

Imitators of God

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn to our Bibles now, and if you need a Bible, there are some at the side, some at the front. Do grab hold of one so you can see where we're reading from and follow along.

We're going to be reading from Ephesians chapter 4. We've been studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians with Edward Lobb over recent weeks. We've reached chapter 4, and we're going to read this morning from chapter 4, verse 17, through to the first couple of verses of chapter 5 in that section.

So Ephesians 4 then, verse 17, I'm reading from the ESV, but whatever version you have, follow along. You'll see it's just a matter of different words and language perhaps.

The Apostle Paul says to them, Now this I say, and I testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

They're darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They've become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

[1 : 1 4] But that is not the way you learned Christ. Assuming that you have heard him and were taught in him the truth that is in Jesus. To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.

And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor. For we are members of one another.

Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he might have something to share with anyone in need.

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.

[2 : 3 1] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.

And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Amen.

And may God bless to us his word and enrich our understanding and our application of it. Well, we'll come back to that in a little while with Edward, as I said.

But we're going to sing... Well, good morning, friends. Very good to see you all. And good morning also to those at Queen's Park and at Bath Street as well.

[3 : 42] Well, let's turn up our passage for today, which is Ephesians 4, 17, to chapter 5, verse 2. Now, if you are new to our church, let me explain that in the teaching part of the service, and that's what we're beginning just now, we call it the sermon, we always take a passage from the Bible and try to open it up and look carefully at its contents.

Because the Bible is our great resource. We understand it to be God's true message to the world. God's true message to the Bible. His word, his words. So as we hear the Bible, unpacked and unfolded, our minds are illuminated and our hearts are stirred into action.

And that's why we ask people, if they can, to open up the Bible and follow the passage. Because if you can see the actual words there in front of you, the whole thing makes more sense and your mind becomes focused on what God is saying.

So Ephesians 4, 17, to chapter 5, verse 2. And my title this morning is, Imitators of God. And you'll see that phrase is taken from chapter 5, verse 1.

And I'll read that whole verse. Chapter 5, verse 1. Therefore, says Paul, be imitators of God as beloved children. Now in that verse, Paul the apostle, the author of this letter, is summing up the thrust of the previous section, which runs from verse 17 to verse 32 in chapter 4.

[5 : 13] And we'll look carefully at that section in just a moment. But let's get our bearings on it from this startling summary. Be imitators of God. Now is that not a startling thing for Paul to say?

How could anyone imitate God? We probably feel that imitating God is simply impossible. We might say, but we are earthly. He is heavenly.

We are mortal. He is immortal. We are weak as a cobweb. He is all-powerful. How could frail, mortal human beings ever imitate the creator of the universe?

However, it begins to make sense when we realize that Paul is not talking about imitating God's strength or power or knowledge, but rather his character.

He is truthful. He is dependable, kind, forgiving, slow to anger, unfailing in love, and much more besides.

[6 : 14] Paul is saying learn to imitate his character and his ways. And you'll see verse 1 gives us a further clue. Be imitators of God as beloved children.

Children. Now the New Testament's teaching is that when you and I become Christian believers, we simultaneously become children of God. We don't start life that way.

We're all creatures of God from our birth, but we only become children of God when we receive Christ as our Lord. That's when we change from being a creature of God to being a child of God.

The Apostle John puts this very clearly at the beginning of his gospel in chapter 1, verse 12, where he says, To all who did receive Christ, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

So to receive Christ, to believe in him, is to be born anew, born again by the power of God, and to become his child. So in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 1, Paul encourages his Christian readers to imitate God because they are his beloved children.

[7 : 35] The child is to display the character and the characteristics of the parent. Years ago, I used to be friendly with an old farmer in Derbyshire whose name was Frank Clark.

We lived in Derbyshire in those days. Now Frank died some years ago, but I used to visit him at his small farm in the hills near Matlock. Before he'd retired, Frank's job was to deliver AI, which back in those days stood for artificial insemination.

So what he would do would be to visit the local dairy farms which didn't keep their own bull, and from a big hold-all bag, he would deliver the necessary procedures to get the cows pregnant.

He used to call himself the bull in the bowler hat. Anyway, Frank knew a great deal about livestock breeding, and he used to say to me, I was a lot younger than him and less experienced with these things, but he used to say to me, Edward, always remember this, like begets like.

