

Imitators of God (Eph. 4:25-5:2)

Today we will study from 4:25 to 5:2. 5:1-2 receive the content up to cp. 4 and connect it with the latter part of the letter. It is just like the summit of a mountain pass. So I decided to stop here.

Last time we studied that we have taken off the old self and put on the new self. So do not give the devil a foothold. Be imitators of God. That is today's theme.

1. Don't give the devil a foothold

We have taken off our old self, which is being corrupted (v.22). We were made new in the attitude of our minds (v.23). And we put on the new self (v.24). I wish there wouldn't be any trouble nor disturbance till we go to heaven. But the reality is not so easily. There is someone who disturb it. That is the devil.

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Do not give the devil a foothold.

“Give a foothold” is to “give a place.” That is to give the devil a place to work in our heart. It is to give the devil a platform to play an active part in our mind. And some of the examples are listed here.

1) v. 25. “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood.” And v. 29 as well. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.”

Lies, and unwholesome talk. The devil will get his foothold through our words.

2) v. 26. “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,”

Anger. The hostile feelings will become an opening for the devil to enter our heart.

3) v. 28. “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

Stealing. That is an action. Evil intention and action, selfish behavior will become a platform for the devil to play an active part.

Stealing is a shortcut to get what you want. Working is hard, it takes effort and time. By stealing and cheating, you can get what you want quick and easily. Shortcut is devil's favorite.

4) v. 31. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

Malice. When our thoughts and will lean toward the negative, the devil get a foothold to enter our heart.

Remember, Paul, here is speaking to people who have taken of the old self and put on the new self.

The devil, diabolos is the accuser. He will insistently accuse us. "You were like that. You used to be a person like that, right?" And he whispers in our ear, "You should do this. It will be more fun, if you do that." "Oh, that is because they are wrong. You can do it actually." "You will suffer a loss, if you are not following your feelings. You are always suppressing yourself." He appeals to our will.

Once we give him one place, and let him establish a firm position, then he will continue to attack us and make us compromise.

The devil will first take a foothold in our words and feelings, and then enter even into our thoughts and actions. Now, we are talking about Christians. We are talking about people who realized their sins, understood Jesus forgiveness, repented and turned back to God, people who jumped into Jesus' love. Normally, there is no one who does something terribly evil, all of a sudden, from the very beginning.

A little misunderstanding because of words, a little emotional entanglement. They are good opportunities for the devil to enter our hearts. Once the devil got a foothold, he will persistently try to stay there. His voice inside us will gradually become louder and bolder.

Let's look at one example in the bible.

When you think of Judas Iscariot, what comes to your mind? He betrayed Jesus. He betrayed him for 30 silver coins and handed him over to the chief priests.

He was one of the twelve disciples. Jesus had many disciples. And Judas was especially chosen from them. Not only that, he was entrusted to do a special work. Do you know what it was? He was an accountant. He was in charge of all the money (John 13:29). No one wouldn't entrust this kind of work to someone

who spend money without thinking, someone who has no ability to manage things, or someone who is very forgetful. That means he must be a trustworthy person at the beginning.

But he betrayed Jesus at the end. The Bible clearly says, “Satan entered into him” (John 13:27). Suddenly, did Satan start to control him? No. He gradually gave Satan a foothold.

John 12:6

“He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

It is unlikely that he was stealing money from the beginning. I think at first, he was doing his job faithfully. But, we are not sure what happened and when, but he started to cheat and take some money for himself. As he repeated this, once, and twice, gradually the fear of being found out disappeared and feelings of guilt also disappeared. In his heart, Satan was surely establishing a firm position and enlarging his territory. Finally, Satan ruled his heart to the extent that he would betray Jesus.

For us also, this is not somebody else’s affairs. When Satan finds a small foothold, he will enter from there.

In order *not* to give Satan a foothold, what can we do? To put on Christ. Every morning, as we wake up, we must choose to put on Christ. By the cross of Christ, my old self died with Christ and was buried with him. Every moment is a newly experienced opportunity of the power of salvation through Christ.

