

Your Identity in Christ and Your Behavior

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes when parents are getting ready to let one of their kids take the car out by themselves for the first time, they pepper the child with last-second instructions. As the child who just got her driver's license heads down the driveway, the parent will stand in the doorway and say: Remember to keep your eyes on the road; no texting; make sure no one is running a red light before you pull into an intersection; wear your seatbelt. Sometimes the Apostle Paul can sound like that, and today on *Groundwork*, we will look at passages in Ephesians where Paul gives a lot of advice very quickly. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now program four of a planned six-part series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. So, we have gone through the first three chapters, and in this program, we are going to go through a good chunk of 4 and the first part of 5. There are six chapters in Ephesians, so today we will be in 4 and 5, and then we will look at more of 5 in the next program, and 6 in the final one; but these verses that we are going to look at today...I think it is fair to say, Darrell, these were very challenging verses for the Ephesians two thousand years ago, but I think we should see them as challenging for us in the 21 Century, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Paul is framing them, understanding their identity in God first, and God's plan to include them in the family of God; and now because you have this identity, you live a certain way; and he is going to give kind of a survey course, if you will, on the things that need to happen...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because, I mean, as he wraps up the letter, he is not going to go into great detail, he is just going to nail a few things; and to make sure they understand this is how we now live in light of that; live a life worthy of the calling which we received.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, he has laid the foundation now, or we could even say the groundwork in the first three chapters. Now what? So, you have been elected before the foundation of the world. You are part of the one new humanity. God has broken down the dividing walls of hostility; so, now what? One of the things we said in the first program, Darrell, is that Ephesians doesn't read like 1 Corinthians, where Paul is clearly responding to a laundry list of questions and issues he has heard about. That doesn't mean, though, that Paul wasn't aware of some background issues in Ephesus that he needs to address, because that is the context in which they lived, this very cosmopolitan city in Asia Minor. It was a port city in Asia Minor in the area of what today we call modern-day Turkey, but it was kind of a crossroads of life, and that created some challenges.

DARRELL DELANEY

Just like Capernaum in the New Testament; and I mentioned this in an earlier episode. It is like Las Vegas times ten.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

It was kind of the world that they were living in as well...the seaport...they've got different people coming and going all the time; and so, they have these different issues going on, and Paul wants to address that kind of thing, because that is not the way that you are supposed to live if you are a believer in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of my students a while back in a sermon had *YOLO*, and I thought: what is YOLO? All the other students knew what it was, so after the sermon was done, I said what is YOLO, and they all said: You only live once.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, yes; do what you want: eat too much, drink too much, gamble too much if you are Las Vegas...what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas...and probably the same with what happens in Ephesus stays in Ephesus. Don't worry about it. Paul says: No; you just cannot do that anymore. If you used to live that way, you cannot live that way now. If you are tempted to live that way now, you cannot go back.

So, let's listen to some of what he says here in the 4th chapter, beginning at the 20th verse. He has just been talking about Jesus and how they learned Jesus, and then he says:

That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶"In your anger do not sin": do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸Anyone who had been stealing must steal no longer, but must work [hard], doing something useful with their own hands, that they might have something to share with those in need. ²⁹Do 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. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it looks like, Scott, we have a new identity. There is this old self that had all of this stuff that he is telling them not to do in it, but then there is this new self that is being renewed in the knowledge and the image of his creator; and so, there is a distinction of where we used to be and what we used to do. We cannot go that way anymore; now we are called to this new self, and this new self is where God is actually doing the work to show us that he is working and purging the old self out of us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a scene in a movie called *Moonstruck* years ago where an older woman...her husband is away, and she meets a younger guy who wants to suggest that he come into her house with her. He walks her home from a restaurant and he says: Why don't we go in the house together? She says: No, I cannot do that. He

says: Oh, you think somebody is home? She says: No, the house is empty; you cannot come in because I know who I am.

