

“Living Like God”

19 July 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship: Psalm 42:1-4

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 488 As The Deer

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: David Boyd

Farewell: Sophie Corke

Reading: Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Sermon:

“Living Like God” is a provocative title, but this is how Paul describes the Christian life in v.24: *“put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”*. If we are to be like God, Paul says it will require that our lives change. He uses the metaphor of clothes: some things we will have to take off and some things will have to be put on, a bit like the different uniforms we talked about last week.

Or to put it another way, coming to know Jesus (v.20ff) is the most significant thing that happens in our lives. Claiming to be Christians, being “in Christ” will mean a significant change in our lives. Sophie’s testimony is a great illustration of that. We cannot have a relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour and remain the same. The old self of sin must be put off and the new self of Christ must be put on. In doing so, we become more like God. We live what we are, and yet it is a process that God promises will end in glory, true righteousness and holiness.

Paul insists on this (v.17) and he says it is our responsibility (v.25): “Each of you *must*.” This is not optional. If we claim to be Christians and refuse to get rid of sin - to put on Christ’s qualities, to change - you prove to others and to yourself that you are, at best, presently a disobedient Christian or that possibly you’re not even a Christian at all. Similarly, a more positive way to look at this is that the desire to change reassures you are a Christian. You might not feel you have done very well, but you desire to change; that is a good thing! You are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit and “He who began the good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). If you are a Christian, you must change. There must be a desire to put off that which is not of Christ and to put on that which is of Christ.

Verse 25 tells us another important reality as to why this is vital. *“For we are all members of one body”*: we live our lives as Christians not only in relationship with Jesus Christ but also in relationship with others within the church. The entire context of Ch. 4 is about the body of Christ - Christ the head, we the members of the body - and how we live is predicated on relationship to each other. So, the way I speak is about speaking to each other (v.25). We must speak truthfully; we must not lie. We must foster relationship that is good for others. The body works best when we live in this way, because we are in conformity with the head, Jesus Christ. And if we choose not to live as Christ, then we are out of relationship with Jesus and each other and sadly we will hurt the body.

Using the title “Living Like God” is not optional. It is essential for the proper working of the Church. Both are relationship focused and therefore these instructions from Paul are worthy

of our careful attention and we need to understand and embrace them and walk with Jesus in the direction they lead. Each of you *must* put off some things and put on others.

Paul then gives us a list of six issues: lying (v.25), anger (v.26-27), stealing (v.28), unwholesome talk (v.29-30), bitterness (v.31-32), and sexual immorality (5:3-4). We will look firstly at anger.

I. Anger

Paul uses a quote from Psalm 4: *“in your anger do not sin”*. The psalm’s context is his experience of dishonour, being unfairly attacked, hostility towards him. He actually sees these people who are attacking him following the folly of their own thinking, delusions and false gods. He is ripping angry! He acknowledges his anger. It says to him something is wrong, it passes judgement on the person or situation. The Bible makes no attempt to say that (this type of) anger is wrong when it is rightly expressed, because Jesus was angry. Jesus was angry when the religious leaders showed no compassion for a man with a damaged hand; all they could think about was accusing Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. Mark records Jesus’ anger: *“He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...”* (Mark 3:5). Anger is right; it says to us something is terribly wrong. Ultimately, anger flows from love. We mentioned G.K. Chesterton last week and he, along with others, said the opposite of love is not hate, but apathy. Anger is a strong emotion. It arises because we love and care about something important and, used in the right way, it will result in good, protection, justice, and change.

However, in Psalm 4 the psalmist is up at night, wrestling with his emotions as he reflects on what has happened to him. He tells himself, *“in your anger do not sin”*. How do we sin when we are angry? Paul goes on to say, *“Do not let the sun go down on your anger”* and *“do not give the devil a foothold”*. **Don’t let anger linger! Don’t let anger lodge!** We know how easy we allow that to happen. I know it; I’m sure that you know it. It’s easy to keep thinking about that issue. It’s easy whenever you think about that issue years later to feel it almost as strongly as you felt at the time, because it has lodged in your heart. That’s the reality, isn’t it? It’s so easy for us in this good emotion of anger, because we’re sinful human beings, to allow it to linger and to lodge.

