**TRUTH AND LOVE TO REPLACE FALSEHOOD AND BITTERNESS**

***Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28******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.***

***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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31******Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32******Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,*** ***just as in Christ God forgave you.***

***1******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.***

Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2 (NIV)

‘*Therefore each of you must put off …’* (4:25). Paul’s thinking is: because you threw off your former life once and for all, you must now throw off all conduct which belonged to your old life. Since by our new creation we have put off the old humanity and put on the new, it follows that we will now live the life of that new humanity. The old life was characterised by ignorance, futility and deceit, leading to impurity and lust. In its place is a new nature and a new life, characterised by holiness and righteousness.

Paul now gives six examples with three features common to each. They all concerns relationships. They all have a negative prohibition balanced by a corresponding positive command, and in each case a reason for the command is either given or implied.

*‘Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body’* (4:25). Strictly speaking, the word translated ‘*falsehood’* here means ‘the lie.’ Paul might be referring here, (as in Romans 1:25), to the lie of idolatry and that because his readers had renounced that supreme falsehood of paganism (the chief symptom of a futile and darkened mind [4:17,18]), he now urges them to forsake all lesser lies and speak the truth. The followers of Jesus (in whom is the truth [4:21]) should be known in their community as honest reliable people whose word can be trusted. ‘*Each of you must … speak truthfully to your neighbor’* is a quote from Zechariah 8:16 where the post-exile community of Judah was urged to keep covenant with each other. This leads to Paul’s reason for speaking truthfully: *‘for we are all members of one body.*’ The body we belong to is the body of Christ. Harmony in the body only happens when the body conforms to its head, to Christ.

*‘“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold’* (4:26,27). This quote from Psalm 4:4 is a Hebrew idiom that permits and then restricts anger. Scripture plainly teaches that there are two kinds of anger, righteous and unrighteous. In 4:31 Paul includes ‘anger’ in a list of behaviours that belonged to our old self and so must be gotten rid of. Clearly this is referring to unrighteous anger. Only a few verses later in 5:6 Paul speaks of God’s anger, which is clearly righteous (as was Jesus’ anger in Mark 3:5). Christians must be sure that their anger is righteous indignation. It can have no wrong motives and not be allowed to lead to sin in any way. Paul adds: *‘Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry’* using a different word to describe ‘anger’ and one that means ‘provocation,’ the personal resentment that righteous anger can become when harboured in the heart. Paul might have been following the rule of the Pythagoreans: if angry, they determined to shake hands with the one with whom they were angry before sunset. We should deal with anger and so ‘*do not give the devil a foothold*.’ Our enemy knows there is a fine line between righteous and unrighteous anger and how hard humans find it to handle anger responsibly. He finds an easy target in angry people who offer less resistance to his provocation to hatred, violence and breaching fellowship.

*‘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’* (4:28). There were some in the communities to which Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 6:10,11) who had been in the habit of pilfering. The present participle here infers an on-going practice. But when the thief becomes a Christian, he will not only give up stealing but will do what he can to earn an honest living. Paul’s word for ‘*work’* in *‘but must* *work*’ was used for strenuous work that created fatigue and is used in 1 Timothy 4:10 and 5:17 for earnest Christian service and Paul’s manual labour in 1 Corinthians 4:12. The reason for this change of habit is ‘*that they may have something to share with those in need’* (4:28). Generosity is not only a grace but is part and parcel of the Christian’s lifestyle (Luke 6:29-36; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-12). To *‘work with one’s own hands’* is a frequent expression in Paul’s writing (1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:11), both practiced by Paul to support himself (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8,9) and in supporting others in need (Acts 20:34).

*‘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. 30 And* *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were* *sealed for the day of redemption’* (4:29,30). Not only are Christians to shun what is deceitful, but all *‘unwholesome talk.*’ The adjective used here means ‘rotten’ and has a derived sense of ‘worthless.’ This is talk that is ‘rotten’ and spreads ‘rottenness.’ It has to be replaced with talk that ‘*is helpful for building others up according to their needs*.’ Jesus taught the power of our words. Our hearts are revealed by what we speak (Matthew 12:33,34). No wonder He warned that we must give an account of every careless word on judgement day (Matthew 12:36,37). The new standard of the new creation is this: do my words ‘*benefit those who listen’*? This last clause is literally ‘giving grace to those who hear’ (cf. Colossians 4:6). Paul’s ‘reason’ for speaking out of the new creation within and not the old is so his readers ‘*do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption’* (4:29,30). The Holy Spirit is fully personal because Paul’s word for ‘*grieve’* means to cause sorrow, pain or distress. Only a person can feel these things. Because He is the Holy Spirit He is always grieved by unholiness. Believers are ‘*sealed for the day of redemption’* (4:30). The sealing (1:13) took place at the beginning of our Christian life. The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal with which God has stamped us as His own. The ‘*day of redemption’* looks on to the end when our bodies will be redeemed, thus completing our redemption. So the ‘sealing’ and the ‘redemption’ refer respectively to the beginning and the end of the salvation process. In between these two we are to grow into Christ-likeness and to be careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

