

MODELING CHRIST IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Ephesians 4:17-5:2



So one of the things we all do is we dress for the job. Our work typically requires us to dress a certain way. If you work on the railroad, you've got to put on the hard hat, the safety glasses, the hearing protection, the orange vest, the steel toe boots.. If you are a mechanic, you might wear light overalls. If a contractor, you'll wear a toolbelt. If a nurse, scrubs. You get the point. Whatever you're doing, you're going to dress for the occasion.

Well, as Christians, we are to "put on" Christ. The Bible says all believers have been baptized into Christ, having been clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27). But there is also a practical sense in which *each of us in Christ must now put on Jesus Christ, like new clothing, through our lifestyle*. We are to put on Christlikeness. That's sort of what we want to talk about today as we consider this biblical concept of modeling Christ.

And this is an important concept because consciously or unconsciously, we are passing on a legacy – good or bad, Christlike or un-Christlike – it's like radiation or osmosis. We are being an example to others whether we want to or not. Think about children – they always imitate what we wear. They want to wear our big shoes, our big shirts. Well, we want to make sure they learn to "put on" Christ from our example.

And it may not be just, but the way you dress usually impacts the way people perceive you, literally and metaphorically. They can tell what "clothes" you are wearing. It's like the atheist Fredrich Nietschze said, *"Show me that you are redeemed, and I'll listen to you talk about your Redeemer."* If you say you're a Christian, you want to put on Christ because it's winsome and attractive. It's a legacy thing and a winsome thing. Let's look at Ephesians 4:17-5:2 as our next *Modeling Christ* passage.

"So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the

devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

As always I just want to introduce to the book we’re in. Paul is writing to the church at **Ephesus**, located in modern day Turkey or ancient Asia-Minor on the west coast. It was one of the most influential cities in Turkey. Paul stopped here on his 2nd missionary journey and spent 3 years here. He also called the elders from this church to meet him at Miletus as he passed by. Christ’s address to this church in Revelation 1 made it famous, addressing the church’s problems giving them corrections and encouragement. But in this letter we call Ephesians, there is an **absence of personal names** and absence of addressing **controversies** and reference to **problems**, which is either a miracle or significant of something else. It has led many to suggest it was an encyclical letter by **nature**, meaning it was meant to be copied and forwarded to other churches.

It’s **purpose**, though, is to reveal what a high and heavenly calling God has called believers to in Christ. In chapter 1-3, Paul lays out this deep theological wisdom of God describing God’s eternal purposes & accomplishments in Christ – the eternal purposes God has accomplished for us in Christ. It’s this stupendously gracious calling by grace through faith in Christ:

1. An adoption as beloved children of God, members of His household. (1:4-6; 3:14-21)
2. A hope of inheritance. (1:11-13, 18)
3. A treasure chest of all the heavenly spiritual riches. (1:3, 13-14)
4. A trophy of God’s grace. (1:6; 2:8-9)
5. A purpose in God’s will to glorify Him through good works. (1:11; 2:10; 3:9-11)
6. A member of Christ’s body, under Christ’s rule (1:18-22)

I would love to spend all of our time looking at these great **positional** truths about who we are in Christ. But in this series, we are concerned about our **condition** – how we should live in light of these truths. That’s the emphasis of Paul in the last half of Ephesians, he’s **moving from doctrine expounded to practical guidance and application of the doctrine**. Chapters 1-3 are about who we are in Christ and 4-6 is how we should put on Christ in our day to day living.

The Structure of Ephesians



And I can’t tell you this morning **how critical it is that you get the order right**. I think a lot of people reject what they think is Christianity because they think Christianity is this religious idea where we must be right in order to get right with God. It’s the false idea where we must be “good enough to get into

heaven.” But that’s not the message of the Bible. The Bible would call that legalism. Yes, there’s a lot of talk about conduct and behavior in the Bible, but like today’s passage, it’s mainly for believers who have the Holy Spirit (not that unbelievers can’t learn from it). We don’t *do* in order to *become*; we’ve *become* in order to *do*. We don’t become saints by what we do, we’ve become saints (5:3) to do what saints are called to do (Eph. 2:8-10). We must have new life by the Spirit, before we can walk by the Spirit or be filled by the Spirit. If you get that wrong, you get Christianity wrong, and your destiny is at stake. We must be in Christ positionally to put on Christ practically.

