

Lighten Your Load

Ephesians 4:29-32

Preface

Show video on Forgiveness - Lord Lord.

The closing lines of the video are; "Why do you keep calling me Lord? You won't even do what I ask!"

Like the lady in the skit, we often conclude that our Lord's instructions are "unreasonable."

Our Lord knows what is best for us but in our stubborn refusal, we add to our burdens. God calls us to obey Him and gives us clear, simple instructions for making our lives easier.

When Jesus said, "*I am the way the truth and the life*", He clearly meant if you will listen and follow me.

Scripture - Read

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:29-32 NIV

Introduction

Paul writes to the church at Ephesus from prison in Rome. Having spent three years in Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey, Paul was very close to the believers at Ephesus.

Several remarkable things happened in Ephesus:

1. Paul baptized a dozen of followers of John the Baptist
2. Extraordinary miracles took place including people healed
3. Sorcerers were converted
4. The city was incited into a riot by Demetrius because of his loss of silversmith business because people were worshiping God rather than idols

Ephesus was a place that saw great revival and thousands converted to Christianity. In Revelation chapter 2, our Lord commends the church at Ephesus for many things. But, he also rebukes them for "losing their first love."

It is easy to get caught up in our pride and miss the simple things that God calls us to do. Last week we heard testimony from those who went on the mission trip to New Orleans. This was an experience in which their circumstance changed enough that they could focus on doing Christ-like acts of love for others. The reward was great.

Paul stresses how our love for Christ absolutely must influence our action towards others. Everything we do must be a reflection of our sincere love for Christ.

Illus: I had an employee that was repeatedly instructed on how to handle the telephone at the office. He was told to greet people with "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon." He was also instructed to refer to the person by their name and be friendly. However, within a day he would always revert to his dry cold phone mannerisms. The problem was he never genuinely cared about the customer and didn't enjoy what he was doing.

Quote: If you serve for the sake of service, you will never serve genuinely or effectively.

I have said before that some Christians can be the meanest and most miserable people on earth. I know that sounds like a harsh statement and it burdens me to say it. But it is true.

When Christians lose their first love for Christ, they become miserable pieces of course sandpaper.

When Christians look inwardly rather than outwardly, they become self-centered grumps.

When Christians hoard their faith and do not share it with others, they become awkward and broken, no longer serving their calling.

When Christians allow anger and resentment to build up inside, they become hard like a pimple desperately in need of a needle.

Our text today gives the key to returning to our first love. It tells us how to flesh-out our love for Christ, lighten our load and be free.

Content

1. Lighten your load by lifting up others (vs. 29)

Illus: I saw a church sign this week that read, "Be a fountain, not a drain." As Christians, we are called to be fountains rather than drains. We are called and instructed to use our words for the purpose of lifting up others.

Notice, the responsibility is upon us as believers. It is our responsibility to bridle our tongues and insure that nothing unwholesome comes from our lips.

In everything we say and do, we should lift-up others and encourage them. Think about that for a moment.

Illus: I know a Christian man who for many years has been very successful in sales. His company has merged and been purchased several times and each time he feels the threat of being terminated because he is very highly paid. But he never gets terminated because his customers love him. This man truly cares about other people and is always looking for ways to help them. He helps with his words of encouragement as well as suggestions and advice. I have known this man for over 25 years and never have I had a conversation with him that he did not compliment or encourage me in some way.

On the other hand, I am thinking of a Christian woman I have known for 30 years and speak with frequently. She is always negative and always speaking poorly of someone. In all the years I have known her, never, absolutely never has she paid me a compliment or been an encourager to me. She does criticize me plenty and routinely talks about me behind my back. If this woman is ever truly happy, I haven't seen it.

So which kind of person are you? Are you a fountain or a drain? Do you follow God's instruction by making sure your words lift up others or do they put others down? Must the conversation always be about you or can it be for the benefit of others?

Jesus said; ⁴³⁸ *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* Luke 6:38 NIV

I am reminded of the song by the Imperials. "Keeping on casting your bread upon the water, soon it's going to come back home on every wave.

Lighten your load by lifting others up.

2. Lighten your load by dumping the anger and bitterness (vs. 31)

Nothing can steal the joy of a Christian like harboring anger and bitterness. When we are weighted down with bitterness and anger, we don't even look like a Christian.

In fact, Paul says do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by carry the nastiness of such things. Through Christ, God's Holy Spirit dwells in us. The Holy Spirit is that part of the Trinity that lives within our hearts.

