

3/10/24 What Christian Living Looks Like Ephesians 4:17-5:2
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Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am one of the pastors here. I am so glad that you are here – whether you are watching online or if you are here in the sanctuary. I am glad that you made it a priority to be here today.

How many of you remember the TV show Extreme Makeover: Home Edition? The premise of the show was that there was a family in great need or hardship. Their house was falling apart. The house had flaws, projects that were started but never finished, the house was too small, and it could not function the way the family needed it to. These houses needed an extreme makeover. The family would go away for a week to a wonderful place; the house would receive a makeover.

Carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and interior decorators would come and fix the house to make it look beautiful and be more functional. In the last five minutes of the show, the family would come back from their trip. The neighbors and community would be there for the great unveiling of this new, transformed home. The house would look incredible. Everything was done perfectly for this family. The kids and parents loved it. As you watched this transformation, it was cool to see everything come together and look astonishing.

When I think about my life, I can often see the ugliness of my behaviors and actions that I wish were not there. There are times in my life when I have said something, and later wished that I could have those words back. There are times when I do something, but then regret my actions. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I need an Extreme Christian makeover in my life.

The good news is that God is doing a makeover in the life of every believer, including me and you. When we become followers of Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts that begins the work of transforming our hearts to be more like Christ. Just like those homes, our hearts undergo a makeover.

Have you ever thought about what God wants his Christ-followers to be known for? If you have your Bible, please turn to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4. Chapters 1-3 focus on God's vision and mission for the church. Pastor Doug shared about God's

love, grace, mercy, and power. We see that God has a great desire to tear down the dividing walls of hostility between the Jews and Gentiles. God's plan was for the believers to come together as one body, one family, and one church. They would be united in love.

Chapters 4 through 6 focus on what that looks like in a practical sense. What does this look like in day-to-day life? How can we live daily with each other in unity and love? Today, the text starts with Ephesians 4:17-19:

“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. 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.”

What does Paul say? “You must no longer live as the Gentiles do.” Meaning, you can no longer live like the people around you. You need to be different. You are Christ-followers. You have a different focus and mission in life. As Christ-followers, who were they to follow? Jesus.

I want you to picture Paul as a mentor and pastor to these early Christians, a small handful of people who are believers. Paul cared very much about their behavior and how they acted towards each other. Remember, Paul spent considerable time with them. It was Paul who started these house churches. He knew them. He loved them. He cared about them.

Paul understood the context and surroundings when he wrote this letter. Ephesus was a large city of 300,000 people in the first century, in modern-day Turkey. It was the center of worship of all kinds of Greek and Roman gods. He knew the temptations that the Ephesians were facing. Society was so vastly different.

Paul had lived with them, cared about them, and loved them. Then Paul went away. Now, two years have gone by, and Paul is writing a letter to this young group of believers. He is challenging them to keep walking and putting their faith in Jesus.

Paul is saying, remember what I taught you. I taught you to live like Christ. Keep your focus on Him and not the way of the world. The pagans' thinking is futile. It will

lead to destruction. When you have your eyes on Jesus, he will lead you in the right ways.

Let's read Ephesians 4:20-24:

“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.”

For Paul, Christianity is not about knowing a bunch of facts about Jesus. It is not about memorizing what you should or should not do. For Paul, it is about following the example of Jesus. Paul taught these young Christians what it meant for them to walk with Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? It means your life is going to be different. You are going to focus on different things than other people around you or what society values.

Going back to the text, Paul uses the words “to put off your old self.” In the Extreme Makeover show, old walls needed to be knocked down before the new layout and transformation could take place. Just like these homes, our hearts have sinful habits and attitudes that need to be knocked down and discarded, so God can begin a new work in us.

Unfortunately, the Ephesian believers in these house churches had many struggles. They were known for lying, anger, stealing, and talking rudely about each other. Paul reminds them that their behaviors and actions should be different than people around them. This small group of Christ-followers was in desperate need of a makeover.

Ephesians 4:25 says, **“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”**

How are we to be different?

