



GOD'S FAMILY VALUES

Every family has rules. Though not always the same from family to family, there are always guidelines which structure the way families function. Some families take their shoes off at the front door. Others place high value on meal times and evening devotionals. Still others limit the amount of TV to be watched and set curfews for bedtime. There are chores to do, roles to honor, and relationships to respect.

If you were to join my family, you would have a new set of rules to learn. It would not matter that your former family did things differently or observed different rituals or placed value on different activities. To become a part of *my* family would require you to learn the rules of *my* household. Only by learning and respecting those rules could you hope to become a full member of my family.

*Be imitators of God,
therefore, as dearly loved
children and live a life of love,
just as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us
as a fragrant offering
and sacrifice to God.*

Eph 5:1-2

That's the way it is with the family of God. We have been adopted into God's household, and there are new behaviors to learn, new guidelines for what is acceptable and what is not, new roles and rituals and relationships to respect. Not all of these values come naturally for us. Some are quite different from the ways we have conducted ourselves in our former lives. But this is *God's* family, and if we are to become full members of it, we must learn and respect the rules of conduct which our Father requires.

In *Ephesians 4:25-5:2*, Paul urges us to imitate our Father, and to learn from his example how we ought to conduct ourselves in this new household. By watching our elder brother, Jesus Christ, we learn the family values which must govern the manner in which we live together.

THINK ABOUT IT:

- ♦ How we act, the behaviors we put on and take off as members of God's family, are not determined by what comes naturally to us. It is, rather, what comes naturally for our Father which sets the standard for his household. It is his character, not ours, which determines the tone for the church.

 **LET THE CHURCH
BE THE CHURCH**

SERMON 23

- ✓ Notice how Paul roots our behavior in values. What we "put off" and what we "put on" is determined by "who we are." Since this family is shaped by the character and values of its Father, our behavior must exemplify those values.
- ◆ Imitation is not only the sincerest form of flattery; it is also the surest path to obedience. "Treat others as God has treated you" is one of those helpful rules which cuts through our rationalizations and excuses, and motivates us to act in godly ways.

There has been a great deal of talk about "Family Values" lately. You would think that certain political parties had *invented* the topic by the way their candidates talk.

Long before this subject became politically popular, however, Paul talked about the values which shape the family of God. He taught that there are certain things which have no place in God's house. Instead – and because of the new values we share – there are certain behaviors we must exhibit. Think about the chart below:

Text	Put Off	Put On	Family Value
25	falsehood, lying	truthful speech	we are one body
26-27	anger leading to sin	quick reconciliation	we love peace
28	stealing	hard work	we share with others
29	unwholesome talk	speech that builds up	we bless others
31-32	bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice.	kindness, compassion, forgiveness	we act like our Father

Why do we put off lies and speak the truth to each other? Because this is *family* and we owe it to our Father and to each other to speak the truth. Why are we quick to make up and deal with anger when it arises? Because we are a people of peace and are not going to give the Devil any opportunity to destroy our unity. Why do we work hard? Because, in this family, we want to be contributors, not parasites. Why are we careful about our words in this family? Because we know the power of words. We were saved by words. And we want to be a blessing to each other with our words, not a discouragement.

Finally, Paul wraps up a whole batch of behaviors we ought to "put on" and "put off" – kindness, compassion, and forgiveness as opposed to bitterness, brawling, slander, etc. – and simply urges us to "imitate God."

In another context, this advice might be wishful thinking. It would be wonderful if everyone acted this way, but The trick is not in making a list of virtues and vices. It is, rather, in introducing people to a power that can help them live up to the list. Don't forget that what makes this teaching distinctly *Christian* is not the superior standard it holds up, but the powerful God who gives us power for living. Without the God to energize, the list is irrelevant.



