
Faults: Our Challenges Together

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

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Introduction Theme: "We seek to maintain Christ's love by being quick to forgive our faults and failures"

One of my most talented soccer teams that I coached at Dayton Christian was possibly one of the most talented teams the school had ever had in its 50-year history, but it was difficult team to manage because of disunity and factions on the team. The team was successful on the scoreboard but could have been even better if they had been more unified. It was a continual challenge to keep unity with in the team both on and off the field mostly because of 4-5 players. Sometimes players would refuse to play the ball to one another because of the divisiveness. That year we made it to Regional Finals (State quarter finals, the furthest the school had been in the State tournament in 30 years), but we lost that game, but played below their potential for most of that game.

The following year, (after losing a lot of outstanding seniors), no one expected the team to achieve any success after losing so many great players. But, largely the players who caused the divisions and disunity were those outstanding players. The thing about those remaining players was that even though they weren't as talented as the previous team they were all good friends. That team made it to the Regional semi-finals, only one game shy of matching the previous year's success. I believe that year's success was largely due to their unity, hard work and love for one another. That second-year team had many Chapel players on it; Parker, Jordan and Kevin and Kyle were all an important part of that team, and that group of young men are all still good friends today. (A side note, that team was also the smartest team I ever coached with an average GPA of over 3.5, and virtually every player on that team receiving academic awards for their outstanding school work).

The church is also called to be unified. The church reflects Christ. The church is called to grow into a mature and unified body of Christ, both locally and universally, through God-given leaders and the giftedness that Christ has given to each believer, in the church both locally and universally. Every believer is given gifts for building up, unification and the maturing of the body of Christ. These gifts are given solely through God's grace and God's sovereign will and good pleasure. Paul writes that we are supposed to "grow up in every way" until we reach full unity and maturity as the body of Christ.

When each believer is using his/her gifts properly the church will grow towards full maturity and unity, firmly grounded in love. Sadly, this was not always the way it was in the early church, and a lack of maturity and unity is often a characteristic of the church today. All too often, we set aside the gifts God has given us to serve one another and instead revert to treating one another as if we had never been saved. This is what the Ephesians were doing and something we can easily fall prey to as well. Even with the good gifts that God has given his church it is easy to fail and hurt one another, adding to the disunity in the church because we refuse to forgive one another, causing an atmosphere of anger and bitterness. Sadly, we tend to ignore this sin as being normal.

Be Careful How You Walk within the Community of Believers (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Paul writes in Ephesians chapter four that believers should have a “walk” in this life that reflects who we are in Christ. After you are “in Christ”, your life should look very different than the way it looked before you were saved. Our walk both alone and together (as the church and in community) should reflect growth, maturity, and unity as we become increasingly more like Christ. It takes time to mature and grow in love and Christ-likeness, but we should not live our lives within the church as if we have never been saved. And when we do sin against each other we should be quick to forgive one another.

The Ephesians were failing to live in such a way that reflected the full growth and maturity that Paul expected, particularly when it came to their words and the attitude behind those words. We might say to ourselves, of course my life looks different now than before I was saved...but what about your speech? Or what about your attitude towards other believers in the church? Are we living more like an unregenerate Gentile, or a follower of Christ trying to live in true righteousness and holiness?

Our Walk Before Christ (Ephesians 4:17-19)

Once you belong to Christ you should stop walking through life like an unbeliever. *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds (v.17). They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart (v. 18). They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (v. 19).*

There should be a contrast between our former lives as unbelievers and our current life in Christ. As unbelievers, we had no desire and no ability to live as new creations. Because we were dead in sin, we couldn't perceive or understand a life in Christ apart from our sin. We were separated from God due to our ignorance and the hardness of our hearts. Before knowing Christ, we had hard and calloused hearts and pursued all kinds of sensuality and impurity. These things should not be a part of the church community, and yet at some level these desires still cause division and interfere with growing and maturing in Christ.

Our Walk After Christ (Ephesians 4:20-24)

Walking in Christ after salvation should be based on living as a new creation, as a new person, with a new mind, not in the pursuit of all kinds of sin as demonstrated by the life of a Gentile. The kind of life that Paul is calling us to is a life learned from Christ and scripture. The truth is in Jesus, and taught by Christ through his word. Truth is a life lived together in true righteousness and holiness, and kindness and forgiveness towards one another. But too often the opposite is true in our fellowship with one another. In the pursuit of church unity and maturity, we need to learn to put off our sinful desires and put on Christ and our new self that was created when we accepted Christ as savior.

But that is not the way you learned Christ! —assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, (v. 20, 21) to put off your old self, which belongs to your

former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, (v. 22) and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, (v. 23) and to put on the new self, (v. 24) created after the likeness of God (v. 24) in true righteousness and holiness. (v. 24)

Walking in Christ requires that we put off (throw, or cast off) the old desires of our sinful man. Desires like sensuality, impurity, corruptness, and callousness, are all desires that have no place in a new creation, nor in the church community. We are to put off our hard hearts and put on our new self, placed in us through a new life in Christ. Putting off and putting on takes place when we renew our minds, replacing sinful actions and thoughts with scripture that addresses our idolatrous wants and desires, and then following through with obedient action of repentance and change. Putting off and putting on is how Paul describes “learning” the truth in Christ, it is how we grow. If we are all putting off our sinful desires and putting on Christ-like desires when we do sin against one another we will be quick to forgive one another and we will better be able to live together in biblical unity.

