

Title: Mount Charity
Date: March 26, 2023
Subject: Christians are to be people of charity.
Scripture: Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2

There are perks to being the first to do or see something. Such was the case with - Lincoln Ellsworth, one of four people who've been awarded two Congressional Gold Medals. The other three were war heroes from the 1800s and WW II. He got his for exploring the North and South Poles.

During one of Ellsworth's four trips to Antarctica he discovered the highest mountain range (during flights in November 21 and 23, 1935). He could have named it after himself, but he chose other names for it and the three main mountains. The entire range is the Eternity Range. The mountains from north to South are Mount Faith, Mount Hope and Mount Charity. This is Mount Charity.

I don't know if the names immediately came to him, or if he thought of them while he and his pilot were cut off from the world for almost two months because of a malfunctioning switch on their radio antenna. They flew across the continent for two weeks, making frequent stops because of brutal weather conditions. The plane eventually ran out of fuel. They then walked across the forsaken wilderness for 11 days before arriving at the base known as Little America. In total they spent almost two months alone with some assuming they had died. The names of the mountains are appropriate for what the duo needed to do to survive – have faith, hope and charity.

Followers of Christ need the same three of which the greatest is charity or love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Read Ephesians 4:29 - 5:2.

Reread from The Amplified Version.

I. Speech exchange. v. 4:29

The analogy of taking off old, ragged, soiled clothing and putting on new clothes continues. Followers of Christ are to put off unwholesome talk. Not just some of it, but any unwholesome talk. It's speech that's rotten, decaying, putrid, worthless. Some specifics are name-calling, ridicule, mockery, gossip, slander, destructive criticism, words of threat or revenge, griping, complaining, lying, profanity, filthy talk and dirty jokes. A nasty list. These kinds of words can destroy.

Ben was so timid it was difficult to hear him speak. His Christian counselor had to keep asking him to talk louder. The counselor said this of Ben, "You might look to see if he was wearing a sandwich board that read 'Excuse me for living.'" He had a painful story, much from his early teens. His mother suffered a nervous breakdown and people cruelly told him he was responsible for transforming his mom into an emotional invalid. For years he lived under the weight of guilt and anguish (adapted from David Seamands in *The Quest for Character*, Chuck Swindoll, pp. 44, 45).

The saying “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is completely oblivious of reality. It's easy for us to recall times when something was said that hurt us, possibly deeply.

We aren't to be engaged in demo even though that might seem appealing. We're to put on words that can be used to build up others. Christ followers are the building of God. This picture is used throughout Ephesians. Each of us is a worker on the construction site and part of the building project. We all add to the spiritual structure of one another.

The construction is to be according to the other person's needs and bring spiritual benefit. Even as buildings like this church are constructed according to plans, we should think intentionally of how we can build others up through the words we use – a two by four of instruction, a support beam of affirmation, a carpet of appreciation, a kind word to lift a heavy heart.

Earlier, we were commanded to do something useful with our hands and abilities to meet the needs of others. Now God tells us we're to do something useful and profitable with our mouths.

Dave was heartbroken when his good friend and co-worker Kurt died suddenly while on his regular lunchtime run. He was honored when Kurt's wife Mary asked him to give the eulogy at the funeral. Dave recalls, “I was overwhelmed with the bittersweet privilege. As I reflected on Kurt's life, one trait continued to surface. It was a remarkable characteristic, and it was something that I focused on in my eulogy. In the 22 years I had known him, worked with him, and talked with him, I never once heard Kurt say a negative word about any other person. What a remarkable legacy of a true Christian heart!... He sought to build up others, showing kindness and tenderheartedness instead of bitterness and malice” (Dave Branon, Our Daily Bread).

Joanie Yoder offers “examples of corrupt communication we often aim at our children: "Can't you do anything right?" "What's wrong with you?" "You'll never learn." "You're always breaking something." "Oh, let me do it." The list is endless. But so are examples of edifying communication. A list called "99 Ways To Say 'Very Good'" offers these encouraging words: "That's it!" "You're really working hard today." "I'm very proud of you." "Now you've figured it out." "You are very good at that." "That's the way!" "Now that's what I call a fine job." "Good thinking.” Then she applies it: Remember, people need encouragers more than they need critics. Which one are you?” (Our Daily Bread, Joanie Yoder, 12/30/98).

II. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. v. 4:30

The Holy Spirit was given by God to permanently live inside us to be our teacher, counselor and guide. We're no longer our own but are God's temple. Therefore, the Holy Spirit isn't a guest in our house. We're guests in God's house. We're to act according to his rules, not God according to ours.

We aren't to grieve the Holy Spirit. We aren't to distress, sadden or displease him. The immediate application is to unwholesome speech. It's inappropriate and wounds the Holy Spirit.

The truth is any sin would grieve the Holy Spirit...

III. Anger exchange. vv. 4:31, 32

A. Get rid. Last week's sermon focused on the problem of anger. Recap a little. It's okay to have what is sometimes called "righteous anger" but it shouldn't lead to sin. Anger is to be temporary and we need to exercise care so it doesn't allow the devil to gain a foothold in our lives.

This verse deals with types of unrighteous, inappropriate anger which don't have a place in our lives. This includes bitterness, the long-standing attitude of spitefulness and resentment. Rage is wrath, outbursts. Anger: hostile attitude, seeking revenge. Brawling: screaming arguments, loud self-assertion of rights. Slander: insulting a person behind their back, often to make the speaker look good. Malice: general attitude of wishing and plotting ill-will, having it in for someone.

I heard the story of a man who was on his deathbed. He felt that his daughters had not taken good care of him, had basically neglected him as they didn't spend time with him, call him or do what he felt they should have done. In his dying wish he pronounced a curse on them - that they'd suffer as he had and more, never find true love, be lacking for money and die a slow, miserable and agonizing death.

It's hard to imagine someone could act that way. It would be pretty safe to say that dad suffered from all sorts of anger and revenge issues.

We're to put off all those mannerisms, attitudes and thoughts of the old life. Instead, we're to operate by putting on what God provides for us in the newness of our spiritual lives. This brings us to v. 32. The first aspect is kindness. Synonyms include generosity, gentleness, graciousness.

A young factory worker, the only Christian in the shop department, noticed a valuable tool was missing from his toolbox. Later, he saw it in a fellow worker's toolbox. Since he wanted to be a good testimony for Christ, he went to the man and said, "I see you have one of my tools, but you may keep it if you need it." Then he went back to work. Over the next 2 weeks, the person who'd taken the tool offered something of equal value, volunteered to help on some home projects, and finally slipped money into the Christian's coat pocket. Eventually, the co-workers became good friends and the tool thief admitted he couldn't resist the man's kindness. (Our Daily Bread, HGB, 8/8/94).

Compassion. Tenderness. Showing empathy. Eric Liddell won a gold medal in the 1924 Olympics. His story is told in the movie "Chariots of Fire." What he did after winning the gold is unusual for an Olympic athlete. He went to China to join his missionary parents and brother. He was there when the Japanese invaded during WW II. At one point Eric was assigned to a new city where the missionary hospital treated only the Chinese, not the Japanese or Communist soldiers. Liddell treated all of them. His reasoning was they were loved by God.

The Japanese and Communists had inflicted pain and suffering on the Chinese, the people Eric had known, loved and served. He could've become bitter and resentful. He didn't. He chose to show compassion and continued to until he died in an internment camp in the winter of 1944. His fellow prisoners remembered him as trying to make the prison more bearable for children who were separated from their parents.

Forgiveness. Taking the initiative to mend hurts. Forgiveness has been described as “an active process of the mind and temper of a wronged person, by means of which he abolishes a moral hindrance to fellowship with the wrongdoer, and reestablishes the freedom and happiness of friendship” (Scottish theologian H. R. MacIntosh).

The great evangelist John Wesley was traveling with General James Oglethorpe, founder of the British colony in Georgia. Oglethorpe was angry with one of his subordinates. The man came to the general and humbly asked for forgiveness, but was gruffly told, "I never forgive!" Wesley looked the general in the eye and said, "Then I hope, sir, that you never sin."

