

God's Love Changes Our Lifestyle
Ephesians 4:17-5:19

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July 7, 2019

Go ahead and open your Bibles to **Ephesians 4:17**. My name is Emerson and I am one of the pastors on staff here at The Creek.

We are in a series called, "God's Love Changes Everything." (Give examples...)

Today, we are potentially wading into some tumultuous waters because Dan has *ever so graciously* blessed me with the opportunity to talk about how **God's love changes our lifestyle**. Nothing like getting the opportunity to talk to people about how they ought to live their lives.

I think it's important to be asking questions like, "What is the foundation for how we live our lives? What determines *how* we live? What is the basis for our ethics?"

When it comes to how we parent our kids, how we treat and love our spouse, how we treat the poor and marginalized, how we react to those who wrong us, how we spend our money, how we spend our time, what we do with our sexuality, how we work, how we engage with people different from us, and how we love our neighbor...what is it that we use as the basis for our lifestyle?

There are many people who have tried to answer those questions throughout history. I want to introduce you to three of them.

1. **Aristotle**. Aristotle is one of the most popular philosophers in history and his ethical teaching still resounds today. His answer to the question of what the foundation of our lifestyle should be rested on what he called the 'Golden Mean' of all things. Meaning that in any lifestyle choice we find the middle ground between complete excess and utter restraint. The problem with this is that this is a very black and white way to look at life and if my short 24 years of living has taught me anything, it's that life can be very grey.
2. **Jeremy Bentham**. Bentham is another well-known philosopher whose ethical teaching is perhaps functionally more influential in our day and age than Aristotle's. Bentham was the father of Utilitarianism which says that, in any and every circumstance, we should live our lives based off of whatever produces "the greatest good for the greatest number of people." That doesn't sound too bad, but the problem with this is that sometimes "the greatest good for the greatest number of people" has the potential to harmfully infringe on people's liberties.
3. **Woody Allen**. This will give you an idea of his ethical foundation:

In 1993, Walter Isaacson, the famed biographer of Steve Jobs and Ben Franklin, and long-time journalist for Time Magazine, interviewed a guy named Woody Allen (actor, director, comedian) about his infamous affair with Soon-Yi Previn.

For those who don't know the story, Allen was in a long-time relationship with Mia Farrow, a model and actress who had adopted Soon-Yi as a little girl from South Korea. Mia adopted several other children as well and she and Woody Allen had a biological child of their own. Years go by – 15 or so – and Mia finds photos of her eldest adopted daughter, in the nude, in Woody's briefcase or something. It comes out that they're

having sexual relations together. Woody is 56. Soon-Yi is 21. Allen then goes on to date her in public for a number of years and then eventually they marry in '97.

You can read Isaacson's interview online...it's just fascinating. Isaacson is just persistent in his questioning of Allen. He does it kindly, but he digs deep! It's a fascinating study of the human condition because Allen just time after time will not admit that he did anything wrong. He says, "And at the very end of the interview, Allen gives us the iconic line...the reasoning for why he did what he did. His justification? Quote: ***'The heart wants what it wants. There's no logic to those things. You meet someone and you fall in love and that's that.'***"

So, when it comes to lifestyle, how do we go about answering the question, how then shall we live? Do we follow after Aristotle? Jeremy Bentham? Woody Allen?

What do we do? Well, I think that Paul has a different ethical foundation in mind in our passage today. Rather than basing how we live our lives on the ideologies of folks like Aristotle, Bentham, or Woody Allen...what if it was Jesus? Paul says in Eph. 5:1 to the Christians in Ephesus, **"1 Be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**

Or, in other words, I'd contend that at the heart of the New Testament's ethical teaching is the exhortation that **Our lifestyle should be styled after Jesus.** Paul is saying that, as Christians, our goal is to become like Jesus and do what Jesus did. And he gives us three theological truths right off the bat in **4:17ff** that form the basis for ***why our lifestyle should be styled after Jesus.***

1. God's past work.

"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." Notice Paul's first words. **"So I tell you this..."** Basically with a phrase like that in a text like this, Paul is saying "Ok, now in light of everything that I've been telling you...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do."

