

EPHESIANS 4 v17 to 5 v20

-The moral standards of the church

One of my childhood memories is visiting my maternal grandparents who lived in an English Spa town. Spa towns were famous for their water which was held to be life-enhancing and have healing properties. It was a treat to be allowed to drink some of the spa water. My memory is that it looked very rusty! Presumably, it was full of iron.

Spa towns prospered because they were healthy. In contrast, I have paternal forebears who died of cholera when their drinking water became polluted.

**Ephesians 4 v17 to Ephesians 5 v20, in my Bible, has the headline:
"The moral standards of the church".**

SO, using the word "spa" as an acrostic, let us look at Ephesians and see what gives life and wholeness to the local church and helps us avoid being infected by the world.

"S" stands for SOURCE.

And the source of our life is GOD. And our calling, Ephesians 5 v1, is to be "IMITATORS of God" (RSV) The NIV 'follow God's example' is a weak translation.

Why imitators of God? Because, also v1, we are his "beloved CHILDREN" and he is our Heavenly Father.

All children inherit and reflect some particulars from their father. It's an inescapable consequence of DNA and genes. Likewise, all Christians should seek to do all they can to reflect the characteristics of their heavenly Father.

He is the source of our life and wholeness and well-being. HE sets the agenda, not the world!

"P" stands for PRACTICE.

The particular characteristic we are called to imitate is, Ephesians 5 v2, "**to live a life of LOVE**". And a life of love will involve, v2, sacrifice. Just as Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for us, v2, our lives have to be offered to God as a "pleasing sacrifice".

(2)

We MUST grasp our calling and purpose.

Verse 14 says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead!"

And verses 15 to 17 say,

"Look carefully how you live" "Be wise and make the most of the time"

"Do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is"

Paul is quite clear that we mustn't sleep-walk through life but think carefully how we live and how we may imitate God and please God.

Ephesians 1 v4, right at the start of the Epistle, spells this out as:

"God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

'HOLY and BLAMELESS' is our purpose in life.

'To please God' is our calling.

Ephesus was dominated by the Temple of Diana with its Temple prostitutes. The Temple set the moral tone of the city which was one of free sex and lax morals. In Ephesus any behaviour was permissible.

SO, it is very interesting that St Paul does NOT preach tolerance.

He could easily have said to the Ephesian Christians, "We must get along with our neighbours. We must not offend them or criticise their behaviour. They must be welcome to join us as they are."

INSTEAD, Paul says, verses 3 to 6,

"Let there be NO IMPURITY among you.

No filthiness, no silly talk, which is not fitting..... Be sure of this: no immoral or impure or covetous person will inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Do not be deceived: the wrath of God comes to the disobedient"

Ephesians 4 v22

"PUT OFF your old nature which belongs to your former life"

If we have been called to be "Holy and blameless" it is no surprise that St Paul speaks like this. All that is un-holy has to go. It is a sacrifice people of faith have to make.

We can, Ephesians 4 v17,

"NO LONGER LIVE as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understand and alienated from the life of God."

(3)

The old hymn says,

*All to Jesus, I surrender; All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.*

Paul also gives us another reason for living like this in v7:

**"ONCE you were darkness BUT NOW you are LIGHT in the LORD,
so walk as children of the light"**

Verse 11, "**Take NO PART in the unfruitful works of darkness"**

Verse 11, "**Instead, EXPOSE them"**

Quite clearly, Paul does not preach tolerance.

In fact, though tolerance is a "British Value", it is NOT a fruit of the Spirit
and is not mentioned in the Bible anywhere as a virtue.

Scripture says that our calling is FIRST to live holy and blameless lives
which please God rather than to put tolerance and equality first.

Ephesians 4 v24

*"PUT ON the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true
righteousness and holiness"*

We stand against impurity but we must do so in love.

"A" stands for ADORATION

The antidote to darkness and impurity is ADORATION and PRAISE

Ephesians 5 v18-19

*"But be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns
and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord with all your heart always,
and for everything, giving thanks to God in the name of our Lord Jesus
Christ"*

"God inhabits the praises of his people" (Psalm 22 v3)

Paul is not saying, "sing a hymn on Sunday and that will do!"

No, Paul is teaching something far deeper and life-changing which is an
attitude of praise and thanksgiving "**with ALL your heart ALWAYS**".

This is fully-focusing on God.

(4)

The chorus says,

*"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face
And things of this world will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace"*

The appeal of the world, the appeal of evil and darkness dims when we fully focus on God, who is the source of our life.

So, "S.P.A." teaches us that God is the SOURCE of our calling to live holy and blameless lives; that our PURPOSE is to live lives of love, to live in the light and put off the works of darkness; and that ADORATION and praise will help us to focus aright.

Like good spa water, may this teaching be life-enhancing and healing for us.

Martin Tanner adapted from a sermon preached by Revd Alex Aldous