

## Introduction

If you have your Bible with you, I want to invite you at this time to take it out and to open it up with me to the Book of Ephesians. We are going to be starting in chapter 4, verse 17. You may be wondering, "Are they going to talk about Life Groups every single Sunday for the next two years?" I mean, maybe... you should join one so we'll stop. (Laughter) I'm just letting you know. This is important to us, and we really believe that God has it in His heart for the Church to be living in community. If you don't have a Bible with you today, don't be nervous about that. Right there in front of you, in the seat tray, there is a Bible, and you can use that one. If you don't own a Bible, that Bible is our gift to you. If you have your phone or your tablet with you and you have the Bible on that, feel free to use that as well. We study the Bible every single week, whenever we gather together in our Life Groups or whenever we gather together for worship, because we believe that the Bible is God's Word to us. It is God speaking to us, and it's our way to really know His heart and to know how it is that we ought to act, how we ought to respond to the grace that He has demonstrated to us through His Son Jesus Christ. What we're going to do today is we are going to be continuing on in our series in the Book of Ephesians.

If you are new to the Bible, let me just give you just a little bit of a setup. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. That's basically old promise-new promise. The Old Testament is the story of Israel. Israel was God's chosen people. In the Old Testament we read about how it is that they rebelled against God's plan and how they needed a Rescuer or a Redeemer. They were given that Rescuer-Redeemer, and that was the story of the New Testament. That story tells us about Jesus... about how He came to rescue and redeem. The New Testament tells us about His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection. It also tells us about the people who chose to follow after Him. We call those people "the Church." So this group of people gathers together every week because they are people who believe that Jesus truly was who He says He was... God in flesh... and that He came to make a way for us to have a relationship with God. So that's why we have the Church. Those are people who follow after Jesus. Paul was one of those followers of Jesus, and he wrote several letters to different churches. This Book of the Bible, Ephesians, is a letter that he wrote to the Church in the city of Ephesus in modern-day Turkey. So as we read this, you are seeing a letter that he wrote to let us know about God's intention for the Church. So let's begin reading it in verse 17.

*"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those that hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along*

*with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

*"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

"Lord, these words that we have just read are Your Word. And Lord, I don't understand how You do it, but supernaturally every single week, You take the message of these words, somehow go through my mouth and then into the ears and hearts of those here, and uniquely and supernaturally, individuals with disparate stories and incredibly different circumstances, all hear the truth from You. God, I pray that today You would do so and God that You would do a miracle... that God You would rescue those who are far from You, that You draw them in, that You would bring them to You. God, we pray today, we ask in faith, that You would rescue those who are far from You. God, we also ask for those who are resisting You in an area of their lives... that you would change them... that You would bring them to You. God, heal... draw... love... do the things that You want to do, Lord. Have Your way in this place, God. We ask in the Name of Jesus, that any spiritual barriers... be they demonic, Lord, or be they manmade, Lord... that You would expel them from this place so that You could have Your way... in Jesus' Name. And we ask that in Jesus' Name. Amen."

Last week we read in Ephesians chapter 4, and Paul described the Church. You may remember that we talked about the fact that God, in His wisdom, as He saves individuals, gives people a gift. If you have been saved by Jesus Christ, if you have been rescued by Him, God has placed a gift in you for you to use, but that gift is not to be used for your own pleasure, for your own manner, but that gift is to be used for the Church. Last week we looked specifically at Ephesians 4:12, and we talked about the fact that the Word that is there in some versions it says "building," and in other versions it says "perfecting." It actually literally says "to bring healing to." It means that we are to use our gift to set the spiritual bones of the Body of believers. We are to come together and to use that gift to lift others up into a right relationship with God. That is the job of the Church. Many of us are very comfortable of the idea that we are to be receiving something individually in a large gathered setting, but it was new words for us to hear that we are to be gathering in a smaller setting, using those gifts that God has given us to bring healing to others in our lives.

