

EPHESIANS

LIVING (THE) GOSPEL

Sermon 7 – Ephesians 4:17-5:2 – Imitating God

1. How different do you think that average Australian think Christians are – if indeed they know another Christian! In what ways do you think your neighbours consider *you* to be different because you're a Christian?

RADICALLY DIFFERENT

2. *Why* are Christians to be so radically different that we astonishingly stand out in the world?
3. Many Ephesian Christians had come from a Gentile background. What are some of the characteristics of their previous life and thinking which Paul insists they now leave behind? (vv17-19). Have a look for a key issue, from which all the others arise.
4. What causes corruption in the 'old self'? – v22.
5. The answer to that corruption, says Paul, is *to be made new in the attitude of your minds*. How do you think that renewal happens? (See also Romans 12:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 5:16-17)
6. *How* do we 'put on the new self'? What does this new self look like?

HOW DIFFERENT/DIFFERENT HOW?

Paul now teases out what 'putting off' and 'putting in' might look like in very practical ways.

7. **Lies** – why does Paul say they are inappropriate?
8. **Anger** – how do you deal with it without sinning? Why deal with it prior to sunset?
9. **Stealing** – how does he turn this on its head?
10. **Talk which tears down** – discuss the opposite and how to practice it.
11. **Bitterness** and its close partners – why does this grieve the Holy Spirit and how do you feel about the fact that our behaviour can actually cause God grief?
12. **Kind, compassionate and forgiving** – here's the key to overturning all that Paul says we must 'put off'. What's the key to us growing in kindness, compassion and forgiveness?

IMITATE GOD

Living a life of love is a great way to sum up all Paul has been urging. It's impossible to love while telling lies or stealing or tearing strips off someone. And kindness, compassion and forgiveness describe God's gracious dealing with us. We are his dearly loved children and we ought to dearly love others.

13. How does Jesus' sacrifice serve as the ultimate example of all this?
14. Someone comments to you – "oh yeah, I know a few Christians – they're really no different to anyone else." How might you respond?
15. A friend claims to be a Christian, but clings to bitterness regarding past hurts and withholds forgiveness. How do you encourage them to see the significance of what Paul urges here?
16. Is your life radically different? Is there an area described in this passage that you feel you must work on as a result of this message? If you can – share it with the group and pray for one another, that we might courageously address areas in our life which still need shaping and moulding. Pray that we will live in such a different way that others will see the difference Jesus makes.

Date: 20th May 2018
Services: 730, 930, 930 Peregrian
Series: Ephesians: Living (the) Gospel
Passage: Ephesians 4:17-5:2
Title: Imitating God
Outline:

1. Radically different
2. How different/different how?
3. Imitate God

When I was in 6th form (that's what it was called back then), at Epping boys high school, I think I've shared with you before, that there was quite a lot of us who were Christians - around 12-14 - out of 180 or so... (7 of us went into full time Christian ministry)...

We used to pray that we'd have an influence in the life of the school...

We did some vox pops with the school video camera (camera - lead - reel - reel - video recorder over your shoulder)...

Any way we did some vox pops... and asked people "What do you think of Christians?" - not a very intelligent question - but there you have it - "what do you think of Christians...?"

And I remember being struck by one particular answer: "They're OK... they're just the same as everybody else"

...it wasn't the answer I was hoping for...!

I wonder if we did a survey in your retirement village or your street... and we asked people what they thought of Christians... I wonder if people would say - "they're OK - they're just the same as everybody else!"

Or if you're one of a number of parents known to be Christian at your children's school - or at the sporting club... or known to be a Christian at work - and we asked people **there** "what do you think of Christians?" ... I wonder if they'd say: "Oh they're OK - they're just the same as everyone else...!"

Paul says here - have a look with me at v17- *So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, (he means Gentiles who hadn't become Christians...) you must live no longer as they do in the futility of their thinking...! That's direct isn't it!?*

So three brief points as we explore Ephesians 4:17-5:2 this morning

1. Radically different
2. How different/different how?
3. Imitate God

1. RADICALLY DIFFERENT

Why? Why are Christians to be so radically different that they astonishingly stand out in the world?

I'm not a great fan of Star Wars... but I do remember one line... "Luke - it is your destiny...."

