

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes February 13, 2008

Ephesians 4: 25 - 5:2 (Part 3)

- 25: Therefore, putting away falsehood,
 let every one speak the truth with his neighbor,
 for we are members one of another.
- 26: Be angry but do not sin;
 do not let the sun go down on your anger,
- 27: and give no opportunity to the devil.
- 28: Let the thief no longer steal,
 but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands,
 so that he may be able to give to those in need.
- 29: Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,
 but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion,
 that it may impart grace to those who hear.
- 30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
 in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- 31: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander
 be put away from you, with all malice,
- 32: and be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
 forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
- 1: Therefore 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.

Introduction: How do we get a handle on conflict? How do we live out our faith, our commitment to Christ, when we just can't seem to get along with others in the Church, or in our work, or frankly within our own families? In worship we stand and sit next to brothers and sisters in the faith, who have been sealed like us with the Holy Spirit in baptism, yet sometimes when we turn and greet each other in the sign of peace, our relational connection is no deeper than our surface smiles. What can we do? Well, this is what we'll learn from St. Paul today on Deep in Scripture.

House cleaning items...

- Website, book special: "The Gift of God: The Holy Spirit," by Andrew Apostoli, CFR
- We want your input!!! Phone: 740-450-1175
 Email: marcus@deepinscripture.com
 Forum: <http://www.chnetwork.org/forums/forum51>

REVIEW:

- **As we've been discussing, we believe that in Ephesians, St. Paul was preaching, from prison through the leaders in Ephesus that he had converted and ordained, to the newly baptised Gentile believers.**
 - In the first three chapters, St. Paul describes the changes that have already taken place in their (our) lives once they heard, believed, and then were sealed with the Holy Spirit, or baptized. Their relationship with God, with each other, and with themselves were changed by grace. As St. Paul wrote in chapter 2, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith;***

and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- In the grace of baptism, they were saved from their old nature, not because of anything they did on their own, while living in that old nature, but rather because God loved them, and by grace opened their minds & hearts, partially through the preaching & witness of St. Paul and others.
- But now after being baptized, they must actively, by grace, chose to live this new life: they must reject their old way of life, with its passions and habits, and actively live the new life they have been given; they must put off the old nature and live a life of holiness, or as St. Paul says, walk in the good works which God prepared beforehand for them to do.
- In verses 22-24, St. Paul summarizes this: (and this is a verse that I believe ought to be memorized)!

*22: Put off your old nature
which belongs to your former manner of life
and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,
23: and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
24: and put on the new nature,
created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- **St. Paul, knows from experience, however, that baptized believers do not always act like baptized believers!**
 - In his other letters, St Paul referred by name to baptized Christians who were not living out their baptisms.
 - In this section, 4:25-5:2, St. Paul give some “Rules” for getting along within the Body:

Two Important Prelims:

- i. **Disagreements are sometimes necessary or at least unavoidable (4:26a)**
 - “**Be angry...!**” -- possibly a concessive imperative: (“Be angry, if you must.”)
 - Even Jesus modeled “righteous” indignation within the Church (Mt 3:7; 21:12)
- ii. **But we must be careful!**
 - “**Be angry but do not sin**”
 - **Just because our anger may be justified does not necessarily justify anger!**
 - We need to separate anger from emotions, like charity & forgiveness!
 - Uncontrolled anger can lead to sin, which grieves God! (**4:30**)
 - These “rules” are to help us deal with disagreements constructively.

Before we get back to the “Rules” for Getting Along, I want to talk about the importance of inner prayer: We cannot live by the rules without inner prayer.

- Our faith is full of externals!
 - Mass, sacraments, devotionals, activities, spiritual reading, etc.
 - All, to different extent, give grace and honor God!
- But it is easy to fool others and ourselves into thinking that all is right in our hearts:
 - We each may LOOK like we have a great relationship with God on the outside, but on the INSIDE we may be completely self-centered!
 - An old analogy pictures a throne in our hearts: who’s sitting on that throne? Ourselves, others, or Jesus? Only God and ourselves really know. Others can guess by our words & actions (i.e., “fruit”), and sometimes we can fool ourselves, but we can’t fool God?
- **How can we know?**
 - All of First John is about this: we know we **know** God if we recognize that grace has changed us: i.e., we love, we obey His commandments.

- Another test:
 - When something GOOD happens to us, to whom or what does our heart give the **first** credit? Do we congratulate ourselves, our skills, our good luck, or do we offer up a prayer, a thanksgiving to God?
 - Or when something BAD happens, do we get overcome with grief or despair, or do we immediately remember & affirm that God is in control, loves us, and will never leave us nor forsake us?
 - How we initially respond is a sign of where our heart is.
- **What must we do to ensure that we are truly growing in our relationship with God?**
 - **Faithfully practice the “externals”** (Mass, sacraments, devotions, service, readings, etc.)
 - **Love:** This is what these rules are all about!
 - **Prayer:** Talk to God!
 - Mt 6: 5-6, "And when you **pray**, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and **pray** in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you **pray**, go into your room and shut the door and **pray** to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
 - Rom 12:12, "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in **prayer**."*
 - 1 Thess 5:17, "Pray constantly."*
 - Eph 6:18, "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all **prayer** and supplication."*

