

SERMON: To The Glory of God's Grace- A Closer Walk with Jesus

GOOD Morning OIC & Welcome to Father's House

Today, we will continue in the Book of Ephesians, the Letter inspired by Holy Spirit and written by the Apostle Paul. In my last Message we saw how Paul gave instructions to the Ephesians, therefore, to all Christians today; how God creates Unity in the Church while using Diversity of Gifts in the people Jesus calls to fill specific Offices in the Church. These Leaders receive more power from God as He requires more from them. This week we will see Paul's instructions on Walking the Christian Walk, which I have titled: To The Glory of God's Grace- A Closer Walk with Jesus.

Now let us review my closing words from my last Message.

We Christians stay on the Growth and Maturing Track with the help of our Leaders, who are vital channels of God's Power. This is according to God's Plan in (Ephesians 4.11/NIVUK) *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, thus "Power in the Church through Men." Then "miraculously" {it will seem} as Paul said in (Ephesians 4.15/NIVUK), we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.. Then also, (Ephesians 4.16/NIVUK) From him {Christ} the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* I had related the story of Jesus confronting a rich young ruler who chose his wealth over following Jesus, and Jesus' Words in (Luke 18.27/NIVUK): *What's impossible for men is possible with God.* This was to emphasize how *impossible* it seems for any church, including OIC, to grow to that level of maturity. Now, for today's Message, the challenge does not center on that kind of choice of Spiritual Riches verses Earthly Riches; but, similar is Jesus' final answer to his disciples in (Luke 18.27/NIVUK) *Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'* And

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE- The Christian Life

I emphasized how a church's Faith is tested and *stretched* in order to become *the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ* in (Ephesians 4.15/NIVUK); and also, *the whole body, joined and*

held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” as in **(Ephesians 4.16/NIVUK)**. Now I want to emphasize that today's Message on living **The Christian Life** that is pleasing to our Jesus and His Father, is equally **impossible, without God's Helper, Holy Spirit**. Every Christian, whether he is sent to the “Ends of the Earth” or commanded by Jesus “to stay where you are,” is on this **IMPOSSIBLE MISSION, Living a Holy Christian Life**.

Paul and the Lord Jesus insist on this **Christian Life** in **(Ephesians 4.17/TLB)** *Let me say this, then, speaking for the Lord: Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are blinded and confused.* The Apostle Paul makes it clear what he, and thus the Lord Jesus, demands of Christians: *Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are **blinded and confused**, or, in the NIVUK, **in the futility of their thinking**.* Sinners have no ability to choose anything. They are blinded by Satan. As a Japanese Taxi driver I witnessed to recently said: “I am free with no religion: Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity!” He said that he is free from “religion” but he is ignorant that he is **blinded and confused**, a slave to Sin and Satan. Thus Jesus' prayer on the Cross to His Father in **(Luke 23.34)** when *Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’*, is the **Intercession for every sinner who ever lived to be offered forgiveness while yet blinded by the Evil One. Born-Again, we are then brought into God's marvelous light, repenting of sin and turning away from sin and Satan.** So we are expected, quite reasonably by Jesus, to now live *the Christian Life*.

You may ask, “Pastor Bruce, why do you say that it is impossible for Christians to live the Christian Life? How could Paul say God is asking the *impossible* of us now?”

My point here, and in many of my sermons, is that if we just **try hard to live the Christian Life, we will fail**. We do have the responsibility to exercise **our will, the will we did not even have as sinners**, which at first was to walk toward God, and away from sin and Satan; and now, to continue in that direction. **That job is on us!** But, as the famous Warrior for Christ Hymn by Martin Luther, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, declares “If we in our own strength confide, the Battle will be losing.” The Battle in this hymn is focusing against our enemy, Satan. But, often more difficult, is the battle against our old sinful thought life and the sin it could lead to. **This also requires prayer and faith.** As forgiven sinners, thus now saints, we don't fear condemnation; but, our sinful natures require God's Power to help us be **over-comers**, against our sinful flesh and the Devil. Thus, with our will, we choose to reckon or consider ourselves dead to sin according to **(Romans 6.11)** *In the same way, count yourselves **dead to sin** but **alive to God** in Christ Jesus.* Yet, at the same time, Jesus's declaration in **(John 15.5)** *‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can **do nothing**;* applies not

only to our “ministry”, but also to our ability to *no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking*. As Luther's Hymn continues: “if not the right man were on our side, the battle would be losing. Dost ask who that may be, Christ Jesus, it is He...” Therefore the Spirit of Jesus inside Christians, that is the Holy Spirit, must add Jesus power to our will to no longer live in the futility of sinful thinking, as we have the habit to do after past years under the Devil. So, God by His Spirit, causes this *impossible to happen* in every Christian, all around the World, and every day until our Glorious Entrance into Heaven.