*‘Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 1 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’* (4:31-5:2). Paul now names six kinds of behaviour that belong to the old creation and not to the new. ‘*Bitterness’* is a resentment that refuses reconciliation; ‘*rage’* was used for hot-tempered anger; ‘*anger’* of an underlying, settled, seething hostility; ‘*brawling’* of the shouting of an angry man; ‘*slander’* of abusive speaking against God or others to defame them; and finally ‘*malice’* of ill-will, wishing and plotting evil against others. This last word had a broader meaning than any of the others and Paul might have used it to sum up the preceding five – silently, harboured grudge, indignant outburst, seething rage, public quarrel and slanderous taunt.

All of these are to be replaced by being ‘*kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other’* (4:32; cf. Colossians 3:12). ‘*Kindness’* is love in practical action; ‘*compassionate’* means literally ‘well (or good) hearted’; ‘*forgiving each other’* can have the wider meaning of ‘dealing graciously’ with one another although forgiveness is the dominant thought here (cf. Colossians 3:13). The final example of all Christian forgiveness is God’s forgiveness, *‘just as in Christ God forgave you’* (4:32). He has done this once and for all and completely. God’s forgiveness cannot be received by the heart which is itself unforgiving (Matthew 6:12,14,15; 18:21-35).

There is to be a real likeness between God forgiving us and our forgiving others (‘*just as’*). Our forgiving others must be as free and complete as God forgiving us. We are to act in grace to others as God has acted in grace to us.

Because of God’s gracious attitude and generous actions to us, we are to *‘follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children’* (5:1). The word translated ‘*follow’* is used a number of times in the New Testament for following the human example of others but only here of following God’s example. The verb is more strictly ‘become.’ Those who by grace are made ‘children of God’ are by perseverance and imitation of the divine copy (cf. 1 Peter 2:21) to become more like the heavenly Father (cf. Matthew 5:44,45,48; Luke 6:36).

We are to *‘walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us’* (5:2). The same verb for ‘giving up’ was used in 4:19. Pagans ‘gave themselves up’ to sensuality. We are to ‘give ourselves up’ to love. This self-giving for others is pleasing to God. As with Christ, so with us, self-sacrificial love is ‘*a fragrant offering and* *sacrifice to God’* (5:2). The words Paul uses for ‘*fragrant offering’* and ‘*sacrifice’* are used in the Septuagint of Psalm 40:6 (quoted in Hebrews 10:5). The leading thought here in 5:2 is how Christ was an ‘imitator’ of God the Father and how we, as ‘*dearly loved children*,’ need to similarly walk in obedience to Him. The Old Testament sacrifices were spoken of as a ‘sweet savour’ (Authorised Version) to express metaphorically their acceptability to God (Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18,25,41; Leviticus 1:9,13,17). The sacrifice of Christ was infinitely more pleasing to the Father. The life that those in Christ live in sacrificial self-giving to God has a fragrance to God and in the world. Paul’s other two uses of the expression illustrate the point. To Paul the gifts of the Christians in Philippi was a fragrance (Philippians 4:18), as he saw his own life calling to be ‘*an aroma of Christ’* to God (2 Corinthians 2:14-16) and to spread the ‘*fragrance of the knowledge of him’* (2 Corinthians 2:14).

It was noted in the beginning of this study that Paul gives six examples of behaviour to be ‘put off’ and replaced by new creation living. Five have been covered here. The last leads in to a broader section of teaching and so will be covered in the next study.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

‘The Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians’ (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by F. F. Bruce (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984)

‘Ephesians’ (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by F. Foulkes (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1989)

The Message of Ephesians (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by John R. W. Stott (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1999)

‘The Prison Letters (Paul for Everyone)’ by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

‘Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words’ by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)