

Commentary

As we consider the particular contribution of this section, we always have in our mind the big picture of God's plan to unite all things in Christ (1:10), the significance of the Church for revealing God's wisdom (3:10), and the primary lifestyle application of this: in humility and love, to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:1-3).

It is extraordinary to ponder the significance of these connections: very practical, everyday, lifestyle choices made by Christian believers are the means by which the wisdom of God Himself is revealed to powers beyond what we can even see – His wisdom to be able to unite disparate, hostile people in one, divine, human being – His Son, Jesus Christ. *The Church's unity displays the final cosmic unity planned in Christ.* It is astonishing to think that, in a sense, the extent to which God is seen to be able to unite the universe in Christ is the extent to which Christians are able to live in peace with one another! Church unity is utterly essential if God is to be seen to be wise enough to bring harmony and order out of hostility and chaos.

And to this end Christians, who were all by nature disobedient idolaters, need ongoing, God-centred, direction for living *so that we can learn how to live in peace.* We get this as we receive the ministry of God's word, and as we mature together in love, by means of all our diversity, seeing that our unity comes only as we grow into Christ (4:7-16). This present section brings us exactly this God-given, God-reflecting, God-honouring instruction that we need.

4:17-24 **Two ways to think: futile, ignorant and callous vs. true, renewed and God-like.**

In many ways it seems that becoming a Christian is like recovering from drug addiction. At one time we had hard *hearts* (v.18) and so all our *thinking* was only ever about seeking more and more sensual gratification (v.19). This is despite the fact that that thinking was futile (v.17), darkened in understanding (v.18), ignorant (v.18) and selfishly dirty (v.19). The craving for the drug (i.e. sin) was a deceitful desire bringing corruption of life and social breakdown (v.22). Once we're in this mess, there's no way out of it – the problem is that we don't *want* to get out of it; we just want our 'drug', thinking it will satisfy us. Only Jesus can save us, through His death and resurrection, and, (*Warning: Paedobaptist view!*) in the case of 'covenant outsiders' through the proclamation of the gospel (Ch.1-2). Through God's grace in Jesus we are given new hearts (v.18, ref. Heb. 8:10) and therefore are renewed in the spirit of our minds (v.23), ready to begin living in unity, after the likeness of God (v.24). (Note that the literal rendering of 'old man' and 'new man' in v.22+24 may well relate to the unity of the 'one new man' in 2:15).

4:25-5:2 **Five lifestyle changes after the likeness of God**

1. Speaking truth rather than falsehood. Motive: we belong to each other in Christ's body. (Just as the three persons of the Trinity belong to each other).
2. Restrained rather than unrestrained anger. Motive: we want to stop the devil's work. (Just as, in Jesus, God appeared in order to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8)).

3. Working rather than stealing. Motive: sharing with the needy. (In Jesus, God is revealed to share with the needy (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10)).
4. Speaking to build up, not tear down. Motive: it's good and gracious to the hearers. (Just as God is full of grace to His hearers (Eph.1:1-14)).
5. Don't be bitter and malicious, but rather kind and forgiving. Motive: We have been forgiven. (This forgiveness was granted to us by God, at His expense (4:32-5:2)).

The whole section is bracketed by the commands to be like God in 4:24, and an imitator of God in 5:1-2, the latter emphasising the central role of love in the making of a united, meaningful, community.

The placement of v.30 suggests that destructive words and unforgiving attitudes (v.29, 31-32) are the most grievous things to the Holy Spirit. After all, He seals all His people for the day of redemption (v.30, ref. 1:13-14), is the source of unity in Christ's body (4:3-4) and enables word-embodied relationality between God and man (6:17-18).

5:3-21 **Fitting behaviour for God's children of light, brought forth from a dark and foolish world to worship Him**

v.3-6 – Have nothing to do with the *deeds* of idolatry, since the *people* of idolatry will have no place in God's Kingdom.

(Note here, as throughout this section, we need to distinguish deeds and people. By the grace of God, we are no longer idolaters (v.5), sons of disobedience (v.6) or darkness (v.8), but rather beloved children of God (v.1-2), saints (v.3), light (v.8) and children of light (v.8). Yet, to our shame there are still all kinds of ways in which we need to dissociate from all these dark ways of living and start embracing light ways of living – hence our need for these commands.)

v.7-10 – So don't partner up with those dark *people*, since you have a new sonship as a child of light, producing the *fruit* of light, pleasing to the Lord.

v.11-14 – And don't partake in those dark unfruitful *deeds*, since they're shameful and are to be exposed to the light and therefore made light, just as you have been.

