

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

MSG: A Recipe for Christian Growth

Ephesians 4:11 - 5:20

In my quiet time recently, I have been struck by a passage that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus; part of its impact is related to the particular version of the Bible that I was reading it in. The version is simply "The Message", which is written in very contemporary English. It's abbreviated "MSG".

These passages have impacted me so much that I am going to quote the passage below, as translated in the MSG version, so that you are also reading the same words. This, for me, is a very powerful scripture, which speaks strongly for itself. Following our review of the passage below, let's consider all that Paul has packed into this small piece of scripture, and how it can directly help us to grow and mature in our Christian walk. So, from the MSG Version, let's peruse the following:

Ephesians 4:11-32

To Be Mature (cont'd)

¹¹He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher ¹²to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, ¹³until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

¹⁴No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. ¹⁵God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. ¹⁶He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

The Old Way Has to Go

¹⁷And so I insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. ¹⁸They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. ¹⁹They can't think straight anymore. Feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion.

²⁰But that's no life for you. You learned Christ! ²¹My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus. ²²Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, ²³a life renewed from the inside ²⁴and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.

²⁵What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

²⁶Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. ²⁷Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

²⁸Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work.

²⁹Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

³⁰Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

³¹Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. ³²Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1-20

Wake Up from Your Sleep

¹Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. ²Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

³Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed.

⁴Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don't talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn't fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.

⁵You can be sure that using people or religion or things just for what you can get out of them—the usual variations on idolatry—will get you nowhere, and certainly nowhere near the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.

⁶Don't let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with him. ⁷Don't even hang around people like that.

⁸You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! ⁹The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. ¹⁰Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.

¹¹Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. ¹²It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. ¹³Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.

¹⁴Wake up from your sleep,

Climb out of your coffins;

Christ will show you the light!

¹⁵So watch your step. Use your head. ¹⁶Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

¹⁷Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.

¹⁸Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. ¹⁹Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. ²⁰Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.

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Now consider the following questions:

1. Do you think that this passage instructs us to grow up, i.e., to mature? If so, cite below at least two verses that tell us that:
2. What is the theme of the verses in Ephesians 4:11-16?
3. Paul says in Ephesians 4:17-24 that we are take on "an entirely new life". How does he define this new life that we are to take on? (See verses 23-24; they contain the key to this new life.)
4. Write down the specific thing that Paul instructs us to do in each of the following verses:
 - a. Ephesians 4:25
 - b. Ephesians 4:26
 - c. Ephesians 4:28
 - d. Ephesians 4:29
 - e. Ephesians 4:30
 - f. Ephesians 4:31
 - g. Ephesians 4:32
5. What is the theme of Ephesians 5:1-3 (i.e., what is the one word repeated over and over again in these verses)?
6. In Ephesians 5:3-20, Paul provides us seven "don't"s. List each of these below:
 - a. Don't #1:
 - b. Don't #2:
 - c. Don't #3:
 - d. Don't #4:
 - e. Don't #5:
 - f. Don't #6:
 - g. Don't #7:
7. We can summarize this lesson with Paul's warning to "wake up" and start living the kind of life that God would have us to live. Ephesians 5:1-2 gives us a model to live by. Describe it in your own words.

As I contemplated these passages in Ephesians, I was convicted by each of them in terms of how far short I fall in following Paul's instruction regarding God's intention for my life. I pray that as you study with us, God will speak to your heart as well. We are commanded to grow and mature, and to be Christ-like. To help us succeed, we are given very specific instructions. At the heart of them all is love.

Our growth does not come from the outside, or from "doing" of things, but rather from the inside and by what motivates us. Let us ask God to examine our hearts to ensure that our motives are pure and that our lifestyle reflects our God and Father in heaven.

Thanks for studying with us.

Yours in Christ,

Wes