You also may be thinking, dear OIC Saints: “But Pastor Bruce, this theology is too complicated for me to always think about in my Christians Life.” I guarantee that Holy Spirit will have some of this teaching, especially the Bible verses, stick to you like “peanut butter.” But, at the same time, I posed that question as if you said it because it is reasonable. The answer that includes the Word of God is your “desiring a *Closer Walk with Jesus*.” Note, as the song we just sang, “closer” does not imply it is not already a **close walk!** **It means that my sinful nature keeps moving me to not stay close to my Wonderful Loving Saviour, Jesus. So I pray for *Just A Closer Walk with Thee!***

In **(Ephesians 4.17-18)** *Their closed hearts are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds against him, and they cannot understand his ways.* Don't think that there are “nice” sinners. Sure, they may appear “nice” especially with the cultural habits in Japan, but they are not fooling God. God loves them...we pray for, and witness to them, but, as in

(Ephesians 4.19) *They don't care anymore about right and wrong and have given themselves over to impure ways. They stop at nothing, being driven by their evil minds and reckless lusts.* This is a true description of the sinner. The Bible actually declares that a sinner is an enemy against God.

(Romans 5.10) *For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!* However, as by God's grace we became Christians, so might they. But our lives must not be in these ways of living anything like theirs. We know *right and wrong!* We desire *holiness* not *impurity*. Our human desires are tempered and tuned by Holy Spirit to please God.

(Ephesians 4.20-21) *But that isn't the way Christ taught you! 21 If you have really heard his voice and learned from him the truths concerning himself.* Jesus' Presence by the Spirit; His teachings in the Bible (or from the Apostles' Letters before the written Bible as to the Ephesians); and the Older Testament of the Bible, for today and 1st Century Jews; with all godly influences together; are the *truths concerning himself*. These teaching points are contrary and in contrast against the lifestyle of sinners which *isn't the way Christ taught you*. Now, in **(Ephesians 4.21)**, Paul, and

evangelist, as well as a pastor, teacher, and missionary....encourages **doubt. Why?** If someone in Ephesus is play acting being a Christian, it is better they realize it *sooner rather than later, before* death closes the door for Salvation. So Paul says: *If you have really heard his voice and learned from him the truths concerning himself.* Heard His voice includes the Still Small Voice of the Spirit. It is Jesus! The Christian knows they heard in their heart, and were moved in their winding steps, to come to Christ. The “*If*” is to encourage self-examination. God wants all Believers in Jesus to confidently say with Paul in **(2 Timothy 1.12/KJ21)** ... *nevertheless I am not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day.* Although as we mature, our confidence will increase; at rebirth, a New Believer knows deep inside that it was Jesus who died for the forgiveness of his sins personally.

So in **(Ephesians 4.22)**, *Then throw off your old evil nature—the old you that was a partner in your evil ways rotten through and through.* The Greek New Testament **(MOUNCE)** describes *your old evil nature, as being corrupted and deluded (apatē) by its desires.* Apatē (ἀπάτη) means, what I call, the **3 D's of Deceit, Deception & Delusion.** This instruction to Christians is similar to **(Romans 6.11)** *In the same way, count yourselves **dead to sin** but **alive to God** in Christ Jesus.* But, there is more emotional unction and punch in this exhortation by Paul in **(Ephesians 4.22).** Counting yourselves dead to sin is vital, but more passive, in that when our old nature just makes *noise inside our hearts,* we can choose to ignore it and count ourselves dead to it. But, the active and desirous lusts from our old evil nature are often strong *feelings overpowering our senses that we are, from our Pre-Christ days, in the habit of satisfying by an act of sin!* These more emotionally charged temptations must be *thrown off!* ...thus an active, not passive, act of our will.

