

Brush It Away
Ephesians 4:25-5:2
Colebrook Congregational Church
August 16, 2015 / Ordinary 20

The Epistles, especially Paul's, are the oldest writings of the New Testament, mostly written by the first generation of Christians, where the rest of the New Testament were written by the second and third generations. They give us insight into the early church, and the issues that they had to deal with. They follow the Gospels and Acts, and like in the subsections in the Old Testament, they are organized by length within their subsection, unless the title has a number in it. And there are two types of epistles...Paul's and Everyone Else's. There are thirteen Pauline Epistles, seven of which are confirmed authentic, and six are in dispute. Those six in dispute, even though they are disputed, had good messages, good theology, and were widely used, so they were kept in the Bible anyway.

The Letter to the Ephesians is one of those disputed letters. We know Paul himself did not write it, because of the writing style, phrasing, & expressions, but the content is very Pauline, leading to the belief that one of Paul's disciples wrote it while Paul was in prison. Paul's writing was simple, polished, and accessible, while still intelligent and logical. In Ephesians, it is like "Paul" had suddenly decided to speak very melodramatically, by comparison.

The content of Ephesians is very general, and some scholars have described it as a summary of Paul's theology. It takes that theology first to cosmic proportions, then to the church level, then to the household level, then to each individual believer, connecting each level to the other three. The audience was a completely gentile church, founded not by Paul, but his followers, who knew nothing of Israel and the covenants or promises; and who, by joining, are experiencing a radical transformation of their personal and social identities, guiding them from their baptism in to being active members of their community of believers.

The first three chapters of Ephesians deal with the theology and doctrines. The cosmic level stuff and the mission of the church. The last three chapters have four exhortations and advice. First, on the unity of the church and how

a diversity of gifts is a good thing. Second, to do away with pagan ways. Third, on household relations. And lastly, on individuals putting on God's armor.

Our selection this week comes from the middle of the Second Exhortation. It is a list giving attention to special rules for their new lives. It deals with vices, which are not compatible with genuine fellowship, and then with essential virtues. Those vices are: falsehood, anger, thievery, and foul language; and the virtues are the antonyms: truthfulness, placability, honest toil, gracious language...and it adds one more, a readiness to forgive.

It starts off with the command to not lie, because that affects us all. Then there is a familiar saying to many cultures, that we should be slow to anger, and not let the sun set on your anger. Anger or indignation with cruelty and vileness, while justifiable, should not be allowed to fester in our hearts, giving opportunity for evil to infest us or our actions. We must deal with our anger, then let it go, as quickly as possible.

The implications of the thievery verse reminds us of the welcoming nature of the Church, including criminals who NEED the redemptive help. The Church was not for the respectable back then.

We should not speak evil, only good and gracefulness, so watch our mouths!

The part about not grieving the Holy Spirit follows one of the overall themes of the Epistle, so that sins against each other are also sins against the Holy Spirit, because She binds us all together.

The next two verses are a summary, also reminding us of our relationship with Christ, which should also inform our relationship with others. And lastly, the connections are made to the other levels.

A lot of good advice in that. When I first read it earlier this week, I had a Wesley Snipes movie quote immediately pop up in my head: Stay Righteous.

What really stuck out to me was the be slow to anger and watching what you

say, especially in the face of adversity.

My first year in college, I was assigned a rather heinous roommate. He was very...particular. He complained about me a lot. He did many things that annoyed me, but remembering Jesus' teachings, I was accommodating and forgiving, not speaking ill of him, & even praying for him.

He and his mother tried to get me kicked out of the room, and my father gave me some advice, to ignore him and let him dig his own hole. I did so. I heard that he and his mother caused a ruckus on nearly a daily basis to the Administrators, but I brushed it away, and stayed righteous.

And it worked. The Dean finally had enough of him and his mother, so he was reassigned to room with someone else, and then conveniently forgot to assign me a new roommate.

And more recently, a guy in the New England steampunk community who was a very good artist, but also a very mean person would frequently lash out at people. Most of those were people far away, so us locals just took him at his word.

But then, he started targeting people the rest of us knew. He eventually set his sights on Theresa & I, claiming that we stole credit for something he did, even though our styles are drastically different; claiming that we banned him from the largest festival in New England, even though we did not have that authority; claiming that we were acting against our own artist consortium; even though that just doesn't make any sense at all!

He did whatever he could to rip our community apart by tearing into people and driving people away, and just being very negative. Each time he targeted someone, especially when he targeted Theresa & I, more people finally started to ask themselves, "Wait, I know Geof & Thee...does that really sound like something they would do?"

It wasn't, and there was the obvious backlash. And guess what Theresa & I did to combat his negativity? Not a thing. We did not allow anger to run

amok, or let evil words come out of us. We just brushed it away, and stayed righteous, and like my former college roommate, he dug his own hole on his own and jumped right in. People had enough of him, and they just stopped listening to the vitriol.

People are going to talk. If you heed this advice given to the early church, you will be able to stay righteous, and people will know that about you, and then you don't need to worry about anything negative that is said about you. Just brush it away and know that the unrighteous will never truly harm you. Just brush it away.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, we hold up the needs of our neighbors as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer to You our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of our church, our community, and the world.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs.

We pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, of body, or of spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in any way our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Hear our prayers, O God, and through the ministry of your Son, free us from the grip of distraction, that we may be of service to others in your name in our lives and proclaiming your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

Ephesians 5:15-20

5:15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,

5:16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

5:17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

5:18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

5:19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.

5:20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.