Wednesday Class Notes

Walking in Love

Ephesians 4:29-5:2 · English Standard Version

Ephesians 4:29-5:2 is part of a larger argument. God has saved a people and formed them into a community. Chapters 1 and 2 describe that salvation. The long opening sentence of the letter (1:3-14) lists the gifts God has given: blessing, adoption, redemption, and forgiveness. Chapters 2 and 3 then show that the people God has saved are made into one family, one nation, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jews and Gentiles, who once could not live together, are now one people. The wall that divided them has been taken down. Because the church is God's temple, the standards that govern it are not loose. The old temple had strict rules about who could enter, when, and how a person had to behave. Breaking those rules brought severe consequences. The same principle applies now. God requires particular attitudes, words, and actions from the people who belong to this community. This short section names three of those requirements: build one another up with words, love one another with actions, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit. The requirements are strict because the community is the place where God lives. Ordinary speech and ordinary relationships matter to him.

Ephesians 4:29-5:2

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 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."

Edifying by Words

Words show what is in the heart. What is not inside does not come out of the mouth. Saying "I didn't mean that" or "I don't know where that came from" does not change the fact. If it is not in the heart, it does not leave the mouth. Words also affect other people. They can build someone up or tear someone down. They can give grace or withhold it. That is why the command is absolute. No corrupting talk is allowed. The word translated "corrupting" is the same word used for rotten food. No one keeps rotten food in the mouth. The same rejection is required of rotten speech. There are no exceptions for a hard day or a difficult person. The positive command is just as clear. Speak only what builds others up, what fits the moment, so that it gives grace to the one who hears. Building up is the opposite of tearing down. Timing matters. A word that helps in one moment may hurt in

another. What the moment needs decides what should be said. The goal is not merely to avoid harm. The goal is speech that actually helps the person who hears it. In God's temple, ordinary conversation is part of how the people honor him.

Ephesians 4:29
"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Verse 30 looks at first as if it does not belong. It does belong. The community is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Speech that tears people down and attitudes that hurt them grieve the Spirit who lives there. The Spirit marked the believers as God's own for the day of redemption. That mark is a sign of ownership and a promise of what is still to come. To grieve him is to treat his presence lightly, as if God did not care about ordinary speech and ordinary relationships. The command is not an aside. It shows why the words and actions that follow matter. The same Spirit who marked the people as God's own is the Spirit who is grieved when the people wound one another.

Ephesians 4:30
"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Put Away and Put On

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice are to be put away. These are not small problems. They work against the community God has formed. Bitterness holds a grudge. Wrath and anger break out. Clamor is loud fighting. Slander attacks a person's name. Malice wishes harm. None of these belong in the temple. In their place the text commands kindness, a tender heart, and forgiveness. The standard is not simply that people put up with one another. The standard is the forgiveness God has already given in Christ. Because God in Christ has forgiven, the members of the community are to forgive one another. The forgiveness they have received is the measure of the forgiveness they are to give. The same people who have been made into one family are now told to treat one another as family. Old divisions, whether between Jew and Gentile or any other division that still tempts the church, do not create a different standard for speech or for forgiveness.

Imitators Who Walk in Love

The section ends with the main command. Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love. The pattern is Christ's own giving of himself. He loved and gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The words that build others up, the refusal to grieve the Spirit, and the putting away of bitterness are all part of that walk. Love is not an extra command added to the others. Love is the way the other commands are carried out.

Ephesians 5:1-2

"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."

Walking in love is not an idea. It shows up in the words that leave the mouth, in the refusal to hold on to bitterness, and in the decision to forgive as one has been forgiven. It shows up in the recognition that the person across the room is a fellow member of the temple, marked by the same Spirit for the same day of redemption. The fragrance of Christ's offering is not only something to admire. It is the pattern for ordinary life in the community.

Concluding Thoughts

The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. That fact shapes speech, attitude, and action. Corrupting talk is ruled out because the temple is holy and because words show what is in the heart and affect other people. The Spirit who marked the people for redemption is not to be grieved by careless treatment of one another. Bitterness and the attitudes that go with it are put away so that kindness and forgiveness can take their place, following the pattern of God's own forgiveness in Christ. The whole section is summed up in the call to imitate God by walking in love, after the example of Christ who gave himself as a fragrant offering. The requirements are strict because the community is the place where God lives. What is required is not only the avoidance of harm. What is required is speech that builds others up, attitudes that put away malice, and a walk that follows the self-giving love of Christ.