

1 Kings 19:4-8
 Psalm 34:1-8
 Ephesians 4:25-5:2
 John 6:35, 41-51

Eph 4:32
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WALK IN LOVE

The journey from this world to the kingdom of God, which every pilgrim undertakes, has been described as a long road, a mountain climb, 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 and fun, at times exciting, at times peaceful, at times dark and painful.

Last week we discussed how Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians give all the assurance you need that completing the 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 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).

Then 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 teaches another kind, and we must learn to follow the latter. Review Eph 4:1-3 and also Rom 12:1-2, “*I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” There are many verses like these in Paul’s letters. They are prophetic in the sense that God is speaking to you through Paul. He is *appealing* to you in the love of Christ 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.*” The words of God here likewise call for a real change in your heart and mind and actions when you surrender your life to Christ.

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:”

Mark 4:26-29. “*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.*”

Phil 1:12-13. *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.*

Therefore, while discussing the instructions for life’s journey in today’s passage, keep in mind that you are never left alone to follow all these instructions without help. When you feel weak, let God take the burden. He loves you, and it gives him pleasure when you allow him to take over.

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 began with this same word. This time 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 these specific steps we must take in v.25ff to stop living this way, which is the way of the world today as much as it was in Paul's day. The world doesn't change in this respect. *We* must change. The remainder of our lesson lists several specific ways in which we are called to live differently.

- *Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another* (v.25). Telling lies is never a good idea, even when we are tempted to tell a "white lie" to protect someone when the truth would hurt. 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: untruthful bragging, not mentioning a hazard, etc.

- *Do not let the sun go down on your anger* (v.26). How different the world would be if we could all obey this instruction! As v.26 says, as long as anger remains, the devil has an opportunity to nourish the seeds of hatred and make us more like himself. A minister visited an old man in a hospital, who reluctantly admitted 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, "*Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools*" (Eccl 7:9), and "*... the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God*" (James 1:19-20).

- *Let the thief no longer steal ...* (v.28). It is sad that there have always been those who rely on stealing as their means of support. There are other reasons why people steal things, but stealing always 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 the words of Jesus, "*How he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*" (Acts 20:35).

- *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you* (v.32). Discuss how this verse takes care of 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, 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 give 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 kindness, which the world does not understand, 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). It's a tall order for any of us, but in Christ, it can be done.