But then Paul goes further, and he begins to contrast that manner of life, using those gifts to build others up with the way of the Gentiles, those who are far from God, or even worse, those who have heard about the Name of Jesus and have simply traded in worshipping Artemis now for worshipping Jesus, but they have no intention of changing their lives. They just simply think that worshipping after this new God, in name alone, might actually bring them better luck or better favor. But they don't understand that worshipping Jesus actually means a change of heart and consequently a change of action. Maybe you have known some people like this... people who would say, "Oh yes; I'm a Christian," but when you look at their lives, you say, "Really?" Maybe sometimes you would fall into that category. You would say, "Well, I'm a Christian," but you don't really know what that means. You think that being a Christian simply means coming to church... because if you come to church then God will be good to you that week, and things will go your way. Listen to me: That's not the way that it works. But God has something far deeper and far greater for you and for me. If you're like me... in fact, sometimes you have looked at these people, these individuals who have declared that they are Christians and then they live like the devil, and you have wondered, "Why is it that they get to live like that? Why can't I live like that?" Have you ever looked at people who were not Christians, who didn't even claim to be Christians, they were proud pagans and they

loved declaring it and you thought, "I wish that just one day I could live like them. I'm tired of being good. It is exhausting having to act like Jesus each and every day. Why is it okay for them to live like that and not for me?" That is what this passage is all about. It is about how the Church is different internally. When we relate to one another, we craft, we create, we enact a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is so beautiful and so powerful... if we will only trust it.

### **The Callous Heart (v. 17)**

You see, starting there in verse 19, Paul begins to give us a picture of the internal condition of those who are far from the Lord. He uses the word "callous." He says that they have become callous. Now, previous to that, he uses several other words. Starting in verse 17, he declares that they have "futility in their minds." No matter what they think, their philosophical thoughts will end up being futile, leading to no positive results. "They are darkened in their understanding." It's like the lights are out; there's a shadow over the way that they attempt to understand the world and the way that they attempt to work; they cannot see things clearly. "Alienated from the life of God," they cannot experience the grace of God because there is the separation of their unredeemed and unforgiven sin. "They are ignorant"; they do not know what they do not know, and they have a hardness of heart. "They have been calloused."

Whenever I was a young man... I've told you many times that my father was a plumber for 43 years, and I got to be his summer helper, several of those summer years whenever I was growing up as a teenager. I'll never forget the very first time that I got to use a shovel. I learned that day that I should have worn gloves... but I didn't. I was using a shovel to do the things that plumbers do which is dig ditches. Pipes go in the ground. And when the ground is hard, you've got to use a shovel to break it up. So my dad would draw a line and say, "Dig a ditch here." I would start to do that. After a day of digging, I began to notice that there was some skin below the ring finger on my left hand that was starting to really hurt. It was getting sore. In fact, by the end of that first day, I had not only gotten a blister, but that blister had burst, and it was starting to bleed on my hand. It was really, really painful. I put a band-aid on there and tried to work through it, but I had that the rest of the summer. Even underneath the glove, it got harder and harder and harder. In fact, it wasn't too long before I had a callous. Now here's the funny thing. I have that same callous right below my ring finger even today. I haven't dug a ditch in a long time... but there it is. Callouses last a long time. They can stick around.

How does a callous happen? A callous happens because of a wound that continues to be attacked and continues to be more and more of a wound. The body defends itself by creating a tough layer of skin, to make it hard to where there is no longer any pain. What does it mean to have a calloused heart? A calloused heart works a lot in the same way. We do something that we're not supposed to do. The first time that we do it, we feel the pain. We feel the regret, the guilt, the sting. We know that we did things that we ought not to have done in that moment. What about the thirtieth time that we go down that path?

You've heard the Scripture refer to the fact that individuals eventually will get seared consciences. You see, this is what happens. The more that you return back to that guilty action, the more that you return to sin, what happens is that your heart stops feeling the pain because you have a defence mechanism inside of you that will happen. You will become calloused there. You will no longer feel the pain of that rebellion. It will begin to get harder and harder and harder. This is what we mean by hardness of heart.

