# EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

Over the last few weeks, Tracy Eide and Donna Donnelly have taught about unity in the body of Christ, maturity and the renewing of a person's inner life. If you missed either of those talks, please do go back and listen. In today's passage, Ephesians 4:25-5:2, Paul gives even more specific examples of these principals. Tim Keller calls these verses case studies. I describe them like being in the trenches of what living life should look like as a follower of Christ.

As in previous chapters, today's passage opens and ends with the word therefore. Obviously, this is a transitional word. It indicates what is to follow is closely connected to what has been previously said. The verses in between follow a pattern of a negative admonition followed by a corresponding positive command. As Donna described it last week, this is the putting off and putting on.

At first glance, these verses read like a set of moral rules. But these verses are more than that. They describe how Christ heals a people so they can function together in love.

I realize that many of you have gotten into the Pickleball craze. And I don't mean to scare you with one more story about a Pickleball injury, but I'm going to scare you with one more story about a Pickleball injury. About this time last year, I was headed to the net to hit a volley, planted my right leg and leaned to the right. What seemed like an innocent move completely ruptured my Right Anterior Cruciate Ligament, better known as the ACL. For anyone who knows about sports injuries, this is bad. My leg immediately was unable to support my body and down I went.

I had major surgery scheduled a few weeks later to replace my torn ligament with a new cadaver ligament. For the past year, my life became about healing my knee. My knee had to learn to bend and flex, my muscles had to be strengthened again, and my brain had to learn to communicate with the muscles and ligament to learn to walk again with good balance.

I am going to use this analogy of my healing and recovery throughout my talk as a metaphor to illustrate how we are to live this new life in Jesus Christ.

There are three overarching themes in this passage.

First, Transformation is replacement. My ACL was broken. It could not be repaired. It had to replaced. That replacement put a whole new ligament inside me. And it took a surgeon to do it. When we accepted Jesus as our Savior, our old heart died and was replaced with a new one. Jesus was the surgeon.

Second, Holiness is communal as well as individual. Romans 12:5, "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another". Our verses today instruct us to protect the unity of the body of Christ.

Third, Love is the goal and Christ is the model. The aim as summarized in Ephesians, Chapter 5:1-2, is a community that reflects the self-giving love of Christ.

Vs. 25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." This verse is based on the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Zechariah 8:16, "Speak the truth to one another". Here is an example of transformation as a replacement. In order to be a truth teller, you have to put away falsehood. What is falsehood you might ask? It is more than just not telling lies. It can a be spin on a story to suit your purposes. It can be telling part of the truth, instead the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It can be deceiving, exaggerating, concealing, and manipulating. A body cannot heal when its signals are false. When I had a new ligament put in my knee, I actually had to retrain my brain to listen to the signals from my new ligament to walk and balance correctly. If the brain receives inaccurate information, it cannot protect the injured part of the body. In the same way, the church cannot heal and grow in Christian community when falsehood is present because as the second half of verse 25 states, "for we are members of one another". God is a God of truth. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life". First, it is living a life of honesty with God. It is believing all the things he says about who we are in Christ…loved, forgiven, saved by grace and not believing the lies from Satan. Secondly, it is living a life of honesty with yourself through repentance. Tim Keller talked about this in one of his sermons. He describes it as Gospel humility. He says it is not kicking yourself or downing yourself, but kissing yourself goodbye. He calls it a delicious farewell. We don't need to be puffed up when we do well or devastated when we fail. Can you receive a hard truth from someone else? If it is true and you can't, you are not living the gospel. Thirdly, it is living a life of honesty with each other. Are you the same person with one person as you are with another? Consistency, sincerity, and integrity in relationships are the mark of

a new person. Tim Keller quoted Alexander Pope as saying, “An honest man or woman is the greatest work of God”.

