

Intro. Read Eph. 4:25-5:2

The church, marriage or family that believes the gospel will always be recognizable. People who have been saved by God can be picked out of a crowd because they are the ones expressing concern that their behavior be pleasing to God. Of all the weaknesses and inconsistencies that may be found in the saved person's life, ultimately the gospel produces a freedom and desire to work, talk, solve problems and love others in a God-like way. It can be said that genuine Christians are those who live connected lives . . . they are intentional in closing the gap between behavior and belief.

We all easily recognize the tornado like devastation that is caused in a church, family or marriage where there is agreement on professed beliefs without a committed method of behaving according to those beliefs. Believing the right things and then practicing them in our lives and relationships is at the core of the God given, attractive unity of Christ's church.

The Dad who will not humble himself before his family, the wife who is enslaved by resentment, the church member who does not spend time with God in Bible study and prayer, the student who lives two separate lives depending on who is watching, the senior citizen that is consumed by anxiety . . . none of them would blatantly confess their unbelief in the core and blessed teachings of the gospel. However, their conduct effectively communicates a distorted picture of God and his glorious gospel. The lack of connection is obvious and harmful.

You may remember several weeks ago when we began our study of how people saved by God live their lives that we summarized the message of Ephesians 4 with a value statement that shows the real connection between our position in Christ and our practice. The connection between what we believe and how we behave . . . a connection that the saved person longs to keep as tight as possible.

God's blessings in Christ are graciously, breathtakingly overwhelming.

Therefore we commit ourselves to reflecting these blessings in our daily lives and relationships.

The first two verses of Ephesians 5 both summarize the message of chapter four and continue the dominant theme of saved people behaving in new and God-like ways that appear in stark contrast to former ways of living.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Eph.5:1-2

Your success in closing the gap between behavior and belief is dependent on understanding concepts that are the basis for practicing new life behaviors. So let's organize our thoughts with the help of God's Holy Spirit around these two paths . . . foundational concepts to embrace in our renewed minds and challenging behaviors to practice in our real lives.

Foundational concepts to embrace in our renewed minds

These concepts are mentioned directly in these verses and have been established already in the Epistle. These represent essential truths for 4:23 kind of mind renewal. As you pray Psalm 86:11, for God to change your current way of thinking, these concepts are what begin to move in and replace old thinking.

Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth;
Unite my heart to fear your name.

1) Your view of God – you desire to imitate him.

Imitation is used several times in the scriptures but this is the only place where it is used of God being imitated by his children. It means to copy him closely, to repeat his speech, actions and behaviors in your live and circumstances. It is an unbelievably high standard but yet a clear and compelling one.

Luke 6:36

1Peter 2:21

Lev. 19:2

2) Your view of self – you appreciate your identity.

‘as beloved children’ explains the basis or reason why we imitate God, we are his children. There is certainly an expected family resemblance. We reproduce the family likeness of our heavenly Father and our adopted family in our daily lives. Your mind is being renewed by God when you begin to think of yourself and talk to yourself as a family member with full rights as a son. Four terms describe your new identity . . .

Beloved 1:4; 2:4; 3:14-19

adopted 1:5; Rom.8:12-17

Forgiven 1:7; 4:32

redeemed 1:7; 2:19; 5:2

3) Your view of life – you see life as meaningful.

This 3rd reference in this section to conducting your life in a certain way (walk – 4:1, 17; 5:2) continues to reinforce the concept that your life matters. Your daily walk is the stage on which the glorious gospel is displayed to a watching world. A major gap that needs closing is that how you talk, work, react and submit to the Spirit of God doesn’t matter.

Review both 4:25-32 examples and 5:22ff opportunities.

These concepts ingrained by the scriptures, prayer and Bible teaching into our thinking become the basis for new life behaviors that are distinctively different and God like. These truths distinguish gospel transformed living from people trying to live good lives on their own.

Foundational concepts to embrace in our renewed minds

- 1) Your view of God – you desire to imitate him.
- 2) Your view of self – you appreciate your identity.
- 3) Your view of life – you see life as meaningful.