- 1) We tell the truth.

God created the church to be one body with many different people groups. The early church had people of diverse backgrounds. Speaking the truth was especially important to believers. When you speak truth to each other, trust forms and community deepens. Relationships grow closer when people share and are truthful with each other. What happens when people lie to each other? Trust is broken and damaged. It can be hard to build it back. Paul was encouraging the believers to be different than the people around them. He wanted to encourage the young church to be truthful with each other. In our sinful nature, we can lie to each other. We can put blame on someone else. We can lie to a person so we can protect that person's feelings so that they do not feel bad. Sometimes we lie to make the story better than what it was, or to make ourselves look like a bigger hero than we really are.

We all know that telling the truth to each other can be difficult. Sometimes telling the truth is not pleasant. Sometimes telling the truth can cause conflict. Sometimes hearing the truth from someone can be difficult as well.

Unfortunately, when we lie to each other we break trust that is so important in relationships. When we lie to each other, we are giving the devil a foothold in our lives. Those lies are hurtful to our friends, family members, and people here at church. This displeases God.

The good news is that God can forgive us when we lie. There are times when we need to go to God and ask for forgiveness. The good news is that God will forgive us. There are times when we need to go to our friend or family member and ask them for forgiveness. Each of us should want to repair that broken relationship.

When we tell the truth we are honoring God. I know there are times when telling the truth can be difficult to do. You may need to offer grace and mercy when you have tough conversations with someone. You may need to start the conversation by telling the person you love them, but you have a challenging thing you must tell them.

We all know that we are not perfect. But a real friend wants us to grow in our relationship with God and with each other. When we speak truth, we are honoring God. Let's move on to verse 26:

“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

How are we to be different?

- 1) We tell the truth.
- 2) We do not stay angry.

Did Jesus ever get angry? Yes. If we remember, back in the gospels, Jesus was angry. He was angry in the temple and overturned the tables. Of course, Jesus had righteous anger. I cannot speak about you, but my anger is not righteous anger. It's the wrong type of anger.

When the world gets angry, what usually happens? (1) People carry grudges. Often you hear people say, "You did this to me. I will do this to you." This is not healthy. (2) People can also let their anger fester. This anger can fester inside of us. Unfortunately, this anger can lead to many health problems. This is not healthy either.

As Christ followers, Paul says, do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. What Paul is saying is that we are not to stay angry with each other. We need to work this problem out and not let it fester.

Let me give you an example from my house. Christy and I get in an argument with each other. We are pretty upset with each other. Each of us feels like the other person is not listening and hearing what we are saying or talking about. The temperature of the conversation can get heated.

How do we handle it? Often, we will need to take a break, time apart from each other. We often need to give each other time to settle down and think clearly. Time away from each other gives us time to reflect on the conversation. There can be time to pray. One of us will come back to the other and say, "Can we talk about that thing we were talking about earlier?" Sometimes, I will or Christy will say, "I was wrong. I am sorry. I overreacted." Other times we come back with a willing heart to work through the situation. Eventually, we will work it out. The key thing is that we don't stay angry with each other.

As Christ-followers, we need to talk through these situations. We cannot let our anger fester. We should not hold grudges. We need to resolve our differences the best we can. As Christ-followers, we all will become angry, but we do not want to stay there.

Let us move on to verse 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.”

How are we to be different?

- 1) We tell the truth.
- 2) We do not stay angry.
- 3) We do not steal; we work and share with others.

The apostle Paul must have known something about the situation and what was happening. What Paul is saying is, do not be part of the problem. Do not steal. If you have been stealing, you need to work. You need to find a job. You need to do something useful with yourself. That sounds like pretty good advice.

Then Paul shares with us an important thought. What is a Christ-follower to do? They are to share with those who are in need. Christ-followers are to be generous. They are to be generous with what they have. We are to help those who are in need. We are to give and help others.

One of the wonderful things about Brewster Baptist Church is that we have people who do this on a regular basis. One example is, we have people who come on a Sunday morning, or during the week, and they drop off food for the food pantry. We have containers in the foyer area. This is a way we share with people in need.