GOD'S FAMILY RULES

Small Group Member's Guide

ICE BREAKER

Every family develops traditions and "rules" that make it distinctive. Many of these carry great weight, even if they always remain unspoken. Share some of the "unspoken rules" that made the family you grew up in distinctive. Have you discarded any in your current family?

BEHAVING IN GOD'S FAMILY

For many, Christianity remains an essentially private and personal experience. Some, if part of a church at all, find nothing unsettling about being just another anonymous worshipper in the crowd on Sunday morning. They see Christianity solely in terms of a vertical relationship with Christ—there is no horizontal link between themselves and other believers.

*Be imitators of God,
therefore, as dearly loved
children and live a life of love,
just as Christ loved us and gave
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Ephesians 5:1,2

While this may be true for many, it is not the pattern of the Christian life presented by Scripture. Indeed, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is full of "family" language: we have been *adopted as God's sons* (1:5), we are *members of God's household* (2:19), God is our *Father* (4:6), and we are *brothers* to one another (6:23). In fact, there is no support in Scripture for the idea of a purely personal and private relationship with Jesus. God himself is said to add us to the church when we are saved.

Of course, the appeal of a Christ-only religion is obvious: the church is full of people that are just like me—faulty and hard to get along with. It simply would be much easier (so we think) to love God and not have to mess with all those other folks.

But this is not God's way. He has called us not only to Himself but to His new community. And He expects us to evidence the love we profess for Him by loving His other children. He is so intent on our making this family concept work that He has given us certain rules of behavior to govern our conduct with one another.



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To Discuss

In these verses Paul finally gets around to identifying and describing exactly what he means when he says we are to put off the old and put on the new patterns of behavior. Perhaps the position of the first characteristic he lists indicates its fundamental nature to healthy family life: our propensity to lie must be replaced by a commitment to always speak the truth.

Lying no doubt had a place in our former way of life when we followed the prince of this world who is the "father of lies." But our new Father has no darkness in him and will neither speak nor countenance that which is false.

Then, for the sake of unity, we are to not only control our tempers but must pursue peace with our brothers. Though painful disagreements may be inevitable, quick reconciliation is the pattern God's Family will adhere to.

The importance of our Family unity is further stressed by the admonition that it is not enough to stop hurting others, we must actively work on our brothers' behalf. In the same way that we stop taking from others what is rightfully theirs we stop hurting them with our words and learn to build them up by our encouraging speech.

Such things as bitterness and rage and brawling and slander—indeed, any form of malice—has no place within this Family. If we are to survive and thrive, we must replace such "human" tendencies with the Godly attributes of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Forgiveness will be easier, Paul reminds us, if we will keep in mind that the reason we are in the Family is because God has graciously forgiven us through Christ.

Ultimately Paul knows we are going to need some strong motivation to lay down such deeply ingrained patterns of self-serving behavior and adopt a mindset that puts others' needs before our own. And he gives us that motivation in the reminder that we are doing nothing more for our brother than what God has already done for us.

Our most altruistic act is but a pale imitation of the selfless service God has rendered to us in Christ. Paul's call for us to imitate God is not a hopeless plea to be sinless, but rather to love as we have been loved. God's love for us caused Him to act sacrificially on our behalf. Show that you understand this, Paul says, by sacrificially loving your brother. There is no place in Paul's theology or ecclesiology for a Christian that claims to be in relationship with God, yet eschews relationship with God's children.

- ♦ *In the earlier part of this chapter Paul emphasizes the necessity of unity within the body. Are his injunctions about "putting off" and "putting on" a new emphasis upon the individual or is he still speaking of "family matters"?*
- ♦ *Is it unrealistic of Paul to expect us to so drastically change our behavior? Where does he anticipate we will get the power to make these changes?*
- ♦ *Paul lists about 10 different characteristics of "natural behavior." How would you broadly characterize these? Can you sum up the behaviors he lists with a more general descriptive phrase?*
- ♦ *For each of the negative traits that we are to put off a matching positive trait is to be put on. Why is it not enough to simply refrain from doing evil? What is likely to happen to a family whose members simply "do no harm" to one another?*

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A Look At The Church

God's Family Values

Eph 4:25-5:2

April 7, 1996
The Holy Life
Eph 5:3-20

Purpose

To find out what it means to put on the new person that God has created in each Christian.

