

Christ-Centred Living Ephesians 4:31-5:2

The address for today is based on the Ephesians reading from chapter 4 and going into chapter 5. I read from verse 31.

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

Let us Pray. Heavenly Father who caused Holy Scripture to be written for our understanding, grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly discern your Word. May we embrace and hold fast to the blessed hope and comfort of everlasting life, which You have given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Identity! It follows us all throughout our whole life. The characteristics which define who we all are as individuals. The most common form of identity is photo identity which identifies us based on our physical appearance. But identity stretches much further than just physical appearances and the photo you have on your drivers' licence or your passport. Your identity is also made up of your qualities, your traits, your beliefs, your personality... and what you stand for. For example people might identify you as compassionate, maybe a loving parent, a generous person, an animal lover, and the list could go on endlessly. But not all identities are positive. Sometimes a person's identity is associated with evil such as serial killers or people who are scammers.

In today's reading, St Paul gives a list of traits and attributes which fit into two kinds of contrasting identities. A self-centred identity and a selfless identity. Let me explain and give an example of both.

The self-centred identity, which Paul warns against, is an identity full of bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, malice. All these actions glorify yourself; they make **you** the centre of attention. They make **you** feel better by inflicting damage on your neighbour. And Paul gives examples. In Verse 4 he writes 'Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly.' Stealing inflicts pain on your neighbour. It causes them to suffer whilst the offender benefits. Another example used is corruptive talk or talking behind someone's back. You build yourself up by speaking about a terrible mistake another person made, and openly state you would **never** make that mistake. Self-glorification again at the expense of someone else. Failing to love your neighbour. You focus on how you can be glorified in the situation, rather than showing love to your neighbour.

These are just a couple of examples of sins which flow out of a self-centred, sinful identity. The self-centred, selfish identity which Paul is asking the Ephesians to turn away from. Actions which fail to protect our neighbour. Actions which we today also engage in today which puts the spotlight on ourselves rather than on loving our neighbours. But Paul also presents a contrasting identity to both the Ephesians and to us. The Self-less living identity also known as the Christ-centred living identity. So what does this look like?

V32 gives us some key thoughts here :

‘Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another a God in Christ has forgiven you’

A selfless living identity is living in the identity of what Christ has shown and given us. Christ was kind to people, in fact Jesus was kind to all people including people of society which others wouldn't socialise with- the tax collectors, lepers, people who were unclean. Jesus had compassion on all these people, he was tender-hearted. And then there is the example of forgiveness for us all. Christ forgives us all of our sins. A forgiveness which we don't deserve. A forgiveness which shows us God's kindness, God's compassion, God's tender-heart towards his created people. One of the clearest examples of Jesus enacting forgiveness was Jesus on the cross, when he said about those who were in the process of killing him: 'Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34)

But there is a problem with this identity. Us human beings are not good at selfless, sacrificial Christ centred living. Our sinful identity always pulls us towards self-centred living. So what happens now? How do we get ourselves out of this self-centred identity?

We are unable to shake off this self-centred identity by our own strength. But God has the solution. Baptism! Baptism washes us all clean. Clothes us in righteousness. Forgives all our sins. It empowers us all to live a new life. To have a new Christ-centered identity. This is the same 'once for all' baptism which Paul refers to in Romans 6:4 'We were buried therefore with Jesus Christ by **baptism** into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we too may walk in newness of life.**'**we too may walk in newness of life.** The old self-centered, sinful identity is taken away through Baptism. It is replaced with the the new self, the new identity created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness. And God also gives us his Holy Spirit in Baptism which helps guide us in living in this new identity

Friends, Paul in the conclusion of our text has one more point to make regarding the self-less identity, the Christ centred identity. 'Be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love as Christ loved us.' We are to be imitators of God. Note here the word imitators. It doesn't ask us to be God. We are to imitate God That is a very

important difference. We are not saved and judged on how well we can imitate Christ. If this was the criteria for salvation, no human being would ever be in heaven.

But to imitate God is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who gives us all an example of how to live. Jesus lived a sacrificial life which was out of love for us all. With God's help, we can all follow Jesus by living a life of love, a life where we are slow to anger, a life where we are compassionate, a life which we are forgiving of others just as we pray in the Lord's prayer 'Forgive us our sins **as we forgive those who sin against us**'

Living a Christ centred life and having a Christ centred identity is about trying to treat others the same way God has treated us- with unconditional love. And this does require God's daily on-going help, which he has graciously given to us through the waters of baptism, where all our sins and failures are washed away.

Friends, Which identity do you want to follow? You own selfish, self-centred inclinations or the new life, the selfless, Christ centred life which God calls you to through the waters of Baptism? I encourage you all to follow and continue following the Christ-centred life of Jesus. Jesus who is love personified, Jesus who enacted God's grace, Jesus who forgives us all and then teaches us also how to forgive. May you live in him, live through him and live for him..... the selfless Christ centred identity **AMEN**

May the peace of God that passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in the selfless identity of Christ Jesus. **AMEN**