Walk in the Way of Love

Ephesians 4:17-5:20

Key Verse: 5:2 “…and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

There is no true morality without God. God sets moral values in the Scriptures and in our conscience. In the book “*the Case for Faith*”, Dr. William Craig said, *“If God does not exist, then objective moral values do not exist*.” Ravi Zachariah also said, “*The denial of an objective moral law, based on the compulsion to deny the existence of God, results ultimately in the denial of evil itself*.” In other words, God’s word, the Scriptures, teaches us life and death, good and evil, and light and darkness. Apostle Paul said in his second letter to Timothy, “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*.” (2 Ti 3:16)

Ephesians is known as the book of Christian ethics. In this letter to the saints in the Ephesian church Paul teaches them how to live as people of God and how to grow as mature Christians. In chapter 4:1-16 Paul urges them to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. (4:3) Paul asked them to be one in Christ, serving the Lord with one hope, one baptism, and one faith. (4:4) The Ephesian church consisted of Jewish believers and Greek speaking gentiles. There were many obstacles for them to become one, such as racial barriers, cultural differences, language gaps, and so on. Nevertheless, Paul urged them to become one in love in order to build up the body of Christ, which is the church. In UBF we also have diverse races, speak several languages, and experience different cultures because this church is an international campus ministry. Despite all these differences, we become one today because of Jesus Christ, who is the head of this church, and who died for our sins and made us one to be the people of God. More than these we enjoy diverse cultures and experiences while we are serving the Lord with one hope and goal: “Thy Kingdom Come.” Amen.

In today’s passage Paul teaches us how to grow as mature and influential Christians as people of God. May God teach us his words and give us deep understanding about them. Amen!

First, put on a new self (4:17-32) Paul urged the believers in the church, especially the gentile believers, to put off their old lifestyle and to put on new self in Christ. In fact, the gentiles had lived without having any moral value. They lived without sensitivity, but only with sensuality. (19) They lived following their fleshly and sensual desires. When they did not know God and did not have moral value, their thinking was futile (17), their understanding was darkened, and they were ignorant due to the hardening of their hearts. (18) Their life without God was indulged in every kind of impurity and greed. (19)

We live in an era of moral degradation. These days when people leave God out of their thoughts and life, they lose all sensitivity and give themselves over to sensuality. Paul mentioned this in Romans 1:21-32: “…*their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened…They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator---who is forever praised. Amen…Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error*.” Before I came to know Christ Jesus through Bible study, I thought that a premarital sexual relationship was obedience to instinctive human desire. So, I made mistakes which displeased God. There are many people who have lived immoral lives out of their ignorance and arrogance. In Tolstoy’s novel “*Resurrection*”, the prince Nekhlyudov fell in love with Masilova, a maid of his aunt. Their pure and naive love didn’t last long since Nekhlyudov joined the army. He met many comrades who had immoral relationships with women at their young age. The moral value of the prince was shaken. After discharging from the army, he visited his aunt’s house and raped Masilova. Then he justified himself saying, “I did as everyone did.” But his selfish behavior was not justified. He left her being pregnant. His action was not vindicated until he came to realize his complete ignorance and arrogance. Today many people blindly follow other’s godless lifestyle as if they share intellectual companionship.

Paul asked them to put off their godless lifestyle and put on the new self. Look at verses 20-24. “***That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 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***.” In these verses Paul said that fleshly desires which corrupt our heart and body are deceitful desires. Lust, greed, pride, and selfishness are all deceitful desires. These desires deceive us as if they give us true happiness and satisfaction, but finally they lead us to death and destruction. These deceitful desires have made us lost sensitivity and indulge in sensuality. Paul urged them to get rid of these deceitful desires by renewing their hearts and minds with the true righteousness and holiness of God.

How can we put off our old self in order to put on our new self? **First of all, we must renew our attitude toward God**. Paul said, “…*to be made new in the attitude of your minds*…” Having right attitude toward God determines our new lifestyle. Our attitude toward God should be love and respect. We trust in him and fear him. When we have fear of God, we live in righteousness and holiness according to his teaching. Therefore, we must change our attitude toward God and improve our relationship with him as first importance.

**Second, we must control our anger**. We must be self-controlled. Look at verses 26-27. “***In your anger do not sin.”; Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry., and do not give the devil a foothold***.” This verse does not mean that we must be completely emotionless. Even Jesus became angry and furious about the corruption of the Jewish leaders. We may be angry and furious, but we must be controlled. If we don’t control our anger, we provide the devil a foothold which destroys our relationships and breaks our unity. People often break relationships when they blow up. When they can’t control their anger, they become violent and exclusive. Before we become angry, we must pray. Those who pray receive wisdom from God who provides us with the way to go.

