

"Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Introduction

- Okay, are you ready for your morning anatomy and physiology lesson? What's a reflex? A reflex is an involuntary response to a stimulus. A familiar reflex commonly tested by physicians is the patellar reflex, in which an involuntary jerk of the knee is evoked by lightly striking the tendon of the patella, or kneecap, indicating the efficiency of certain nerve tracts in the spinal cord.¹
- I believe that the most effective Christians are those who act according to their reflexes. Their behavior, their response to certain stimuli is almost involuntary because they have been so transformed by the word of God implanted in their lives. Whereas muscular reflexes physiologically produce muscle movement, like the jerking knee, what does or should leading an effective Christian life produce? This morning, as we continue in our study of Ephesians, I want to suggest to you that...

Proposition

- **Leading highly effective lives, like a reflex, builds the unity of the body of Christ**

Transition

If the church, if any church lacks unity, its safe to say its nervous system has disintegrated. Unity within the body of Christ is so crucial that Jesus said in John 17:23 that the world's belief in Jesus is dependent upon whether or not the church is united. *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* Did you realize that? If we fail to be united as brothers and sisters in Christ, the world will reject Christ. How then do we, as a local expression of the body of Christ, build unity so that this community will believe in Christ? We lead highly effective lives. **Leading highly effective lives builds the unity of the body of Christ.** I bet that every Christian in this room desires to be an effective member of the body of Christ. Even if our lives don't always show it, the church is important to us, otherwise we wouldn't be here, right? But what does it mean to lead highly effective lives? According to God's word, effective Christianity means leading holy, pure, sanctified lives. And that's what will build the unity of the church. As Christians serve they *mature* the church. But as Christians lead sanctified lives, they build the *unity* of the church. This morning, I want us to examine Ephesians 4:25-5:2 because this passage teaches us the characteristics of an effective Christian.

Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 4:25-5:2 contains seven (7) habits of highly effective members of the body of Christ**

¹"Reflex," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Transition

- A number of years ago, Stephen Covey wrote a book entitled *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. This morning, I want us to examine seven habits of highly effective Christians. If these seven things become part of your character you will be an effective Christian. And if you are an effective Christian, it will lead to a united local church. And if we become a united local church, Richland Center will turn to Christ.

Background and Setting

- Again, I want to briefly remind you where we are in Ephesians. The first three chapters are comprised of doctrine. In our study we have learned who we are in Christ and what we have received because of being in Christ. The last 3 chapters comprise ethics, how to live. Orthodoxy, right doctrine, in the chapters 1-3 leads to orthopraxy, right living, in chapters 4-6. Things that are spiritually true must work themselves out practically; otherwise we don't really believe them. For instance, if we learned doctrinally about being united to Christ then practically the Christian must demonstrate that she is united to others as part of the body of Christ. That's why the life of the mind, which we discussed last week, is so critical. The way we think affects how we live. If our minds display unsanctified thinking about the church it will determine our behavior as we relate to the local church. However, if our minds display renewed thinking about the church, we will develop a high view of the local church and pattern our lives according to what we believe.
- Right now we are in the middle of Paul's very practical section of Ephesians. He is in the midst of telling us how to live, how to be effective Christians based upon what we believe. He's trying to build our character and so he commands us. Paul wants these seven things to habitually become part of our lives, knowing if they do, they will lead to individual purity which will produce corporate unity. Listen to me. Personal holiness always works itself out in the context of relationships. Anyone can pretend to be holy cloistered away by themselves. Real holiness develops in the nitty-gritty of life on life contact.

Transition

Let's examine the **first habit** found in verse 25 that we must foster in order to lead effective Christian lives. If we **speak truthfully**, that's the first habit, we will be effective and build the unity of the church.

Main Points

I. **Speak truthfully (4:25)**

A) Validation

- i) Imagine with me what life would be like with a group of people who never spoke truthfully. When one asked how another was doing, and they were really struggling, they responded they were doing fine. When teachers taught, they taught error. No one able to trust another. This group could never be united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. Unity within the body of Christ is dependent upon the truth and **speaking truthfully**.

