

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Morag, for reading. If you keep your Bibles open at Ephesians chapter 4, that would be a great help to me. As always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet.

It would help you just to see where we're going as we look at this passage together. And let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Father in heaven, we thank you so much that you are a speaking God, that your call to us in the Lord Jesus is all of your grace and kindness, that all that we need to be blessed by you is given to us in him.

And so, Father, we pray that you would impress those truths deeply onto our hearts, that we might be willing to take up the costly and challenging calls of your word to us this morning.

By your spirit, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's been a big week, of course, for Donald Trump. And his inauguration took place. But who is the real Donald Trump?

That's now what everybody is wondering. And I guess now we're going to find out. See, some people say that the Donald Trump that we heard a lot about during the primaries isn't the real Donald Trump.

[1 : 15] So we might not end up with the big wall across the Mexican border, paid for by the Mexican government, which was promised. We might not really see Muslims banned from entering the United States.

That was the Donald Trump of his early campaigns. Perhaps the real Donald Trump is the one we read on Twitter, who holds himself up against the liberal establishment and the Hollywood stars, says they're the ones who are out of touch with the common people of America.

He's the one who's in touch with them. Then, is the real Donald Trump the one we heard in that scandal that broke about him 10 years ago, now it is, but that recording of him showing off about groping women and saying, when you're a star, they'll let you do it.

Is that the real Donald Trump? Now, he says, no, that's not the real Donald Trump. And what he said about that, when the scandal broke of what he'd said about groping women, he said, anyone who knows me knows these words don't reflect who I am.

I said it. I am wrong. I apologize. And whether or not we, whatever we think of Donald Trump, I guess most of us can relate to that feeling of being confronted with something we've done or something we've said and feeling that doesn't really reflect who I am.

[2 : 35] Yes, it was me. I did do it. It was wrong. I'm sorry, but I'm not like that. I don't know why I did that. Well, we're going to find out more about who Donald Trump really is in the coming weeks, months, years.

But a similar problem can happen in the Christian life. It's that when people meet Christians, they sometimes feel that there is a kind of a difficulty in knowing what's really going on on the inside, that sometimes Christians are accused of hypocrisy, that we give off an impression of respectability, but deep down inside, maybe we're not quite as good as we think or as good as we give the impression of.

And one of the sad things for me when I was working as a lawyer was this thing that you encountered as a lawyer, that if somebody was accused of doing something bad, if quite early on they told you they were a Christian, it was often a sign that they were guilty because it was as though they thought that by saying that they were an upstanding member of their local church, people might think better of them and often sadly that meant they were hiding real guilt underneath. That's the story of outward moralistic religion and that kind of perception of Christianity, I guess it's probably one of the reasons that the mainline denominations in Scotland, attendance-wise, are in meltdown, that as generations go by, people think, well, if that's Christianity, I don't want anything to do with it.

And in Ephesians, we get a completely different picture of the church. It's a new vision for what the church is in God's eyes and what we could be as a group of Christians together.

[4 : 17] We've been hearing that the church is like God's trophy cabinet, that he uses the church to display his wisdom and his grace and his kindness to everything on earth and in heaven.

The church is the big thing that God is doing in the world today as by his grace he draws in people from all different backgrounds to know him and be reconciled to each other. Now in chapters 4 to 6 of Ephesians, we start to look at how we can experience that spiritual heavenly reality for ourselves, even at St Silas.

no matter how ordinary we look as a group of people, we can experience that. And it started last week with the gift of pastors and teachers. Jesus has given them to the church, that was what we looked at last week.

And as we, as God's people, hear God's word faithfully taught and we respond by serving one another and speaking the truth in love to each other, the body gets built up to maturity.

So what will that look like? What will a mature church body look like? Well now we get some specifics in Ephesians. And so we have the marks of authentic Christian growth.

[5 : 29] And it starts with a new way of thinking. That leads to a new set of clothing and it's all based on a new motivation. So first of all, a new way of thinking.

Let's look at verse 17. And when Paul talks about Gentiles here, he's just talking about the non-Christian culture around them. So if you like, he's talking about the wider city that they live in. And just look about at how much of what he says is about their thoughts from verse 17. So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. So Paul is describing a process here and it starts with having a hard heart towards the living God.