How bad were we before Christ? Well, we only had that one nature, evil and *rotten through and through.* In the northern sections of the United States especially from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean, there are bountiful natural and cultivated apple orchards. Dorothy tells me there are many different apple varieties where she grew up on a farm by the Great Lakes. The degrading expression I heard all my life, *rotten to the core,* comes from “Bad Apples”...on trees ,but describes those walking around on two feet. Thus we all were “Bad Apples” with *evil ways rotten through and through,* so Pastor Bruce says *we all were {rotten to the core like a bad apple}.*

APPLES, HORSES AND MATURING CHRISTIANS

Jesus, as any great preacher...the Best Ever, chose analogies and parables that fit the culture He lived in first, and often, of course, universal concepts and ideas for the whole world which He would die for. But, Israel, is more like Japan than Michigan or New England in the USA. Apples need cooler climates with hot but short summers. If Jerusalem were in Michigan, Jesus would likely say: **“ You are the apple tree branches, and I am the Apple Tree. For you branches to grow Apples, you must abide in Me, the Apple Tree.”**

Well, permit me to return to those apple orchards on and around Dorothy's farm home to discuss Living the Christian Life so to mature. Unlike grapes, which change in color to some degree on the vine, apples give many obvious visual clues to their ripeness or maturity. So, for these verses in Ephesians, I chose “apples.” Apples are frequently picked upon appearance, not just time or size. Most types mature from dark green into a bright red color. My point is that if you pick one still half green, it has not reached its best flavor. So it is with Christians maturing. We Christians are no longer “Bad Apples rotten to the core” as **(Ephesians 4.22)** *then throw off your old evil nature—the old you that was a partner in your evil ways **rotten through and through.*** We are now like apples maturing on a Tree, turning more red, more like Jesus.

Paul now adds a positive factor replacing the negatives of sin to describe the Christian Life that pleases God in (Ephesians 4.23) *Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better.* Paul makes it clear that maturing is **not an option. (Ephesians 4.23)** *Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better.* We are thus commanded to ripen on the Tree, like an apple or, on the Vine, like a grape....**connected to Jesus.** Jesus' Analogy or Type as the Vine, Christians the Branches, in **(John 15.4)** *Abide in me and I will abide in you. Just as **the** branch is not able to bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in **the** vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.* Apples and grapes are *good fruit!* The is spiritual fruit we must produce that is the *attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better* as in **(Ephesians 4.23).** **This getting better and better can only happen for a long period of time as a result of “Abiding” in Jesus.** The Greek word, μένω (menō) means: to abide, to be in close and settled union. Thus, an abiding relationship with Jesus is close and a settled union with Him as your LORD. This is necessary to cause *attitudes and thoughts to **always be getting better.*** Therefore we all need to hunger for this close and settled union with Jesus. That is a *Closer Walk with Jesus,* so that we will continue to mature.

My choice of *maturing apples* also fits that when a Christian departs from this life to be with Jesus it does not matter how mature he is! What matters is was he “maturing” and becoming more like

the Lord in how he lives, *constantly changing for the better?* That is the direction in which he was going when he went home to Jesus. Also, within the Church, we all are apples of different levels of maturity, or shades of redness like apples. Often, we pastors and leaders are the only ones who can discern this changing of the Christians' spiritual color. We need to know who needs our help and more of the Holy Spirit their Helper..so more of Jesus in their life.

Next, Paul continues his exhortation with the verb **“must”** in **(Ephesians 4.24)** *Yes, you **must** be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature.* Ask God to clothe you in prayer, and think about God's promise and you might even imagine putting on your new nature like your new clothing that you just got at the department store! I like this comment in the footnotes from the *Life Application Bible (LAB)* regarding **(Ephesians 4.24)**:

“The Christian Life is a process. Although we have a new nature, we don't automatically have all good thoughts and attitudes when we become new people in Christ. But, if we keep listening to God, we will be changing all the time. As you look over the past year, do you see a change for the better in your thoughts, attitudes and actions?” Although change may be slow, it comes about as we trust God to change us.”