Verse 26 and 27…” Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” Paul directly quotes this from Psalm 4:4, “Be angry and do not sin”. Anger is a characteristic of a holy God. And we are made in the image of God. Paul does not command us to never feel anger. Anger itself is not sin. There are many reasons for us to have the righteous anger of God. Things like injustice, cruelty, and abuse. My analogy to my recovery is this. After my surgery to implant the new ligament, they wanted me to begin bending and flexing immediately so that I would have full range of motion. If I simply sat there and did no exercises, tissue scarring would have developed in my knee. If left untreated I would have had pain as a result of the scarring. Pain in recovery from surgery is not always the enemy. Just like anger itself is not the enemy. Paul does not forbid anger. He forbids the sinful expression of it. So, what are the symptoms of unrighteous anger in our sinful hearts? James 1:19-20, “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God”. When anger becomes a desire to defend our egos, to defend our pride, to defend our reputation, to defend our agenda, anger becomes unrighteous anger. It is like nuclear energy. It is a wonderful thing if harnessed just right. But, like nuclear energy, anger can be very destructive. How easily our anger can be used to attack people instead defending God and His word, his truth and his justice. Anger unexpressed in the proper way would turn into resentment, bitterness and unhealthy ways of expressing anger, as we will read shortly in verses 31-32.

Hence, the warning to not let the sun go down on your anger. Sunset was regarded as a time limit for a range of activities. For instance, paying a poor man his wages before the sun went down. So rather than taking this literally, this was an expression to not let anger fester over time. My knee left untreated, would result in swelling, stiffness and inflammation. I had to begin movement as promptly as possible to prevent the scarring that might have inhibited my healing. Anger should be dealt with quickly to minimize the chances that the devil would take advantage. 1 Peter 5:8-9, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour. Resist him, stand firm in your faith. James 4:7, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Verse 28, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." God's 8th commandment to Moses for the people is found in Exodus 20:15, "Do not steal". Peter O'Brien in his commentary points out that day laborers or skilled tradesmen whose work was seasonal are probably in view. When men were out of work there was no welfare system to assist them and many would steal in order to support themselves and their families. They had to learn that this was not God's way. As new creatures in Christ, this is the putting off. Stealing had to be replaced with hard work. Why? So that we can share with those in need. Acts 20:35, "By working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of our Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Apart from stealing a few Snickers bars from behind the cash register when I was 16 and apart from taking a few Snickers bars from my kids Halloween candy without their permission, I wouldn't consider myself a thief. And I'm pretty sure you wouldn't consider yourself a thief either. So how can this apply to us today? There are many ways that we can "rob" others without realizing it. How about stealing someone's time by consistently showing up late or monopolizing a conversation. Stealing someone's idea and taking the credit. Stealing by dishonesty, like misrepresenting yourself to get something you want. Stealing emotionally, by taking someone's kindness for granted and not reciprocating when that person is in need.

Back to my knee analogy, my recovering knee is not rehabilitated so that it can take from the rest of my body. It is rehabilitated so that it can contribute strength and support to bear my weight and thereby serve my whole body. The former thief is not told to merely stop taking. He is told to work so that he has something to give. Work and generosity strengthen the body of Christ. So, what has God placed in my hands to share? We can have a positive impact on others in many different ways through giving not only of money, but time, attention, skills, hospitality and practical help. In my online zoom group, many of us have lamented that our bodies are aging and we are unable to do the kinds of things physically we used to do. But we are encouraging each other that often this age and stage allow us to use the gift of using our hands metaphorically in prayer in other people's lives to bless them. Ask God what He has placed in your hands to share.

Verse 29 and 30, "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."

