

LIVING FOR JESUS

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

You may know the old gospel song that goes like this: “Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please him in all that I do; yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me.” This verse from that gospel hymn is a good basic definition of what it means to be a Christian. To be a Christian is nothing more and nothing less than yielding allegiance to Jesus and doing all we can to please him. If we do this, then everything else falls into place.

Now, yielding allegiance to Jesus begins by calling him Lord. As Paul told the Corinthians, calling Jesus Lord requires the help of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). If we give full allegiance to Jesus then nothing else takes first place in our lives—not family, friends, nation, a political party, or a political leader. This is why I’ve come to believe that the Lord’s Prayer is our pledge of allegiance to God and God’s realm. So, as the saying goes: “If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.”

With all of this in mind, we hear Paul tell the readers: “Don’t live like the Gentiles” (Eph. 4:17). Remember the audience is largely Gentile, so what they hear is this: Because you are now part of the body of Christ, you must leave behind your old life. You are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Therefore, embody the values of God’s realm rather than the broader Gentile culture.

In the verse prior to our reading, following the version in *The Message*, we’re called to: “Take on an entirely new way of life—a God fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you” (Eph. 4:24 MSG). So how does this happen?

Paul offers four steps to living for Jesus. First, put away falsehood and lies. Because we’re living in a post-truth world where conspiracy theories are all the rage, this is a profound word for our times. The message here is simple: just tell the truth and don’t let deceit define your life and your relationships.

Secondly, while Paul recognizes that we might get angry on occasion, he admonishes us not to sin. It’s good to remember that Jesus equated anger with murder (Mt. 5:21-22). So, as James put it, “be slow to anger” because “anger does not produce God’s righteousness” (Jms. 1:19-20). Here in Ephesians the message is don’t let anger control your life. That’s because if you let anger get control, you become vulnerable to

evil. This is the lesson that Luke Skywalker learned in the *Star Wars* movies. If you give in to anger or let bitterness and wrath take hold of your life, you will fall prey to the dark side, which is evil. And when that happens, you end up destroying your neighbor and yourself. So, if you get angry, let go of it before you go to bed!

Not only should you let go of your anger, but Paul warns against being a thief. Hopefully, that warning doesn't apply to any of us, but it's a good reminder to do what is right when it comes to such things.

Finally, don't engage in any evil talk. As Thumper put it, "if you can't say something nice, don't say nothin' at all." Remember that according to James the tongue is like a fire set ablaze by hell itself and it's a "restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God" (James 3:8-9). What might seem like an innocent joke or a juicy bit of information, can embarrass or dehumanize others. So, if you're living for Jesus, make sure that your speech is appropriate and that it builds up others rather than tears them down.

Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit by the way we live. So put away bitterness, anger, clamor, wrath, and slander. Replace that which destroys with a new and different spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Then we're told to forgive each other as God in Christ has forgiven us. As Lewis Smedes wrote: "Forgiving is the only way to heal the wounds of a past we cannot change and cannot forget." And, "when we forgive, we bring in light where there was darkness. We summon positives to replace negatives. We open the door to an unseen future that our painful past had shut. When we forgive, we set a prisoner free and discover that the person we set free is *us*." [Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, (Harper One, 1996).]

Having heard all these words, Paul calls on us to be "imitators of God." That's a tall order, and yet it's our calling. The key is love. Yes, "live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2). Or as *The Message* renders these verses: "Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that." (Eph. 5:1-2 *MSG*). That is what it means to imitate God and live for Jesus.

This is something that Mother Theresa understood and embraced. She wrote: "Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment." She tried to make every person feel worthy of

God's love and mercy. She didn't ask anything of them. She just cared for them. If we live for Jesus, let us be like him by showing kindness, being tender-hearted, and showing forgiveness to our neighbors.

As we live for Jesus, let us pray that the Spirit will soften our hearts to each other's needs so that through the Spirit who indwells us and empowers us we can feel the pain of those who suffer. We can understand and recognize what keeps people separated from God and the church. In the end, we can grieve with those who grieve and rejoice with those who rejoice.

So, let us live for Jesus "a life that is true, striving to please him in all that I do; yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me."

Rev. Dr. Robert D. Cornwall
Minister at Large
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Troy, MI
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