Here are some practical ideas gleaned from a book by Alasdair Groves and Winston Smith called *Untangling Emotions*, to help us live like God and deal rightly with anger.

II. Engaging Anger

Why are you angry? What wrong are you perceiving? This obviously requires thought and honesty about the situation or the person. Try to get behind the emotion and understand what is at stake. What do you perceive as important and the issue at hand?

How long have you been angry? Paul’s second statement, *“do not let the sun go down on your anger”* is not literally saying daylight hours (12-18 hrs.), but more likely he is saying deal with the reality of your anger soon. You must recognise it and seek to work on it. Often, and sadly, we have been angry for a long period of time. It lingers and will often show itself in other ways, possibly sleeplessness, depression, critical and negative spirit, addictions. I don’t think this will ever be easy to admit, because we find comfort in these other ways.

III. Evaluating Anger

Are you angry at the things God is angry at? The answer to this, again, may not be easy to determine. But let us say you are right: there is some injustice, some wrong in the person or situation. *Even now* we must be careful to pause and think further and think about what is in our hearts. Always remember that when we point, three fingers point back. This has been a huge revelation for me, because sometimes I think I'm right (and I probably am right), but the problem is how I react. The problem is that I become critical. The problem is that in everything I'm doing to sort that out, I become this nasty, distant, critical, judgemental kind of person. We must be careful how we react; you may remain in great danger.

If your anger is wrong, then it needs to be repented of. The human heart is so corrupt we can attack our friends and family because of wrong perceptions, exaggerated hurts, or jealousy, and some self pity, etc. This often points to some deep, disordered love in our hearts.

What is the outcome of my anger? Is this moving toward the person, or is it moving me away from them? Is it moving me to deal with the wrong and injustice, both within me and within them, or is it moving me just to protect myself? We see this in marriage, employment, church, family, etc. The focus of the Bible - and this is where it's tough - is always towards the person, how it affects others. Usually it's not about the injustice that we feel personally, but a wider sense of injustice.

Anger is a tricky emotion as Paul's instruction recognises. The apostle James is blunt and concise in his letter and his instruction about the same subject. Anger... *"does not bring about the righteous life that God requires"* (James 1:19-20).

Jesus is always our example. He was angry, righteously angry at our sin, but He moved to restore the relationship with us at the cost of His life, to offer forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He gave of Himself; He humbled Himself.

If we are to live without being sinfully angry, then we need to:

- **Slow down.** We need to be careful how we react, and often it comes in a sinful way.
- **Act for the good of the other.** Are we working towards justice, redemption and relationship?
- **Ask for help from others.** We need to admit, "This is beyond me to deal with on my own. I need the support of trusted Christian friends who will help me see what I'm doing, who will pray for me, who will guide me in a way that is good and right." We need each other.
- **Bring it to the Lord and give it to Him.** We need to pray about it.
- **Be humble.** Above all, we need to recognise that this is beyond us and we need the grace and mercy of God.

I could speak about the robber who now contributes with useful work (v.28) and more about how we speak (v.29) which is linked to grieving the Holy Spirit, noting that God is personal. He hurts when our behaviour is contrary to His will. I hope you have noticed how often we've had instruction about speech: speak the truth in love, speak truthfully, speak what is helpful for building others up! Taking these instructions to heart would surely change our conversations. However, let us look at:

IV. Get rid of bitterness and be kind to one another (v.31-32)

The list of six things we are to get rid of are ugly even if only one is found.