B) Explanation

i) **Verse 25.** *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* What's the therefore there for? Look at verse 22. Because we have been taught to put on the new man and to put off our old selves, we must also put off the behavior that accompanied the old self, namely everything false. *Put off falsehood.* It is not enough simply not to lie. Paul commands us to put off everything false. Quoting from Zechariah 8:16, Paul sets the standard for Christian speech in the body of Christ, absolute truth. Not only does he give a negative command. He gives a positive command. Speak truthfully. Get rid of every appearance of falsehood in speech and instead speak truthfully. I can't help but think of the Christ's prayer in the gospel of John. *Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth.* How do we become holy? By truth? What is truth? The word of God. Speak the word of God to one another. Why are we to live this way? *Because we are all members of one body.* In other words, "in the body which is a model of harmonious relationships, there is no place for anything other than the truth."²

C) Illustration

i) *"Let us begin by committing ourselves to the truth—to see it like it is, and tell it like it is—to find the truth, to speak the truth, and to live the truth."*³ Who said that? Richard Milhous Nixon, at a speech in Miami, 1968, in which he accepted the Republican nomination for president.

D) Application

i) Ironic? Isn't it. And yet we who are to be people of truth often are easily as deceptive and sneaky and conniving with our words than the 37th president of the United States. Students, are you honest with your parents? Parents, are you honest you're your kids? Or are you deceptive with your words? We will never reach this city with the truth of the gospel if we can't be truthful with one another. Otherwise we have an issue of credibility. You want to be effective Christian, holy and sanctified? Get a hold of your tongue. Psalm 15:1-2 *LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? 2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart.* How's your speech doing?

Transition

Let's examine the **second habit** we must foster in order to lead effective Christian lives. Verses 26-7. If we **avoid sinful anger**, that's the second habit, we will be effective and build the unity of the church.

II. Avoid sinful anger (4:26-7)

A) Validation

i) Imagine life in a group of people who were always angry with each other. People incessantly nursing their wrath thinking "how could they? The nerve. The gall. Who do they think they are?"⁴ Always irritated and upset at the inability of others to live right. Unable to fellowship with those that upset them. This group could never be

² O'Brien, p. 338.

³ Richard M. Nixon (1913–94), U.S. Republican politician, president. Speech, 9 Aug. 1968, Miami, accepting the presidential nomination.

⁴ Bruce, p. 361.

united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. Unity is dependent upon **avoiding sinful anger**.

B) Explanation

- i) Turning from speech to conduct, Paul next addresses anger. Is there a more destructive attitude to relationships and unity? **Verses 26-7**. *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.* Quoting again from the Old Testament to bolster his authority, this time from Psalm 4:4, Paul again commands. Be angry as the occasion requires it **but do not sin**. He doesn't say never be angry. Jesus and God both were angry at sin. There is a place for righteous anger. Anger towards sin and injustice. And then there's the anger we are all more familiar with. The violent moods, the irritations that send us through the roof. The escalating conversations. Paul commands us to quit, not only our outbursts, but the flaming glares we secretly give others, the harmful words uttered in the privacy of our minds.⁵ How do you tell the difference between righteous anger and sinful anger? As one commentator said, "If our [anger] is not free from injured pride, malice, or a spirit of revenge, then it has degenerated into sin."⁶ And because anger is such a destructive force, Paul puts a timeframe on it. *Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry*. Does that mean that in the land of the perpetual sun like Greenland or Alaska it's okay to be angry all the time? No. In other words, don't nurse your anger. Deal with it. Don't brood. In the words of **John Stott**, "it is seldom safe to allow the embers to smolder."⁷ If you do watch out. You've given the devil a foothold, an opportunity to cause strife and disunity. That should be a great motivation to deal with anger. Do you want to give Satan an opportunity to destroy Christian community or your family life? Don't give the devil a chance to exert his influence.⁸

C) Illustration

- i) As of last night, the USGS warned that Mt. St. Helens could erupt anytime.

D) Application

- i) The picture of a smoldering volcano fits well the person who is angry. Seething, boiling, fuming under the surface, ready to blow at a moment's notice. Some of you are walking volcanoes at home, at work. You're constantly angry. If you are an angry person, if you are angry at something please deal with it and end it today. *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* James 1:19-20. You cannot be an effective Christian seething with man's anger. God is calling us to a higher standard.

Transition

I want us to now look at the **third habit** of an effective Christian. Look at verse 28. We must **work hard to benefit others** if we hope to build the unity of the church.

III. Work hard to benefit others (4:28)

⁵ Reinecker, p. 534.

⁶ O'Brien, p. 340.