The Holy Spirit is the Christians Compass or GPS. It is alive in our hearts guiding us through the decisions of life. It tells how to react and respond to life's challenges.

The problem is that the Holy Spirit does not reside well in a heart with anger, rage, slander or malice. When we have such things in our hearts, we quench the Holy Spirit and can no longer pay attention to its guiding instructions.

Speaking practically, a Christian has no excuse for angry outbursts. We have no business letting anger fester. A Christian must not have unsettled conflicts that linger on and on.

As Christians, we are called to be Christ-like, being of His nature and His manner. This does not mean we do not stand-up for the truth and what is right.

Like Christ, we can be angered without sinning. We can be irritated without being rattled.

Speaking of Christian love, Paul writes: *"It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."* 1 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

A Christian is not to keep a record of wrongs. We must not allow our anger to fester and grow. Like a cancer it will consume our heart and soul, thereby grieving the Holy Spirit within us.

Illus: I recently had hernia surgery. For a year I knew something was wrong. Something was causing the pain and discomfort and it had to be dealt with. Now 3 weeks later, I feel so much better. The agonizing pain is gone.

Christians must consider the source of our anger and bitterness and we must remove it in order to experience happiness. It can't stay inside of us.

Lighten your load by dumping the anger and bitterness.

3. Lighten your load by practicing compassion and forgiveness (vs. 32)

Quote: "Sympathy is never wasted except when you give it to yourself." Author Unknown

Throughout God's Word, we are reminded to forgive others as God has forgiven us. Too many professing Christians *receive* forgiveness, but never really *experienced* forgiveness. Experiencing forgiveness involves receiving and giving.

If we live only according to justice, always seeking to get what is ours, we burden ourselves with selfishness. But if we live according to forgiveness, sharing with others what God has given us, we enjoy freedom and joy.

Peter asked how many times he should forgive someone. Jesus answered 70 times 7. Peter was looking for a measuring rod and Jesus told him to forget the measuring rod and start practicing forgiveness.

The world's worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart.

Some of the most miserable people I have met in my ministry have been people who would not forgive others. They go through life weighted down by an un-forgiving heart.

Illus: Dwight L. Moody was a great preacher and evangelist in the late 1800s. He is known for his dynamic sermons and many books. He was also a missionary and founded the Moody Institute and Moody Publishers. He was a dynamic and accomplished preacher. On one occasion he was conducting a lecture to young preachers when one man asked a question. For some reason the question irritated Moody who snapped back at him. At the end of his talk Moody paused and confessed, "Friends, I want to confess before you that I made a great mistake at the beginning of this meeting. I answered my young brother down there foolishly. I ask God to forgive me and I ask him to forgive me." Then Moody quickly left the platform and went to the young man and shook his hand. Someone who witnessed this called it, "the greatest thing I ever saw Moody do."

If we will just show compassion upon others and forgive those who offend us, we will be doing great things for the gospel. The greatest sermon we will ever preach will not come from our words but from our actions of kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

Lighten your load by practicing compassion and forgiveness.

Conclusion

Illus: Ten years ago I marched myself over to Foley to the John Deere dealership with the intent of purchasing a new riding mower. I had to do it quick before my wife changed her mind.

I bought a brand new John Deere LT160, 42" cut with a 16 hp Kohler engine. Over the years, every time I use the mower, I take the blower and blow off the grass clippings and dirt and then hose it off and put it in the garage. I will confess that on 2 occasions I have even waxed the thing. Now that is eccentric.

A few years ago I ran into a light pole with it and busted up the entire hood and front end. I ordered a replacement and the mower to this day looks very nice, not brand new but very nice.

However, a couple of weeks ago the rod in the engine broke damaging the internal parts and completely locking up the motor. Now the mower sits in my shop with the cover on the floor, the engine taken apart and in a bunch of pieces in a box. It is a sad sight to behold.

The people at John Deere and Wilson Dismukes both say it isn't worth spending any money on and I should get a new one. But they don't see what I see. I still see value. In fact, I see an LT160 that has the ability and potential to be a great riding mower for many more years to come. I see something that needs a little work and investment but has plenty to offer.

God sees the same in you. God sees His children as broken but fixable. If we will just trust and obey His instructions, He will do great things in our life.

All of us have broken parts; some physical and some emotional. But with a little investment and work, we still have plenty to offer.

Will you obey the word of God? Will you trust Him and do as He instructs? Who do you need to forgive? What does His Holy Spirit call you to do today?