In other words, you're not going to breed excellent cattle out of knock-kneed, bow-legged, broken-winded cows. Now it's obvious, isn't it?

[8 : 47] Offspring reflects the character of the parent, and that's what underlies Ephesians 5 verse 1. Paul is saying to the Ephesian Christians, you are God's children now that you have come to Christ.

Not only his children, but his beloved children. He loves you to pieces. Therefore, set your hearts on imitating him, developing and displaying his own characteristics in your lives.

And this will involve, look at the next verse, chapter 5 verse 2, this will involve walking in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us as a sacrifice.

So the predominant characteristic of the lifestyle which imitates God is love that is willing to sacrifice oneself in order to bring blessing and strength to other people.

Now, as I said a moment ago, chapter 5 verse 1 acts as a summary of the teaching of verses 17 to 32 in the previous chapter. So let's return now to chapter 4 verse 17, and we'll pick up Paul's line of thought.

[9 : 52] But just a little background and context first. Paul has been explaining to the Christians at Ephesus in the earlier part of chapter 4 that the unity of the church and the maturity of the church are two matters of fundamental importance.

You'll see this first in chapter 4 verse 3 where he writes, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Why?

Because, verse 4, there is one body, there is one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, and so on. As one of our old hymns puts it, one church, one faith, one Lord.

There is one God, there is one gospel, and therefore the church must take great care of its unity, its oneness, so that its people are able to live in peace with each other.

So anyone who makes trouble and brings division into the church is badly out of line. But it's equally important, Paul is saying, for the church to develop maturity.

[10 : 57] And in fact, unity and maturity are brought together in verse 13. Paul says, Now that's a delightful picture of the local congregation as it ought to be, not damaged by cockiness or self-importance, by individuals throwing their weight around and getting grumpy if they can't have their way about something, but rather, just look back to chapter 4, verse 2, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

That's the way to maintain genuine unity, which will lead to an increasingly mature church, and maturity grows as the church members listen to the teaching of the Bible that comes from their pastors and teachers.

And that kind of church will be steady and stable, not knocked off course every year or two by some wind of new doctrine, which proves, verse 14, to come not from God, but from human cunning craftiness and deceit.

Now who wants to belong to an unstable church like that? Paul does not, and neither do we. It's the practice of humility that builds up the unity of the church, and it's the careful listening to the teaching of the Bible that builds up the maturity of the church, making it strong and stable.

Now having made those points in chapter 4, verses 1 to 16, Paul then sets off in a slightly different direction as he begins to describe God's beloved children, whose characters are shaped by the example of God himself as they seek to imitate him.

[12 : 57] Now this passage, verses 17 to 32, falls straightforwardly into two sections separated by the paragraph break between verse 24 and 25.

In the first section, verses 17 to 24, Paul is teaching the Christians a new way of thinking, and in the second section, 25 to 32, he is teaching a new style of living.

Now the new style of living grows straight out of the new way of thinking, which is why Paul begins verse 25 with a big therefore. As the Ephesians learn to think differently, they will inevitably begin to live differently.

And these two paragraphs, of course, apply directly to ourselves. What the Ephesians needed to learn back then, we need to learn today, and every generation of Christians needs to learn.

This is the Christian life. It's a new way of thinking, and it's a new lifestyle. First then, verses 17 to 24, Paul teaches this new way of thinking.

[14 : 06] Now remember, these Ephesian Christians were Gentiles. They didn't have any background from the Old Testament. They'd only been Christian believers for a few years. Now they were not brand new beginners.

They were not just out of the egg. They'd had some instruction already in the Christian faith, as we'll see. But not many years before Paul wrote them this letter, they had been thoroughly pagan people.

And they would not have forgotten what goes on inside a pagan's head. So Paul reminds them forcibly here, and he does not mince his words. Verse 17.

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. 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.

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is scathing language.

[15 : 13] It is like a flamethrower burning off old paint. Now you might think, but isn't Paul being a bit harsh here? Were all the Gentiles in the Roman Empire as far gone in vice as Paul seems to be suggesting?

Well, certainly, in the literature of ancient Rome and Greece, you come across high standards of morality in various places. There were men and women who were self-restrained, who placed a value on the lives and happiness of their fellow men.

It wasn't as bad as it could have been, but in these verses, Paul is describing the life of many Gentiles in the ancient world. You could call this description a societal average.