A second way we do this at BBC is through our Deacon Fund. Many people give money to our Deacon Fund to help those who are going through a rough time. Last year, we collected over \$40,000 for our Deacon Fund. The money went to people who were struggling. BBC helps people with car repairs, utilities, rent, or camp scholarships. This is a wonderful thing about our church. This verse reminds us that we are different. We are to share with others who are in need. We are to be generous.

Let us move on 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.”

How are we to be different?

- 1) We tell the truth.
- 2) We do not stay angry.
- 3) We do not steal; we work and share with others.
- 4) We build others up when we speak.

This was one of the first verses I memorized in college. I will not say why I picked this verse out; it was just a verse that I needed to learn and work on.

When you think of the words “unwholesome talk”, what comes to your mind? These are words that cause harm or decay. These are words that put people down and are hurtful. These may be words that are degrading.

How many of you remember this saying, **“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”**? I do not know about you, but words or unwholesome talk can stay with you for a very long time – way longer than people realize. Words can be very harmful and damaging.

I think we can all think back to our childhood, and somebody said something to us. It might be a family member, friend, or classmate who said it. Those words hurt. They have stayed with us in our memory. We do not forget them. I think we can all think of a time when somebody said something to us that was hurtful. It is hard to get over and past it.

When I was in elementary school, I struggled with reading, and, more specifically, the pronunciation of words. I can remember being teased because I struggled so much with words. Years go by; that memory stays with you.

Teasing words or harsh words, they stay with us. Words are powerful. I believe many of us have had hurtful words that have stayed with us.

I want to read you this verse again: **“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”** (Ephesians 4:29).

Our focus needs to be building people up when we talk with them. We need to be positive. We need to look at all the good things in people. We should be a community that talks nicely to each other. We need to look for ways to be encouraging and say

helpful things to each other. We should point out how people are helping us in our walk with God. We should be people who are thankful. We need to move to verse 32:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children 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 4:32-5:2).

How are we to be different?

- 1) We tell the truth.
- 2) We do not stay angry.
- 3) We do not steal; we work and share with others.
- 4) We build others up when we speak.
- 5) We are to be kind, compassionate, forgiving and loving people.

Do you know any kind people? Do you know any compassionate people? Do you know any forgiving people? Do you know any loving people? Those are the people we want to become.

Paul wanted the church to be special. He wanted the church to be known in their community as a place that was full of kindness and compassion. Paul wanted to see a place where people were willing to forgive each other and practice what it means to love each other. That would be a special church. That would be a church that outsiders would want to be a part of. That is what Christ-followers should be known as.

When I look at the list that I covered today, I fall short in so many of these areas. I know that I have work to do. I need God help in my extreme Christian makeover. How are you doing with that list? Here is the good news.

Well, when we fall short of God’s expectation, God wants us to confess our sins to him. When we confess, God will forgive us. He gives us a fresh start. God can begin to work in our heart and in our life.

Please join with me in saying this prayer:

Most Merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned against You in thoughts, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in Your will, and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your name. Amen

(The Book of Common Prayer)

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. Who is one person who you look up to today? What qualities and characteristics do you value in that person?
2. Why do you believe Paul cares so much about the way that Ephesian Christians were living?
3. Paul tells the Ephesian Christians to no longer live as the Gentiles do. How were the Gentiles living? (Eph. 4:17-20)
4. Paul reminds the Christians that they are to live differently as believers. How does God want Christians to live? What should new Christians stop doing? What should new Christians begin doing? (Eph. 4:22-24)
5. What specific behaviors does Paul warn against? How might these behaviors work against building up the body of Christ? (Eph. 4:25-5:2)
6. What five vices are believers to get rid of? What positive commands did Paul give to the Ephesians? (Eph. 4:31-32)
7. Who is the one person we should imitate? What are ways we need to do a better job in imitating Jesus? (Eph. 5:1-2)
8. Bonus question: What aspect of your Christian life do you want to practice more consistently?