

Introduction

As I have grown older, one of the things I haven't got used to is looking in the mirror in the mornings and seeing my mother looking back at me! Family likeness is an interesting thing. We are both born with it and acquire it.

When I was younger people often told me how much like my father I was, yet others thought I was very like my mother. I certainly have my father's eyes and hair and my mother's temperament. When we were younger my mother, sister and I sounded very alike and I must confess that we used to play a naughty game where we would all sit around the telephone when my grandmother rang and passed the receiver around. She couldn't tell us apart and it created great confusion.

We definitely get physical and emotional characteristics from our parents but there is also an element of learned characteristics and skills. One of the most charming sights is to see a small child with their parent doing something together and learning from them. They learn to do things the way their parents do and to walk, sit and behave like them. Most of all they pick up their parents attitudes and speech. My mother taught in south London for many years and often tells the story of a parent's evening when a child's mother said to her I don't know where he gets his bleep bleep language from, (obscenities deleted!)

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul has been telling the Christians in Ephesus what their heritage is. He reminds them how God has called them and chosen them to belong to him. He tells them how God has broken down the barriers that used to separate them from God. He reminds them that they are God's children, a body of people gifted to serve him and now he goes on to tell them how they should be distinctive in the way they live and in their attitudes. As redeemed people they should be different from how they were before they knew Christ and from the pagan society in which they lived. He tells them, "*Follow God's example therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.*"

As God's children, Paul tells us we are called to imitate God, our Father, and live a life of love. In order to do that there are things we need to leave behind.

When I prepared to move from Hackney and began to pack up my belongings I realised that I didn't want to bring everything with me. There were things I no

longer needed, clothes that no longer fitted me, reminders of my past that I didn't want to take with me, things that were broken and no longer of use to me. As I packed I took three car loads to the dump and two to a charity shop. As I prepared for my new life there were things I needed to leave behind.

In the same way Paul encourages the Ephesian Christians to "put off" or leave behind attitudes and behaviours they had brought with them from their previous unredeemed lives. He lists six things they must leave behind

1. "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour"

Can I ask,

"Who here always tells the truth?"

"Why don't we always tell the truth?"

We want people to think well of us. We are afraid that the truth will hurt.

Can we lie without saying anything?

The lie of speech and the lie of silence. Both show a carelessness about the truth

Interestingly Paul's reason for putting off falsehood is because we are all part of one body. We can live in safety only because our senses and nerves are passing true messages to the brain. If they took to passing false messages, if for example they told the brain something was cool and safe to touch when it was in fact hot and burning life would very soon come to an end. A body can only function healthily when each part of it passes true messages to the brain. If as Christians we are all bound together as one body that body can only function properly when we speak the truth.

2. There must be anger - but the right kind!

Anger is something we often struggle with as Christians because we think we shouldn't be angry at all. If someone hurts us or does something wrong we struggle to pretend it hasn't made us angry and we get very confused. Paul does not say, "Don't be angry". What he says is, "In your anger do not sin." Of course bad temper and irritability are without defence but there is an anger without which the world would be a poorer place. The world would have lost a great deal without the blazing anger of William Wilberforce against slavery and Lord Shaftesbury at the labour conditions of the 19th Century. We see

examples of Jesus being blazingly angry in the Gospels when he saw people treating others badly or disrespecting God

The angryometer

Let's do a quick poll of things that we should be angry about

A friend breaks something we are fond of

The flow of migrants into Europe from Africa

There isn't enough pudding for me to have a second helping

We see people dying of starvation in other countries

A friend is punished for something they didn't do.

Our favourite star is voted off the reality TV programme we are watching

A friend tells us a truth about us that hurts us

Anger which is selfish and uncontrolled is a sinful and hurtful thing and must be banished **but** selfless anger which is disciplined into the service of Christ and our fellow human beings is one of the greatest dynamic forces in the world.

However

We are told not to let the sun go down on our anger because the longer we postpone mending a quarrel the less likely we are to ever mend it. If we harbour anger we are giving the devil the opportunity to do harm in our relationships, fellowships and communities.

3. Christians should not steal but should be honest

This was necessary advice in the ancient world where thieving was rampant - particularly at the docks and public baths. Paul tells his hearers that they must not steal but work - not just so they can support themselves and their families - but so that they have sufficient resources to give to others. Instead of being a burden to their community the Christian is to be a support.

4. Christians should be characterised by words that help others. They are to put off all foul mouthed language

5. We are urged not to grieve the Holy Spirit

When we act contrary to the guidance of our parents we grieve them. In the same way when we ignore God leading us we grieve him.

6. We must get rid of wrong attitudes and behaviours

Ephesians 4: 25-5:2**John 6:35, 41-51**

Christians should have nothing to do with bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and every form of malice

Instead we are called to be kind and compassionate to each other forgiving each other as through Jesus Christ God forgave us. We are to imitate God and live lives that show we are his children.

All the things we are asked to leave behind are concerned with relationships. We cannot be good in a vacuum but in the real world of people. The things Paul exhorts us to avoid are all things that destroy human harmony.

Each negative prohibition is balanced by a corresponding positive command. As Christians It isn't enough to leave behind our old behaviours and attitudes we have to adopt a new way. We need to allow God to transform our lives and ourselves as Christians

In each case Paul either gives or implies a theological reason for the Ephesian Christians to change their attitudes and behaviour. In Jesus' teaching and living belief and behaviour are always dovetailed into each other

So we are called to show our family likeness, to follow God's example and live a life of love