When I was a kid, my dad often invited me to help in various projects. Things like splitting wood for our wood-burning furnace, landscaping projects, and even construction. All things I ever-so-obediently obliged to help in. Now, my dad was a good teacher; I was just a horrid learner. I just didn't care one bit about splitting and stacking wood, mulching our front flower beds, or helping build grandma's garage home. My dad had this thing where when in the midst of one of these projects and when we'd complete a task, he would say, "OK, NOW." And he did it all the time. This was his signal that that step 1 in the project had been completed, and because of that, step 2 can now commence.

That's what Paul does here with his "So I tell you this..." And because of this, for us to understand the reasoning for why he says what he says in this verse and following, we need to understand what he is saying in chapters 1-3 that *lead up to this point*. In these early chapters, Paul is letting them know that they are children of God, who are part of the family of God, because of the finished work of the Son of God, through the sealing of the Spirit of God.

It's why Paul writes all throughout chapter 1-3 things like...

- **Ephesians 1:4** = God "chose you before the foundation of the world..."
- **Ephesians 1:7** = You "have redemption through his blood"
- **Ephesians 2:1-5** = You were "dead in your trespasses and sins...BUT GOD...made us alive together with Christ..."
- **Ephesians 3:6** = "You are heirs...partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Our ethics derive in part out of gratitude and appreciation for what God has done for us – a theme iterated *throughout* the Scriptures. Think with me about the Israelites' departure out of Egypt. Which came first – God saving the Israelites from bondage in Egypt or all his laws??? His saving work came first!

As Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright says, "The sequence of events in the biblical story is very important. God did not reveal his law to Moses on Mount Sinai when he first met him there at the burning bush. He did not then send him down to Egypt with the message 'This is God's law, and if you keep it fully from now on, God will rescue you out of this slavery.' Israel was not told they could deserve or hasten their own deliverance by keeping the law. No, God acted *first*. God first redeemed them out of their bondage, and then made his covenant with them, a covenant in which their side was to keep God's law, as their response of grateful obedience to their saving God."

The same is true for us as we think about *why* our lifestyle should be styled after Jesus. At the heart of our faith is a God who humbled himself, died a gruesome death, and then rose again bringing us into his family! Shaping our lives to look like Jesus' is one part obedience and a million parts gratitude! And it's with God's past work in mind that Paul moves from having reminded the Ephesians of God's saving work in the *past* to moving to a *present* reality that affects why their **lifestyle should be styled after Jesus**.

2. Our present reality.

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. Paul begins this part of his letter to the Ephesians *insisting*, not just of his own concern, but of a concern that derives from the Lord himself, that they must no longer walk as Gentiles do. Which is interesting...because...he is primarily talking to people who for all intents and purposes consider themselves to *be Gentiles*. But Paul wants to make it clear that God's work in the past *changes* their present reality. These folks might have been born as Gentiles, but their *being Gentile* does not determine their primary identity anymore. Jesus does that. These are Jesus people Paul is writing to!

Notice Paul's words in verses 18ff: **18 They (Gentiles) 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** (It's like spelunking in a cave. You intentionally enter and as you descend it gets colder and colder and darker and darker until you are completely separated from the light and life above). **19 Having lost all sensitivity** (word for "become callous" – I work out...and I have developed callouses on my hands from holding the barbells and whatnot. That's what happens, but morally/ethically, for those who continue to walk apart from the ways that God has

established. We become calloused to His ways making it harder and harder to walk in them again), **they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed** (literally these people have “betrayed” their true self for the false self and have given in to whatever brings them satisfaction or pleasure. They do whatever makes them happy.)

Which is why Paul is so adamant in the verses that follow! Look at what he says:

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned! (Christianity is not just a set of beliefs to hold cognitively. Christianity is a *way of life*. “Christian” literally means “follower of Jesus.”) **21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 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 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** (Desires aren’t bad in and of themselves. As humans we are filled with desires. Example: As I said earlier, I’ve been upping my game at the gym. I desire health. But when I walk through the mall, I *also desire* Auntie Anne’s cinnamon sugar pretzel bites! I have both of these desires, but I’d argue that only one is deceitful. Now, that’s obviously not very emotionally loaded...or maybe it is!)