Challenging behaviors to practice in our real lives.

Forgiving those who sin against you and loving others in a costly and sacrificial way are primary behaviors that point back to the new heart and mind of a saved person. Both are commanded in these verses. Since you are an imitator of God, a beloved child of God and convinced to live life for purpose, then you find yourself compelled and empowered to forgive and love like God did and does.

1) Forgive, just like God does.

‘therefore’ of 5:1 clearly describes the behavior of God to be imitated as that mentioned in 4:32. Imitate the family likeness of forgiveness.

4:32 forgiveness is a translation of the term for giving freely or graciously. It is not the common word for releasing or remission of sins but rather emphasizes along with the other terms in 4:32 the gracious response of the saved person to other sinners.

Cmp Luke 7:42

Col. 3:13

Luke 6:36-37

Your struggle with forgiving, being merciful and kind towards those who hurt you is rooted in your lack of a renewed mind regarding your view of God, self and life. The motivation . . . as God forgave you and be imitators of God, is amazingly energizing especially when contrasted with the darkness and enslavement of resentment and self pity.

2) Love, just like Christ does.

As God's forgiveness of you is the standard for comparison of your forgiveness, so Christ's love for you is the standard for your love for others. Loving others has never been an expectation required of the unloved. Loving others is impossible without first being loved by God.

Note the following about this kind of love expected of each saved person . . .

Love is giving to the point of sacrifice.

Sacrificial love for others fills heaven with a God pleasing fragrance.

This love is expected in marriages, toward enemies and in all relationships.

The limits you have established for giving of yourself to and for others have been established by your old man ways of thinking. Before Christ, you had to set limits to protect yourself, nurture your pet projects and assure your success. Now that you have been loved to the point of being set free by the death of Christ for you, you can rest in his love for you, his being for you and his promise to love you all the way through no matter what.

Gal.2:20

1John 4:7-21

Mark 10:45

Summary/Review

Foundational concepts to embrace in our renewed minds

- 1) Your view of God – you desire to imitate him.
- 2) Your view of self – you appreciate your identity.
- 3) Your view of life – you see life as meaningful.

Challenging behaviors to practice in our real lives.

- 1) Forgive, just like God does.
- 2) Love, just like Christ does.

Take Aways

1. Cry out to God in repentance for your lack of appreciation for his forgiveness and Christ's sacrificial love for you. Renew your devotion to God's word, prayer, accountability, and the Lord's Table. Build your schedule around your values rather than trying to fit your values into your schedule.
2. Ask for help with that issue of forgiveness and/or loving others sacrificially that you continue to struggle with and lose. You know who and what it is. God brought this person or this relationship to your mind three words into this morning's sermon and you can't stop thinking about it. Ask for help today from one of our Elders or someone you respect in the Lord.
3. Turn from your sin and ask God to save you by faith in Jesus Christ. You have asked enough questions, given enough reasons why you should wait and tried to resist the pull of truth on your heart . . . humble yourself now before God in saving faith and repentance.
4. Thank God for his kind response to your sin and Christ's costly, sacrificial love. Worship God with song, prayer and costly, sacrificial love for people in your life. Send up a sweet smelling sacrifice to God in this way.

Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 4:17-5:2 as a group.
2. What are some of the conformity to Christ gaps that exist in your life and have caused you significant concern? What are some of the most challenging issues you face to close the gap between your beliefs and your behavior? Encourage one another as group members share openly.
3. How has your thinking changed in the past few months regarding your view of God, self or your life? What are some of the most productive ways you have found that God renews your mind to appreciate

these new truths? What do you do to make yourself available for God to change your thinking?

4. Review the teaching regarding forgiving and loving like God/Christ. What real life challenges are you facing in these two areas of conformity to Christ? What about God's forgiveness and Christ's love is comforting and perspective changing to you?

5. Pray specifically for each other that God will renew our thinking as we seek to forgive and love others.