1. One commentator, Armitage Robinson, defined bitterness as *“an embittered and resentful spirit that refuses to be reconciled”* and John Stott said that finding such a spirit in an elderly person is incredibly sad. Not many of us would describe ourselves as bitter. However, our sinful flesh or nature does tend when in conflict with another or when things do not go as we had planned, when people and life are a series of disappointments, to become bitter, resentful and not wanting to go in the direction of reconciliation. I don't say this as condemnation, but I want us to hear Paul say unequivocally get rid of such an attitude. It's easy for it to linger; it's easy for it to lodge. We are to get rid of them; get rid of all bitterness!
2. Rage is the type of anger where we don't think and are immediately angry. It's a short fuse, deeply passionate, unproportionate. Road rage is a good example, but we also can rage at our loved ones. Get rid of all rage!
3. Anger: the more settled, unchanging, constant anger at someone or something. Get rid of all anger!
4. Brawling: the one who is always clamouring for a fight, speaks loudly, excitable, not reasonable. Get rid of all brawling!
5. Slander is part of the unwholesome talk of v.29. It speaks negatively, gossips, tells lies (v.25) and seeks to put another person down and cast them in a bad light. Get rid of all slander!
6. Malice: the intent to do another harm, wishing harm and plotting to do harm. Some see it as a summary of all the others. Get rid of all malice!

These are the attitudes we are to get rid of. If we recognise these in ourselves, then we must admit them to ourselves and to God. We have to say, “That is how I am. That is how I react. I don't like it and I don't want it. I'm asking You to forgive me and asking You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. *I need You.*” Put off; put on.

Be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other.

It is a direct command: *be kind*. Kindness is gentle and accepting, it's seen in relationship with others, it's shown and received. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told those listening that God is kind (Luke 6:35). Sometimes we don't think so, but the Bible says He is. And Paul told the church in Galatia that kindness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And we see that Jesus showed kindness, compassion and grace to us when He went to the cross, and offered us forgiveness for our sins. (Aside: In Greek, the word for kind is “chrestos” which bears a remarkable similarity to “Christos”, Jesus' name and title.) Christians, followers of Jesus, if we are like Jesus, will be kind, compassionate and full of grace.

But why should we do that? Why should we live like God? Paul answers because we have been the recipients of His grace: *“just as in Christ, God forgave you”* (v.32). I was thinking about this and wondering about the different ways we might typically answer this question. Is it simply better for us and results in blessing? That is true, but it sounds selfish - it's simply

better for *us* if we live this way. Is it so that we can see the progress we have made in life and in our characters? “I’m not as angry as I used to be; I’m gentler than I was.” Yes, that is also true and commendable, but it is still about us.

You see, Paul insists that we live like this because that is how God has treated us. God does not hold our sins against us. God does not distance Himself from us; God does not remain aloof. He comes to us in the incarnation; He gives Himself for us on the cross. Why does He do that? Because He loves us and wants a relationship with us. If we have received this gift of grace and forgiveness, then Paul insists we must give it. So, why do we live like this? Because it shows that we have been recipients of the grace of God.

We live like this because it is essential for the Church. The Church is a body; it functions best when the body works together. “Be kind and compassionate *to one another*. Be kind and compassionate . . . *forgiving each other*.” That’s what we’re to do and that’s how the Church works. That’s when it works best, when we have an attitude of forgiveness, trying to be in relationship with one another, and being kind.

And we live like this because it is our mission to the world. If you see what happens in government when someone makes a mistake, what is the attitude of the press? What is the attitude of the opposition? What is the attitude of others? It is to crucify them, to hurt them. That is not the message of the gospel. as a contrast to the world which struggles to see kindness, compassion and grace in action. We have a mission to live, and our mission is to show the world that we forgive. Our mission is to show the world that we are kind to one another. Our mission is to show the world that we’re in relationship with one another. It’s dark out there and they need to see light. It’s unforgiving out there and they need to see forgiveness. We live like Jesus for the purpose of shining as lights in the darkness of the world. We live like this so that people would come to know Jesus and be saved. That is how our society will see that when Jesus is King of our lives and we, as His followers, live with His Spirit, *this is good*. This is how we bring honour and glory to His name, and we do that by putting off the old self and putting on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. That is our calling, our mission, our goal in life.

Hymn of Reflection: IPH 542 I Will Offer Up My Life

Prayers for Others: Winnie Wilmot

Closing Praise: IPH 491 Be Thou My Vision

Announcements:

- Tithes and offerings
- Next week’s service will be led by Dr. Graeme Murdock. Please pray for him this week as he prepares.
- Sam will be away on holidays for the next two Sundays.
- Registration for next week’s service will hopefully be fixed by Tuesday. If it is not working by then, you may also contact Stuart directly.

Benediction: And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.