

Ephesians Chapter 4 v 17 - Chapter 5 v 2

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[0 : 00] 4. So Ephesians chapter 4, and I'd like to read from verse 17.

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.

5. 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.

6. Having lost all sensitivity, they've given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

7. You, however, did not come to know Christ in that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[1 : 20] 8. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which has been corrupted by its deceitful desires, 9. 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.

9. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour. 10. For we are all members of one body.

11. In your anger, do not sin. 12. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. 12. And do not give the devil a foothold.

13. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, 13. That he may have something to share with those in need.

13. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, 14. But only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, 14. That it may benefit those who listen.

[2 : 50] 15. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, 15. With whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

16. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, 16. Brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

17. Be kind and compassionate to one another, 17. Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

17. Be imitators of God, therefore, 17. As daily loved children, 18. And live a life of love, 18. Just as Christ loved us, 18. And gave himself up for us 18. As a fragrant offering 18. And sacrifice to God. Now before we look at that, 18. Now I wonder if you're like me, any of you, and enjoy antiques programmes on the TV.

[4 : 16] You know, the Antique Roadshow and all the rest of it. There must be very many programmes now on antiques. 18. And going back a little bit further, it might be that some of you enjoy listening and watching programmes on archaeology.

And, you know, sometimes, perhaps often, you watch these programmes and you see some sort of artefact, and you wonder, whatever is that?

What's it for? Why was it made? Why did it see the light of day? What had its creator got in mind? Well, most of you here today are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if not all of you.

And you've been given new life in him. You've been made again. Why? Why have you been given new life in Christ?

What was the purpose of your new life? Why has God given you a new nature? It would be very sad if you didn't demonstrate that new life.

[5 : 29] It would be bizarre if you remained as you were, because you wouldn't be serving the purpose for which you were made, for which you were made a new creature in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what was God's purpose in making you a Christian, a new creature? Why was it that you were born again?

Well, Paul tells us why it was we were given a new principle of life in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 24.

Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

That's why we were given a new life. That's why we were born again. We were created again that we might be like God.

[6 : 38] That's what his purpose was. And if we read on a little bit further into Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 1, the Apostle Paul gives us a very clear command.

It's this. Be imitators of God. If you're a Christian, if you're a child of God, Paul said, be imitators of him as daily loved children.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ did a similar thing on the Sermon on the Mount. Remember in Matthew chapter 5, verse 44, Jesus said this, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, so that all might see who you are, that you're a child of your Father in heaven.

He makes his Son to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

that there's no doubt at all, when you read your New Testament, that this is the purpose of God, that you should be imitators of him, that you should reflect something of his glory.

[8 : 08] You ought to have the family likeness. And we'll explore this a little bit shortly. Now, it wasn't just Paul, it wasn't just the Lord Jesus Christ who said this.

The Apostle Peter said a very similar thing in his first letter, chapter 1 and verse 15. This is what Peter said, as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct, because it's written, be holy for I am holy.

And you notice that Peter said it is written. He's referring back to Leviticus chapter 11 and verse 44. You shall be holy for I am holy.

That's what God said back there in Leviticus. And he repeated himself in the following verse. You shall be holy for I am holy.

You shall be like God. And you and I therefore have no doubt that in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, we've been given a clear command to be like God.

[9 : 21] If you like, we're to be godly. What else can that word mean? But to be like God. So Paul is following a clear pattern in writing to the Ephesian Christians, be imitators of God as dear children.

That's God's purpose. That's God's plan for your life. Now, is it your purpose in your life to imitate God? Is that your single steady aim?

And we're told to imitate God, but how can we do it unless we know him?

How can you imitate someone that you don't know? God is a spirit. It doesn't have a body like we do. So how can you follow someone you cannot see?

Well, Jesus came to make God known. He said to his disciples, If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.

[10 : 32] And from now on, you do know him and have seen him. Jesus is Emmanuel. God with us. And if we're to be imitators of God, we're to look at the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're to copy him. We're to imitate him. So I need to ask you, are you a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?

A young, inexperienced mountain climber needs to follow a suitably qualified and experienced guide.

He needs to follow him and put his feet and his hands where that climber puts his feet and hands. He needs to follow the same path of the mountain.

And he recognizes his guide's experience and his wisdom, and he trusts him and he follows him. He imitates him. Now, do you see that Jesus is the one for you to follow?