Paul had seen this kind of life in so many cities. He was well-traveled. And with his God-given understanding, he's telling us with painful realism what life in Ephesus outside the church was really like.

So what does he point out about the Gentile way of life? Five things. First, verse 17, their minds are marked by futility.

[16 : 26] Futility. They have minds, but their thinking has no basis, no stability. They're without purpose or direction or principle. They can't join the dots up to make real sense of life.

Secondly, verse 18, their understanding is darkened. Darkened. So they're a bit like people who are walking around in pitch darkness, bumping into things, getting injured because they can't see beyond the end of their noses.

Verse 18, thirdly, they are alienated from the life of God. That is a kind of living death. For us to be shut off from the light of the sun would mean physical death, but to be shut off from the life of God can only lead to eternal death.

They're like zombies walking towards the edge of a great cliff. Fourthly, verse 18 still, they are ignorant. Not of everything.

No doubt they can buy and sell, they can eat and drink, they can make money by working, but Paul means that they're ignorant of God. God means no more to them than a hole in the road.

[17 : 37] He created them, but they have never so much as shot a glance to heaven to acknowledge him. Ignorance of God, that is the tragedy of the ancient world as it continues to be the tragedy of the modern secular world.

Then fifth, verse 18 still, all this is due to their hardness of heart. Hardness of heart. Paul uses that word for hardness, a word which is porosis in the Greek language, porosis.

And that was a kind of marble, a very hard type of stone. In ancient medical writers, apparently, it meant a callous or a bony formation on the joints. And in verse 19, Paul actually uses the adjective callous.

Verse 19 is really unpacking this idea of hardness of heart. they have become callous. It means that their consciences have become insensitive.

God might launch an appeal to their consciences, but they say, thank you, but no. Who are you to tell me how to behave? I am the regulator of my own life and values.

[18 : 47] I shall do exactly as I please. So where does it lead them? It leads them to abandon all sense of restraint and self-discipline.

In Paul's phrase in verse 19, having become callous, they have given themselves up. They've allowed all restraints to go. They've given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

So they're not practicing impurities with a sense of shame or secrecy, doing things behind closed doors, but openly, greedily, giving themselves to unbounded self-indulgence in matters of food, alcohol, and sexual adventure.

Well, such was life in first century Ephesus. You wouldn't have felt very safe walking down the streets of Ephesus after dark back then, especially if you were a pretty girl or a handsome young man.

J.B. Phillips produced an excellent translation of the New Testament back in the 1960s. And I want to read you his translation of verses 17 to 19 because it's vivid.

[19 : 59] Do not live any longer as the Gentiles live, for they live blindfold in a world of illusion and are cut off from the life of God through ignorance and insensitiveness.

They've stifled their consciences and then surrendered themselves to sensuality, practicing any form of impurity which lust can suggest.

It's chilling, isn't it? And it is so contemporaneous. Doesn't that describe so much in the world that we live in today? But Paul is at pains to point out that the diagnosis of contemporary life is not stemming purely from his own insight.

This is the Lord's teaching, the teaching of Jesus. That's what he means when he begins verse 17. Now this I say and testify in the Lord. He means this is the Lord Jesus' instruction and it comes with his authority.

It's our Lord Jesus who is urging us and commanding us to reject the lifestyle of paganism. Now on to verse 20 where we have an emphatic but which indicates an emphatic contrast.

[21 : 12] But he says that is not the way you learned Christ. That's a very interesting verse. Not the way you learned Christ.

It assumes that the Ephesian Christians had undergone a course of instruction given to them in the past either by Paul himself or one of his fellow workers. They had learned Christ.

Not simply learned about him but learned him. Learned to know him to know his character. Learned the meaning of his cross and resurrection and his reign at the right hand of God.

Learned to know him personally as their friend and savior. And then verse 21 assuming that you've heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus.

Now just look at verse 21 carefully because there's a mistake there in the translation. That little word about should not be there at all. Well of course the Ephesians had heard about him.

[22 : 11] They'd been Christians for some time. They couldn't be Christians if they hadn't heard about him. What Paul actually says is assuming that you have heard him and were taught in him.

There's no preposition about in Paul's original. So Paul is really saying that Christ himself had been their instructor. You heard him through of course the instruction that you've received.

You've been taught in him as though you've been immersed in him like a swimmer in the sea immersed in a total environment Jesus himself being the environment in which you now live and breathe and think.