**Third, we must speak truthful and encouraging words**. Look at verse 25. “***Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body***.” In the ninth Commandment the Lord said, “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*” (Ex 20:16) We must speak truthfully to our neighbors because we are all one in Christ Jesus. When our finger hurts, our whole body becomes painful. Likewise, the body of Christ hurts when one or two becomes wrong. In verses 29 Paul taught the saints in the church how to speak truthfully as mature Christians. Look at verse 29. “***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”*** As we control our anger, so also we must control our tongue. Proverbs 18:21 says, “*The tongue has the power of life and death…*” This means that we can save others with our lips and words and kill them with the same mouth. James 3:2 says, “*We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*” What is unwholesome talk? Paul explained it in 5:4, ***“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving***…” All untruthful and unbelieving words are unwholesome words. The words which discourage others, or make them angry, or cause others to sin are also unwholesome words. Paul said, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths*…”

What are ‘wholesome words’? The word ‘wholesome’ means good, healthy, nutritious, and nourishing. Wholesome words are words which encourage others, lifts up their soul, and strengthen their faith. Paul explains its meaning well in verse 29, “…*but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*.” Before we say something, we must check our words first to see if it is helpful for others or not. We must filter our thoughts, desires, and select our words before we talk. If our words are not helpful for others or building them up, it is better for us to keep quiet. Paul did not mean that we must flatter others to please their ears. He meant that we must be prayerful and careful when we use our words and terms in our conversations.

Bible reading and teaching is one of the best ways to build up others. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, the word of God is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. The word of God itself has the power for life and wisdom. Those who frequently quote Bible verses in their conversation will be respected and praised. Amen!

**Fourth, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.** Look at verse 36. “***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption***.” When we live according to our fleshly desire, we live against the Holy Spirit. Paul said in Romans 8:6-8, “*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God*.” He also said in Galatians 5:16-17, “*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want*.”

What must we do in order to follow the Holy Spirit? What kinds of life must we live in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit? We must repent of our sins and follow the example of Jesus. Look at verses 31-32. “***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you***.” As long as we are filled with anger, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and all kinds of crooked thoughts, the Holy Spirit cannot abide in us. All these are evil spirits. The Holy Spirit cannot contend with the evil spirits. We must get rid of all these evil spirits and be filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22-23, kindness, gentleness, forbearance, goodness and faithfulness are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Those who bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit are mature Christians. They are true disciples of Jesus Christ.

God forgave our sins in Christ Jesus and through him. We were all objects of God’s wrath and punishment due to our sins. We were destined to die because of the price of our sins. But Christ paid the price of our sins by his blood on the cross, and we are redeemed. We become forgiven sinners only by God’s grace. Therefore, in Christ and through him as God forgave us, we must forgive each other. There is no sin without being forgiven by God. It is the matter of our attitude and our willingness to be reconciled between God and men and between men and men.

Second, walk in the way of love. (5:1-20) How much can we grow spiritually? What is our spiritual goal? We can grow up to the level of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the example and our spiritual model. Look at verses 1-2. “***Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God***.” We can walk in two ways of life; the way of love and the way of sin. Psalmist says, “*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners*…” (Ps 1:1) The blessed man is a happy man. The blessed man is the one who walks in the way of Jesus, the way of love. Jesus loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. We are truly blessed and happy when we walk in the way of love which Jesus walked. In the past we walked in the way of sinners with impurity, greed, idolatry, hatred, anger, and pride. But now we walk in the way of love which Jesus Christ did, with forgiveness, forbearance, faithfulness, kindness, humbleness, gentleness, and so on. If we don’t forgive, but hold grudges against our brothers and sisters, and if we hold bitterness and anger against our co-workers, we don’t walk in the way of love. Paul said, “*Follow God’s example.*” (“*Be imitators of God*.”)

In verses 3-20 Paul teaches us how to live as children of light. Among us there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. (3) In verse 5 he warns us of more serious consequences when we live according to our fleshly desire. “***For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person---such a person is an idolater---has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.***” (5) Paul also asked the saints not to be partners with those who are disobedient to God (7) and to live as children of light in the Lord. (8)

In conclusion, what did Paul encourage them to do as children of light? Look at verses 17-20. “***Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** “Amen. Who are the mature Christians in this verse? They are those who sing and make music from their hearts to the Lord and always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The mature Christians always trust, always believe, always become patient, and always wait. Above all, they always give thanks to God in all circumstances because they believe that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and come to him. (Ro 8:28) They sing hymns and psalms in all circumstances whether they are in the times of blessing or in the times of suffering. Dr. John Jun said to us during CME last year that he always sings hymns in a loud voice every morning. Then he feels that all evil spirits are gone and the Holy Spirit fills him instead. Let us walk in the way of love as Jesus Christ did. Let us sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord and give thanks to God for everything. Let us put off our old childish behaviors and put on the new self as mature Christians with integrity in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.