The entire flow of the book of Ephesians follows that order. Look at the transitional verse right in the middle of the book, in 4:1, “*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you’ve been called.*” We’ve been called, or entrusted with, a heavenly calling, and now here’s how to live out that heavenly calling in earthly life.

So he goes from discussing how we’ve been placed in Christ but now we are to put on Christ. “*Put on the new self... put off the old self.*”

☪ **Our new clothing is Christ, and we model Him through our lifestyle. (4:1-2, 17-24, 32; 5:1)**

And that’s important because again, even unbelievers like Nietzsche understand that Christians should be different. Society holds us to a higher standard. They understand it. Gene Getz writes, “*A Christian who has a poor reputation is demonstrating traits that are not in harmony with Christian principles, nor is his lifestyle in harmony with what people naturally expect from a man who claims to be a Christ-follower.*”ⁱ

Illustrating it: Can you imagine if you went to the hospital and your doctor comes in with a hard hat and orange vest, steel-toed boots. Or if you went to the mechanic out at the Ford dealership and he’s dressed like doctor with a white lab coat, scrubs, and stethoscope around his neck. That would be weird. It wouldn’t line up with what we expect. It’s the same way in the Christian life. As Christians, we put on Christlikeness.

That’s what Paul is talking about in verses 17-24. Your new self has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth, now put on the new self, the new, true you. You have a wardrobe tailored after Jesus, by grace, now put it on because it fits who you are now in Christ (Rom. 13:14).

But what I want to emphasize out of this text this morning is how critical is it to put on Christ for the sake of our relationships. There are **four different articles of clothing to put on and put off in our relationships and they all emanate from the subject of anger. Why anger?** Because anger is something we all struggle with and something that destroys interpersonal relationships. We can have the “blow our tops” anger where we lash out in rage with words and actions, or we can “simmer and stew” in anger, avoiding others and clamming up. Red-hot rage against people or ice-blue rejection of them. Our whole being is involved in anger. It is more than an emotion: it is also cognitive, volitional, and behavioral. It involves our beliefs, motives, perceptions and desires.ⁱⁱ It is absolutely critical that as Christians, we learn to understand and perceive the root causes of our anger that wrecks relationships. For a great book on this, check out ***Uprooting Anger* by Robert Jones.**

1st ARTICLE:



PUT OFF DESTRUCTIVE SPEECH AND PUT ON CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECH. (4:25, 29; 5:4)

In verse 25 Paul says to *lay aside falsehood and speak truth.*

Why? Well, for one, lying ruins relationships. No one likes to be lied too. We say, “*Why’d you lie to me?*” Relationships require trust and lying diminishes that. And look how Paul stresses this in the Church environment. We shouldn’t lie because **we are members of one another** (4:25; Rom. 12:5). We are all part of the same body – Christ – and Christ doesn’t lie. You wouldn’t lie to yourself, would you? Yet, when you lie to another believer, it is like lying to yourself.

Even when there is pressure on and it’s easy to lie for some self-centered reason, we must remember that there’s a greater reason not to lie: we mirror God’s image. The world should know us a people who don’t lie because **God, by His very nature, can’t lie** (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) and we are **imitators of Him** (5:1). I remember selling something with wheels to someone and the person wanted me to write out a lesser amount so that they wouldn’t have to pay as much in taxes. And all I could say was, “*I’m sorry, I can’t do that. Honesty is not just the best policy, it’s my only policy.*”

In verse 29, ***let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only words that edify, giving grace to those who hear.***

It’s not only lying that we should keep our lips from speaking – we should keep our lips from speaking anything inappropriate or unproductive or tears other down. Anger is often expressed in words. We speak against one another (James 4:11). In 5:4 he mentions filthy language and coarse jokes aren’t proper among saints. Instead, we want our words to bring healing and life and build others up. I’m a big fan of Colossians 4:6, “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*”

⚡ **Season your speech with salt: preserving & enhancing conversation.**

You can tell by all of the comment threads and “fact-checking” today that our world has a problem controlling its tongues. But **there is a direct correlation between how we use our tongues and how healthy our relationships are.** If the world would only keep verse 29, it would transform this world and prevent a lot of arguments, broken friendships, divorces, job-losses – you name it. Check out some Proverbs that directly relate the tongue with the health of relationships:

Proverbs 15:4 – “*The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.*”

Proverbs 26:20 – “*Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.*”

Proverbs 12:18-19 – “*The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.*” Remember when Jesus equated hate with murder? When we’re angry with someone, we can stab people verbally – you could call them verbal jabs. We gossip and manipulate with our tongues to get our own way out of anger.

