

It being the 500th anniversary of the Reformation I've been reading and hearing a lot of Martin Luther. There is a quote that keeps popping up that popped into my mind while I was preparing. Maybe you have heard this one before, maybe you haven't. It goes like this: I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.

Now, what does that quote have to do with the lesson from Ephesians?

Sometimes as a pastor, let's be honest, *every time* I stand up here as a pastor it is good for me to remember that my job is to simply preach the Word of God and get out of the way – God's Word carries a power to work in your heart and life that is infinitely greater than any word I could ever write or say.

I especially thought of that with Ephesians 4-5 because I don't think that this section of God's Word requires all that much explanation from me. I could probably almost just read it again and say amen, but then you guys would get out of here too early and you wouldn't know what to do with all that extra time ☺.

But seriously, there is a not a lot more than needs to be said, so let's let the Word work.

I'm going to read you that lesson from Ephesians 4-5 again. I want you to listen well. I have a little commentary to guide your listening but for the most part I want to get out of the way and let the Word work. You can follow along on p. 9 if you want – listen to the crystal clear instructions from God's Word.

Verse 19: **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

Need I say more?

Has your talk been wholesome?

Has every single word that you uttered – to your girlfriends over a class of wine, to your spouse after a long day at work, to your buddy at the links, to your coworker by the watercooler, to the world on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to your classmate over snapchat – has every single word that you texted, whispered, or spoke been helpful in building others up?

Has every single syllable that flowed from your fingers or lips been a benefit to those who listened?

I didn't think it would be appropriate to have a Wittenberg beer up here to drink with Martin Luther, but let me get out of the way for 30 seconds and let God's Word work. As awkward, contrived, and silly as it may seem, I'm gonna read that sentence one more time and I'm gonna give you 30 seconds to just think about it. **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful in building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...**

Verse 30: **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

If you were listening well, verse 29 made you feel pretty guilty. But I know how easy it is to forget. A day or two from now, even though God potently spoke to you about the use of your words, I know how easy it is to forget, how easy it is to swallow that unspoken excuse that it is not that big of a deal, in fact it is even a good thing to vent a little bit, it's just not healthy or practical to keep all those unwholesome words bottled up.

But did you hear it? Verse 30? That makes God sad.

Maybe you remember a time as a teen when you did something, and instead of getting disciplined or yelled at by your parents, they just looked at you with a broken heart, tears in their eyes, and said they were disappointed in you. There is little that is more crushing than that... to see someone you love disappointed and hurt because of your careless actions.

If you've ever felt that way with your parents, if you've ever felt that way with your kids (past the point of anger to the point of heartbreak), how much more so does the Holy Spirit feel that way when he looks at you and the careless way you continue to use your words – even when he knows you know better?

Let me get out of the way and let God's Word work. **Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption...** why do you give God a reason to be disappointed in you? Why do you keep breaking his heart that way?

Verses 31 and 32: **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

We've covered words. Now we add thoughts and deeds...

Sinners living in a sinful world sin – that is by definition who we are and what we do – which means I've wronged you. You've wronged me. We've wronged each other. And the more time we spend with each other, the more we love each other, it does not make all this go away. No, the more time we spend with each other the more we will sin against each other by sheer proximity. The more we love each other, the more it will disappoint and betray when we are sinned against.

Has all this sinning that happens when sinners get together made you bitter? Are you one of those people who grumbled under your breath about "stupid" people? Has it jaded your relationships with people who just keep on sinning?

Has it made you angry? Is there a person in your life that has wronged you so many times and in such painful ways that the mere sight of them, the mere mention of their name just makes your blood boil – and you may bottle it up so the world doesn't see, but it's still there in your heart – the heart that God sees with more clarity than even you?

And has that bitterness and anger ever led to brawling, slander, or any other form of malice? Has a glass of wine ever loosened your lips so the bitterness poured out in a slander-laced tirade? Has the anger ever gotten the better of you so that you physically lashed out and looked more like a brawler than a child of God?

Are you kind and compassionate with *everyone* because you remember that parable Jesus told – you remember how enormous a debt God has forgiven you so you must forgive *everyone*?

Let me get out of the way and let God's Word work. As awkward, contrived and silly as it may seem, I want you to close your eyes (if it helps) and think about it: **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you...**

Ephesians 5:1 and 2: **Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children, and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Follow God's example... walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us...

The bar has been set. Be like God. Love like Jesus. That's the standard. That's the expectation.

Need I say more? I don't think you need another 30 seconds to let that one sink in.

Luther said the Word works, the writer to the Hebrews said: **The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

Do you feel the Word working? Do you feel the Word cutting?

This morning I just needed to get out of the way and let the scalpel of God's Word start slicing.

Friends, if you've been listening well you know that God's Word is very good at cutting and it is time for me to remind you that God's Word also heals. In fact, that is exactly why God gave his word so that in his Word, through the Word made flesh God would heal the broken hearted and bind up our wounds.

So, let me preach the Word and get out of the way again. I'm going to read Ephesians 4 and 5 again but this time I want you to listen not to the instructions, but to the stated facts of God's Word.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful in building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption...

For those of you here today who were brought to this baptismal font, or one like it, some before you even uttered an unwholesome word, others after many had spilled from your lips, this is God's fact for you: through that water and the power of God's Word you were sealed for the day of redemption. God put his mark, his lasting imprint, his claim on your soul. No matter what you have said or left unsaid, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption – the day when every sin you have committed will come due, when you will stand accountable to your God and the

Holy Spirit will give you your bill with the words "paid in full" plastered across in big bloody-red letters.

Let me get out of the way and let God's Word work. This is a God-declared fact: **You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption.**

Verses 31 and 32: **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

Yes, you have been bitter. Yes, you have been angry. Yes, in that bitterness and anger you have lashed out in brawling, slander, and all other kinds of malice.

No, you have not been as kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other as God forgave you – not consistently, not well.

BUT that hasn't stopped God from forgiving *you*. In Christ Jesus – the one who was anointed, who took on his shoulders the responsibility of saving you, in his perfect life, in his innocent death you are forgiven. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed your guilt from you. Though your sins are as scarlet, he has made them white as snow.

Let me get out of the way and let God's Word work. This is a God-declared fact: **in Christ God forgives you.**

Finally, verses 1 and 2: **Follow God's example therefore, as dearly loved children, and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Dearly loved children... let that sink in... *you are a dearly loved child of God*, not because you were so good, or good enough at following the instructions here in Ephesians, but because Christ loved you and gave himself up for you as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Let me get out of the way one more time this morning and let God's Word work. Let these truths, these God-declared facts define who you are from this day forward. **You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. You have been forgiven. You are a dearly loved child of God.**

God's Word works. It does the seemingly impossible by sealing, forgiving, and adopting unwholesome folks like us. God's Word is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes these God-declared facts.

And to the degree that you find your identity in these facts, I guarantee you, better, God's Word guarantees you, you will find in your heart a desire to follow God's example and walk in the way of love, because God's Word works that way too. It convicts, it heals, it inspires.

Dear brothers and sisters, fellow dearly loved children of God: **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.**

Amen.