Again, Paul puts forth a negative admonition followed by a positive command. Paul turns from our hands to our mouths, out of which comes our speech. Tim Keller asks this question in one of his sermons, "What makes us different than any other form of life? It is our speech." He calls language "a divine institution." It is a power and wonder of God. Why is it so powerful? Because it makes us like God. We have a God who speaks to us in the Bible. We have a personal God to whom we talk to in prayer. It is no wonder that this is such a big deal. Words matter. Words reveal what is in our hearts. In James 3:4 it talks about the tongue being like the rudder of a ship. It is small but powerful to steer the whole ship. Proverbs 18:21, says "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Unwholesome talk comes from the word sapros, a word used to describe rotten trees and rotten fruit. When applied to speech it means dishonest, unkind, vulgar, slander, contemptuous talk and abusive language. Paul follows with the positive command. If we are truly a new creation in Christ, instead of using our words to be harmful, we will use our words to help, encourage, comfort and guide. Proverbs 16:24, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." Back to my knee analogy…Physical Therapy exercises often involve small, repeated movements. They may look unimpressive, but repetition rebuilds strength. So do words. It is not only about what we say and how we say it, but what you don't say when you should! One truthful apology, one timely encouragement, one refusal to pass along a rumor, one gracious response under pressure. Who can remember a kind or thoughtful word given to you by someone a long time ago and you still remember it to this day? I know I can. These are all small exercises in love that strengthen the body of Christ. Before speaking, maybe you can ask yourself a few questions. Is it kind? Is it true? Will it build others up? Are my words fitted to the need? Am I speaking in love? Am I listening to understand or simply waiting for my turn to speak? Am I correcting others to help them or to make myself feel superior? Am I responding thoughtfully or reacting emotionally? Will I be proud of these words tomorrow?

A second aspect of this positive command is to not grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul is reminding us of the promises that Maureen Joos taught us in Chapter 1, namely that we were sealed for the day of redemption. That sealing took place at the beginning of our Christian life, when we became saved. The Holy Spirit himself, came to live within us. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Anything impure or unholy is incompatible with his nature. Therefore, he is hurt by sin, discord, and falsehood. Bryon Chapel does a

wonderful job in his commentary. He says, “The same Spirit who convicts my heart of sin, generates in me love for God, gives me new birth, provides my apprehension of the beauty of grace in the world, and seals my redemption until the coming of the Lord- this same Spirit who loves me so intimately and perfectly, I can cause to grieve.” From the time of our sealing by the Holy Spirit to the day of Christ’s return, we are to grow in Christ likeness so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit in us.

Verse 31-32, “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.” Once again, Paul gives a negative admonition followed by a positive command. Paul returns to the previous topic of unrighteous anger, but this is unrighteous anger on steroids. Let’s briefly define each one. Bitterness is a deep emotional feeling of resentment. Wrath is extreme anger that often includes a strong desire to punish someone or exact revenge. Clamor or brawling describes someone who gets excited, raises their voice in a quarrel and starts shouting. Slander is speaking evil of others, especially behind their backs and so undermining and even destroying their reputation. Finally, malice is an intentional desire to cause harm, injury or pain to another person. Paul’s choice of words and the order in which he lists them, almost indicates this is a progressive process when unrighteous anger is left unchecked. Continuing my knee analogy, this would describe me ignoring the signs and symptoms of inflammation or infection. If this was left untreated this could interfere with my healing and impair my whole body. You can’t control your feelings, but you can control your thoughts. And thoughts turn into actions, behaviors, and habits. Donna Donnelly spoke to this last week and quoted Romans 12:1, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit living in you.”

That’s the putting off. What then are we to put on? Kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness. Colossians 3:12-13 echoes this, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones…compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience…as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.” Whole books have been written about forgiveness. So, before I begin this section, I would like to address the elephant in the room and quote Anthony who frequently says, “Don’t hear what I’m not saying.” If there has been a betrayal or there are destructive relationship patterns in your marriage or with siblings, children or friends or in the workplace, your first priority is to protect yourself from harm. This command is not saying that you allow destructive behavior against you to

continue. Tim Keller says “Pull back as far as is necessary to keep them from sinning against you”.

But this doesn’t mean you can’t forgive. How? Because of God’s kindness and compassion toward us, he then asks that we forgive one another. Easy right? Simple right? No, forgiveness is not an easy thing. What is forgiveness exactly? Here are some guidelines that might be helpful as you examine your own heart. The following statements might help clarify some common misperceptions of what forgiveness is and is not.