[11 : 37] Do you remember that Jesus invited, he commanded, he encouraged his early disciples to follow him? In John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 43, we read this, The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.

Finding Philip, he said to him, Follow me. And verse 17, For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only, who's at the Father's side, has made him known. Just think about that for a moment.

Jesus is described here as God, the one and only who's at the Father's side. He has made him known.

And if you're to imitate God, then you're to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. And John tells us that God is full of grace and truth.

[12 : 45] And we see grace and truth in Jesus Christ. That's his glory. Now, Paul reminded the Ephesians in chapter 4, and verse 24, that they were created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, therefore, each of you must, must, but of falsehood, and speak truthfully to his neighbour. Jesus was full of grace and truth.

Now, do people see that in you? Do they see at least some faint reflection of him in you? Notice that Paul writes to these Ephesian Christians, be imitators of God as little children.

Have you ever looked at a photograph showing a father and a son? Sometimes when that happens, a person comments, he looks just like his father.

Now, of course, that's not always true. Sometimes you don't see the family likeness when you look at a photograph, but you do see it sometimes in the way that the son behaves.

[14 : 04] And sometimes you hear the comment, he walks just like his father. His father might walk with a funny thought of limp, and the son does as well.

Perhaps it's in the way he talks, or the way he expresses himself. Paul is saying that the Ephesian Christians should appear to be like their father in heaven.

There should be a family likeness. So are you Christ-like? It's a lovely thing to see a son who's so proud of his father that he seeks to imitate him.

It might be that he sees his father as a brilliant businessman, or soldier, or teacher, or fisherman, or farmer, or engineer. And out of deep admiration for his father, the son follows his father's path.

He's intent on imitating him. And he asks his father questions. He listens to his father's advice. He follows his father's example. Why?

[15 : 13] Well, he holds his father in high esteem. Perhaps he has heard how his father's respected in the community, and he's proud of his dad, and he wants to be like him.

And he imitates his dad because of his respect for him. He rejoices that he's his father's son, and he tries to follow his example. That's it.

You'll want to imitate God if you rejoice in him, and if you respect him. So do you hold him in awe, and reverence, and love?

Do you rejoice in the Lord? If you do, you want to be like him. In his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 and verse 4, Paul wrote these words, Rejoice!

Rejoice in the Lord always! I'll say it again, Rejoice! In the same letter, Paul, writing from prison, facing death itself, expressed his earnest desire that he should be made like him.

[16 : 23] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him, like him in his death.

And then, so humbly and so realistically, he writes, Not that I have already obtained all this, or I'm already being made perfect, but I press on.

And if you're an imitator of God and aim to follow him and be like him, you'll be acutely aware of the fact that you fall short. And you'll confess with Paul, not that I have already attained or already perfected.

Even the apostle Paul had to confess his failure. I'm reminded of a man who would often say, Those that would serve him best are conscious most of wrong within.

The apostle John put in another way in his first letter, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[17 : 39] And shortly afterwards, if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. So we're to be imitators of God, but it will be an imperfect imitation, at least in this world.

For now, Paul says in Ephesians 5.1, Be imitators of God as dear children. So how do you read that?

Do you want to imitate God? No, but God, the Lord, is the sovereign Lord. He is the master of all he's made.

He does all things according to his own will and pleasure. Are you going to imitate him by trying to be all-powerful?

Well, clearly not. Some people do try to rule over men and nations and they're monsters. They're tyrants. We're not called upon to be Napoleons or Hitlers or Stalins and impose our proud, self-centred will on others, even in a limited way with those around us, in our families or at work or even in our church.

[19 : 06] We're not to be bossy and overbearing. We're not to be like God in the sense of being almighty. That's not our lot. That's not our purpose.

Now, God is all-wise. He knows everything. He understands everything. We don't. We're made with limitations. And the most knowledgeable of men are the quickest to admit they know so little.

In any case, remember the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1 and verse 15. Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing.

God is everywhere. Are we to imitate him in that sense? Well, I do know that some people do try to be everywhere. But even with the aid of Blue Circuit TV, Skype, Jet Aircraft and so on, we cannot be everywhere.

God is so different from us. And yet, we're called upon to be like him. And in chapter 5, verse 1, Paul urged the Ephesian Christians to be imitators of God.