Paul says that the more that we do this things change. In fact, things even change to the point that they become so hard... in verse 19... *"They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality,*

*greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*" In other words, they stop fighting the temptation. Have you ever had anything like that in your life? You are so tempted by a particular behavior, and you have always given into it, time and time again. It has been that way so often that you actually stop fighting it, whenever you begin to feel the urge inside of you to give into that sinful action. You used to be able to fight it, resist it a little bit. The more you've done it, the more you've rationalized it, then you finally reach a point where you just say, "You know what? I'm just going to do it. I don't even care." That's when you give yourself up over to it.

Paul uses that same phrase in Romans chapter 1. He talks about those individuals who continue to return to sinful activity. Romans 1 tells us that God gave them over to those activities. It's the same sort of picture here. It's the idea that God just says, "Fine. If that's what you want to do then I'm going to let you do that, and you will reap the consequences of those actions." Now, the consequences there of those actions in Romans 1 is a little bit different direction than he is talking about here, but it's basically the same result. Your heart becomes calloused; it becomes hard and you no longer sense the evil of the actions that you are undertaking. And those who call themselves Christians but have actually not encountered the grace of God, they have a calloused heart. Also, those who are proud pagans that are far from God, they have a calloused heart, and they do not sense the goodness of God. They are darkened, futile, alienated, ignorant, and hard of heart.

### **The Transplant (v. 23)**

Verse 23... Paul then says: "However, you have learned different, and you have been renewed in the spirit of your minds." Look at verse 20... He says, "*But that...*" ('that' being the calloused heart, the hard heart) "*...that is not the way you learned Christ!*" It's a lie. It's a lie to live like you need to have a calloused heart. It's a lie to live like you need to give yourself over, and you can't fight temptation any longer. That is actually a lie. You actually, instead, need to know that you have learned Jesus, and Jesus gives you every tool that you need to resist temptation. Jesus gives you every tool that you need to have a brand new heart inside of you. Jesus gives you every tool you need to fight the lies of sin and of the enemy that come against you (verse 22): "*...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitfulness...*" It's an old way of life. He describes this in verse 23 as "*...to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.*"

That word "renewed" there, I thought it was probably the same word as Romans 12:12, "*...to be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*" But it's actually a different word. This word here in Ephesians chapter 4 is actually saying "you get something brand new. You get a new mind... a new way of thinking." Now contrast that back with what Paul was saying. Paul was saying that those who are far from Jesus, they are darkened in their thoughts, they are futile in their understanding and in their thinking. Their mind, the way that it works, is always clouded. It cannot work perfectly. But those who have Jesus, God gives them a brand new mind. A new way to think. They no longer think in the way that the rest of the world thinks.

So how does the rest of the world think, and how then ought the Christian to think? Great question... let's dig into it. First of all, we see that those who are Gentiles, the way they think, always goes after themselves. Whenever they act, they are only concerned with getting the things that they want. They only focus on getting the desires of their heart. Anybody here ever fall prey to just being a little bit selfish? ...Only me. (Laughter) But those who have Jesus Christ begin to change. You see, I oftentimes have found myself being jealous of individuals who are proud pagans because they get to flaunt the idea that they are doing exactly what they want, going after their own desires, not having any measure of self-control. And in those

moments, whenever I begin to feel like "That's not fair; why do they get to do that?" God drops chapter 4, verse 25 right in my lap and says, "That is a lie." *"Therefore, having put away falsehood..."* Those ways of thinking are lies. They are false, they are destructive, and you must take those and put them away.