In other words, not wanting God to be there, not loving him and wanting him to be God in our lives. That attitude towards God separates us from God. And that separation has two quite dramatic effects on the human mind that every Christian is called on here to recognize so that we think differently.

[6 : 46] We turn from this way of thinking as we grow in Christ. And the first thing is that our old way of thinking was futile. It led to futility. That was at the end of verse 17.

Futility is about not achieving what you want to. About setting out with some goals and it never really quite happening. Now partly that's because, I guess, without God, death stops you from achieving the big goals of your life.

If you choose not to live for Jesus, you choose other things or another thing to really put first in your life that you think will give you what only God can really give you. And whatever that is that you build your life on, whether it's relationships or your career, your success, respect from others, love from other people, a particular partnership, your children, whatever you choose, death will come and will take it away.

So because of death, the secular people who I know, the humanists, atheists who I know, will tend to say, well yeah, we know we're going to die, but I'll be remembered.

The good things that I commit myself to in this life will leave an impression and I'll be remembered for generations to come by the people around me.

[8 : 05] But without God, that idea of doing good to be remembered is completely meaningless. Whether what you're doing is good or is terribly bad, it's just a matter of personal opinion if there's no God.

And so living like that is futile. If you really think about it, if you really examine your life, it's futile. None of us really lives consistently with the idea that there's no God.

We had a good example of this on the TV last week. I don't know how many of you watch Sherlock, but the last episode was on last Sunday evening, the latest series coming to an end, and we met Sherlock's sister.

He had a sister. She's been locked away in a maximum security mental hospital on an island. Why was she locked away? Because she was so intelligent and she had such little emotion and she was living consistently with the idea there's no God.

So she was very dangerous. So she'd realized if there's no God, there's no real meaning to our lives and human beings have no real value. So she was killing people and she was locked away. [9 : 16] She meets Sherlock in the episode and they had this fascinating conversation where she said to Sherlock, why am I here? And he said, she said, no one ever tells me am I being punished?

Sherlock said, you did something bad. Eurus's sister said, good and bad are fairy tales. We have evolved to attach an emotional significance to what is nothing more than a survival strategy of the pack animal.

We're conditioned to invest divinity in utility. Good isn't really good. Evil isn't really wrong. Bottoms aren't really pretty. You are a prisoner of your own meat.

And Sherlock said, why aren't you a prisoner? And she said, I'm too clever. And just imagine an atheist, you know, who strongly believes there is good and evil and right and wrong, that those are real things.

Imagine them having a conversation with Eurus. What can they say to Eurus from their shared atheism that shows Eurus she's wrong to think like that?

[10 : 22] She says, good and evil are just the emotions that we have attached, we've evolved to attach to things that help the survival of our species.

The only problem with humanity is no one else is intelligent enough to have realized and to snap out of it. There's nothing that an atheist can say to show that's wrong.

And in real life there are rare examples of people who say things like that, not just on Sherlock. And you know what we do with them? We lock them up. We treat them as mental, as mad, as mentally unwell.

Just like Eurus was locked away. We treat them as patients. There's a great book about worldviews called *The Universe Next Door* by James Sire. He questions in that book as he talks about atheism, he says, there may come a day for any society when things get reversed and the people who start getting locked away for being mad are the ones who still think that there's right and wrong and good and evil when there's no God.

So the Christian is called to recognize that the thinking of the non-Christian mind is futile and we turn away from it. There's another problem in these verses.

[11 : 36] It's that turning away from God enslaves you. That was in verse 19. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity and they are full of greed.

So when we push God out of our lives, we think we're making a bid for freedom. I won't have to do what God wants me to do anymore. But actually, turning away from God enslaves you.

What happens is all we're left with are our own sensual desires to try and fulfill and satisfy. and we become enslaved to them. So the Christian is called to think differently, to recognize that about perhaps their old way of life or the non-Christian way of life and to turn to a new way of thinking. And we get that from verse 20. Just look at the emphasis on teaching here from verse 20. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

[12 : 58] So this is change on the inside, not an external veneer, real inner change. Committing ourselves to the faithful teaching of God's Word so that we're made new in the way that we think so that our thinking changes our attitudes and desires and it reshapes how we live.

