

God's people, the church session 7: Living as God's family (part 1)

We could call this session 'walking the talk'. We looked at some of these things when we were studying the Kingdom of God and it probably also overlaps with our studies on the fruit of the Spirit as well as some of our earlier studies on the church. So... As members of God's family, we should have a family likeness. What this is and how we achieve it is what this study is all about. It's not easy to pick just a few passages because most of the NT letters end with instructions on how to live as Christians! So here are just two.

Ephesians 4:17–32

Notes: 'Gentiles' in v17 is a shorthand for 'pagans' or 'non-believers'. Those to whom this letter was sent were Gentile Christians. This passage follows on from those we looked at in earlier sessions when we thought about us being a building and a body.

- What contrast does Paul make in vv 17–23? What does 'put off' actually mean here? Why does he 'insist' that we 'put off' one and 'put on' the other?
- Paul here seems to emphasise the role of the mind – how many words are there to do with 'learning'? Why do you think it's important that we learn not any old 'truth' but 'the truth that is in Jesus'? What difference in practice would this make?

The 'new self' is 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (v.23). Paul goes on to spell out some of the implications for that in vv. 25–32 when he talks about things we should 'put off'.

- What would you say is the main thing that Paul emphasises here? Why do you suppose he does so?
- Why are we to make sure we speak truthfully and helpfully? What do you suppose this means in practice? What do you think 'unwholesome talk' might mean, and what would happen to a church fellowship where this and lying to one another was normal?
- 'Do not give the devil a foothold' (v.27) – how should anger do this? What's the point of not letting the sun go down on one's anger? How might this affect the things Paul tells us to get rid of in v.31? And how do these things grieve the Holy Spirit?

Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–17

At the end of the letter to the Hebrews, the author gives some practical advice to his readers. In this passage we find a sentence each on love, hospitality, prison visiting, marriage, contentment.

- In verses 1–5, why do you think that the author emphasises these particular things? Would you put them at the top of practical advice for churches today? Would you leave any out? Why?
- Verse 7 seems to speak about leaders in the past tense, probably thinking of those who originally told the readers about the gospel. How should we best remember our past 'leaders' in the church? What has this to do with verse 8?
- In verse 17 the author goes back to thinking about leaders. How should we support our current church leaders (taking this in the widest sense)?

Verses 15–16 are a kind of summary of what we've been discussing, reminding us that as God's people we are to be praising God and declaring him to others. But how we as God's people should act towards those outside the church is the subject for another study...

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.