

Trinity 11, Sunday 11 Aug, 2024

Ephesians 4.25-5:2

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

27 and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

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

Rules for the New Life (Eph 4:25-5:2; 11 Aug, 2024)

May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

When was the last time you bought something new? I confess when I buy a new thing, I rarely read the instructions, instead jumping right in to see how it works. We may all be tempted to do that, but with new things, it is wise to pause, and consult the makers handbook.

In these lessons from Ephesians, Paul is writing from prison to a young church under pressure. These were his last words, spiritual truths (who they were in Christ) but also practical rules for success in the new Christian community. And last week Alison asked: *what is **our** gift to this new community?*.

In our verses today, Paul is saying to the Ephesians: *“you have this new life and new community, so here are some ground rules for it”*. In my Bible the subtitle is: *Rules for the New Life*; and like someone buying a new product, we will be wise to read and listen to them.

Paul gives the Ephesians at least 3 rules for this new life: *speaking the truth; forgiving each other; and imitating Christ*.

Do you want to understand your part in this new Christian community? Do you want to succeed in this new life?

If so, then St Paul says, *obey these rules*.

Paul's 1st rule for the new life is: *speak the truth.*

Our first verse today (v25) says: *'put away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another'*.

'Put away falsehood' is the idea of getting rid of the old and embracing the new – *it is a very conscious decision.* The image is of a change of clothes – not just putting away winter clothes for the summer - but taking a trip to the charity shop - to put them away for good.

We all struggle with this – it's one thing buying a new thing – it's quite another getting rid of the old one, which is why some of us can't close our drawers. Paul says **put away** falsehood, speak the truth, don't go back.

Note this is a community activity. Speak the truth to our neighbours, to each other *'for we are members of one another'*. And speaking the truth is only the beginning. Paul wants them to stop doing other things and start doing others.

In v27, *stop stealing and instead work hard - so that we can share with the needy.* In v29, *'Stop evil talk and instead use your words to build people up'*.

Our words and actions have the power to build up or to tear down – and Paul is clear about what the Ephesians need to do - to make a success of the new life.

So a 1st rule for this new life is to speak the truth.

A 2nd rule for the new life is to *forgive one another*

In v32, Paul says, *'be kind to one another, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you'*.

One of my favourite quotes is: *'be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle'*. It assumes that everyone is carrying some kind of burden, fighting some battle. It is a helpful quote, especially when people upset us.

And yet the power of Paul's second rule is not just in kindness but in forgiveness – *forgive one another*. He says, as Christ has forgiven you, learn to forgive others.

Does anyone have strained relationships today? Is anyone angry with their partner; or their mum or dad, or kids, or neighbours, or fellow church members? Paul says, try forgiveness. This is not easy, it can sometimes be easier to hold onto bitterness.

Again, Paul urges them to consciously ***put away*** bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, malice - and to ***forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you*** (v31-32).

This is where the Holy Spirit helps. It's not easy, but with the Holy Spirit's help and the prayers of friends, we **can**, slowly at first, get into the habit of forgiving each other. Putting bitterness down - picking forgiveness up.

So a 2nd rule for this new life is to forgive each other.

Paul's 3rd rule for this new life is to imitate Christ

5:1,2 says: *'be imitators of God, and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice'*.

Paul's 3rd rule for this new life is to imitate Christ. *How do we do that? As Christ did, by sacrificing himself for others.* The idea of *sacrifice* seems strange to many, yet we see examples all around us.

Not just the sacrifices of the athletes at this week's Olympics – but the sacrifice of a parent for a child; or a carer for a client. This week we saw community leaders and police-officers putting themselves *on the line* for our communities. Thanks to everyone for their sacrifice.

It simply means putting others first. A dying to our own wants and desires for the sake of others. This dying to self is what Christ did for us - and what we have all done in our baptisms - dying to self and rising to new life.

Have you ever met such people – whose sacrifice reminds you of Christ? Paul is saying, try to be like them, imitate Christ.

So the 3rd rule for this new life is to imitate Christ.

So in conclusion

Buying a new car? Joining a new club? Learning a new hobby? Why not understand the rules first – so that you can get the best out of them.

In the same way, St Paul gives the Ephesians 3 rules for their new Christian life.

They are to: *speak the truth; forgive each other; and imitate Christ.*

By doing these, Paul says, your new life in the Christian community will get off to a flying start.

And it's not just about stopping the bad stuff – things like lying, holding grudges or constantly looking after No1.

It's about starting the good stuff too - speaking the truth, forgiving those who have upset you, and learning to sacrifice like the most amazing person who ever lived – Jesus Christ.

If you do all these Paul says, you will not only secure a successful Christian community – you will, in time, be personally transformed into the likeness of Christ, which is actually what the Christian life and the Christian Church is all about.

Welcome to the rules for a New Life.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.