DARRELL DELANEY

Uh-huh.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, she has an identity as a married woman; and Paul says you have to know who you are; and in Ephesus, that included a lot of things their fellow citizens were doing that they cannot, including something that must have been an issue or Paul wouldn't have brought it up: Lying, and falsehood; they top the list. Paul says: When you speak to your neighbor, speak the truth.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is actually against God's top ten. We know God's Ten Commandments tells us not to lie. So, this is kind of a remix of the Ten Commandments. So, we need to be speaking truthfully to our neighbor, even if we are trying to lie to help people, even when we do "white lies," that is not really helping anyone. Deception, at its root, is really something broken; and he also tells us not to let our anger fester, because he knows that that can turn into something that might destroy us later.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Jesus even says anger is the same as murder. If you are angry with your brother, you have kind of murdered him in your heart. Jesus said that in the Sermon on the Mount.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul also moves to what he calls *unwholesome talk*, and we will see in a few minutes that he will return to this in the next chapter as well. Paul says: Look, what comes out of your mouth should build people up, not tear them down. So, use your words to build people up.

DARRELL DELANEY

Do you think that includes sarcasm? I was just wondering about that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

You wonder, right? I mean, if it is meant to tear somebody down or make them feel stupid, I would say that it would. I mean, you know, there can be fun tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, but, you know, any kind of speech that tears another person down, makes them feel smaller, Paul says don't do that; build people up...build them up...make them feel better.

DARRELL DELANEY

He also continues to talk about these things. He is talking about bitterness, rage and anger...you know, these things that are kind of leading to violence in our hearts. It is crazy how he has got to tell them not to brawl...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Brawling!

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, when you are at church or when you are teaching a class, you don't have: I've got to stop these people from fighting. Like, I don't want you to brawl in here. Apparently, it must have been a problem in Ephesus or he wouldn't be bringing it up not to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I cannot think of a single sermon where I told people: Stop brawling. This didn't seem to be a thing, but it was in Ephesus, stop living... He even says: the one who is stealing must steal no longer. It is like there are thieves in the congregation? That is crazy! Basically, though, right; you are a new person...a new self...now act like it; and so, he gives all this advice quickly, but as they say on TV advertisements: But wait, there's more; and there is, and we will look at that next.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, let's dive right back into Ephesians. Let's go into Ephesians 5, and let us know what Paul says there.

DARRELL DELANEY

Starting at the first verse, it says: Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children,² 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.³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.⁵ For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolator—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, those opening words of Ephesians 5, and there can be no doubt, Darrell, that in the ancient world, as today, a whole lot of stuff goes on in the area of sexuality that did not accord with God's gift of sexuality to the human race. That was a concern then, and there is an array of bad sexual practices then; there is an array of bad sexual practices now; and so, the Church historically has talked about that. Sometimes, you know, if you think of *The Scarlet Letter*, you know, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes the Church has been criticized for being obsessed with sex to the exclusion of all else. Probably not fully a fair criticism, but on the other hand, sometimes the Church has earned that reputation. But Paul makes it clear this is an area of concern, but it is also interesting to me, Darrell, how quickly he moves other stuff onto the exact same level of concern.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, because he clustered them together...I think of grapes because they are all clustered together...he actually names a whole bunch of different things, to put them on the same par as all bad, all problems, but the one that sticks out to me is he says: Not even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity or greed. There shouldn't be a hint. That word *hint* goes to all of these groups. It is not just to sexual immorality. So, we cannot make this hierarchical; we cannot make this one thing priority. They are all equally bad.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this is not the only passage in Paul. There are a number of passages where he has what we sometimes refer to as the vice lists: Lists of sins; and greed is always right at the top. It must have...well, we know it is a problem today. We will talk about that before we close the program, but it was obviously a problem then; and when Paul comes back in verse 5 to greed...so, he mentions it first in verse 3, but in verse 5 he comes back,

