

Gospel Transformation to Gospel Imitation

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe. It is the amazing concept that although we are all breakers of God's law and therefore deserve his just, eternal judgment in hell, God became a human and suffered this judgment in our place. The death and resurrection of Jesus removes God's judgment from upon God's people so that they can enjoy God forever. The Gospel has been graciously saving and transforming God's people ever since Adam and Eve first rebelled in the Garden of Eden.

According to the book of Genesis, humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, as we read Genesis carefully, that meets that we were created as God's sons and our purpose for being created was to imitate God. God has held out this expectation that we should imitate Him by giving us commands to follow that reflect his nature and character. The problem with humanity from the beginning has always been our failure to truly imitate God in every way. The Gospel has been the promise to rescue us from the consequences of our failure to imitate God, and to transform us as adopted sons of God into imitators of God.

A continuing problem that God's people have had when understanding the Gospel has been truncating the Gospel and not seeing its fullness. On one hand, there are some who see the Gospel as a mere rescue from the judgment that we deserve and neglect its power to transform us. On the other hand, there have been some who bypass our deliverance from judgment and focus only on imitating God by trying to keep his commands. Both of these understandings severely short change the power and fullness of the Gospel.

Our passage this morning goes to the very heart issue, and presents the fullness of the Gospel for God's people. So turn with me to Ephesians 4:25.

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and 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 own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by 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, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5:1 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.

The main thing that we will observe from this passage is that ***in the Gospel, God transforms our attitudes and actions so that we imitate His Gospel love.*** We are going to look at this in three pieces: 1. Statements of the Gospel, Gospel Transformation, and Gospel Imitation.

I. Gospel Statements

The book of Ephesians has 6 chapters. And almost from the time the apostle Paul wrote this letter nearly 2000 years ago, people have realized the structure of Ephesians: chapters 1-3 are doctrine and chapters 4-6 are application of that doctrine. What that simply means is that in the first 3 chapters, Paul gives the Ephesians no commands to follow but simply describes God's work in the Gospel. The command or instructions do not show up till chapter 4 and continue to chapter 6. So are we are in chapter 4, we are in the beginning of the "command center". What many Christians do when they get to chapters 4-6 in their minds they break it apart from chapters 1-3 and forget that chapters 4-6 flow out of chapters 1-3. In other words, they neglect that the Gospel from chapters 1-3 drives the Christian life described in chapters 4-6. Note the connections in our passage of chapters 1-3 with our passage, particularly 1:3-14:

1. "You were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30)

-connects to Ephesians 1:13-14 *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

2. "God in Christ forgave you" (4:32)

-connects to Ephesians 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses*

3. "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (5:2)

-connect to Ephesians 1:5-6 ***In love** 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved.***

II. Gospel Transformation (Gospel movements):

Now as I have just said that we are in the "command center" of Ephesians, Paul gives us a spray of commands. So if these are commands to Christians, why would I say that God transforms us? Right, didn't I say that in the Gospel, **God transforms** our attitudes and actions? If these are commands for us, why would I say that? Doesn't that mean that we are responsible for our transformation?

Well, Last week we looked at the previous segment in Ephesians 4:17-24. Let's just glance down and have a reading of it.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is

*corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, **created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.***

This passage describes the transformation of Christians in general terms. Our passage this week gets into the specifics of this transformation. So let's look at the specifics.

(root/attitude) Bitterness, Anger, Malice
(fruit/actions) Wrath, Falsehood, Stealing, Corrupting

1. Falsehood to Truth

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

2. Anger to Patience

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

3. Stealing to Sharing

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.

4. Corrupting to Building

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.

5. Grieving to Pleasing

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption...5:10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

6. Bitterness to Forgiveness

31 Let all bitterness...be put away from you 32 ...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

7. Wrath to Kindness

31 Let all wrath...be put away from you 32 Be kind to one another.

8. Malice to Love

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice 5:2 ...And walk in love.

III. Gospel Imitation

*32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **as God in Christ** forgave you. 5:1 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.*

The Gospel is not the A,B,C's of the Christian life; it is the A to Z.

Non-Christians/Unbelievers: If you don't read this passage carefully, you get the impression that the Christian life is a quest for moral improvement. It really isn't. The Christian life is the process of God continually forgiving us (moral failures) through the death and resurrection of His morally perfect Son. As He continues to forgive us, we learn that his moral compass is broader, longer, wider, deeper, and more beautiful than any human moral compass. And we find his graciousness in killing his Son for us so beautiful, that we can't help but want to imitate it and replicate it for others. You fail, just like we do. And you can be forgiven just like we are. You can confess your sins and come to cherish Jesus in his death and resurrection to forgive you and re-create you.

New or Young Christians: Your conversion was the beginning of this transformation which will finally be finished at the end of the age when Jesus returns. Make no mistake, you will never be able to improve the Gospel or "help" God out in his mission to re-create humanity. The compass of your "moral" improvement has irrevocably changed in the Gospel. Now you are tasting the true gap that exists between you and your God, and its universes apart. Things are complicated and will get more difficult for you in Christ. Continue to learn about the categories of God's work in the death and resurrection of Jesus. What you see here are the beautiful areas where we all need to grow in. Mark these, be convicted by these, and see how these connect to the way Jesus is toward us. He will transform you as you learn.

Older Saints: There are many temptations with a passage like this. One of which is starting to think of all of the people who need to work on these issues. That is extremely dangerous, and cuts against the very grain of this passage. Please don't do that. This passage is a great gut-check, and a reminder that you still need to change. Change is harder to come by the older we get. It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. Learning and continual transformation can seem impossible for you, but it's not. I hope if you have learned anything in your years, one thing would be that Gospel transformation is not perfection over night, but perseverance over a life time. Change in your life often happens unnoticeably or you notice it only in looking back and taking inventory. May God continue you to blow you away in the Gospel and bring you into the depths of its wisdom and longevity. Would you agree that you still need His transforming grace?