instruction comes to us very differently. We have a new life in the gospel in which we are no longer promised life upon our perfect obedience to the law but now because of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ and his merited righteousness, which was freely given to us through faith alone, we have the promised life forevermore. We have life because of the obedience of another.

Therefore, the gospel and grace determines our standing before God, not our keeping of the law. But now that we have life in Christ, how much more now should we live a life that is pleasing to God. Therefore, as Paul told the Corinthians:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law (1 Cor. 9:20-21).

The law of Christ comes to us in a very gentle and humble manner that lovingly woos the transformed heart in Christ to live a life of obedience to God in gratefulness, joyful thanksgiving of the free gift of God's grace in Christ. Why? As Jesus told us:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 “For My yoke is easy, and My load is light” (**Matt. 11:28-30**).

The law of Christ is a higher form or expression of God's moral law because it is not longer merely an external law written on tablets of stone, but now it is written on our hearts by the Spirit of God through union with Christ. The Spirit of God has literally written Christ upon our hearts so that his life is being lived out in and through us to produce a life that is being transformed into Christ. The law of Christ comes to us by God first giving us the promised life and then in the power of God's Spirit transforming our lives into a life that is consistent with our new life so that we are daily becoming what we already are in Christ. As Paul said in **v. 24**, **the life that has been put on us by God is a life of righteousness and holiness in truth because that is Christ's life**. But now that we have been clothed with Christ, who is our righteousness, sanctification, and holiness in truth, then our lives will now be a life of holiness in truth.

Now to the specifics: since God has put off the old man, Adam, and put on the new man, Christ then we should:

1. "laying aside falsehood" and "speak truth to one another" (**v. 25**) Why? because we are members of one another. Notice how Paul not only gives us the negative prohibition but also the corresponding positive command. Since Jesus Christ is truth (**v. 21**) and we have been clothed in Jesus (**v. 24**) then our speech to one another (mutual dependence) is to be consistent with who Christ is. If we are going to "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (**4:3**) then Paul said that it is only as we speak the "truth in love" that the body is built up in love (**4:15-16**).

2. Secondly, when we get angry, we are not to sin (**vv. 26-27; 31-32**). It is clear that Paul sees a distinction between righteous indignation or anger and unrighteous anger that is sinful. There is a proper place for anger in the Christian walk, especially when God's name and his work in Christ is not revered. However, this must be distinguished in the body of Christ from those who simply have a bad temper and are given to losing control of their anger (**cf. James 1:19-20**). The easiest way to distinguish between righteous and unrighteous anger is to ask what is the basis for such anger. In accord with Paul's exhortations, you should ask if the basis of our anger is focused outwardly or inwardly. In other words, are you angry because God's truth is being dishonored or someone who is weak is being mistreated or harmed OR is your anger the result of your own pride and arrogance that has been offended? Is your anger due to malice or a spirit of revenge upon your brother or sister in Christ? Paul warns against letting this latter form of anger from festering too long. Those who brood in anger or continually nurse it are in danger of falling prey to Satan taking that anger and exploiting it bringing discord and division within the body (**cf. Gal. 5:13-15; 19-21**). Therefore, Paul gives us a time frame of reconciliation. Whether or not Paul literally means you have a day to be reconciled with one another, it is clear that he wants you to take care of your anger as quickly as possible because those who live at peace with their anger towards others will soon develop a root of bitterness (**Heb. 12:14-17**) which will eventually destroy them and the peace of unity among the body of Christ.

Finally, in **v. 32** Paul tells us both how and why we should replace anger with being kind to one another, being tender-hearted toward one another and forgiving one another (**cf. 4:2**). Rather than being quick to get angry with one another (and all that follows from that; **cf. v. 31**) we should be quick to show kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness. We should be passionate about showing kindness and forgiveness toward one another; to be tender-hearted! Why?

Because God in Christ has forgiven you of so much so that Paul can say to the Romans that when our sin abounds, God's grace super-abounds (**Rom. 5:20**). The next time you think you have a "right" to explode and lose your temper before your brother or sister in Christ just remember what God has gone through to show merciful kindness, tender-heartedness and gracious forgiveness towards your own sin.

3. Believers are to work hard, rather than steal, so that they will have something to share with those in need (v. 28). Again, notice the negative prohibition followed by the positive exhortation which is followed by the proper motivation. Whatever the specific context of Paul's exhortation, **Paul sees the purpose of God's blessings in our life is to be used and expended in sharing with others**. Ask yourself why you have what you have? The gifts you have? The knowledge you have? The skills you have? The job you have? Where did you get all those things? The life that is transformed by Christ wants to give up everything in the service of Christ. Paul told the Corinthians that God blesses us so that in our abundance we might do good with what God has given to us (**2 Cor. 9:8**). The measure of our giving is to be consistent to how Christ gave to us (**2 Cor. 8:7-15**). Generosity should characterize the heart of those to whom such generosity has been shown. God has richly blessed us, both spiritually and materially. As he has blessed us so that we have an abundance to meet our needs and an overflow to share with others. So there is a reason for God's over-abundant blessings. It is not to be used selfishly for ourselves, which is consistent with our old life in Adam, but to share with others in need, especially those within the household of faith (cf. **Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 5:8; 6:17-19**). But not only is stealing inconsistent with the new clothing of Christ in righteousness and holiness in truth, but God will not bless or honor ill-gotten gain whether or not it accumulates great wealth in this life.

4. But not only should believers do good with their hands, but also with their mouths. If it is our desire to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, then we should not speak to one another with "unwholesome" or harmful speech but only with words that edify and give grace to one another. "Unwholesome" words tear down one another. But remember that our goal is the edification of the body; to build one another up in Christ. If this is our goal, then we should refrain from using language and speaking to one another in a manner that destroys our brother and sister in Christ. Our words should always be tempered with grace and love. We should give grace in our speech building up one another in love.

Finally, notice how Paul addresses you in another summary verse of the Christian ethic (v. 30). Our sin grieves the heart of the Holy Spirit of God. The fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved tells us that he is as much of a person as the first and second members of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not simply a force or power; He is God. And when we sin we must always remember that our sin saddens the Holy Spirit because we are permitting sin to enter into the very temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. **1 Cor. 6:19**). The fact that our sin grieves the heart of God ought to be yet another motivation to keep ourselves pure and holy before God. Instead of grieving the Holy Spirit we should want Him to rejoice in us. Why? Because He has sealed us as a pledge of our inheritance for the day of redemption (cf. **1:13-14**). How do we make the Holy Spirit rejoice over us? That's what this passage is all about! How we long for the day when we will be glorified with Christ in the resurrection and our sin will be completely removed and we will no longer grieve the heart of God! But note the incredible assurance that Paul gives us as the ground of the exhortation. Even in the command not to sin, Paul stresses the security of your salvation in Christ because the covenant promises are based upon his obedience, not yours. Your union in Christ, which has been sealed in the Holy Spirit (cf. **1:13-14**), is now the foundation out of which you now walk.

Amen! -SDG-