Our Walk Within the Community of Believers (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Within the context of putting off and putting on Paul addressed some specific concerns in the Ephesian church, and applicable to us today. Community life lived in an ungodly way creates disunity and immaturity and interferes with a church life that is expected to reflect the love of Christ.

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25). In the context of putting off the old nature and putting on the new, we do not live in a vacuum. It is a lie to believe that the life of a Christian is supposed to be lived outside of the church community. Our giftedness is given to us by God for use within the community and for the community. We are supposed to speak the truth to one another. Because we are all members of the same body of Christ there is not to be any falsehood or lies spoken to each other,” ...we are no longer alienated, independent beings, but people who now belong together in unity...”¹ We are members of the same body, illustrated by the fact that we all have differing gifts that work together *“joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”* (Ephesians 4:16). The church is called to grow in unity and love and this foundation must be speaking truth to one another, but in love! Unity and maturity cannot be achieved together without the truth, and the truth will not be heard without love. Truth and love is the beginning of forgiveness and growth towards righteousness and holiness.

Putting away falsehood (or deceit) in the body of Christ is the foundation of living as a new creation within the community of believers. Falsehood is the opposite of how we learn and grow to maturity in Christ living as brothers and sisters in one body. If the life we live among our Christian brothers and sisters is different than who we are outside the church, such a difference is falsehood.

¹ Turner, M. (1994). Ephesians. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1240). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press

If we pretend to be someone we are not among our Christian brothers and sisters, that is falsehood. A life of “slight deceit” is an accepted lifestyle that many of us live within the church. All too often the areas of sin that Paul addresses in the book of Ephesians are overlooked by the church because we simply accept them as normal behavior in our relationships with one another.

Anger (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil (v. 27). According to D.A. Carson Ephesians 4:26-27 introduces the main topic of the passage: anger. ... ‘Be angry, but do not sin’ entirely misses the force of the original. It is not an encouragement to righteous anger (indeed all anger is condemned in 4:31); it is a warning, ‘If you become angry, beware! You are at sin’s door!’ If in the West anger is regarded as a sign of manliness, Jewish tradition was more aware of its divisive, satanic, and corrupting power.... Anger, and the related sins of vs 29 and 31, are the epitome of socially destructive and alienating sins, and so characteristic of the old creation²

How prevalent is anger in the church and how does it tend to manifest itself in the church? Is there any excuse to live in anger and deceive one another in the church? What about the brother or sister we live with at home, your spouse and children? Is there somehow an alternate rule allowing us to accept anger and sinful talk at home and then pretend it doesn’t happen when we gather with other believers? There is no excuse for destructive anger in the church, and I can almost guarantee your anger is not righteous anger..., which all too often is simply an excuse to live an angry, divisive life within the church. I am not sure if I have ever had anger that I could legitimately call “righteous”.

Do not allow anger to control your emotions and your priorities, and don’t feed your anger with thoughts of revenge and wrath concerning issues with brothers and sisters in Christ. Don’t allow anger to take a foothold, or take root in your heart which can cause division and disunity in the church. Anger is a characteristic of the old nature not the new creation. Anger most often tells us that our wants and desires and cravings have not been fulfilled, and someone has probably stepped in the way of what we truly want. It is difficult to live in kindness, forgiveness and love when we are angry and won’t forgive.

Stealing (Ephesians 4:28)

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 (v. 28). Fellow believers were stealing from one another with in the church of Ephesus, otherwise Paul wouldn’t have addressed it as an area of repentance. Does stealing take place in our church today? Do we take anything from others? Listen to how D.A. Carson’s New Bible Commentary describe this verse, “Theft (28) ... is experienced not merely as the deprivation of property (akin to accidental loss) but as a defiling assault on one’s private sphere and a destroyer of trust within the community. These things and others of their kind *grieve the Holy Spirit* ...in the sense that they oppose the very direction of his reconciling, unifying, new-creation work in the believer.” (D.A. Carson, New Bible Commentary pg. 1240)

²Turner, M. (1994)

Do you disrespect another believer's private space or destroy trust within the Christian community? Do you disrespectfully abuse or take advantage of a brother or sister's time, giftedness and resources for your own benefit and desires? Do you promote forgiveness within the church or are you more comfortable taking from others than giving of yourself? Are you as willing to use your gifts to give back to the church or are you simply a taker? Paul tells the thief to stop stealing and give back to the church community. God gives us spiritual gifts to use for the benefit of the whole church body. The giftedness that God gives each of us by his grace is not for your personal pleasure but for the growth, maturity, and unity of the body of Christ. The diversity of gifts within the body of Christ is a beautiful thing, but often we don't appreciate the giftedness of others who are different than us, and we often fail to recognize how needy we are as individuals and how vital the church is to our own spiritual growth. We need all the gifts Christ has ordained for the church, not just our own.