The New York Times recently put ran an article entitled "The Post-Truth Age of Politics"... [audio cut out for several seconds]

They are false, they are destructive, and you must take those and put them away. I would like to argue with that, but it seems that they have hit on something. Paul talked about it with Timothy that there would come a time whenever people would like to simply have truth, preaching that would scratch itching ears... a fancy way of saying, "Just tell me what it is that I want to hear." How many times have you heard a politician or a public figure... and it doesn't even have to be someone like that... just someone else who would lie with such vigor and boldness, and then there would be media outlets that would craft a narrative that would play to a certain way of thinking in order to give us exactly the things that we want to hear. You see, there can only be one truth, but we have become masters of spin. We like to take the things that we have heard and then spin them in such a way that they fit into the categories, the narratives, of our own hearts. But if there can only be one truth, let us settle it here today that we must put away falsehood and declare that there is only one truth, only one Healer, only one manner in which God wants to make our hearts completely whole and completely fixed, and that truth is Jesus alone. Whenever we declare that Jesus is better, make my heart believe... what we are saying is simply this... that there is only one way in which we will ever see peace enter into our land... through the Kingdom of God... through Jesus Christ. There is only one way by which racial reconciliation will ever happen in the Church, through the grace of God... through Jesus Christ. There's only one way by which we will ever begin to see change in this world... it's through Jesus Himself, and living out the commands that He has given us.

Jesus is the truth... He is it. Here is the problem: We don't like what He says. He tells us, "Love, serve, forgive... be generous." He tells us these things: "Bless those who curse you." And we reply, "But I don't want to do that. Nobody else does that. Look at the people out there that are getting ahead, that are becoming so wealthy, that are building a name for themselves... they don't do those things. Why is it that they get to succeed in the world, and I have to be someone that's always following the weaker path?"

Matthew 6:33... *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* What are "all these things"? Go back and read above that. What does he say? He is talking about the clothes that you wear, the food that you eat, the money in your bank account. He says, "Don't worry about that other stuff; chase the Kingdom first. Chase the Kingdom first." You chase the Kingdom first, He will take care of those things." But we say, "But Jesus, You don't understand. I'm on the fast-track to success here. If I'm going to really make partner by the time that I turn 35, that Kingdom way thing is going to have to really wait. If I'm going to get a million in the bank account in order to leave something for my kids and my grandkids, I've got to set aside my Christian principles for a few minutes and really go after the things that are going to make things work in this world. Jesus... You don't know the way that the world works." And He says to you... "I made it..." (Laughter) "I know the way that it works." Here is the thing. There are two paths. One of those paths is narrow and one of those paths is wide. This is the funny thing. They can actually both ultimately lead to a great deal of worldly blessing, but one of them will be much slower, one of them will shape your heart, one of them will allow you to arrive in the location of blessing with your reputation intact. It is the Kingdom way. (Clapping) Yeah... we can clap for that.

But here's the thing. We don't like to go slow; we like to get there just like that. But Paul is declaring, "Put away those old things. Live, trust, walk in the Kingdom way. Forgive, love, bless, give... Do those things that Jesus commands you to do, and you will find that you will suddenly think in a brand new way." This is why, whenever we think in Kingdom terms and we make Kingdom statements, people, no matter what side they are on, are completely baffled because it looks nothing like the world.

Now, as Paul begins to describe this, as he begins to tell us to put off our old self and instead to live now in our new self, to live in our new way, we begin to wonder, "Well how in the world is that going to really play out?" It's as if he reads our mind and he begins to unpack that, starting then in verse 25. He says, *"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."* Let me tell you what he is doing here. He is going back to the old way, saying, "Okay... look. The Gentiles, the pagans... this is the way they live. They are only looking out for number one. Their actions are always selfish. They just do what they do to feel good about themselves: "What's good for me, what's good for mine, what's good for my family... that's what I'm going to do." Those are the actions of the pagan. But then he contrasts that with the Kingdom way, with the Church, and he then declares this: He says, "The Church doesn't worry only about self. The Church actually lives in such close community with one another that whenever we act, we act with concern for the other people that are in the body of believers." In other words, if the Church is supposed to live in such a way, in such a love, that we see who God is... Let me put it for you like this. Jesus is God in flesh, and we will often say, "If you want to see God, look at Jesus." Right? If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. The Bible declares that the Church is the Body of Christ. Jesus' body is now ascended and at the right hand of the Father, so then the Scripture declares this: If you want to know who Jesus is, He has got a body, it's the Church. Look at it. That's who Jesus is. Now, did you just get scared? If you don't understand... Paul is saying, "You must live in such rich community with one another; you must reject selfishness and instead love one another in such a way that when people look at the way that you live and the way that you love one another, they understand who Jesus is, which consequently points them to God the Father." And if you go, "Whoa... That's big." Now you're getting it. Now you are getting it. If this is beginning to frighten you, then you are starting to get it. You see, in verse 25 where it says, *"...put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."* He is declaring, "The Church is connected. We don't have time to speak falsely to one another."