⁷ Stott, p. 186.

⁸ O'Brien, p. 340.

A) Validation

- i) Imagine life in a group where no one ever worked hard but stole from others; robbing each other of their time and possessions. Imagine a group who idly sponged off the hard work and resources of others. And because of their inability to work usefully, they never had a reserve to give to those in need. This group could never be united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. Unity within the body of Christ is dependent upon **working hard to benefit others**.

B) Explanation

- i) Again Paul gives a negative command followed by a positive one alluding, I think, to the authority of the 8th commandment of the Decalogue. Give up stealing he says. Instead, labor hard in order to give to others. **Verse 28**. *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.* What Paul commands is laboring to the point of weariness.⁹ Do something useful. Work hard. We no longer work for ourselves as Christians. We have been created for good works as Ephesians 2:10 says. And so whatever we do, whatever profession we are in, we work in order that we might benefit others. As **F.F. Bruce** so aptly put it, “the thief is to become a philanthropist.”¹⁰

C) Illustration

- i) According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, employee dishonesty costs American businesses over \$50 billion annually. It is estimated that 75% of all employees steal at least once, and a half of these steal again and again. Get this, one of every three business failures are the direct result of employee theft.¹¹

D) Application

- i) People, the problem is not with the economy. The problem is with the sinfulness of the human heart. And before you check this one off your list thinking you got this one under control. When was the last time you downloaded a song from the internet without paying for it? When was the last time you made a personal copy using the office copier? Have you ever borrowed tools from work and never returned them? Have you ever filled out your time card so that you worked more minutes than you really did? Do you play computer games at work? Have you ever copied software for a friend? Instead of investing so much energy at getting something you don't have, invest that energy in giving to those in need. That's effective Christianity.

Transition

Now for the **fourth habit** of an effective Christian. You want to be effective and build the unity of the church? Look at verse 29. We must habitually **speak good, wholesome words** to one another.

IV. Speak good, wholesome words (4:29)

⁹ O'Brien, p. 343.

¹⁰ Bruce, p. 362, Lincoln, p. 304.

¹¹ Citation: Bob Mather, "Employee theft: Prevention Beats Apprehension"; submitted by Aaron Goerner, Utica, New York

A) Validation

- i) Imagine with me what life would be like with a group of people who continually tore each other down with their words. This group could never be united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. **Unity within the body of Christ is dependent upon speaking good, wholesome words.**

B) Explanation

- i) In the words of **Joseph Conrad's Marlow** in Lord Jim, "*A word carries far—very far—deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space.*"¹² We all know how destructive words can be. Our speech is so important that Paul addresses this subject a second time in **verse 29**. Listen. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* Absolutely no words that must not come out of our mouths can be unwholesome. What are unwholesome words? Words that tear down, destroy, that fail to edify, that slander, that whisper rumors, vulgar words, abusive words.¹³ Any words that are a detriment to the person you are talking about or to are unwholesome words.¹⁴ The word translated unwholesome means "rank, foul, putrid, rotten, worthless, disgusting."¹⁵ It's the same root word used by Jesus of rotten fruit in Matthew 7:17-18. Instead, our words must be constructive. They must build up and edify. They must give grace. That's literally what the text says in the Greek. Speak in order that you might give grace to those who hear. Our words must be a blessing to others. Only those kinds of words can build the unity of the body of Christ.

C) Illustration

- i) You know the fluffy, light as air, bleached blonde white bread by the brand name Holsum, *H-o-l-s-u-m*? Is there a greater misnomer in the entire food industry? That bread, wholesome? That bread doesn't nourish. It's empty.

D) Application

- i) How many of the words we speak have the appearance of building up, of being wholesome but really are cheap imitations of words that feed and nourish? We so easily speak words we want to hear instead of what others need to hear. We want to talk and sound important. We want to make sure people have heard the latest news. Instead of building others up, we talk about them behind their backs. You have heard it said before in Matthew 12:36. *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.* Let's make sure that our speech is edifying, seasoned with grace, so that our words may benefit the person who hears them. Ask yourself the next time you have a conversation if the words that you speak are benefiting the person you are talking to? That makes for an effective Christian.

Transition

Are you ready for the **fifth habit** of an effective Christian? Effective Christians **don't distress the Spirit of God**. Look at verse 30.

¹² **Joseph Conrad** (1857–1924), Polish-born English novelist. Marlow, in *Lord Jim*, ch. 15 (1900).