Background

Last week we talked about the new way of **thinking** that God expects of us in response for what He has done for us. God had a plan for us before we even existed. God sent Jesus to die on the cross so that we can live with Him forever. God gave us the church headed by His Son Jesus. When we put our faith in Him, He **creates** a new person in each of us. Eph 2:10 states, "For we are God's workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Eph 4:22-24 says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made **new** in the **attitude of your minds**; and to put on the new self, **created** to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Now that we are Christians, God expects us to have a new attitude in our minds - a new way of thinking.

In this week's lesson Paul gives us insight in to what it means to put on the "new self". Remember what we have studied: we have been "adopted as God's sons (1:5)," we are now members of God's household (2:19)," God is our Father (4:6)," and we are "brothers" to one another (6:23). What Paul is talking about in today's lesson is how a Christian behaves and why. This is most assuredly what God expects of His children; however, these are not things we do to earn God's favor. God loves us!! He has justified us and cleansed us; we are members of His family. As members of God's family, Paul is telling us what our family pride leads us to do. This is the expectation, the way God's children behave; these characteristics are the mark of a true Christian.

As we study this passage together, see if you can determine three things about each of the areas Paul discusses: (1) what are we to put off, (2) what are we to put on, and (3) why? If we truly comprehend these things and make them a part of our living faith journey, then I believe we are following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We are in the process of individually becoming the people God wants us to be and collectively becoming the church (family) that God wants us to be.

Discussion

1. Ephesians 4:25 discusses lying. What are we to put off? Put on? Why?
2. What are some ways we lie to each other?
3. Ephesians 4:26-27 talks about anger. (This one is a little more subtle.) What are we to put off? Put on? Why? What makes you angry?
4. Ephesians 4:28 touches on theft. What are we to put off? Put on? Why? Is this the way the world thinks? Is this why we work?
5. Ephesians 4:29 addresses unwholesome talk. What are we to put off? Put on? Why? How do you define unwholesome talk? Do you think unwholesome talk is partially defined by your culture?
6. Ephesians 4:31-32 covers six topics relating to run away emotions. What are we to put off? Put on? Why? What are the lives of people like who let these worldly emotions have control?
7. Read Eph 4:30. Why do you think this verse is located in this particular place; what is the context? What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? (See Rom 8:16, 26) Does the way we treat each other affect the Holy Spirit?
8. Ephesians 5:1-2 sums it all up and points our proper motivation for living up to God's expectation as members of his family. Who is offered as our standard of comparison?

Did you know that kindness week was celebrated in the Dallas area in February? The Dallas News, and Richardson News both ran lengthy articles on kindness week. Some suggestions on how to show kindness: pay the toll of the person behind you; give someone your parking space; deliver cookies to your local police or fire station; return several grocery carts to the store; call a friend you haven't spoken to in a long time; tell someone you're sorry - and mean it; smile at a stranger; wave and let a driver merge ahead of you. One of the founders said, "If you're nice to someone, then they're nice to someone else." Many people in the world recognize the value of Christian behavior. They advocate it in the name of good citizenship.

You can talk about morals and standards and interpersonal ethics all you want. That is often all we do - talk about it. The everyday problems arise when we stop focusing on talking and start trying to live the principles we have been discussing. Most of us can recognize what is good and right and true. We just have problems putting it into practice: consistently, authentically, day-in-and-day-out. What is needed is not just education but power and transformation. Not just good intentions, but new lives. How do we tap this power?

Good citizenship is not our motivation for behaving in the ways we have been discussing. We need to behave in these ways because we are **God's kids** and this is the way He expects His kids to act.