Proverbs 6:19 – “*A false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*”

There we are again with the tight connection between community and use of our tongues. James says it’s the tongue can spark a forest fire if we’re not careful with it.

2nd ARTICLE:



PUT OFF UNCONTROLLED RAGE AND PUT ON PROMPT FORGIVENESS. (vv. 26-27; 31-32)

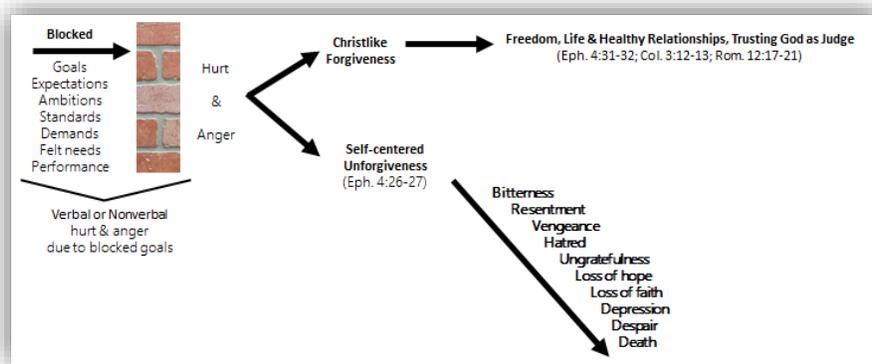
Verses 26-27 ***be angry and don’t sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.***

Verse 31, ***let all bitterness and wrath and anger be put away***

Verse 26 tells us there is an anger that is not sinful, like a righteous anger against sin and evil that destroys relationships, but even that cannot be allowed to take root. Righteous anger is angry with actual sin, concerned with God and His kingdom and not our own sinful, self-centered desires. Righteous anger, Jones says, “remains self-controlled. It keeps its head without cursing, screaming, raging, or flying off the handle. Nor does it spiral downward in self-pity or despair. It does not ignore people, snub people, or withdraw from people. Instead, righteous anger carries with it the twin qualities of confidence and self-control.”ⁱⁱⁱ

If we don’t deal with our anger, we start a downhill spiral into vengeful rage and our whole demeanor will change. Sinful anger can become our master, like Cain (Genesis 4; James 4:7). You see how Paul said not to give Satan a foothold in your life? **An angry man is easy prey for the world, the flesh, and the devil.**^{iv} “Like a city whose walls are broken down, so is the man who lacks self-control.” He’s easy to conquer.

And I just want to take a minute to explain this diagram.



When we are angry it’s because of some type of blocked goal, be it a felt need or legitimate desire. People don’t make us angry, we become angry due to our own demanding hearts, desiring good or bad things – they’re ruling desires. Someone may occasion an angry response by something they do, but the actual cause is in us, in our sin nature that’s usually made an idol out of something good or bad. We want to blame others, but they only occasion it. The occasion reveals our coveting. That’s what James says, “*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures which wage war in your members? You lust and you do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*” One way or another, James continues to reveal it’s due to pride. We can blame shift and point fingers, acting passive, but the source in our self-centered hearts.

The point is, good or bad things being desired, the cause is sinful idolization of something we want – someone offend my kingdom, my will, my way, my timing – they aren’t bowing to my will and so I’ll snub them. “*They cut me off in traffic so now I’ll show them by tailgating them.*” James says the key is humble submission to God – His kingdom, trusting His will, His way, His timing – accepting the circumstance as an opportunity to model Christ. **Illustrating it:** imagine losing your job. Now, for the person who is living for their job (an idol to them) they’ll be incredibly angry. But to a person who understand their worth is in Christ, they lose their job and start looking for how God wants to use them elsewhere. One is concerned about them and making sure things go their way – one is living for Christ, *not themselves*.

This is why James say, “*But He gives greater grace [to the humble]. God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” If we’re angry, most of the time it’s because we think the world revolves around us. We want everyone to bow to our

demanding heart's desire. So we become the judge (we play God) and we try to prosecute rather than leaving that for God (James 4:11-12). When we're angry with God, we even try to drag him into our courtroom.