So in verses 20 to 24 Paul is reminding them of their conversion and their initial instruction in what it means to be a Christian. But at this stage of conversion this initial stage that they'd been through they not only learned Christ and heard Christ and were instructed in him they did something else.

Look at verse 22 they put off their old self which belongs to their former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and they put on the new self described in verse 24.

[23 : 31] Now our English Standard Version is again a little bit squiffy at this point and it could be clearer and it's squiffy to do with the tense of the verbs to put off and put on. I guess the translator at this point was working a bit late on a Friday afternoon and he wanted to get home for his tea.

What Paul is actually saying here is that the Ephesian Christians right at the beginning of their Christian life decisively put off the old self and put on the new self back then.

Paul is not telling them to do it now he's reminding them that they did do it back then and of course the implication of putting off the old and putting on the new still needs to be further worked through.

The Ephesians were not the finished article neither are you and I but in Paul's teaching this is a decisive event that happens at the beginning of the Christian life. It's a bit like taking off a rotten filthy set of stinking old clothes and throwing them into the wheelie bin and then putting on a brand new set of clothes which fit you perfectly and make you feel thoroughly comfortable and fresh and fragrant.

Now that's a delightful picture of the reality of conversion. Look again at verse 22. The old self belongs to the former manner of life.

[24 : 54] That gruesome lifestyle described in verses 17 to 19. The manner of life that is corrupt. Look at verse 22. Corrupt through deceitful desires.

Why deceitful? Well because the desire promises what it cannot deliver and therefore it deceives us. It says to us come with me do this thing do that thing and you'll be happy.

So you follow its lead and you do do this thing and you do that thing and you end up miserable. It makes you the opposite of happy. It deceives you. It diminishes you. It makes you regretful and remorseful.

But what happens when people put on the new self? Verse 24 tells us the new self is a new creation. It's created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So deceit in verse 22 is contrasted with truth in verse 24. Deceitful desires bring corruption but true righteousness and holiness characterize the new self which is created after the likeness of God.

[26 : 09] And that phrase created after the likeness of God links us in with chapter 5 verse 1. We are to be imitators of God because Christians are being renewed in his likeness to be like him.

Our characters are going to resemble his more and more. So let's notice the place of our minds in the midst of this transformation from the old self to the new.

Paul puts it beautifully in verse 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Now the word spirit in that phrase is not the Holy Spirit.

What Paul means is the living and pulsating center of our mental activity. Between your left ear and your right ear you have a gloriously complex organ which is called the brain.

It's full of impulses. There are all sorts of powerful things going on in your brain at this very moment. Even if you're asleep at this very moment which is not impossible your brain is not entirely inactive.

[27 : 18] Now Paul is very concerned with the brains with the thought life of the Ephesian Christians and he's reminding them that at their conversion involving the putting on of the new self that has brought into their lives a new force which is the renewal of their thinking.

Just look back again to verse 17. What was the state of their minds before they put their faith in Christ? Paul tells us, futile.

Even if they were people of ability, artists and builders and businessmen and so on, their thinking about what was really important was futile, was empty, characterized by ignorance of God and shaped by hardness of heart.

And the futility of their thinking revealed itself in their lifestyle which is so painfully portrayed in verse 19. But now that they're Christians, the futile mind is replaced by a renewed mind which is at the heart of the new self which is being created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now we mustn't think of course that our conversion brings to us an instant and total renewal of the mind. Paul's teaching method here, as it is in all his letters, is to show us two things, God's part and man's part in the process of growing as a Christian.

[28 : 50] God plays his part and then we are required to play our part. In verse 24, Paul is using new creation language. This is what God does for a man or a woman.

If you're a Christian, God has done something wonderful. You have been born again. You have been recreated. And that new birth is an act of divine power. Only God can bring that about.

A baby can't give birth to itself. It has to be given birth to by an active and willing mother. You and I cannot cause ourselves to be born again.

Let me repeat that verse from John's Gospel, chapter 1. Those who receive Jesus are given the right to become children of God, born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

It's God and God only who brings about our new birth. But once we are born again by the power of God, Paul teaches us that we then have our part to play in developing a renewed mind.

[29 : 58] And this is why he puts it so strongly in verse 17. He's giving them orders. 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. Paul knew that these Ephesian Christians, yes Christians, would sometimes be tempted to go back to their old way of life, back to futile ways of thinking, back to the sensualities and impurities of verse 19, just as we are sometimes tempted to revert to type.