and he says: If you are a greedy person, you are guilty of idolatry. Wow! That is pretty...if you worship money or your possessions, or whatever...your bank account; if you worship that alongside of God or instead of God, that is idolatry; that is a false god, and that is a pretty devastating charge.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting, because most people don't think of greed that way. I mean, because we saw the movie *Wall Street*, and it says greed is good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are trying to figure out how to gain all these things for ourselves, but we don't understand that we have now prioritized the things, and put our identity—our worth—into possessions and things that are created. That is actually breaking God's top ten as well. He says: No other gods before me. I don't care if they are digital images; I don't care if they are currency images; but this means God is jealous of that stuff, and there is wrath coming because of it; and this is why we need to make sure that we understand that God needs to be the top priority in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but then Paul loops back again to something we also saw at the end of Ephesians 4, and that is what it here calls *foolish talk and coarse joking*. Again, that could be joking about sexual matters. So, you know, it kind of ties some of this together; but it could equally be talk belittling people with a different skin color or people with a disability, or people with a different economic status; people who have a little bit of an accent from their speech, right...they are from a different country. Foolish talk and coarse joking, as we said in the previous segment, Darrell, is anything that tears others down with your words instead of building them up, and we all know that the old saying: sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me...

DARRELL DELANEY

Lies.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Lies; not true. Words can hurt much more than sticks and stones. But he goes on now, Darrell, to remind them why none of that can be part of their lives.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he says in verse 8: For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²It is shameful to even mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴That is why it is said: "Wake up sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵Be [very] careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, in our second program in this series, Darrell, we were in Ephesians 2, and there we noted that Paul used the image of life and death; and Paul says to the Ephesians: Once you were dead...you were dead in your transgressions; you were objects of God's wrath, but now you are alive. Now he switches the imagery: Once you were in the dark, or you were darkness itself, he actually says...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not only that you were in the dark, you were darkness—you had no light in you; but now, you have been baptized. Wake up, O sleeper. Now you have been baptized and now you are a child of the light, so you have to live like a child of the light. Among other things, that means you cannot keep trying to slink into the darkness. If you bear the light of Christ...so, Paul says anything that has the light shining on it is exposed and you cannot undo that; and so, Paul is now here basically saying: Look, you never arrive at a place where nobody can see you. You cannot do anything in secret. What happens in Ephesus does not stay in Ephesus. You are in the light, so live like you know God can always see you, Christ can always see you, everybody can always see you; and therefore, put your best foot forward all the time.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, as we live as children of light, we realize that we are not supposed to blend in and disappear. We actually stick out like a sore thumb...

SCOTT HOEZEE

In a good way.

DARRELL DELANEY

In a good way, because God is calling us to let our light shine brightly. That is what he tells us in Matthew: Shine your light brightly so they can see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. So, we don't want to hide our light or go back to what we were doing when we were disobedient. He said it was even shameful for them to admit that. It goes without saying that this has a lot to do with the Church today, so as we wrap up this program in a few moments, we will turn the camera onto ourselves. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to wrap up our look at Ephesians 4 and the first part of Ephesians 5. Let's listen to a few final verses for this episode of *Groundwork*. Verse 15 of Chapter 5: Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, being filled is the goal. Now, because Paul is talking to these Ephesians, and he knows the environment that they are in, it is easy for them to be filled with wine—to be drunk with wine. He knows that that is at their every...like left and right...at their every disposal; but he is saying instead of that, be filled with the Spirit. Now, I think it is important to compare these two fillings, Scott, because when people drink too much and they are inebriated, they act differently; they lose their inhibitions; they might say or do things that they wouldn't do... They are acting out of character; and when you are filled with the Spirit, you act out of character in a *good* way, because he helps you to have boldness to speak his truth. He actually has you improve the way you behave, and you can deal with these things and live as a child of light.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; the Spirit in you is going to control you; and you know, we have heard the phrase: He is an angry drunk. There are some people who are not generally angry people, but when they have a few, they get mean. Well, Paul says don't do that. Have a few of the Spirit because that is going to make you nice.

DARRELL DELANEY

No hangover!