So we don't just put on new behavior like a set of clothes that you could take off again when you get home and no one else is watching. No, we put on a whole new self, an exterior that naturally flows out of the way that we've been changed on the inside.

It's not about niceness, Christianity, it's about newness, a deep down whole self-change that's going on in every Christian. We took down our Christmas tree the other week and of course Christmas trees look lovely and people go around the streets to look at the Christmas trees in the windows but Christmas trees look lovely for the decorations that are stuck on the outside and once you take them off of course all of that is gone.

It's not natural the appearance of the tree even though we might like the look of it. Now the religious moralist is like the Christmas tree, things stuck on the outside but inside the same desires lingering.

But true religion is based on an internal heart change that because we think differently we're putting down healthy roots and we're producing healthy fruit.

[14 : 29] But to do that we have to decisively turn away from an old way of thinking and fill our mind with God's word. So what will we then look like? Well that's our second point.

We go from a new way of thinking to a new set of clothing. Paul gives us six specific commands about our behaviour towards each other as the church.

He'll get to our behaviour in the world next week then we look at our behaviour in the household later in the letter but it's the church today how we relate to one another. So even as we turn to the six commands before we've looked at them specifically it already smashes one of the ideas we sometimes have about personal Christian growth.

You see you don't grow as a Christian by sitting on your hands at home and thinking well I've not killed anybody and I haven't sworn yet today. No we grow in godliness when we invest in deep committed relationships with each other as a church family.

That's where God cuts the corners of each other. We cut the corners of each other but God's spirit is at work in growing us to be more like Jesus. So first of all no more lies.

[15 : 40] verse 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour and then the reason for we're all members of one body.

It's interesting isn't it if I was to ask you don't worry you don't have to do a show of hands have you ever told a lie I'm guessing we'd all admit we have if I was to ask you are you a liar most of us would say no I'm not a liar but we tell lies we lie because it protects our reputation we lie because we're too scared that if people knew the truth they'd think less of us or we lie when we're trying to persuade somebody that our point of view is right so we exaggerate things we lie to flatter people because we want them to like us and do what we want them to do.

So Paul says no more lies speak truthfully to one another. Then he says no more anger verse 26 In your anger do not sin do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

So there are times when it is right to be angry it is okay to be angry about sin Jesus got angry if we're being honest most of the time our anger is not good anger it's anger because we're proud we're self-righteous we're greedy we're frustrated that we're not getting what we want we get angry for the wrong reasons usually.

But even when our anger is appropriate Paul is saying here get angry but don't stay angry. We've got six couples getting married at St Silas this year which is a great great joy we've been I was starting to look at sort of marriage prep material and when you look at these marriage books and marriage courses they talk about conflict and what to do when you're arguing and you're angry and they talk about how in a marriage in conflict you can often either be a rhino or a hedgehog some people are rhinos some people are hedgehogs now the rhino when the rhino gets angry you charge you're right out there on the front foot shouting lost your self-control the hedgehog when the hedgehog gets angry the hedgehog withdraws and retreats defenses go up but it doesn't deal with the anger it's still being nurtured inside so we avoid the situation of conflict but the anger has never been dealt with now God calls us as a counter-cultural group of people to something that's much harder to do it's to give the time to cool off to think objectively to be quick to think well what have I done wrong what do I need to say sorry for and to go back to the person who's made us angry and say please can we talk because what you just did or what you did or what you said made me really angry can we talk about it why I got angry

[18 : 39] I think there's things that you need to say sorry for and I'd like to ask you to do that there's things I need to say sorry for can I ask for your forgiveness it's really hard to do that because it's not what people around us do but it's wonderful it deals with the anger so if you get angry don't stay angry and the reason why not is quite a frightening one in verse 27 I don't know if you noticed that verse 27 do not give the devil a foothold so if we stay angry the devil gets in and any church is vulnerable to that let me say I think at a church like St.