I went to the doctor on Friday. I've been on a vegan diet for six months because my cholesterol suddenly decided to revolt and reject and go against me. I went to the doc on Friday, and I was glad that my doc told me the truth. He said, "Hey... way to go on that vegan diet... It didn't work. Your cholesterol actually went up." I'm gifted and talented. I'm pretty excited about that. Uric acid levels, up... showing inflammation in my arteries. CRP (cardiovascular risk protein), up... demonstrating that I have an increased risk now for heart attack and stroke. So now, I walk out of that doctor's appointment, and I'm not going to lie to you guys... I'm shaken. I'm mad... I get in my car and the first thing I do is I start talking to Jesus. "What's up with that? I gave up barbeque for this?" (Laughter) "I'm going right now and I'm going to get me some gravy." That is what I'm thinking. "Lord, I'll just see you in a couple of weeks, but I'm going to have a lot of gravy in my system when I get there." That was kind of my first reaction. I was mad. I didn't understand; how could this happen to me? I was so frustrated. There are some men in the Church that I texted and said, "Hey, this is kind of what's going on. I'm just frustrated and I'm angry." My phone began to ring. I looked down and it was one of those men. I'm not going to lie to you, I didn't want to answer it because I didn't really want to talk to anyone right then. I had all those lies just running through my head. Those thoughts like, "This is unfair. This is wrong. How could this happen to me? Etc, etc, etc." I answered

my phone, I hold it up, and the first words that I hear is one of the men in our church, and this is what he says: "I'm going to tell you what you already know." Okay. This is what he said: "This is what you know: God sustains you until you turn 100, then He is good and He is God because He sustained you until you are 100. If He sustains you only until suppertime, He is good because He is God and He sustained you until suppertime. He is good and He does good. Praise God for who He is." (Clapping) Yeah; we should give a round of applause for that. I will tell you right now... I needed to hear that. I broke down on the phone, because I was already allowing lies to creep into my manner of thinking. And I was so grateful that God brought someone to drop a bomb of truth into my life and say, "Don't buy into the lie of the enemy right now. Don't buy into that." That's what this passage of Scripture is actually about. This is what it's getting after. It is saying this: "When you have the gift of the Holy Spirit in you, you are not to live only for yourself but you are to live for others."

Look at the examples that are given. Verse 26: *"Be angry and do not sin..."* Now that's not a command to go home and get angry. It's the command that when you do get angry, don't use it as an opportunity for sin. Keep going: *"...do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."* Anger can create bitterness, can create a grudge, and can create division in a family or in a church. This is what he is saying. When you get angry, that's fine. Recognize it, find the wound, and then go and reconcile. You don't get divided in the church. Verse 28: *"Let the thief no longer steal..."* Everybody's like, "Yeah! Man... no more crime." Keep going: *"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor..."* "Oh... okay. So it's like a social program." "The best welfare program is a job." (Ronald Reagan) Keep going: *"...doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."* I want you to think about this. Paul is saying that God is so radical in His deliverance that He takes someone who is a thief who takes from others, and He gives them a mindset that they want to work, not just to have pride in themselves, but so that they can share with those who are in need. If you have a job, God gave that to you, not so that you could just take care of yourself... not so that you could go get a new Jet Ski... but so that you could give, so that you could share. Your truth is not for yourself. Your anger is there to expose things, to create forgiveness. Your financial resources are there so that you can share with those who are in need. Verse 29: *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace..."* Anybody here ever talk bad about somebody? You all are holy... (Laughter) Anybody here ever talk bad somebody in the Church? Yeah... He says, "Yeah... you don't do that." Words come out of your mouth... use them to build up people in the Church. Exhort... encourage... edify... build up the Church. Heal the Church. Set the bones of brokenness in the Church. Verse 31: *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."* He takes every action and he says, "Look... it's not just enough to have this new more pure, more holy action coming out of your life. You must then not only be more pure and holy... You must use it to bring wholeness and health to the others in your life. Let's make an application. You cannot do this if you are not living in community with other believers. If you are living isolated from other Christians, you cannot do this. Now I know the things that you begin to think. You say, "I don't mind being nice to people on Sunday morning. I'll be polite to them but you're asking me to live in such a way that I begin to actually express the very nature of God?" Yes... that is what I'm asking.