(These are tricky verses. It seems that it is shameful to *speak* of (let alone partake in) secret dark deeds, but that exposing those deeds to the light (which probably comes about through the fruit of the children of light, v.8-9) causes them not only to become visible (v.13), but even thereby to become light (v.14a). After all, Christians are those who were dead and were darkness but have been made alive and made light, so as to know Christ's light (v.8, 14b; ref. 2:1-10). Perhaps then dark worldly deeds can somehow be redeemed by the light of Christian living.)

v.15-21 – Walk carefully, being wise not foolish, having your mind and life driven by the Spirit not by wine, and being corporately passionate towards God in everything.

Group Study Outline

Ephesians 4:17-5:21 Theme Sentence

In all your lives together, walk like the God of glory, shining with His wisdom.

Launching Question

If you were to do a survey of people in the street and ask them who their hero or idol was (past or present), what names do you think they would come up with?

What is it about those people that makes them worthy of respect, or worth imitating? Are there any aspects that *wouldn't* be good to imitate?!

READ Ephesians 4:17-5:21

Who is better for us to imitate than any idol? (Think a *bit* carefully!)

What verses back up that idea?

What is it about God that makes Him brilliant to imitate?

Focus on 4:17-24 – Brain reboot!

What changes in the 'spiritual anatomy' are needed before people will *want* to start imitating God?

How does that come about? (v.20-21)

Focus on 4:25-5:2 – Living *like* God

What should you do if you know that you:

...sometimes deliberately deceive people with what you say?

...sometimes get angry for days about something?

...copy CDs or computer software illegally?

...put down other Christians for various reasons?

...get all chewed up and angry about the way another Christian has treated you, refusing to have anything to do with them?

What's the God-imitating motive in each case?

And what word sums up a God-imitating attitude? (5:1-2)

Focus on 5:3-21 – Living that's *fit* for God

v.3-6 Why should we say a big 'NO' to these selfish, dirty deeds as Christians?

v.7-10 How are we distinct from 'sons of disobedience'? What should we say 'YES' to?

v.11-14 Why should we say 'NO' to the unfruitful works of darkness?

v.15-21 What does it show if we say 'YES' to Spirit-filled worship at Emmanuel, and we sing songs of thanks to God together with all our hearts?

...So from these verses, how should the fact that we're going to be in the presence of God in the *future* (see 1:4) affect the way we live *now*?

Wrapping it up

What would be the effect on us as a family at Emmanuel if we better imitated God in these kinds of ways?

What would heavenly authorities and non-Christians around us see?

Ephesians 4:17-5:21



The story so far

MJS

What's God's grand design for the universe, according to *Ephesians*? It's to **unite everything in Christ (1:10)**. And what's the focus of that – where does the action happen? It's in the redemption of **people** (see 1:1-14, and v. 18 – where God's 'inheritance' is the 'saints', i.e. people of the worldwide/for-all-time Church). Before the foundation of the world, God chose a countless number of people to be **100% spiritually blessed in the present world**, and **100% personally transformed in the age to come** (1:3-6), and all *in Jesus*, through His death and resurrection (1:7-8, 19-23; 2:4-7), forgiving us our trespasses and enabling us to start doing good (1:7, 19; 2:10). It's **all God's work** – all by grace (2:5, 7-9) – so we've got nothing to brag about, but everything to be happy about!

A key part of this **uniting**-everything-in-Christ-by-**saving**-people-in-Christ plan is that **otherwise hostile people are themselves united** (Ch. 1-2). In particular, Jews and Gentiles – i.e. the privileged and the non-privileged, the hopeful and the hopeless, the 'in' crowd and the 'out' crowd – are seen to be on a level playing field. In Christ's death, all human pretensions have been brought to nothing, (2:11,13-16), and peace has been brought about amongst all who are sealed with the Spirit (1:13-14; 2:14-18, 22; 4:3-4). This new united family, founded on Christ, becomes the place where God dwells (2:18-22).

God's eternal plan that even complete outsiders can be brought into this family is the wonderful mystery that is only finally **revealed to people** through the knowledge of Christ (3:1-9, 11-12), and is only **revealed to the heavenly authorities** through the life of the Church (3:10). This supremely loved and blessed Church family (3:1,13-21) is to maintain **unity** (4:1-6) and **grow** together through its diversity (4:7-16).

Ephesians 4:17-5:21 Theme Sentence

In all your lives together, walk like the God of glory, shining with His wisdom.

Application

The potential avenues for application here are endless. Think of *any* part of your life...Are you looking to the good of the Church *family*, especially at Emmanuel?...Are you acting as *God* would, seeking unity through forgiveness?...Are you living in a way that fits God's glorious, pure, sparkling, fruitful, end-time plan to unite everything in Christ?...Are you, by the Spirit, reflecting, and delighting in, God's harmonious wisdom in Christ, so that others can see it? We're God's beloved children, so let's walk as children of light!