SCOTT HOEZEE

No hangovers and no regrets. You shine with the light of Christ. So, be filled, but be filled with the Holy Spirit; and we said, Darrell, we want to turn the camera on to ourselves now here in the 21st Century; and you know, the Church lately has faced some very hard times, and I think it is a sad fact that many of us...a lot of us...have become guilty of the very things that Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 4 and 5. I mean, for instance, we live in a time when social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter...they become havens of slander and malice, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, we have all read posts where somebody quotes only half of what somebody says to make them look bad. If they quoted the whole thing, the person wouldn't look bad, so they only quote half. Well, that is twisting someone's words—that is slander, Paul says, and you cannot do that. In fact, in recent times there has been some evidence emerging from maybe some whistleblowers or whatever, that Facebook has algorithms designed to keep you angry, right? They program it to keep you angry because that keeps you engaged, and that means it is good for Facebook's business; but it isn't good for you if you want to be filled with the Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we need to be careful here, and I have seen so many times where they call it *shots fired*, when people are indirectly implicated in a Facebook post. I could be talking about you, Scott, but I don't mention your name; but everybody kind of knows what is happening there. So then, you see in the feeds now people are adding to this anger...this malice...this what you call slander. When it is written, it is libel, really; but it is actually something that children of light are not supposed to be participating in. This anger and this malice we have seen in many different places over petty things—over small things: over vaccines, over masks, over, you know, different political views. We have seen people split, we have seen churches split, over these things; and it is unfortunate that anger and malice are not in a place where we can resolve them, where we could be humble, where we could forgive. The love that Paul just prayed for in Chapter 3 doesn't show up when we are operating in anger and malice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You read it all over the place these days about how the political walls have gotten built so much higher in this country. They used to say...we may have mentioned this before on *Groundwork*...but they used to say, you know, back in the 1970s, if you asked people: Would it be okay if one of your kids married somebody from the opposite political party of you? Very few people said that would be a problem...you know, a very, very small percentage. Today, it is like sixty to seventy percent say: No, I would not want my kid to marry a Democrat because we are Republicans in this house, or vice versa. Wow! Paul has been all about in this...we have seen this in the previous programs, Christ broke down the dividing walls of hostility. If we bring these high political walls right through the church sanctuary, we are operating at cross purposes with Jesus, right? We also mentioned here that greed is high on the hit parade. It is idolatry. You mentioned the movie *Wall Street* earlier...the Gordon Gekko character: Greed is good; and indeed, we live in a society that depends on greed. In fact, the philosopher James K. A. Smith—Jamie Smith—teaches at Calvin University in Grand

Rapids, Michigan. He has written quite a bit lately about how the modern-day shopping mall is our new religious temple. This is where we go to worship the god of material things; and indeed, malls are constructed to make that happen.

DARRELL DELANEY

Unfortunately, the Church has become this super center...this one-stop shop where you get all of your needs met; and then at the altar, there is a transactional god: I bring this, you give me that. Like, pull the slot register and then you get what you get; but the relationship with God is missing from that kind of mentality. The consumeristic view of how we consume these things and come back to God, that is exactly the opposite of what we want; and that kind of transactional living, and this tit-for-tat, that is the kind of world Ephesians came out of.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is the kind of world that God wants us to not be a part of; and so, unfortunately, that kind of mentality has found its way into the Church: we need to achieve goals and we need to keep going and have these materials in order to be recognized, unfortunately.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, is there any hope? Well, yes, because Paul...at the beginning of that passage we just read...Paul calls for the Ephesians to be wise, and that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Wisdom is a major theme in the Bible, and as we have said before on *Groundwork*, we have done series on Proverbs and the like, wisdom is a knack, but it is a knack the Holy Spirit can build in us, so that we are always discerning, we are always scrutinizing, we are always saying: Where does the realm of darkness stop and where does the realm of light begin? How can I stay out of it? It is a knack—it is an acquired thing. We just keep having to learn it; but that is hope. We do have the Holy Spirit, Paul says. So, you know, the questions we have to ask about our behavior in society, in church, at the shopping mall, those weren't easy questions for the Ephesians, but they are not easy for us either; but thanks be to God that we can sing to one another, Paul says, in songs and psalms and spiritual songs. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study Paul's instructions for Christian families in the second half of Ephesians Chapter 5 and the beginning of Chapter 6.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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