[20 : 41] So we need to unpack very carefully what Paul said. We need to look at the context of this. If you simply saw words in front of you be imitators of God, you'd be utterly confused.

And it might drive you into all sorts of different paths if you didn't read the context of what Paul was saying. Go back to the previous verse, chapter 4 and verse 32.

And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Therefore, be imitators of God. So do you see how we're to imitate him? We're to be forgiving of others. That's part of God's glory.

Remember how Moses, the man of God, prayed to the Lord to show him his glory. And the Lord showed him his glory. And the Lord said this, that he forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin.

[21 : 59] Now that list includes everything you can think of. It includes anything and everything that offends him. And we're to be like him in this.

We're to forgive all manner of offenses, all manner of people who offend us. And that's the challenge here in this verse.

You're to imitate him by forgiving others. So, do you forgive others?

And you say to yourself, I don't know. I don't know whether I do forgive others. I just can't work it out. Well, you can work it out from the passage as to whether or not you're one who forgives others. Now, many of the Ephesian Christians held riches they were unwilling to forgive. They'd forgotten that they should imitate God.

[23 : 05] And that's why Paul had to write to them in this way. Some of them showed their inability and unwillingness to forgive in different ways. And in verse 31, Paul had to say to them, get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice.

Get rid of these things. They don't belong your new life in Christ. If you managed a restaurant and you were given a new spanking clean kitchen and equipment, you simply don't hang on to the filthy, crapped, grease-laden pans and bowls that you once had and were perhaps condemned by the authorities as being not fit for purpose.

Your new kitchen was given you by its owners for their purpose, their profit, their delight, and their good name. And hanging on to the old ways would have been utterly inappropriate.

So Paul says, get rid of your old unforgiving ways and imitate God.

So if you think of someone with bitterness, it's probably because you haven't forgiven him or her. If you're filled with wrath and you wait for some opportunity to extract revenge for some wrong, you're not forgiving.

[24 : 48] And if you have angry outbursts against some person, you can't say that you've forgiven them. And if you stir up others against that person and speak evil of that person, there's little sign that you've forgiven them.

If you display malice towards them in any way whatsoever, you can hardly say that you've forgiven them. Don't you agree? Isn't it obvious?

And that's why Paul was writing in the way that he did. So do you have malicious unforgiving angry thoughts against anyone?

Is it members of your family? Neighbors? Fellow church members? Paul said instead of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking of those that you think have wronged you, we should be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.

And he's using the present tense. We should continue to forgive one another. We should continue to be tender-hearted and kind to one another. And this should be especially true of fellow Christians.

[26 : 10] Going back to 425 again. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour.

For, we are all members of one body. That for is so important. We're to forgive one another because we're part of the same body, part of the redeemed church of Christ.

We're all members of him. Now, Paul heaps up the arguments why it is that we should forgive others. Yes, we're all members of one body and Paul goes on and says, in your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while he's still angry and do not give the devil a foothold. Now, the devil loves to create division, distrust, and lies.

Do not give him a foothold by your unforgiving nature. He goes on and says, do not grieve the spirit.

[27 : 28] Think how dependent you are upon the spirit for your communion with God, for your fellowship with God, for your joy in him. Now, if you grieve the spirit by your unforgiving nature, those bad thoughts, you're not going to enjoy communion with the Lord.

You won't know his peace, you won't know his joy, you won't know his strength, because you grieve the spirit. Yesterday, people were praying across the country for revival, and we all desire revival. We want God to revive his church. How does he do it? Well, the spirit comes down. The spirit comes down upon preachers, the spirit comes down upon individuals, the spirit comes down upon men and women, even in the street.

Remember some years ago, listening to a man who was converted during the revival in the south of Wales, and he said this, I was standing there in the street, and God came down and he convicted me of my sin.

God, the spirit. God, how can a person become a Christian, how can a person be forgiven by God unless God, the spirit, comes to him and gives him new life?

[28 : 51] how can our churches be revived apart from God, the spirit coming down and reviving us? So Paul says, do not grieve the spirit.

Forgive one another even as God in Christ forgave you. This is how we imitate God. Remember the words of Jesus on the cross.

He prayed for his enemies. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Some fellow Christians have circumstances that make it very hard for them to forgive others and we should pray for them.