As John Mark Comer says, “There are far more serious desires that war within us. “I want to stay faithful to my spouse...and I want a divorce. I want to fight for women’s rights...and I want to objectify women by lusting after them when they walk past me on the street. I want to be a generous person...and I want to go shopping. I want to follow Jesus...and I want to do whatever the heck I want. I want a life of prayer...and I want to stay up late watching Netflix and be on my phone.”

It is when we give in to the desires that are bad for us that, as we mentioned earlier, we “betray” the *real* part of ourselves. You end up betraying the “*you*” that God has created. Paul is reworking their present identity. He is reminding them of their present reality – that they are no longer Gentiles; they are followers of Jesus.

Think about what it means for Anthony Davis now that he has been traded from the New Orleans Pelicans to the Los Angeles Lakers. He was bought with a price. And part of his job now is to live in that reality. It may seem obvious, but Anthony can no longer wear Pelicans uniforms, no longer play his home games at Smoothie King arena, no longer abide by Pelican team rules, no longer talk specific game plan details with old teammates, and no longer listen to the coaching of the Pelicans coaching staff. And he’s okay with this! Because for him, he’s happy to be out of New Orleans. He’s happy to be a Laker and so he’s happy to follow what being a Laker entails. His new, present reality affects every aspect of his life.

In the same way, we too, have been transferred from one team onto another since we have been redeemed through Christ’s blood (Eph. 1:7) and been adopted as sons and daughters into His family (Eph. 1:5).

Paul is saying that their *fundamental* identity is not based on any worldly category – Gentile or otherwise. It'd be like him saying to us, "Your lifestyle choices are no longer based on your ethnicity, your gender, your color, how you grew up, your political affiliation, etc..." Paul is saying that your North Star is Jesus himself!

So, **Our lifestyle should be styled after Jesus** because of God's past work and because of our present reality, but the third reason why is because of God's future plan.

3. God's future plan.

Look back at what Paul says in verse 24. **24 Put on** (i.e. "clothe yourself") **the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** [Greek = "Anthropos" = *human* or *humanity*; Eph. 1-3 is about God creating a *new humanity*. Why? Because God's plan is that Heaven would invade the Earth (Jesus prays, "Your kingdom come, your will be done" – through a community, through a new way of being human). **Eph.1:7-10 = 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**

Inevitably, a new heaven and new earth will be had. God is in the business of restoring all things. The end of the bible testifies to this reality when John the Revelator sees a New Heaven and a New Earth. Unlike a musician's song idea that can be scrapped or a business deal that could potentially fall through, God's future of uniting all things in Heaven and on Earth is set in stone. Our job is to live as a people who both proclaim and manifest God's future in this present world, as an alternative, as something completely new! We are to be a people bringing a little slice of Heaven to Earth until this plan is fully realized.

Skye Jethani, in his book *Futureville*, illustrates what the Christian lifestyle in the midst of an evil world might look like when he writes about the Cellist of Sarajevo. He writes about what it might look like to bring a little Heaven to Earth. He says,

On May 28, 1992, the principal cellist in the Sarajevo opera dressed in his formal black tails and sat down on a fire scorched chair in a bomb crater to play Albinoni's *Adagio in G Minor*. The site was outside a bakery in Smajlovic's neighborhood where twenty-two people waiting in line for bread had been killed the previous day. During the siege of Sarajevo from 1992 to 1995, more than ten thousand people were killed. The citizens lived in constant fear of shelling and snipers while struggling each day to find food and water. Smajlovic lived near one of the few working bakeries where a long line of people had gathered when a shell exploded. He rushed to the scene and was overcome with grief at the carnage. For the next twenty-two days, one for each victim of the bombing, he decided to challenge the ugliness of war with his only weapon – beauty.