I say Amen to this comment. However, I must add another factor that I believe is just as important for our encouragement in our Christians Life. That is, **As you look over the past year did you sense Holy Spirit, your Helper, being the power to be causing you to get better and making Jesus more real to you?** I am convinced, that the best maturity in Christ comes from listening to God: the Word and the Spirit.

TAKEAWAY #1

As you look over the past year do you see a change for the better in your thoughts, attitudes, and actions? And, over the past year did you sense Holy Spirit, your Helper, being the power that caused you to get better and making Jesus more real to you? I am convinced, that the best maturity in Christ comes from listening to God: the Word and the Spirit.

Paul now instructs the Ephesians on some things they must stop doing. These are things that sinners consider okay and normal...Jesus does not! In **(Ephesians 4.25)** *Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves.* **Stop lying (Ephesians 4.25) :** When a Christian lies he is asking Satan to replace Jesus inside the

throne of the heart! Jesus made this clear to the Anti-Christ Pharisees in **(John 8.44/KJV21)** *You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the Father of Lies.* So, when a Christian lies, he is also asking Satan to be his “Daddy”, his “Chi-Chi!” Ask Jesus to cause you to stop this activity that may be habitual from your past. He will!

Please note that Paul in particular said *Stop lying to each other.* Holy Spirit is especially grieved when Christians sin against Christians. Paul did not say it is okay to lie to anyone. Jesus fulfilled ALL THE LAW including the First Ten Commandments and the LAW was nailed to the Cross with Him. So we walk by the Spirit and not under the Law. But Holy Spirit will always lead us away from breaking the Commandments including **(Exodus 20.16/AMP)** *“You shall not testify falsely [that is, lie, withhold, or manipulate the truth] against your neighbor (any person).* Jesus was not teaching against this Commandment when he said in **(Matthew 7.6/AMP)** *“Do not give that which is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, for they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.* This means: **Jesus-followers need to have boundaries on what they share with non—Christians. This can be done without lying.** **tell the truth (Ephesians 4.25) :** I preached some weeks ago on August 4th, the difficulty, yet necessity, to *speak the truth in love.* from **(Ephesians 4.15).** *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* I put forth a likely question by you sincere saints here at OIC: “Pastor Bruce, how do I do this when I don't feel right about speaking a needed truth to a fellow Christian?” My answer: “ May I point you back to **(Psalm 127.1)** *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.*” The house, the City, the Temple of your soul, and the Local Church all come under this Bible teaching. **Keep Jesus informed of your problem to speak the truth in love.** He will guide you without preventing a needed truth to be spoken.

for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves.

(Ephesians 4.25): OIC, we as a local Church of the Lord Jesus Christ are a Temple or House for the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are the local and part of the Complete Body of Christ here on Earth. The Apostle Paul was addressing the Local Church at Corinth when he said in **(1 Corinthians 3.16-17)** *16 Don't you know that you yourselves {plural} are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives among you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.* So as in **(Ephesians 4.25)** ***when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves.*** Besides inviting the Devil into our Church, and, likely the person we lied to

finding out and being deeply wounded; when we lie we Grieve *Holy Spirit*. As we are still Jesus' Church, Holy Spirit won't depart completely, but His powerful Presence will keep decreasing until the church becomes like the Seme, Cicadas, as they make their last weakening noise of Truth in Osaka, in Japan, on Earth!

Paul continues the list of **Do Nots, or No Nos** to teach Christians the severe effect of what they may “feel” is a small sin. **Every sin, small or large, sent Jesus to the Cross!** In **(Ephesians 4.26)**

26 If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry—get over it quickly; 27 for when you are angry, you give a mighty foothold to the devil.

Also, the Philips' paraphrased version catches a strong meaning here **(Ephesians 4.26-27/JBP)** *If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry—*

don't give the devil that sort of foothold. Most Christians get most angry when they have a just cause or reason. However, forgiving everyone involved is vital for your *Closer Walk with Jesus*.

Well, I should say, forgive everyone except the Devil. But do not confuse the Devil's influencing a real Christian, with the Devil himself. We all are too often tricked by his evil schemes. You are

commanded to *hate evil* as in **(Romans 12.9/NIVUK)** *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* I believe that it is easier to forgive sinners who hurt us than Christians.

