

LIFE GROUP LESSON

Hot Topics-Studying Ephesians - Week of September 27

Introduction

Is everyone angry these days? We speak of road rage but tempers that flare in traffic have been stewing way before drivers get behind the wheel. We hear angry rhetoric in news media outlets. We see neighbors snub folks who hold a different view. Pockets of division spill into our own marriages and church families ... ugly words, cutting remarks, gossip when a sensitive subject matter is triggered. Some of us have experienced the pain of our children looking us in the eyes and lying to us or demonizing us over a disagreement. All of us have encountered 'hate speech', hate-filled attitudes, and divisive words ... and sadly, sometimes, the hate spews from our own mouth. Is there a better way to live?

As Christ-followers, we are called to a higher standard. Instead of spouting angry words and justifying our remarks, perhaps we should instead ask: What kind of words should be coming out of my mouth? Where is my heart? Does God write people off? Jesus said—

“So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come. A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad ... For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you” (Matthew 12:31-33, 34b-37).

Background

Should we hate 'hate-speech'? When the apostle Paul writes the church in Ephesus, he explains how once an individual is part of God's family, that person (being adopted into God's family) will reflect their heavenly Father. Christ calls us to live in peace. Paul says: “Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God” (Ephesians 4:1). When it comes to being a part of the family of God, love is the goal. Not hate. Building others up is our new agenda, not tearing one another apart. We are a light in the world around us, thus, divisive words of attack will never help a would-be brother or sister come to faith in Jesus. It pushes them away. With the help of God's Holy Spirit, we must practice discretion, discipline, and love.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

We cannot 'hate' or 'shame' people into the Kingdom of God. And we must remember not one of us gets it right all the time. We must resolve to love one another despite our faults. Yes, there will be times we must speak the truth in love. And yes, there will be times a brother or sister will need to speak the truth in love to us. Speaking the truth in love is very different than 'speaking truth without love' or 'speaking love without the truth'. We must never use truth as a weapon, but as a path to freedom. On the flipside, we must never quietly ignore a deadly path before a brother or sister for fear of offending them.

- What can result from 'speaking truth without love'? What can result from speaking love without truth'?
- Condoning or overlooking some issue that should be addressed is not real love. In fact, it may be a form of deception. Perhaps you have experienced someone loving you enough to hold you accountable. How is humility required in both ... accepting accountability and making an allowance for one another's faults?
- Count the number of times you see the word 'one' in vv4-7.

“For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all” (Eph. 4:4-7).

Consider This

We do not compromise the truth; neither do we crush people with the truth. The Holy Spirit calls us to be one with love as the goal. The apostle Paul is addressing people whose cultural grid has been extremely polytheistic. He wants them to understand oneness in Christ does not diminish individuality. Because Christ descended into our lowly world, he accomplished a mission only he could fulfill. And as a result, he generously gives to his church (each of us) special gifts to build up HIS ecclesia into the full and complete standard of Christ. So yes, we should hate 'hate-speech' for it does not fulfill the greater mission of our Lord. The goal in Christ is for the body to be healthy, growing and full of love.

Read aloud:

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ ... He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:11-12,16).

On a scale of 1 – 10 (one being I am not doing my part, ten being I am doing my part and sold out to Christ) where do you currently rank yourself for utilizing your gifts in the church (your work assigned by Jesus) so the body of Christ is growing/healthy? 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

Time for a makeover! Paul calls believers in Ephesus to 'throw off' the old sinful nature and former way of life, and instead, make room for the new. According to vv22-32, quickly make two lists: (1) what I will clear out; (2) how I will live instead. In Jesus' name, GO!

What to stop.

How to live instead.

In Closing

You and I cannot walk in forgiveness while also feeding bitterness. Anger is an honest emotion. God's Word does not say we should not feel anger, but his Word does show us how to deal with anger properly. When we have a problem with another believer, we don't retaliate with more lies, hate, and gossip. We go to that person directly. Pray first. And ask the Lord to give you a heart for them, not an attitude of being against them. Ask the Lord to give you the words to say. Pray for wisdom and discernment, for right timing, for healthy and mature attitudes, and for their heart to be open to what you need to say. Be open to what they may have to say.

- Who comes to mind when you think of 'hate-speech'? Pray for them now.

Of all people, Christ knows what it is like to be falsely accused, spat upon, and betrayed. Close by reading together Jesus' words —

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 6:43-48).

HOT TOPICS

STUDYING THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Text: Ephesians 4

Plain Truth:

_____ faith produces
_____, _____
attitudes, and _____ that bring _____.

1. Our words _____ our _____.
2. Devoted followers of Jesus speak _____ in _____.
3. Make _____ for _____ people.

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