

Becoming New People, Part 2
Authentic Discipleship
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Ephesians 4:25-32
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To live a life of integrity as disciples of Christ, we must put away the old person and put on the wholeness of Christ.

We have been talking for a year now about discipleship—what Christians believe and how we live that out. Being a Christian is a lifestyle, a journey, a new outlook that brings us closer and closer to the God who made and saves us. What does it mean to be a disciple? A disciple is a learner, a follower, an apprentice. In living that out, we have learned that there are costs. It is an ongoing journey of disciplined faith.

Wholeness or the Hebrew concept of "Shalom" is Integrity. It protects our hearts and souls. When we come to Christ in belief, we trust in God's grace to work wholeness in us.

Look up to God in all things: First, Paul tells them to put away falsehood and speak truth to their neighbor. This is important within the community of the church as we are unified in Christ. The world perceives us as one, and if we say hurtful things then it will compromise our witness to unbelievers. We must choose grace in and for our community; by doing so, we will show that we are one in the Lord.

Open up to authentic life: Second Paul tells the Christians in and around Ephesus to be wary of letting their anger cause them to sin. He doesn't say that anger is wrong—it is merely an emotion that tells us we are threatened or anxious. But our actions,

- especially in reaction against others
- or against ourselves in depression compromises our own integrity.

That sin gives an opening, literally a place, for the Enemy to begin to tear us down from within. So again as disciples living a new life in Christ, we can choose grace. This time we choose grace for ourselves, and in doing that we remain whole.

Authentic living as a disciple means choosing grace to help others in need. Paul tells the believers not to steal, but to work honestly and share from their wealth with others less fortunate. We learn to trust God and not take matters into our own hands, for we have been given in abundance. Too often we don't recognize God's care and live as if our blessings were about to run out. That attitude creates both greed and stinginess rather than generosity and goodness.

Give up control: For in the new life, we belong to God. We have been marked by the Holy Spirit and bear the Name of God. We must grow in the likeness of God. This is evident by our grace and compassion—and it is noticeable. The old self will try to squelch that natural outpouring, but we must lean into God's gift in us. Listen...pray...ask God to speak...learn. It is a still small voice, but as we tune in we recognize more and more God's speaking in our hearts. God's grace is free to us as sinners, but a discipline of daily life as believers. as Bonhoeffer says costly—in order to become a habit for us, we must practice and discipline ourselves in our spiritual walk.

As practice improves our senses, as we look up and open up, we realize that we can give up

- our expectation of how it should be—its so much better
- our comparisons to others—we find our own selves
- our need to be right—God knows best
- our selfish ambition –we learn to be for others, kind and compassionate; we have been there as posers, and we have been there as learners and we now know in the real sense that we haven't arrived yet.

Paul says it well, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you."

This last is the most basic lesson of discipleship. We remember that we have been forgiven. We are not God. God has loved us in grace and that is our best example for living with God and living with each other. God loves us so much he died to give us new hope and new life. We may still fall, but we can get up with hope for we are forgiven people. As we have been forgiven, we can forgive others.

The more we live into God's grace the more we grow into whole persons. This wholeness is spiritual health, it is *integrity*. That gives us strength which will not fail us in our hour of need. It is the full sail that catches the wind, not the sail that has been cut and shredded. And this fullness will carry us through the storms of life in hope for an eternal future with the Lord in heaven. No matter what comes, when we choose grace we choose life and love.