We expect something better from each other, even as God does in the above **(Ephesians**

4.23) *...Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better.* But, even with Believers, we must remember that we must forgive everyone even before they ask us to. But,

if they never ask us to forgive them, God expects us to remove the uninhibited trust that Holy Spirit wants to cause in the Body of Christ. These boundaries are needed and I pray that God will blow

them all away by the *Moving of His Spirit at OIC*. Also note how anger must be dealt with as much as possible on the day it springs up within each of us. Justified anger does not change the

command to forgive, and not hold a grudge.

Also remember: We have this instruction in **(Hebrews 10.30/AMPC)** *For we know Him Who said, Vengeance is Mine [retribution and the meting out of full justice rest with Me]; I will repay [I will exact the compensation], says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge and determine and solve and settle the cause and the cases of His people.*

AND... We must forgive as God has forgiven us for Jesus' sake in (Ephesians 4.32) as we will read later in this Message. Therefore, Leave it to the Lord Jesus to give retribution or take *vengeance* as He, not we, decide!

TAKEAWAY #2

Increased Presence of Holy Spirit is not only for power to witness the Word with signs and

wonders following. It means more power beyond our mind to cause forgiveness in our hearts to those who have hurt us deeply. For deep hurts, we need God's Power from our Holy Helper : We must forgive as God has forgiven us for Jesus' sake. God will show you miracles inside your own heart with more of His Spirit...for it is more of Jesus.

(Ephesians 2.28-29) Is clear and simple: *28 If anyone is stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work so he can give to others in need. 29 Don't use bad language. Say only what is good and helpful to those you are talking to, and what will give them a blessing.*

Newly Born-Agains after many years of using *bad language* may take some time to get better at this bad habit. It is often a reflex to things going wrong! As we mature we may still see *bad language* in our heart, but with *earnest prayer*, our Helper, Holy Spirit will empower us to not speak it. This is what Jesus meant when he told His Disciples in **(Matthew 5.20) 20** *"But I warn you—unless your goodness is greater than that of the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, you can't get into the Kingdom of Heaven at all!* **Earnest prayer will give a bridle to a Christian's tongue before his heart is as pure as he, or Jesus, desires to have it.**

Another illustration from my wife, a farmer's daughter. She used to put a **bit** into her horse's mouth, held in place by **the bridle**. By use of the reigns, she could tell the horse to turn or stop. The horse may want to do otherwise, but by the power of the **bit** in the mouth the horse understood the command and to fight against the **bit** would hurt him! Her horse also showed his wanting to please her as she trained him. The Lord's animals teach us many good lessons on learning to obey our Master Jesus.

Paul now points to the main point of all these verses in **(Ephesians 4.30)** *Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who marks you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete.* And, in another translation, **(Ephesians 4.30/EASY)** *Do not do anything that will make God's Holy Spirit sad. God gave his Holy Spirit to you to show that you belong to him. As a result you know that God will make you completely free one day.* As a Christian matures, and desires a *Closer Walk with Jesus*, an intimate relationship, he begins to care more about God's feelings in a personal way. **God has feelings. His indwelling Spirit feels the way we live the Christian life.** Mature Christians get more and more better, as above, as they learn to **not only do** what pleases God and also **to feel more what God feels.** Just the thought of making Jesus sad should keep us sensitive to His Spirit. Even a horse learns to feel what his master feels, and wants to please his master. He matures into this, away from being wild and willful. He learns with someone on his back, to literally walk *closer with his master.*

In **(Ephesians 4.31)** *Stop being mean, bad-tempered, and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives.* This is simply as it says, instructions that God will empower us to obey. Our motivation for all these instructions on *better behaviour* come from Jesus Cross as spoken by Paul in **(Ephesians 4.32)** *Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ.* Christ redeemed us, purchased us while yet sinners, He died for us. God forgave us because of Jesus taking away our sins. As we remember what we were when Holy Spirit led us to Jesus hanging, suffering, bleeding on the Cross for us...forgiving one another should flow like the river of Blood that Jesus shed for us all.

Now, let us remember with adoration and Thanksgiving, Jesus' Cross for our Forgiveness, as we celebrate Holy Communion...how could anyone not want a Closer Walk with Him?

REFERENCES

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