Thomas Edison is one of the world's great inventors with almost 1100 patents. His groundbreaking inventions included the phonograph, carbon telephone transmitter, electricity distribution system, commercial fluoroscope for taking X-rays, movie camera and viewer, alkaline storage battery. Though he didn't invent the light bulb, he was the one who created a bulb that would last for over 1000 hours.

At one point he and his team had worked 24 hours straight to assemble one bulb. The bulb was given to a helper, a young boy, who nervously carried it up the stairs. He cautiously watched his hands, afraid to drop the contraption. He got to the last step and dropped the one-of-a-kind bulb. It took another 24 hours to make another bulb. When it was completed, Edison gave the bulb to the same boy to have him carry it up the stairs. That's forgiveness.

There's a qualifier on forgiveness - just as how in Christ God forgave us. God is the forgiver. He did this through Jesus Christ dying on the cross. We apply this to ourselves when we place our trust in Christ as our Savior. God then sees us through Christ's sacrifice. He sees us as forgiven and doesn't hold our sins against us as something to be judged. We're declared not guilty. One survey indicated 75% of people were able to accept God had forgiven them. However, only 52% were able to forgive others.

We are to forgive the way we've been forgiven. We aren't to hold wrongdoings of others against them. We don't treat them as being guilty. We forgive by not keeping score, being bigger than the offense, not harboring a judgmental attitude and when forgiveness has been given to a repentant person, the case is closed.

If Satan can get us to hold grudges, be resentful, be bitter, avoid others, talk behind the other's back, and use cutting remarks instead of forgiving, he wins. We wind up serving him and his cause. There's a saying that goes “To err is human and to forgive is divine.” We could add: “To not forgive is satanic.”

IV. Be imitators of God 5:1, 2

The root of kindness, compassion and forgiveness is love. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of love, of seeking the highest good of others. He demonstrates how God treats us even though we've wronged him. God could have led Paul to use examples from how Jesus acted while he on earth - his tenderness with children, his compassion on the sick, his kindness toward people on the outside of society, his forgiveness of those who crucified him.

Instead, God draws us to the ultimate expression of love. Jesus willingly chose to offer himself on the cross so we could be in a right relationship with God. Though those who benefit from Christ's act is people, the love was really directed toward God the Father who receives it as a fragrant offering.

The call for us is to go and do likewise – love like Christ. We're to be imitators of God. There's a saying, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." We can change it - "Imitation is the sincerest form of being a follower of Jesus Christ." We're not trying to flatter God, nor merely be like him on the surface, but we're to be like him, to copy his heart and the actions that flow from it.

We can think in terms of children imitating their parents. They like to wear mommy's and daddy's shoes, pretend to put on makeup like mommy. Children enjoy playing dress up.

We're to play dress up to be like our Father. We're to clothe ourselves with love. Love is the greatest and highest virtue. It's the crown. It binds all the other virtues together (Colossians 3:14). Love is the basis for the other qualities.

Previously in Ephesians, Paul prayed that Christians would be rooted and established in love (3:17). Now he asks that love be practiced. We're to live a life of love.

Earlier in 4:1, the challenge to Christ followers was stated: "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." The command was followed by qualities, ones similar to those at the end of chapter 4, that are to be incorporated into our lives. The challenge was repeated in 4:17 - that we no longer live as Gentiles or nonbelievers. Now the challenge is expressed as being imitators of God and living a life of love. We need to hear things again and again and again.

We imitate God and live lives of love because we are dearly loved children.

Emil Von Sauer was a gifted pianist and the last surviving pupil of the great Franz Liszt. His travels took him to Budapest, Hungary where he heard of a skilled 16 year old named Andor Foldes. Von Sauer requested the young man to play for him. Foldes obliged with some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven and Schumann. When he finished, Von Sauer walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead. "My son, when I was your age, I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson saying, 'Take care of this kiss. It comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.' I've waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it."

We have a sacred heritage we are to pass on. We have been unbelievably blessed by God. Unlike Von Sauer we aren't to wait until we find the rare person who possesses unique ability and deserves to be blessed. We are to pass on what we have received to all. As God has loved us, we are to love others.