The reason we are to live radically different lives is because it's our **destiny** to do so...

Remember that (1:4) He chose us in him before the creation of the world - *to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

It's at the **heart** of our calling

And then - do you remember? - he made it happen.

We needed **rescuing**, he **rescued** us

We needed **forgiveness**, he made it **possible**

We were **dead** in sin, he made us **alive**

And then – and we recall with great joy on this Pentecost morning – he then gave us his Spirit – his Spirit, taking up residence in each believer...

And the indwelling of the Holy Spirit **unifies** us – **bonds** us – **binds** us together as God's people like nothing else could

then he gave us gifts of the Spirit so we might all serve one another as Christ's body and grow strong and mature... you'll recall from last week...

that's quite a **story** of the work God has **done** with us!

How **absurd** then – if all *that* has happened to us... if **that** is our **calling**, and we shrug our shoulders and get up on Monday morning and say 'that's nice' and go on living as if **nothing's happened!!**

"Oh Christians – they're OK – they're just the same as everybody else" //

No they're **not!!**...

we're fundamentally **different** from everybody else and our lives ought to show it day by day

Look with me again at the opening verses of the passage: (second line)

v17 - *...you must live 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... 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. //*

Friends – this is the **sobering reality** of people today who have **nothing** to do with **God**...

Did you notice what Paul said?

That they are **futile** in their thinking... **darkened** in their understanding and **separated** from the life of God.

Why? Because of their **ignorance**... and why are they **ignorant**? Because they've **hardened** their **hearts**.

... they've swallowed the lies that Jesus was no one **special**... or just a **teacher**... or that it's all **made up**... or he's the **invention** of the **early church**...

So they live in the **dark**; **separated from God**... **ignorant**... **and with hard hearts!** //

But friends... **this is not us**... !

...not us – NOT because we're so **great** or **superior** or so much **better** – but it's not us, because of the **grace** of God that's been at **work** in us...!

We **were** in the **dark** – **now** we're in the **light**

We were **separated** from God – now we've been **reconciled**

We were **ignorant** – now the truth of Jesus has been **revealed** to us...

We once had **hard hearts**, now our hearts have now been **softened**..... //

all the work, this Pentecost Sunday, of the Holy Spirit!!

And **because** that is the case... people ought to be able to **see** it in our lives... as **soon** as they meet us! ///

Because... Paul says – as soon they heard about Christ... they began to be taught - v22 *with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

There has to be a distinct break with the past when someone comes to know Jesus...

...because notice the old self is *being corrupted by its evil desires*? So the **old self**, has to **go!**

Evil desires corrupt the **mind**

...so that our **corrupted mind** then **excuses** and **justifies** what our **evil desires want**... so that we begin to think that what God has said is **not** ok, is **OK!**

But what Paul says here, is that it has to be the other way **around**... so that we are **renewed** in the

attitude of our **minds**.... So that then our renewed **minds** then shape and change the **desires** of our hearts...!

So the answer is – (v23) we have to **be made new in the attitude of our minds**....

(I'm going to ask in the connect groups this week – ‘how do you think that happens...?’)

So this is not just a matter of trying to pull up our **moral socks**? It's not that we are just a **tiny bit better** than we **used** be...

Paul says in 2 Cor 5 – we are a **new creation**...!

And **here** he says... v24 – that we are to put on the **new self** – created to be like God in true **righteousness** and **holiness**...

Like **God**!!

Wow! That's a huge call! That's **radically different**! //

Well Paul now teases this out for us so we're not left imagining or asking ‘hang on, what on earth is he talking about?’

So:

2. HOW DIFFERENT/DIFFERENT HOW?

Well these are the areas he talks about...

- **lies?** – because we've left the control and clutches of the **father of lies**... (which is how the evil one is described), and we're now following him who is the way, the **truth** and the life.... It is totally inappropriate for us to be involved in anything that's spreading **falsehood** about another person... / Connected to him who is the truth, we are to **only** speak the **truth** to one another...
- **Anger?** – we all get angry – but the question is ‘how do you **deal** with that anger?’.

Do you deal with it in a way which involves revenge and malice and getting back? or do you deal with in a way which is appropriate – in a way which deals with the underlying issues...?