"In place of these socially destructive activities, Paul advocates corresponding ones that are cohesive, upbuilding, and pattern the new-creation existence epitomized and brought into being in Christ: the erstwhile thief should turn philanthropist instead (28); speech should not be used to be foul and tear down, but for good (29); in place of anger, the believer should show the forgiving character of God (32; 5:1) and the self-sacrificial love of Christ who died to atone for us (5:2)."³

Corrupt and Destructive Talk (Ephesians 4:29-32)

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. (v. 29)

Let NO corrupting talk come out of your mouth! None. What is corrupting talk anyways? Well, first it's speech not shaped with anger. Corrupting talk causes disunity and tears down the intended. Corrupting talk is meant to disrupt and destroy. This type of talk grieves the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 30; *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (v. 30)*. Corrupting talk is not the kind of talk that Christ expects of believers and is not conducive to unity and maturity among brothers and sisters, and this includes all fellowship including the home.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice (v.31). In the context of anger that Paul says has no place in the community of believers, it is particularly noted that these destructive attitudes are often portrayed in our speech. In the exercise of putting off our sins and putting on Christ, we are to put off all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

Instead of Christ permeating our maturity and love for one another in our speech, it is bitterness and wrath that often influence and form our speech with one another. We are bitter because our desires are being interfered with, and we choose to take revenge through our speech and words as we cut one another down with our words.

³ Turner, M. (1994).

We are all too skilled at verbal assassination after years of continued practice and refinement. We may put on a happy, cheerful face in community but in private we are thinking and living out a war of words with a brother in sister whom we should be forgiving and working towards unity and reconciliation. James says this type of speech is murder! Slander is the purposeful character assassination with the intent on destroying and causing harm. Does this sound like a reflection of Christian maturity, and an image of “growing in Christ”? How willing are you to forgive when someone talks this way to you, especially for the sake of unity in the church?

How can we talk to others about spiritual maturity and unification in the church when we are so skilled and practiced at committing verbal assassination? And in our homes, it is fully inappropriate to use corrupting and destructive speech, but somehow, we justify our angry assault towards our loved ones because they are considered family. How often does this damaging, corruptive speech go unrecognized as even a problem at home or at church? What type of harvest will we reap as a church if we destroy each other with our words and fail to forgive?

Our Walk in Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)

So, what should our walk in Christ look like? It is obvious that we are to put aside our own wants and desires to walk in a way that is honoring to Christ, and there is no doubt that what is expected of us as a church is simple... but clearly, it's not easy.

We are to put off all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice, and then we must put on Christ. It is never enough to simply put off sin...we must also “put on” Christ. What does putting on Christ look like as a community?

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (v.32)

Instead of anger, slander, wrath, and malice, and bitterness be kind to one another, tenderhearted. Let your heart be soft towards others, even those who offend you and hurt you. Give up your own desires for someone else. Serve one another with humility and compassion. Intentionally use your gifts to bless those who can't return the favor.

What is it that makes it so difficult for us to look past offenses, and to forgive our brother and sister? To be kind to one another? Is the problem that we tend to live our lives as if we are still unbelievers? Are we living as we did before we came to Christ? Perhaps many of us were saved a very long time ago, and we don't remember what our life and speech was like before Christ. Or we simply accept this behavior as being ok, since it's not what we think of as a “big” sin, or maybe we simply accept hurtful damaging speech as normal. Whatever our reasons, they're wrong. Paul says we are to imitate God! We are supposed to consider the great forgiveness that God extended to us, and we are supposed to forgive one another as Christ forgave us.

Imitating God – Walk in Love (Ephesians 5:1-2)

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 (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Therefore...because God expects us to grow and mature together in the body of Christ and to pursue unity we are NOT supposed to live as we formerly did before we were drawn to Christ. But instead we are called to be imitators of God, as the beloved children. Day in and day out we are called to walk in love.

Because Christ loved us and gave up his life for us as a beautiful, fragrant offering we are supposed to do the same thing for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are supposed to give up our lives for one another every day! This is the gospel lived out before us each day in community. Our sacrificial walk and imitation of Christ should be a beautiful picture of Christ's death on the cross for our sins when we didn't deserve it.

Conclusion

Learn and practice intentionally putting off your old self (which can be illustrated more like casting or throwing off your old nature) and replace your old self put on (or clothe yourself) with the new self, created by Christ at conversion.

Put away falsehood and deceit words and attitudes and speak the truth to one another, but do so in love and not anger.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit with your speech, but get rid of bitterness, wrath, anger, slander and malice in what you think and say to one another. But instead be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another because Christ forgave you and gave up his life for you.

At the beginning of chapter 4 Paul urges the Ephesians to "walk" in a way that is worthy of our calling (in a manner that reflects Christ our savior). We are no longer supposed to "walk" as we did before we came to Christ (separated from God due to the hardness of our hearts), but instead we are supposed to "walk" in love and imitate God, maintaining Christ's love by being quick to forgive one another's faults and failures.