So Paul is both warning and encouraging his Christian readers. You have learned Christ, he says. you've been taught in him, you've put off the old self, you've put on the new.

Don't go sneaking back to that filthy dustbin trying to find the stinking old clothes of your former life. Your minds are now under a process of wonderful reconstruction.

Let that reconstruction continue. Let it develop because it is a reconstruction after the likeness of God. You are being made increasingly like him in true righteousness and holiness.

[31 : 09] Now it's at this point that Paul turns from the new way of thinking to the new style of living. The two things of course are connected in the closest possible way because as our minds are reconstructed, inevitably our lifestyle is deeply redirected.

And that's why Paul begins verse 25 with another resounding therefore. You have a new mind, therefore let it be expressed in a lifestyle that is righteous and holy.

Now friends, before we dive into these verses, let's remind ourselves and reassure ourselves that this new lifestyle is thoroughly and totally delightful.

People who've got a cockeyed view of Christianity can be suspicious of the Christian lifestyle. they sometimes say, but being a Christian must be a killjoy.

Isn't Christianity full of restrictions and thou shalt not? Doesn't the Christian faith make a person gloomy and forbidding, desiccated like a prune, shriveled up?

[32 : 20] The answer is no, it does not. That's the devil's talk. And if it were not undignified, I would blow a loud raspberry at this point, at this very moment.

Was Jesus desiccated or shriveled up? He was the life and soul. People flocked around him in enormous numbers so as to hear him teach.

They just loved to hear him talk. Now, he could be sharp, he could be explosive, but people hung on his words because he spoke with such authority, quite unlike the gloomy religious teachers of his day.

He was a joy. He radiated joy. He was utterly delightful. And wherever his people have understood this Christian lifestyle, they too have been utterly delightful people.

Now, of course, there are restrictions. Of course, there are thou shalt not. But these negatives are the most positive negatives in the world because they're protecting human happiness and security.

[33 : 22] So, for example, don't bear false witness against your neighbor. don't lie to your neighbor because truthful speech promotes friendship and lies destroy friendship.

You shall not steal. Yes, that's negative in form, but thoroughly positive in its intention because it protects people's property and to break that commandment violates people and brings them great distress.

You shall not commit adultery. Well, that's a restriction, but it's a wonderful restriction because fidelity in marriage brings great joy and infidelity breaks people's homes and breaks people's hearts.

The Christian lifestyle based very much on the Ten Commandments is the lifestyle of joy and peace. And in fact, in this very passage before us, Paul is actually expounding some of the Ten Commandments.

You'll see that verse 25 is based on the Ninth Commandment. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Verse 28 is based on the Eighth Commandment.

[34 : 26] You shall not steal. And then if you look into chapter 5, verse 3, you'll see that Paul takes both the Seventh Commandment in principle, you shall not commit adultery, and the Tenth Commandment, you shall not covet.

And he says some very striking things about them. So let's turn now to this section 25 to 32 and Paul's teaching on the new lifestyle.

In these verses, there are five great contrasts to teach the delightful behavior that expresses reconstructed thinking.

So here's the first. Paul says in verse 25, out with lying, in with truthfulness. Verse 25, therefore having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Paul has reminded us back in verse 21, that the truth is in Jesus. And Jesus himself said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[35 : 30] He is the truth. And therefore his people need to reflect that in being truthful. Now if we're honest, we have to acknowledge that telling lies is something deeply rooted in our natural makeup.

And it starts very early in life. For example, mother comes into the kitchen where she finds her five-year-old looking at a pot of jam that lies shattered on the kitchen floor.

The jam is seeping everywhere. Jimmy, did you knock that pot of jam off the table? No, mom. It fell off by itself. Now of course, mother is not taken in for a moment.

She doesn't believe in self-propelling jam pots. Now Jimmy has told that little lie to make himself look better than he really is. That's often our motivation when we're tempted to tell lies.

We want to give the impression that we're better people or that we've done better things than we really have done. A university student might submit a brilliant essay to his tutor pretending that it was all his own work when in reality he's lifted most of it from a source which he's hoping is unknown to his tutor.

[36 : 46] The tutor says to his colleague, you know, I've got a wonderful new student, a brilliant student called John Jenkins, clearly a fine young scholar. But the fact is he's not brilliant and he'll probably get rumbled sooner or later.