Silas in this season of life we're very vulnerable to spiritual attack we are growing in numbers in terms of the number of people here Sunday by Sunday and midweek and the devil hates it when a church grows in number we're seeing people who are not Christians coming on Sunday mornings where that's a joy to us you're very welcome here if you're not yet a Christian and Sunday evening as we're running Life Explode but the devil hates that when people who are not Christians come to church and people say the devil loves a gap called grudge he loves to get in and nurture grudges so that we stop living as a transformed loving community of believers because we've let anger fester

and we haven't forgiven one another don't stay angry next Paul turns to stealing but it's a very broad understanding of stealing no more stealing verse 28 anyone anyone anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer but must work doing something useful with their own hands that they may have something to share with those in need so you might not be someone who steals you might not have things in your shed that you borrowed off people and never got round to giving back you might not be someone who downloads music or films illegally on the internet you might not be like that but the command of verse 28 goes beyond that to say so far as

God gives you the opportunities we should be people who work so that we can give to others give to meet needs to meet people's physical needs by helping the poor and to meet spiritual needs by giving to support gospel work work to give not to get next Paul tells us no more corrupting speech it's very emphatic verse 29 do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen I don't know whether you saw there was a study last week reported on in the news some psychologists had done some work and they said gossip is good for you that was the headline gossip is good for you they monitored women talking about the weather and saw what happened and then they monitored them gossiping and they found that gossip released unusual amounts of the love hormone oxytocin and what happens when that hormone gets released among people is they feel closer to each other they feel the love as they talk together now of course what the study didn't focus on was when it said gossip is good for you is what gossip is doing to the people being gossiped about who are not there what I think they really meant in the study which is what I could have told them is gossip makes you feel good well of course it does because that's why we do it but gossip is a toxic thing and churches are rife with gossip we jump to conclusions about people about their motives about what's happened or people confide in one another things they don't want to be shared and then we talk behind one another's backs it's toxic to do it and a classic example in a church of course the great pious example is the prayer request we hear something that someone has told us confidentially but we feel we can tell other people because we say I'm just telling you because then you can pray but really we're just telling them because we're enjoying telling them what nobody else knows it's good to pray but we need to be honest if our motives are actually that we just want to share the news Paul says could out anything that is unwholesome that is not good to share and instead what should we use our tongue for he says use it for helpful speech that builds others up according to their needs what a great picture in other words think of the people that you know at St.

Silas in fact I wanted to take a risk a counter cultural risk about church this morning which is to ask if you just look around at one another so just turn your heads have a look have a look at the people around look at the people that you know some of you are not doing it that's fine it's optional okay but as you look these are the people God has given us to love make it your ambition that the people you know and love at St.

[23 : 48] Silas become more like Jesus that they grow to be more like Christ and then reflect and think what do I need to be saying to them specifically day by day week by week to point them to Jesus so they grow in their faith and their dependence on him their love for him their grasp of his love for them and they walk as he made us to walk next Paul talks about grieving the spirit I've called it on the sheet no more grumbling it's in verse 30 and do not grieve the holy spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption now the spirit of God lives in every one of us in every believer and God is passionate about seeing us become more godly it's why he redeemed us at great cost to himself so he is grieved whenever we sin whenever we turn away from his commands that might be all this is referring to it might be an overarching thing about not grieving the spirit I think it might be more specific than that in that when Paul says do not grieve the spirit he's referring back to a little reference in Isaiah that was talking about when God's people first were rescued out of

Egypt in the exodus and the spirit of God led them out of Egypt and what the people did that grieved the spirit of God was they grumbled they grumbled to one another and they complained about God's provision so it may be that Paul has specifically got that in mind when he says don't grieve the spirit that kind of grumbling and negative talk and complaining that we're all tempted to do about church often because we feel very passionately about church so when things aren't going the way we want them to we complain and we grumble and it damages the unity of the church it's an unhealthy thing don't grieve the spirit and finally in the list we've got no more malice verse 31 get rid

of all bitterness rage and anger brawling and slander along with every form of malice and then the alternative in verse 32 be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you so when we're offended by what someone has done malice is when we respond by trying to harm them directly or indirectly perhaps we cut them down or we turn others against them instead what we're called to do is to forgive them and be kind to them and compassionate to them and that is a really difficult thing isn't it when we feel sinned against or harmed or wronged my experience of church life has been that the biggest pastoral problems in the churches I've been in haven't come because someone has done something wrong they haven't come because someone wouldn't say sorry they've come because other people couldn't forgive them so there's no resolution the person said sorry they've asked for forgiveness people couldn't forgive them and it leads to terrible long-lasting problems in the church family so those are six things that should mark the way we live together as church informally when we spend time together during the week formally when we gather on a

