

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – August 12, 2018

[Ephesians 4:25-5:2](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Read the provided commentary below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Ephesians 4:25-5:2

(From *Homiletics*; “Lorem Ipsum” – August 12, 2018)

It should not be hard to be truthful or to learn to be truthful. Yet, elaborating on what it means to "speak the truth" is the purpose of today's passage from Ephesians. The text articulates the lifestyle befitting those who have assumed a new identity in Christ, and much of the passage is concerned with speech that is comely to a Christian community.

"So then" (formerly "therefore"), the opening Greek word of verse 25, ties today's passage to the argument which has preceded it, and the series of moral exhortations in 4:25-5:2 is -- in the context of the letter -- the logical outcome of the propositions the author has asserted in verses 17-24. Because the Ephesians have been instructed in proper catechism (vv. 20-24), it is not only immoral but nonsensical for them to live by the false lights of the Gentiles, who are "darkened in their understanding" (v. 18).

"Therefore," the author continues, the Ephesians should speak the truth, "putting away" falsehood, resuming the theme of renunciation first sounded in verse 22, where the Ephesians were reminded that they were taught to "put away" their former way of life of futility, alienation, ignorance, hardness of heart, licentiousness, impurity, corruption and lust (vv. 17-22) after their initiation into the life of Christ. Although Paul is writing primarily to a Gentile audience (3:1), he emphasizes throughout the letter the sharp distinction between those Gentiles who, through Christ, have been brought near to the "household of God" of the religion of Israel (2:19), and those Gentiles who continue to live, as he says in this context, "in the futility of their minds" (4:17). All Gentiles, in Ephesians, are not alike.

To "speak the truth" is a summons to righteous behavior that runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. Truth-telling, both for God (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 89:35) and for human beings, is chief among biblical virtues (see Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Deuteronomy 5:20, 19:18-19; Job 6:28; Proverbs 14:5; Jeremiah 8:8, 27:10, 14, 16; John 19:35, 21:24, etc.), since trustworthiness is the foundation upon which all relationships, human and divine, are built. Unlike particular error or wrongdoing, which is subject to correction and reproof, lying destroys the trust that constitutes the environment in which all interaction must take place, and to damage that trust through deliberate deception is to cast all subsequent interaction into at least partial shadow. For such a community-centered text as this, such behavior would have dire consequences.

The "falsehood" of which the apostle speaks refers specifically to deliberate religious deception, as opposed to innocent factual error. It is the kind of active fabrication that is chosen and practiced in the face of opportunities for enlightenment rather than naive ignorance, and those who persist in spreading such doctrinal deceit are liable to receive grave punishment (Revelation 21:27, 22:15). Such behavior is characteristic of the devil (John 8:44).

"All of us" (v. 25) emphasizes the joint constitution of the body of Christ at Ephesus, made up of Jews and Gentiles. To be "members of one another" is to continue the somatic metaphor, which is moderated somewhat by the use of "our neighbors," a phrase which occurs only here in the New Testament. One expects, in a letter emphasizing the closeness of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, a biological or familial designation for the other, rather than a social one.

The following catalog of moral exhortations resembles other lists of virtues and vices found throughout Paul's writings, as well as Hellenistic moral literature and lists at Qumran. The Greek word for "anger" (*parorgismos*), which occurs nowhere else in the NT, refers in the Septuagint to that which provokes to anger, a provocation; here, it refers to a simmering resentment that endangers the stability of the community (cf. Matthew 5:23-24).

The vices listed -- speaking falsehoods, anger, theft, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, wrangling, slander and malice (vv. 25-31) -- reflect behaviors most likely to jeopardize a fledgling, inward-focused religious community. Other Pauline lists of vices are likewise concerned with the deleterious effects of discord in small Christian communities. In the inevitable struggles for leadership that beset all emerging movements, "quarreling and jealousy" (Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:20; cf. Galatians 5:20), manifested in a host of particular offenses (see, e.g., Romans 12:14-19; Galatians 5:20-21, 26), threatened to undo the missionary work of the apostle.

Thievery (v. 28) appears in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as a serious moral offense (5:9-11, 6:10), and he specifically adjured the Corinthian community to dissociate itself from such immoral persons (5:9, 13). The advice is different in Ephesians, where thieves are urged to desist so that, through labor and working honestly "with their own hands," they may contribute to those in need. Paul's intent is probably found in his elaboration on the vice of idleness in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, where he castigates freeloaders -- "mere busybodies" he calls them in verse 11 -- for taking that which does not belong to them, namely, a portion of the community's provisions. The work ethic of the early Christian communities was blunt: "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (v. 10), and those who found ways to circumvent that ethic were tantamount to thieves.

Although the expressions "the Holy Spirit" and "the Spirit of God" occur frequently in Paul's letters, the combination "the Holy Spirit of God" (v. 30) is unique. Unlike the conclusion of verse 28, which displays wide variation from the Greek original, the reading here is probably original, being attested in all witnesses. Whether grieving the Holy Spirit of God constitutes a summary of the untoward behavior enumerated in the preceding verses, or whether it refers to a separate offense (which seems more likely, given that other offenses follow), is impossible to say with certainty, as the expression occurs only here.

In summary fashion, Paul lists, in verse 31, the offenses which the Ephesians should "put away" (resuming a leitmotif in this passage), and the virtues with which those offenses should be replaced (v. 32). The justification for this transformation is theological: "as God in Christ has forgiven you" (or "us" in some ancient versions).

Paul concludes his peroration a second time in 5:1 ("Therefore," using a different Greek word than he used in 4:25) by urging the Ephesians to become "imitators of God," a rare concept in the New Testament (see, e.g., Matthew 5:48). Much more frequent are exhortations to imitate Christ (e.g., Romans 15:7; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15:49; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:13) or, occasionally, Paul (who is, himself, imitating Christ, e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). As in Jesus' counsel to perfection in Matthew, the Ephesians are to

imitate God "as beloved children," relying on God their heavenly Father as a role model. The passage concludes by urging imitation of Christ as well as God, that the Ephesians may "live in love" (v. 2) following the example of the earthly Savior.

The importance attached to community discourse in the early Christian foundations is nowhere clearer than in this passage from Ephesians. Although the early Christians were enjoined to practice charitable works among themselves and within the larger communities in which they found themselves, much of their ethical code was inherited from the religious tradition of the OT. What was especially distinctive about the early Christian communities was the nature of their discourse, focused on the life and teachings of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in their midst. In such logocentric communities, the importance of correct speech could not be exaggerated.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out another commentary available for these texts (and others!) at WorkingPreacher.org.

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading this passage?