Sometimes people ask, “How far can I do but still not commit sin?” People who ask this kind of question usually feel this way. They don’t want to commit sin, and they don’t want to leave sin. Imagine there is a line here. And over there from this line is sin, and on this side from the line is OK. They want to remain on this side, but as close to sin as possible. His heart is actually inclined toward sin. He does not practice the sin yet, but in his mind he is in the sin.

What is the problem? His focus is wrong in the first place. His concern is how far he can come closer to sin and still not sin. Our concern should be what we can do in order to come even closer to Jesus, how we can spend even more quality time with Jesus. Repentance is the change of direction of our way of life. It’s not onetime event, rather it’s an attitude in new life. We will live facing toward

God.

We have taken off the old self, which is corrupting (v.22). We were made new in the attitude of our mind (v.23). We put on the new self (v.24). What does it mean practically? We put off falsehood (v.25). Instead, we speak what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (v.29). Get rid of malice (v.31). Instead, we must forgive one another, just as in Christ God forgave us (v.32).

There is no way we can do these by our own human effort. If we strain ourselves to do it, we will all the more be depressed. So better not try. This will be done by the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit

30-32

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (v.30). The Holy Spirit lives in us. The Holy Spirit is not power, but a person. He will grieve, when bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice spread inside our heart.

What does the Holy Spirit grieve over? Is it because we think of something bad? That may be true. Is it because we are swayed by bad feelings? That may be so.

Please look at each of them carefully. They don't stay with us personally, but it will affect our relationship with others. In Christ, we were joined together and became a holy temple (Eph. 2:21). In Christ, we, as church, were joined and held together, grew and built itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). Then, bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice entered there, in our relationship. The Holy Spirit cannot help but grieve.

Now let's think about each person. Nobody wants to have bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. Right? When do I have this kind of feeling? Those feelings occurred because I have experienced difficulties and sufferings

that caused these reactions.

The Holy Spirit who is in us grieves with us when we experience those pains. He grieves for the person who have hurt the one the Lord loves. He grieves for the person who were moved by emotions, not by the Holy Spirit. He grieves when we are worried alone. He grieves, saying “Why don’t you come to me?” “Why don’t you share your thoughts with? I am right here, beside you.” “I love you and I care for you so much. Why can’t you trust me and leave it all to me?”

3. Be imitators of God, the Father

5:1-2

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Receiving all that he has said so far, Paul says this: We are God’s dearly loved children. By no means we should give the devil a foothold. No way! We should not be at the mercy of the devil.

God cannot let it go when we tell a lie, speak bad words, swayed by our feelings, hurt others with anger, think of evil thoughts and do evil things. He cannot allow us to be locked up in that kind of way of life. He cannot leave us keep suffering, hurting and grieving in those situations. God’s heart almost burst with grief when he sees his children suffering like that. He can never leave the situation like that. Because we are God’s dearly loved children.

We are already deeply loved by God. We are made alive in His love. We are God’s children. So we already have his nature.

Being imitators of God. It doesn’t mean to see the role model and strive to copy it by our own effort. Rather, our lives reflect the nature and character of the Father. We were made in the image of God. We put on Jesus. The Holy Spirit not only lives in us, but He overflows through us (John 7:38). We remain in His love, and walk in His love. As we live in God’s love, as His children, His nature, love will be shown through us.

Jesus, God’s Son lived in Father’s love. And he practiced that love. Jesus

became a man like us. He could be tired after walking, he needed sleep at night, he got thirsty, hungry. If he was beaten, he got pain, if stabbed, he bled. He could cry because of sorrow. And he knew that he was loved by the Father and he practiced his father's love. He loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Peter 2:21-24

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Here is the tangible example of what it means to be imitators of God. We are called to do this. We were called together for this purpose.

When people hurled their insults at Jesus, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. There is no way we can be happy, when we are insulted. No way we can be comfortable when we are tormented. It's hard for us to remain silent and calm our emotions. We want to get even, or take revenge even double portions. Moreover, there was no fault in Jesus. There was no reason why he had to receive that treatment. What is more, he had power to retaliate. But he didn't.