Sunday when we gather midweek in our groups growth groups routes international cafe these characteristics that should make us look completely different to the people around us I remember as a young Christian thinking I better not look too different to my friends who are not Christians I need to look as similar as I can to them so that then they won't think I'm really weird and then they'll listen to me as I try and share my faith with them but the Bible gives us a completely different picture of how we try and introduce friends to Jesus it's that we live radically distinctive lives of love we're a bit more weird for Jesus because we're so loving people can't get their heads around it those are the new clothes we wear things that are visible to the outside world because our thinking has changed thanks to God and they might not often be the first things people would notice about a church are they when someone's looking for a church we often we evaluate a church by the strategy by its structures by its vision the writer

Richard Corkin says this Paul isn't talking here about church programs but about church godliness for the benefit that we are to our church is far more about us being godly than about being able some churches are full of talented people gradually destroying the church by pulling in different directions with great skill God is responsible for giving us whatever abilities our churches need but he gives us responsibility for being holy with them but how do we bring about that change in ourselves well this true religion this mature Christian life it's rooted in a new way of thinking it's displayed in a new set of clothing and thirdly it's driven by a new motivation just before Paul started this section he prayed for what we would need if we're going to change like this and he didn't pray that we'd feel horrible about ourselves that we'd feel really wretched he didn't appeal to our pride and say come on you're all better than this no he prayed that we would be overwhelmed by the love of

[29 : 14] Christ verse 17 of chapter 3 and I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ so in this passage he tells us to unlearn a whole load of stuff that we've picked up from our culture about what we live for and about sensuality and instead to get our thinking straight but when he says that he doesn't teach us a new abstract doctrine instead we're taught a person look at verse 20 to see Paul bring that out of chapter 4 verse 20 that however is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus the only time in Ephesians Paul just calls Jesus Jesus he's emphasizing this is a man a person we're not learning a syllabus we're learning a person we depend on him we grow in him we walk with him the one who loved us he's not a syllabus he's a savior he's not a formula he's a friend and what a friend he is as Paul ends he points us back to the love that he longs us he longs for us to grasp in chapter 5 verse 1 just have a look as Paul ends the section verse 1 of chapter 5 follow God's example therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God he lived a life of matchless love his whole life was like a pleasing aroma to God and it culminated with him on his knees in Gethsemane begging his heavenly father to take the cup from him what was the cup it was on the cross he would be treated as the one who had committed all the lies we've ever done all the stealing we've ever done from one another all the unwholesome talk we've ever spoken he would take that on himself but he went to the cross willingly because he loved us and gave himself up for us so that we could have every spiritual blessing in him and we don't need to grasp for other things anymore we can trust him and resolve to love like him it's knowing that love that truly changes us the early

Christian writer Augustine was a guy who his book Confessions is extraordinary he lived this very promiscuous life lots of mistresses prostitutes before he became a Christian he came out of this great conviction of sin and he was overwhelmed when he heard about the grace of God years later he was in a town and one of his former mistresses saw him so she ran up to him and he was quite aloof with her so she started trying to entice him to sleep with her and he walked away so as he walked away she assumed that he hadn't recognized her and she said Augustine it is I and Augustine turned and said yes but it's not I completely transformed by the grace of God let's pray together we'll have a moment of quiet to reflect on the passage on what God's been saying to us by his spirit I'll lead us in a prayer in a moment so in a summer which is a full

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[34 : 02] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I pray that you will enable us, by the power of your Spirit, to be a genuinely transformed community.

A community where we're marked, not by lying or stealing, unwholesome talk, grumbling, but but rather by the ways that we love one another, we build one another up, we serve and help one another.

As we do that, Father God, we pray that we will have hearts that can forgive one another, knowing that you in Christ have forgiven us so much.

Would we follow your example as your loved children, living lives of love just as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, that fragrant offering and sacrifice to you.

[35 : 11] In Jesus' name, amen.