Look at that verse... verse 30: *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..."* I heard that verse a lot when I was a kid; I had no idea what it meant. *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit..."* I'd read that and say "Man, that sounds bad. I'm not going to do it. God is going to get me." It sits right in the middle of the passage, talking about no longer being selfish in our attitudes but instead allowing the Gospel to so transform us

that we will bring health and healing to the other people around us. Do you want to know what grieves the Holy Spirit? "Grieve"... Sad... breaks the Holy Spirit's heart. Do you want to know what breaks the Holy Spirit's heart? Whenever we have the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of grace in us and we decide to not love other people as Jesus loved us. That grieves Him. If you want to stop breaking the heart of the Holy Spirit, don't be selfish with your time, with your money, with your gifts... share them. Share them freely and liberally with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. That's what we are called to do.

For years the Church has lived in such a way that we have taken the teaching gift and we have elevated it above all other gifts. This is why we, as a Church in the United States of America, walk around with a bunch of giant heads. Do you realize that if you are a Christian and you have been a Christian for most of your life, you have more theological education than most pastors on the other side of the world. You have more theological education, but we say, "Well... I can't do anything." You can't do anything because your head is so big that you're going to tip over... (Laughter) ...because you have so much knowledge. We've got to use it. Right? That is what God has called us to do... to actually serve and to love and do the thing that God wants us to do. Whenever we gather together as a Body in our Life Groups, it's not just to be a Bible study. I know, I can already hear... "You don't want us to study the Bible?" No... that's not what I'm saying. Study the Bible. Scripture study is important. But when we get together, we need to love, serve, exhort, edify, encourage. We need to speak words of truth to one another. We need to give liberally to one another. We need to bear the burdens with one another. We need to pray over one another. Why? ...Because if we only study the Word we say there's one gift that's more important than all the other gifts. That's not the truth. The truth is that God gives all the gifts to the Body so that the Body can be healthy. There are a lot of bones that need to be set. Some of those bones are theological and scriptural bones that need to be set to correct incorrect teaching and to correct doctrine, etcetera. That's good; we should do that... but there are also bones that need to be set of incorrect identities. There are also bones that need to be set of poverty. There are also bones that need to be set of unhealthy families and unhealthy relational patterns. We have to engage into all of those things, go to war with one another in prayer. We have to do all of that because each of the gifts are important to set the spiritual bones, to raise up the Body, and Paul is saying, "The Gentiles live like this, but the Church lives like this." We don't just focus in on ourselves. We love one another. It's funny because people think sometimes that the Church doesn't love people outside the Church. Before we can ever think about loving people outside the Church, we've got to start loving people inside the Church. We've got to decide, "I will stop isolating myself, and I will live and love freely because God has told me to do so. I will do those things." You see, this is the way of Jesus.