"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats." Why? "Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." How can he do that?

He knew he was loved by Father. It was not just head knowledge. He experienced daily that he was loved by his father, in a real way. He knew how wide, long, high and deep the love of his father. So he could trust the father and entrust himself to Him.

Now we put on this Jesus (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27). We put on him in words and in emotion. God clothes us with Him. We are clothed with him in deeds and in thoughts. We let him live through us.

It says here Christ died on the cross, "so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." It is not that we strive to stop sinning by our own strong

will. My sinful self was crucified and buried with Christ. And I was made new, born again as one who lives for God's righteousness. Righteousness simply means that you have right relationship with God, so then you have right relationship with others and with yourself.

Christ bore all our sins in his body. Not only that, "by his wounds you have been healed."

If we are insulted, spoken ill of, we get heart broken. If we are tormented, we get hurt. If we leave that, a bitter root will grow in our heart. Without realizing, the root will grow deeper and wider. It will spread and firmly rooted. It will grow gradually and bear different fruits like envy, resentment, grudges, and hatred. But we often don't understand why those kind of fruits come out. And we cannot do anything by ourselves.

We can ask the Holy Spirit to show that any part of our heart is damaged. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

Jesus received our pain and wounds on the cross. And, when we are clothed with this Jesus, our wounded heart will receive healing. Jesus gives us healing. He will remove the bitter root. He will recover us. And it takes a process for healing and recovery.

Once the bitter root grows and take root, it's really hard to get rid of it. It's good to bring it before God, leave it to Him and surrender ourselves into the Lord's hands, when we realize it. Otherwise the root will go deeper, the fruits will come out more.

4. Live in the love of Christ

John 15:9

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

We have been loved by the unconditional love of Christ, which was shown on the cross. It makes us imitators of Christ. As Christ first loved us, so his love will make us imitators of God and gives us strength to walk in his love.

I was dead in my sins in the first place. I followed the way of the world,

the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient. I lived in my sinful desires and were by nature objects of wrath.

But God loved me, who was like that. God loved me with his great love, his tremendous love.

I was made alive in God's great love. I don't have to do anything to earn his love. In fact, there is nothing I can do. And it is too great to understand, but we've received God's infinite love. We don't have to compare ourselves with others. There is nothing for us to boast about, or be jealous about.

Putting on Christ. Being entirely wrapped up in the love of Christ. Jesus said, "Remain in Me. I will also remain in you. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:4-5). And, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

When our emotions are swayed by the situation, we can choose to put on Christ. When our thoughts are confused by sins and Satan, we can choose to remain in Christ's love. And we can follow the Holy Spirit who works in us. It's not convincing ourselves to do something we don't like to do, by our will power. It is to entrust myself to Jesus who loves me literally at the risk of his life. It is the response of my love to Jesus' love. Then, the Holy Spirit bear fruit in me.

By the cross of Christ, we became God's children. We are imitators of God, made in the image of God. So we show His nature and His love. Jesus is the reason why we can live like that. The Holy Spirit is the assurance why we can live like that. We remain in him, and trust in him daily, moment by moment. We will not give the devil a foothold in words, in emotions, and in thoughts. We will put on Christ. Being entirely wrapped up in the love of Christ. As imitators of God, let us walk in His love and grace, as children redeemed by Jesus' cross.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

1) The examples of where the devil may get his foothold in our mind are listed in vv. 25-31. Which one is your weak point? How will you protect it?

2) "You are God's child, and were created in His image. You are already deeply loved by God, and made alive in His love." What does it mean to you? How does

this truth encourage you? What is your response?

3) Imagine that you are entirely covered in the love of Christ, and stay there in quietness. What thought comes into your mind? How does this truth encourage you? What is your response?

4) Read Ps. 139:23-24. You may ask the Holy Spirit to show you if any part of your heart is broken, and invite the Holy Spirit for healing and restoration. Imagine that Jesus received your pain and wounds on the cross, and that he is removing the bitter root from your mind.