Paul says in verse 25, in the church falsehood is to be put away and replaced by speaking the truth. truth. And Paul adds two strong phrases here.

First, speak the truth with his neighbor. And that word neighbor immediately conjures up the great commandment to love our neighbor as ourself. And then secondly, there's a strong incentive.

For we are members one of another. That's the language of the body of Christ that Paul has been using in verses 12 to 16 of this chapter. We belong to each other.

We're members. We're part of the same body. And this means, as one commentator has expressed it, that a lie is a stab in the very vitals of the body of Christ.

[37 : 48] In the Christian church, our sense of belonging to each other is built on trust. And trust can only be built on truthfulness. If we're less than truthful with each other, our unity will be undermined.

So out with lying, in with truthfulness. Secondly, out with unrighteous anger, in with righteous anger.

Verse 26, be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Now the main thrust of these two verses is to urge the Ephesian Christians to reject anger as a regular part of their lifestyle.

Now we know that there are some people whose lives become dominated by anger over many years. So we might say, oh, Jeff down at number 36, I should steer clear of him.

He's an angry man. And if somebody becomes an angry man or an angry woman, it shows in the hard, unyielding lines of the face. Even the eyes look angry.

[38 : 57] Don't be like that, Paul is saying. And if you do get angry with someone, clear the problem up very quickly. That's why Paul says, don't let the sun go down on your anger.

Very good advice, by the way, to husbands and wives if they've had a little tiff. Do you know what I mean by a domestic tiff? Sort it out, A-S-A-P, before the sun goes down.

Don't go to bed back to back, grunting and tutting. That gives an opportunity to the devil to prolong discord.

Sort it out before then. So, out with the wrong sort of anger. But Paul is, I think, encouraging here the right kind of anger because he does say, be angry and do not sin.

There is a righteous anger which it's good for us to feel and sometimes to express. Remember chapter 5, verse 1, be imitators of God.

[39 : 56] Does God have anger in his nature? Well, look at chapter 5, verse 6. The wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Of course, anger is there in God's character.

God is angry with sin, always. Jesus was angry at times. For example, from Mark chapter 3, he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

So, if God the Father and the Lord Jesus feel anger and grief at human sin, we must learn also to be angry at sin if we're to be imitators of God.

A couple of examples. Some of our church members, rightly and courageously, are regularly going out onto the busy streets of our city, engaging passers-by in conversations about abortion.

Now, they don't speak angrily to the strangers they're talking to. Of course not. That would be totally counterproductive. They speak graciously. But they are motivated by a godly anger against the great sin of killing babies in their mother's wombs.

[41 : 03] It's right that Christian people feel anger at this wanton destruction of defenseless children. Secondly, it's right to feel angry at the ferocity and violence of national leaders who wage wars against neighboring nations, sending troops and lethal weaponry across borders, knowing that their decisions will cause thousands of deaths and bring terror and misery to countless men, women, and children.

There'd be something wrong with Christian people if we didn't feel angry at this ferocious and unrestrained behavior. The writer of Psalm 119 says to God, Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked who forsake thy law.

That's godly anger. Now we do need to be very careful in all this because there's a fine line between righteous and unrighteous anger and the devil lurks very close to us when we feel angry and that's why Paul tells us in verse 27 to give him no opportunity.

But out with unrighteous anger, in with righteous anger. Thirdly, from verse 28, Paul says, Out with stealing, in with honest work and generosity.

Verse 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.

[42 : 36] Now Paul is obviously echoing the eighth commandment there, You shall not steal. But he immediately draws out its positive implications. And he seems to be implying that even within the Christian fellowship there may be temptations to steal.

He's talking to Christians here. As indeed there are. We know this, don't we? We can be tempted to steal possessions, money, goods from the shops. We can be tempted to steal from the government by not declaring all of our taxable income.

Employees can steal from their employers by not working their full shift. Employers can steal from their employees by paying them less than their work really deserves.

The temptation to steal is something deep-rooted in us, just like the temptation to tell lies. These are deep-rooted things. We are such hard nuts to crack.

But these commandments do crack us, open us up, and force us to recognize what we're really like inside. So Paul says, Let the thief, the Christian who is tempted to steal and is trying to pretend that he's not or is indeed stealing, let this thief no longer steal, but rather, here's the positive, let him labor doing honest work with his own hands.