⚡ **The key to anger is forgiveness through repentance and a trusting, humble submission to God. (James 4:1-12)**

We've got to understand the self-centered source of anger in our hearts and repent of it. And forgive others as Christ forgave us. Let him repay with vengeance. Trust God.

Verse 32 says to *be tender-hearted*, [in contrast to the petrified, hard heart of 4:18]
forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave us.

3rd ARTICLE:



PUT OFF LAZY THIEVERY AND PUT ON HARD WORK & GENEROSITY. (v. 28; 2 Thess. 3)

Verse 28 says *those who steal are to steal no longer but instead must labor, working with their hands what is good, so that he can share with the truly needy.*

Having lived and done mission work in some poverty-stricken areas, I can see how Paul would have to tell Christians this. Crimes of poverty are a big problem in poverty-stricken places. That's why they have fences around everything. Stealing is so commonplace that it's easy to think there's nothing wrong with it – just finder's keepers. So even this might be a radical concept in a poverty stricken ancient world where people had to work much harder for sustenance. But when you put on hard work, stealing for the most part should put off. You at least don't have a reason to steal anymore, but now **you can share and be generous like God is with us.** God is such a Great Provider – constantly supplying our every needs physically and spiritually. By working hard and being generous, we are taking the opportunity to imitate Him.

Listen to why Paul worked hard in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, correcting the lazy Thessalonians,
*“For you yourselves know how you ought to **imitate** us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right but to give you in ourselves an **example** to **imitate**.”* There's those words: imitate, example – be a model for others.

In our Leaders in the Making book, *The Measure of a Man*, the author Gene was speaking at a men's conference and there were 2 gentlemen in the front nodding in agreement and giving verbal affirmations when he was sharing with them about the qualifications for church leadership, one of which is self-control. Turns out, these men were baby Christian big business who had never heard these qualifications before, but they knew, just from being in business world that he was hitting the nail on the head. *The qualities God is looking for in us are the qualities they were already looking for in their employees.* They wanted employees who worked hard and had a good reputation. If men were stealing other men's wives, chances were they would also steal from the company as well, creating more conflict.

4th ARTICLE:



PUT OFF SELF-CENTEREDNESS AND

PUT ON SELF-SACRIFICIAL LOVE. (vv. 5:1, 2; 1 John 4:11)

What might be the number one thing you think about when you think of Christ? The cross, where God proved His love for us. He loves us so much that He died in our place. Paul says, imitate that. That self-sacrifice is the opposite of what causes anger. So much sinful anger comes from not getting our way, but when your focus is on serving others, that's not as much of a problem.

Illustrating it: I liked one of the illustrations Jones shared in his Uprooting Anger book: I can either be the “king daddy” in my home where everyone has to bow down to me or I can be the “servant daddy” where my focus is on serving my family. That Christlikeness is what's going to win them and their trust, isn't it?

“Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Christ walked in love and now it's our turn. Larry Moyer, in our devotional book, simply says, “Love means putting others first, even if it means sacrificing ourselves.”ⁱⁱ The apostle John says, “If God so loved us [in this way], so we also ought to love one another.”

And your friends and family and neighbors need that Christlike love. I don't know about your neighborhood, but in most neighborhoods, there's some sort of squabble among the neighbors about boundary lines, covenant rights. “You mowed on my side!... You drove by too fast!... Your dog dumped in my yard!...” The list could go on and on. And a lot of neighbors let those things become a wall between them for years! And they never talk to each other! That's a miserable life and testimony.

Like Christ, we're called to love our neighbor and give ourselves sacrificially for them. That's the greatest commandment, right? Love your neighbor by speaking truth in grace, building them up, forgiving them, being generous to them. Anger usually has us in mind and not our neighbor. A person who speaks truth in grace, is generous, kind, and loving is going to stand out like a lighted billboard on a dark night in the world.^{vi}

And check this out: not to do these things is to grieve the Spirit of God who indwells you.



We grieve the Spirit of God by not imitating Christ. (v. 30)

God is inside of us through His Spirit, already prompting us to love our neighbor, but our problem is that we constantly quench and grieve the Spirit of God. Loving your neighbor is such a simple command but so difficult because we quench that through self-centeredness.

Our challenge this morning is to walk in love like Christ loved us. Imitate Christ in our relationships.

ⁱ Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Man* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2016), 30.

ⁱⁱ Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005), 15.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 29.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 85.

^v Larry Moyer, *31 Days to Contagious Living: A Daily Devotional on Modeling Christ to Others* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 17.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 18.