If you lived in Nigeria and had your daughters taken away by violent men or your sons killed in their college that they attended, I suspect you'd struggle to forgive.

so we should pray for people who have these dreadful circumstances. But wait a minute. It might be that you struggle to forgive those who are close to you, who said the odd harsh word to you or about you, been indifferent to your needs.

[30 : 10] So it's a very real, very important question. How can we forgive those who offend us, whether in a big way or a small way? Paul tells us in chapter 4 verse 32, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you.

Have you been forgiven by God? Now Paul was writing to those who had come to God and confessed their sins and found forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ.

They'd seen the enormity of their guilt, the depths of their failures, and they confessed it and found peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Is that you?

The Old Testament king, David, had been guilty of a very great sin, many great sins. And in Psalm 32 he wrote this, When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning, all day long, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my vitality was turned into the drought of summer, I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity have not hidden, I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

David knew what it was to be forgiven. Do you believe that God forgives sin? Do you believe it forgives your sin? Do you believe it's forgiven you?

[31 : 53] Look to the cross. Why was it that the Saviour hung and suffered there? Why was it that the Lord of glory, the one and only Son of God, why was it that he came into the world to the shame of the cross?

But he says time and time again, he came to save sinners. He was determined that sinners like you and I might be forgiven. And so in chapter 5, verse 2, Paul wrote, live a life of love, and here again we've got this imitation, even as just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering, and as a sacrifice to God.

God acted purposefully in the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive, and the forgiveness involved sacrifice. In the Old Testament, sacrifices of animals had to take place, and those sacrifices had to be at Jerusalem.

Remember that Jesus had to go to Jerusalem. In the words of the gospel writer Matthew, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and raised the third day.

[33 : 34] some people object to this. They want a bloodless Christianity. They object to the cross.

And the problem is this, they've got no sense of the awful nature of sin. Their sin. God said that he must go to Jerusalem and be killed, even the apostle Peter didn't realize his need of the cross.

When Jesus told him he must be killed and raised the third day, do you know what Peter said to Jesus? He said this, far be it from you Lord, this shall not happen to you.

And Jesus rebuked Peter, get behind me, Satan, you're an offence to me. Jesus had to go to the cross.

There was no other way for men and women like you and me to be forgiven. And those who deny the need of the cross should remember how strongly Jesus spoke to Peter.

[34 : 46] And your deliverance from guilt, from Satan, from wrath, anger, bitterness, clamour, and evil speaking, depends upon the cross. And what happened there?

And if you're to be an imitator of God in the matter of forgiving others, you must first find peace with God, forgiveness with God, through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I ask you again, have you found it? Remember that God forgives, that's his glory, but he only does it through his one and only son.

son, there's only one son, only one saviour, and it's through him, it's through the free gift in him, through that one sacrifice in him that took place once for all at Calvary, that you can be saved, that you can be forgiven, there, outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Have you come to that place? Have you found peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ? And if you've found forgiveness at that place of shame, then be imitators of God and forgive others.

[35 : 59] Now perhaps it is that you wonder, is the sacrifice of Christ good enough for you and all your sins? How does God view that sacrifice?

See again what Paul says about it. He says in chapter 5 verse 2, this offering and sacrifice to God is a sweet smelling aroma.

Isaiah, Isaiah 53, he said it pleased, it pleased the Lord to bruise him. The Lord was satisfied and pleased with the sacrifice of Christ.

It came to him as a sweet smelling aroma. When you walk past some plants in the garden, say some lilies or lavender, you get a nice sweet smelling aroma.

It gives you pleasure, it gives you peace. The Lord looked upon the sacrifice of Christ with delight. We have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[37 : 12] We have forgiveness with him, we've got grace through him, being justified through faith. We've got peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So is your trust, your complete trust in Christ and him crucified?

If it is, all your sins are forgiven. Your sin, not the part, but the whole was taken away there at Calvary, out of sight.

as far as the east is from the west, so far have your sins been removed from you.

I guess most of you here have been down on the quay side, the harbour here, and you've seen the dredger at work, the dredger picks up all that filthy silt, and it takes it out to sea, and it dumps it out there, it's gone, it's gone, it's out of view.

And God says that if your confidence is in Christ, he hurls your sins that you're rightly ashamed of into the deepest part of the sea, and remembers them no more.

[38 : 30] Are you intent on imitating God and forgiving others? Or have forgotten why you were given this new life?

Let's pray. Amen.