The “Rules” for Getting along:

- I offer these recognizing, just like St. Paul, that I am certainly not perfect yet!
 - I know these rules...but I also know how difficult it is to live them out;
 - The enemies (the world, the flesh, & the devil) constantly fight against our willingness to bring our lives in line with God;
 - And so these “rules,” are guidelines & goals for us to follow in grace.
1. **Keep it HONEST! (4:25)**
- “Therefore, putting away falsehood,
let every one speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.”*
- One of the primary barriers to our ability to get along is falsehood: misunderstandings, misinformation, misscommunication, rumors, gossip, prejudice, etc.
 - Sometimes we hold back telling the truth because we’re afraid of hurting feelings:
 - Certainly this is sometimes appropriate...we need to be tactful and charitable...
 - But yet how often do we hesitate telling the truth because we’re more afraid of conflict? Because we’re more concerned about our own comfort levels rather than what is best for the other person?
 - **Here St. Paul calls us to be honest in our relationships:**
 - **Identify & put off falsehood in our attitudes;**
 - Just as charity and forgiveness begin with ourselves, so does being honest in our relationships.
 - **Speak the truth with one another:**
 - This involves remembering what he said earlier: (15)
“Speak the truth in love.”
 - And separating “truth” from “opinion.”
 - **Honest communication requires humility!**

2. Keep it **IN CONTROL!** (4:26a, 31a)

1st: **“Be angry but do not sin...”**

- Note: This is a quote from Psalm 4.
 - St. Paul never “proof texts”; he taps into their knowledge of the Scriptures through their having heard them read & expounded in Liturgy;
 - The Context: Salvation history; frustration from unanswered prayer!
 - [1] *Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
Thou hast given me room when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.*
 - [2] *O men, how long shall my honor suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? [Selah]*
 - [3] *But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.*
 - [4] **Be angry, but sin not;**
commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. [Selah]
 - [5] *Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.*
 - [6] *There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!
Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us, O LORD!"*
 - [7] *Thou hast put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.*
 - [8] *In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for thou alone, O LORD, makest me dwell in safety.*
 - The Psalmist cries out to God, in his private prayer, recognizing that there are many around him who complain to God because God hasn't responded to them the way they wanted or expected: their anger at God became sin.
 - “Why, God, don't you reward us the way you used to do?!”
 - Instead, the Psalmist's “anger” is tempered by his trust, his thanksgiving, his joy. He remembers how God acted & why, and trusts!
 - By quoting this Psalm, St. Paul is reminding them to treat each other with the same respect & love, even when we have legitimate complaints!

2nd: **“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor ... be put away from you...”**

- These attitudes / vices feed justified anger, like armloads of dry wood on a fire, reducing any possibility of honest and controlled communication:
- **“Bitterness”**: remembering & recounting all the times in the past...;
- **“wrath”**: more than amplified anger; carries the assumption of the right to stand in judgement; often used in Scripture to refer to the final judgement and God's justified wrath:
 - **Rom 12:19**, *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the **wrath** of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*
 - **Behind this is the teaching of Jesus:**
 - **Mt 7: 1-2**, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”*
- **“Anger”**: emotional fury!
 - **Mt 5: 21-26**, *“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.”*

- “**clamor**”: shouting back & forth in a quarrel!
- “**Be put away from you...**”: involves a wilful choice & act, regardless of how we feel:
 - Our feelings may try to convince us that we are justified in these attitudes! But all of our faith tells us differently!
- Note also that he included the word “**ALL**.” We are to put it ALL away.

3. Keep it **FRESH!** (4:26b)

“...do not let the sun go down on your anger...”

- A very tough one!
- Remember: not talking about emotions but how we express ourselves:
 - We can’t force our emotions to go away!
 - Rather, if we can, it’s good to discuss how we’re feeling;
- But he also encouraging us not to let it smolder but deal with it now:
 - If there is something wrong, then don’t hesitate or procrastinate, but go to the appropriate person / authority and deal with it (by the rules!).
- Once again, we hear behind St. Paul the teaching of Christ:

Mt 6:34, *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.”*

4. Keep it **CENTERED ON FORGIVENESS!** (4:28, 32b)

1st: *“Let the thief no longer steal,*

but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.”

- St. Paul inserts this, not so much as a warning to former thieves to now be productive, but rather to the rest of us, to let them forget the past and move on in their new lives:
 - Don’t hold the mistakes of other people’s past against them!
 - Don’t lift yourself up as better, but stand beside them as equals!
 - Why? Because of what St. Paul says in verse 32...

2nd: *“...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

- In other words, all of our communications / anger must be guided by the underlying precepts of our faith: we have been saved and forgiven and love by grace, not because we deserve it; so we are to do the same for others!
- This again brings us back to the Sermon on the Mount:

Mt 6:12, 14-15 *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

5. Keep it **POSITIVE!**(4:29, 32a)

“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.”
“...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted...”

6. Keep it **PRIVATE!** (4:31b)

“Let all ... slander be put away from you, with all malice...”

7. Keep it **CLEANED UP!** (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.”