...and did you notice... God's word says ‘do not let the sun go down while you are still angry....’ How many of you have had a sleepless night because you didn't fix things up with your spouse before you went to sleep? Good, practical, common sense...

- **Stealing** – he not only says ‘don't steal’ – have a look with me at v28, *anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, (why?) /// that they may have something to share with those in need.* That's about as opposite to stealing as you can get – it's being generous – it's giving stuff away! – what a beautiful picture that is!
- **Talk which tears down** – see v29 – *do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths* – that's not just telling bad jokes, or rude jokes, or swearing...

We know what “unwholesome talk” is because he's explained what the opposite looks like... v29 again *–but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

Boy – I'd like to rewind my life a few times and just ask that question before I said something: “Is this helpful?”, “is it going to build this person up?”

If we asked *that* question before we spoke, a lot of our conversation might be quite **different**, mightn't it?

- **Bitterness** – and its close partners – **rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice** – there's a certain obvious inappropriateness for the person belonging to God who had every right to **give** us what we deserve, but has given us the **opposite** of what we deserve! – if God has been **so generous** in dealing with **us** – how can we indulge ourselves (and it is self-indulgent) – in **rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice**!?

- **and did you notice?** - such behaviour **grieves** God - grieves the **Holy Spirit** -

Can you imagine - when the Holy Spirit looks on Christians - on **us** - when we get carried away with anger and respond **unhelpfully**, and when we're aiming to get **back** at someone else... and when we're **bitter**... the Holy Spirit... **grieves**...!

it breaks his **heart**... because that's **not** how he's dealt with **us!** //

But how **can** you get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, malice...?

Well, just have a look at the flip side which Paul raises with us...

By allowing the Holy Spirit to **transform** you so that the exact **opposite** is at play - look with me at v32 - *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Kindness, compassion and forgiveness... the **antidote** to all that we're to put **off**...

As we grasp the **kindness** of God which has touched our lives and drawn us closer to him...

As we understand his **compassion** toward us...

As we grasp the significance of our **forgiveness** and what it **cost** him....

...then we will passionately desire to

- Speak the **truth** not lies
- Deal with anger **appropriately**
- Be **generous**, not steal
- Build others **up**, not tear them **down**
- And get rid of **bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice!** //

See **again** friends, how God has dealt with you... !! **That's** the key... //

And that's why he call us, finally... to:

3. IMITATE GOD

Have a look with me - 5:1-2 (OLD NIV Be imitators of God) *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

This makes perfect sense

If we've been unified by the Spirit, if we've been gifted by the Spirit to serve one another, then we **must love!** //

You can't **love** someone and lie to them

You can't **love** someone and then treat them **appallingly** when you're **angry** with them...

You can't **love** someone and **steal** from them

You can't **love** someone and talk to them in such a way that tears them **down**

You can't **love** someone and remain **bitter** and **twisted** as you plan your **revenge!** //

Live a **life of love** says God's Word to **us** this **morning!**

What's the **standard** of love to which we're called?

It's **love, just as Christ loved us!**

And **where** do we see that love most **clearly?** - in all its **depth** - in all its **profundity?** - the verse itself says - *he gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...*

Jesus loved you so much that he **gave himself up** for you... so that by his **sacrifice**, your sin could be completely **wiped out... forgiven, forgotten, cancelled...**

That's **love**...! //

And friends if we are to be **imitators** of God – if we are to follow God’s example... and live a life of **love**... / then that love – our love – will be marked by **giving ourselves up in his service** and the service of **others**...: our life is to be shaped – by **sacrifice**...

That’s what a life of **love** is... ///

Brothers and sisters... we’re called to a **radically different life!** //

You can’t be **chosen, adopted, rescued, informed, sealed with his Spirit, brought from death to life, saved by grace, be free to approach God in freedom and confidence, indwelt by Christ... grasp his love** for you, be **equipped** to serve others in the **body of Christ** // and then **live the same as everybody else!!**

“What do you **think** of Christians?” I asked.

“They’re just the same as anybody else!” came the answer!

May there be **no way**, that could **ever** be said of **you** and **me**... //

Be imitators of God therefore (PEREGIAN follow God’s example therefore)... 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.