Forgiveness…

It is a conscious, voluntary decision of the mind. It is a choice and an action, not a feeling.

It does not require reconciliation. It releases anger and resentment, for my own healing between me and God.

It is not dependent on an apology

It does not require continued trust

It does not require you to tell the person you forgive them

It is letting go of the right or need for justice or for vindication

It releases a debt, allowing God to decide the consequences (judgement or mercy)

It is not once and done. It is not “Forgive and forget”. It is on-going, changing, increasing or decreasing over time

It is accepting reality and moving away from denial or minimization

Tim Keller gives an example of what this looks like. Let’s say you go into someone’s home and break their lamp. Whether you meant to or not, the lamp is broken. The cost of the lamp has not gone into thin air. The cost of the lamp is paid by you. When you forgive someone, it costs you. The debt is transferred. This is where you put on the new self. Remind yourself we are all lamp breakers. We are all debtors before God. Remind yourself of God’s kindness, compassion and forgiveness of you. Titus 3:4, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. Micah 7:19, “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Tim Keller says, “We all struggle with forgiveness, but an unforgiving

heart is an unforgiven heart." That is the only way we can be kind, compassionate and forgive. Forgiveness is granted before it is felt. Again, you can't control your feelings, but you can control your thoughts. Actively refrain from willing harm to the other person. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. You are not the judge or the executioner. When you respond with goodness and mercy, it allows God the opportunity to do His work.

Continuing my knee analogy, forgiveness is restoring complete healing to my knee. It is not pretending that no injury occurred. It is not wishing it didn't happen. The injury is there. But through all the work, pain, exercises, and other people who helped me along my journey, healing was restored.

Lastly, Chapter 5:1-2 closes out this section, "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."

As with the opening verse, Paul uses the word therefore to connect the admonitions from the previous verses to this final culminating command. Be imitators of God. Peter O'Brien says, "Although the notion of following the Lord wholeheartedly and the exhortation to be holy because the Lord is holy appears regularly in the Old Testament, there is no other explicit reference in either the Old Testament or the New Testament to imitating God." To imitate someone means to do something the same way, to mimic their speech or to copy their behavior, to resemble or look like. Sounds impossible. What makes it possible is that we are now children of God. We have a family likeness because God adopted us into his family and gave us the ability to reflect Him through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. What does that family resemblance look like? To imitate God is to walk in love. This model of God's love is demonstrated to us by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This fragrant offering and sacrifice are not just a play on words. We just studied this last year in Exodus when the priests were told how to sacrifice. Exodus 29:18, "Then burn the entire animal on the altar. This is a burnt offering to the Lord; it is a pleasing aroma, a special gift presented to the Lord." We are the sacrifice and the fragrant offering to God as we put off the old clothes and put on the new clothes of our identity in Christ through a changed heart and mind.

Bryon Chapel concludes this section well, "If there was no pain involved, there would be no sacrifice. The fact that your obedience involves pain and struggle does not necessarily mean that God is displeased with you or that you are less spiritual than others. In fact,

without the pain of giving and sacrifice there could be no fragrant offering to God. What enables us to bear and offer this pain is savoring our identity as children of God, and remembering that we are called to live as Jesus who offered and sacrificed himself for us."

To come full circle with my knee analogy…My new grafted ligament was not meant to help me just limp through the rest of life. It was replaced to make me whole, to have the balance and strength to walk, hike, and bike (and maybe play pickleball again??). I am incredibly thankful to the doctors, nurses, technicians, Physical Therapists, family and friends who participated in my healing journey. Let us be the doctors, nurses and Physical Therapists to one another as we seek to bring the healing work of Jesus Christ to our family and friends, to our homes, our neighborhoods, our church and our world.

Let's pray…

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word and for reminding us how we are called to live as your children through the power of the Holy Spirit. Teach us to walk in love, showing kindness, grace and compassion to those around us. Please help these women as they go to their small groups apply what they have heard today as they share and pray for one another. May our words, attitudes and actions reflect the character of Christ. In Jesus name, Amen