Known as the "Cellist of Sarajevo," Smajlovic not only performed outside the bakery but continued to unleash the beauty of his music in graveyards, at funerals, in the rubble of

buildings, and in the sniper-infested streets. “I never stopped playing music throughout the siege,” he said. “My weapon was my cello.” Although completely vulnerable, Smajlovic was never shot. It was as if the beauty of his presence repelled the violence of the war. His music created an oasis amid the horror. It offered hope to the people of Sarajevo and a vision of beauty to the soldiers who were destroying the city.

As Jesus followers, we are to live as people where God’s past work, our present reality, and God’s future all align.

And how do things change for us? Well, that’s what **4:25ff** is all about. Paul shotguns several different examples of what changes when our *lifestyle is styled after Jesus* and we begin to live in light of God’s past work, our present reality, and God’s future plan...

When our lifestyle is styled after Jesus...**just listen** to these verses and ask yourself where the Spirit might be challenging you...

1. It changes **how we treat others** (vs. 25, 32) – we are honest, yet gentle
 - **“25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”**
 - **“32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”**
2. It changes the **feelings** we harbor (vs. 26, 31) – we pursue joy, peace, and kindness
 - **“26 In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”**
 - **“31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”**
3. It changes our **perceived enemy** (vs. 27) – we fight evil and Satan, not people
 - **“27 and do not give the devil a foothold.”**
4. It changes our **work** (vs. 28) – we work so we can be generous
 - **“28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”**
5. It changes our **speech** (vs. 29, 5:4) – we build up, we don’t tear down
 - **“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.”**
 - **“4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”**
6. It changes our **desires** (5:3; 5:5) – we pursue purity of heart - sexual, financial, etc.
 - **“3 But among you 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.”**
 - **“5 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.”**
7. It changes how we make **decisions** (5:10) – we strive for God’s will, not our own
 - **“10 and find out what pleases the Lord.”**
8. It changes how we use our **time** (5:16) – Average person spends 2hrs a day on social media. In 365 days, that’s 730hrs. That approx. 30 days a year people spend watching other people live life instead of living it themselves – we make the most of our time

- **“16 make the most of every opportunity...”**
9. It changes how we look at **food and drink** (5:18) – we fill ourselves with the Spirit instead of only ever consuming sensual experiences to give us meaning...
 - **“18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...”**
 10. It changes how we **worship** (5:19) – we worship whole-heartedly!
 - **“19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.”**

How do we do this? How do we style our lives after Jesus? Let’s look back at **Eph. 5:1...**

1. **We spend time with Jesus** – it says, “Be imitators of God” – how do you imitate someone if you never are with them? Through practices like prayer, Bible study, silence, and solitude we open ourselves to be challenged, changed, and encouraged by the Spirit of Jesus...
2. **We spend time with Jesus people** – it says, “as beloved children” – notice the plurality in this verse...not “child”, but “children” – it is through encouragement, loving relationships, accountability, and fellowship we help each other grow into the kind of people God wants us to become.
3. **We do what Jesus did** – it says, “walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” We open ourselves to those far from God. We speak truth, extend grace, practice hospitality, pray, pursue justice, seek peace, make disciples, serve, forgive, humble ourselves, share our things, and we are generous.

This is our purpose as God’s new humanity – to style our lives after the lifestyle of Jesus so that Heaven is made manifest in the here and now, so that God might be glorified and so that the world might know a beauty so tangible it beckons them to Someone greater than themselves.

As author Madeleine L’Engle writes, **“We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.”**

Or as missionary Lesslie Newbigin stated, **“Christians are to live in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the answer.”**

Or as Peter said in **1 Peter 2:12** (paraphrase), **“Live such beautiful lives among nonbelievers so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God when he returns.”**

Porch/Communion/Offering:

In Christ Jesus, we see the God-man who not only gave us an exemplary life, but who also lived the life that we never could...culminating in his death, burial, and resurrection.

As one pastor says, “Jesus as only an example will *crush* you; you will never be able to live up to it. But Jesus as the Lamb will save you.” Around the room are double-stacked cups...