[44 : 00] Now it's possible that Paul is echoing the commandment about the Sabbath day there when he uses that word labor. Do you know the commandment? Six days shalt thou labor. And a Christian might say, Labor.

Oh, labor. Work is just so hard. It stresses me from my eyeballs to my toenails. I'm only 31 years old and I want to retire now with a decent pension.

Well, yes, work is hard. That is the nature of work. God assured us it would be back in Genesis chapter 3 that in earning our crust we'd be battling against thorns and thistles, that we would eat our bread only in the sweat of our brow.

Work is hard. It always will be. But look at the end of verse 28. When we do work, we then have something to share with those in need and we can be generous, which is what God is to us.

And we are to be imitators of God. So out with stealing, in with honest work. Fourth, out with evil talk, in with gracious talk.

[45 : 09] This is the lovely instruction of verse 29. 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.

Now we are all talkers, aren't we? Some of us are prodigious talkers. Some of us even deserve the title leather blogs. But our gift of speech is a uniquely human gift.

Animals squeak and squeal and grunt and bark and roar, but only human beings speak. And we speak because we're made in the image of God who speaks. But we're frail and fallen creatures, which is why corrupting talk, to use Paul's phrase in verse 29, can so easily come out of our mouths.

The word translated as corrupting is a word that was used of rottenness, rotten trees, rotten fruit. So it's the kind of talk that spreads rot.

It damages other people. It hurts other people. Talk that carries harsh, unnecessary criticism or unpleasant innuendo. Talk that unjustly puts other people down, smears their reputation.

[46 : 29] Or talk that in some way lures other people into sin. Paul says don't speak like that, but rather, verse 29, use only such as is good for building up other people as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

Gracious words. Gracious words help other people. They encourage other people. Gracious words comfort other people, make other people smile and feel gladness.

In fact, we can exercise a ministry of good cheer to our fellow Christians as we learn to develop gracious ways of talking. And Paul adds a further incentive to gracious speech in verse 30.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. The Holy Spirit has sealed us. That means he has put his mark of ownership on us when we first trusted Christ.

We're sealed with the Spirit at our conversion and we carry that mark of ownership from our conversion right through to the day of redemption, the end. We belong to the Lord and therefore we shall grieve the Holy Spirit if we use our powers of speech in a way that damages other people.

[47 : 47] So out with evil talk in with gracious talk says our apostle. And then fifth out with bitterness in with kindness.

Just look at verse 31. There's something hellish about verse 31. It seems to have the footprints of the evil one all over it. It smells of sulfur. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Just notice the verb there put away from you and that reminds us of verse 22 that we've put off or put away the old self and have put on verse 24 the new self.

So these horrible behaviors in verse 31 have no place in the life of the Christian. When they threaten to grip us malice and so on Paul says we must put them away.

But verse 32 gives us great help in obeying verse 31. If our minds are filled with bitterness or anger or malice towards another person because we feel that that person has wronged us in some way the last thing we're wanting to do is to forgive them at that point isn't it?

[49 : 02] We hate them. We'd like to apply a boot to their rear end and send them flying into Dumbartonshire. But no says Paul in verse 32 learn to forgive each other as God in Christ forgave you and then you will be truly imitators of God.

He has forgiven you therefore you must forgive each other even if you have been seriously wronged. I once read of two men who had worked for many years together in a business partnership but they had a bad bust up and they parted company angrily.

Years later one of them lay dying in hospital and he sent a message to his former colleague saying please forgive me. The other man sent a message back regret cannot forgive once we have grasped the depths of forgiveness that God has given to us once we've understood what it cost the Lord Jesus to forgive us we shall learn to forgive other people quickly with kindness and tender hearts.

If God has forgiven me for a ton weight of sin can I not forgive a brother for a gram weight of wrong done to me? so let's allow our apostle Paul to fix in our hearts this lovely command be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love taking Christ as our pattern who loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice belonging to Christ means that we have a new way of thinking and a new style of living so let's think and live as imitators of God let's bow our heads and we'll pray our dear heavenly father thank you for having mercy on us thank you for forgiving us who had strayed far from you we pray that you will fill us with the desire to be like you and to follow the example of Jesus so that we also may be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God and we ask it in Jesus name amen amen amen thank you for having us what are in d howologie