### **The Shift (v. 5:2)**

Chapter 5, verse 2: *"Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us..."* I'm going to read that again because I know you didn't get it. *"Walk in love, as Christ loved us..."* In other words, love the same way that Jesus loved. Now listen to this... he is like, well how did Jesus love? This is what he says: *"...and gave Himself up for us..."* I want you to think about this for a second. Are you willing to give yourself up for the other people in your Life Group... in your church? You're like... "No.... is this a cult? I'm out of here." No... it's not a cult. Let me explain this to you. The Bible, in John chapter 15, John chapter 17... over and over Jesus declares that the way that people will understand that we are different is that we have a deep and abiding love for one another that's patterned after the love that Jesus has for us. The way that they see that God is real is they go, "That is a radical, relentless, specific, community-driven love that they have for one another. That is mind-boggling. I've never seen people love one another in the way that they love one another. They do anything for one another. They pray for one another. They help one another. They do the things that have to be done. Jesus must be real. Jesus must have really died on the cross for sins because



look at the way they die to self for one another. That's real." That is the way that the Church is supposed to love. You see, that's what the Gospel is... that God found you... someone who was rebellious... someone who is expensive... someone who's stinky... someone who is always pushing back against Him and said, "I don't care how bad they are, I want a relationship with them. I'll give My Son, God in flesh, to die on a cross, raised from the dead three days later. I will do that because I want that one... they are Mine." Jesus then declares... this is the thing... now you show that kind of love for each other. When you do that, people will say, "I want to be loved like that." That's the way the Church works.

So here's the question: "Will you do that?" I know what you're thinking. "Aaahh... it seems a little radical." Welcome to Christianity. So here's the thing. This is what we've been doing. We've been coming to church. Did you know that you will not find the phrase "coming to church" in this Book? You won't find the phrase "going to church" in there either. But over and over you will see the description of living as the Church. The Church is the Body of Jesus. What does that mean? If you want to see Jesus, look at the Church. So here's the question: "What should we do?" Let's pray.

I want everybody to just bow your heads for a second. I want to give us an opportunity to think, "How should I respond to this?" First of all, nobody looking around. I just want to pray over people. I'm going to ask some different groups to raise their hands. This is what I want to ask you to do. Number one... if you would say, "Steve, I can't love like this because I never understood this sort of love that God had for me in Jesus. I have never said 'Yes' to Jesus. I'm not saying that I'm going to say 'Yes' to Him today. I'm just thinking about it." If that's you... no pressure... I just want to know who here is thinking, "It might be time for me to follow Jesus." I want you to raise your hand right now. Who is thinking about that... "It might be time for me to follow Jesus." Raise your hand up and I'm going to pray for you. All right... anybody else? Okay. You can put your hands down. Okay now... here's the next question. How many of you would say, "I have been isolating myself and not living in community with others, and I know that God is calling me to now live in community with other people." Raise your hand if that's you. Raise them up. It's alright. I see you. Keep them up; there's a lot of them going up. Okay; you can put those down. How many of you would now say, "Alright, I've been living in community but do you know what? This idea of radical love... that kind of kicked me in the face today. I need to love more liberally, more freely with those around me." I want to pray for you. Raise your hand today. Yeah... anybody? You say, "Wow... It's time for me to love like that." A lot of hands going up. Who else? Raise them up. Okay. You can put them down. Now here's the question... I'm going to pray right now, but I want you to think, "How are you supposed to respond to that?" It's one thing to raise your hand in church; it's another thing to do something. Some of us have action steps today. Some of us need in a moment to say, "It's time for me to be baptized. It's time for me to stop playing footsie with the Church and commit." Others of us need to say, "Hey, do you know what it's time for me to do? It's time for me to get serious in my relationship with Jesus. I've been kind of thinking about it, but it's time for me to commit today." Others of us today... do you know what we need to do? We need to say, "It's time for me to commit to a Life Group. I've been avoiding it. I didn't want to do it. It seems messy; it seems inconvenient." Yes, you're right. It's all of those things, but it's time to do it anyway. Others of us say, "Yeah, I'm in a Life Group, but I don't love like that." If that's you, you have to make the decision today. Let me pray over us.

"Lord Jesus, You are moving and You are speaking. God, show us how we ought to live as a Church, and show us how we ought to respond today, right now, as we sing. I pray that You would draw people to You and we act. In Jesus' Name... Amen."