¹³ O'Brien, p. 344.

¹⁴ Bruce, p. 363.

¹⁵ Reinecker, p. 534.

V. Don't distress the Spirit (4:30)

A) Validation

- i) Imagine life in a group of people who never put into practice what they were taught; who constantly heard good teaching but never changed their lives. Imagine attending a church where people constantly grieved the spirit by their poor behavior; who in essence denied by their lifestyle the very name by which they are called. If we want to build the unity within the body of Christ we must not **distress the Holy Spirit**.

B) Explanation

- i) **Verse 30.** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Don't you find it curious that Paul, in the middle of this list of things that must not become habits, part of our characters, breaks off to mention the Holy Spirit. Why? Paul, for the fourth time now, alludes to an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 63:10 which says, *Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.* The context of this verse is Israel's wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus. Paul argues, using Israel as an example, that that redemption is no guarantee of good conduct. Conduct counts, yes. But we still have a choice. Israel was redeemed by God and became the very place God tabernacled or dwelt by his Spirit. And irony of all ironies, they rebelled against God in the desert and grieved the Spirit as the Isaiah passage says. In the same way, you and I, as the redeemed people of God, *sealed for the day of redemption*, as Paul says, have a choice to follow Israel's negative example and grieve the Spirit or to live differently. Yes we are the redeemed, but our conduct counts. Don't grieve the Spirit in an ongoing manner.¹⁶ Live differently. Live effectively.

C) Illustration

- i) One of the most telling statistics of an effective wide receiver in football is something called YAC. Yards after catch. In some ways, for the receiver, it's not if he can catch the ball. Most NFL receivers can catch a ball. But what separates the cream of the crop is the ability to run down the field after catching the ball, yards after catch.

D) Application

- i) In the same way, it's easy to come to Christ. We do it by faith in his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. God then promises to reside within us by his Spirit. What's important once becoming a Christian is yards after the catch, what we do with our lives after that initial conversion. Our conduct counts. We must lead effective lives. These things we are discussing this morning, must become habits. We must not grieve the Spirit.

Transition

As we move toward the end of this passage, let's examine the **sixth habit** that we must foster in order to lead effective Christian lives. Look at verses 31-2. If we **sweep away irate behavior**, that's the sixth habit, we will be effective and build the unity of the church.

VI. Sweep away irate behavior (4:31-2)

¹⁶ Wallace, p. 717.

A) Validation

- i) Imagine life among people who constantly resented each other; who festered and were bitter, angry to the point of brawling. Imagine a group so lacking in compassion they were unable to extend kindness and forgiveness to each other. This group could never be united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. **Sweep away irate behavior and you'll produce unity within the body of Christ.**

B) Explanation

- i) **Verses 31-2** command us to get rid of sinful anger in all its forms. *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* Paul then draws out five different aspects of sinful anger beginning with bitterness. In **John Eadie's** words, "[bitterness] is a term denoting that fretted and irritable state of mind that keeps a man in perpetual animosity-that inclines him to harsh and uncharitable opinions of men and things-that makes him sour, crabby and repulsive in his general demeanor-that brings a scowl over his face and infuses venom into the words of his tongue."¹⁷ Next, rage and anger. The first term expresses "temporary excitement or passion."¹⁸ The second "refers more to the subtle and deep flowing anger."¹⁹ Get rid of them both. Next, brawling; shouting of people back and forth, escalating speech as in a quarrel. Get rid of it. Finally, slander-literally blaspheming others. "[Slander] is speaking evil of someone."²⁰ These forms of anger, along with malice, Paul commands, are to be completely removed. If we are to be pure, to be effective Christians, if we are to build the unity of the body, we must instead be kind and compassionate and forgiving. The model is God's forgiveness of us through Christ. The cross is the epitome of compassion and kindness and forgiveness. Look to the cross as an example of how to deal with other people. Let that be your guide.

C) Illustration

- i) The quotable **G. K. Chesterton** once said that "Man seems to be capable of great virtues but not of small virtues; capable of defying his torturer but not of keeping his temper."²¹

D) Application

- i) Chesterton's right. It's easier to not murder someone, to not commit adultery, to not extort millions of dollars than it is to be completely honest with our words, or let our temper get the best of us. But it's in the small things that character is built and holiness grows. It's in the small things, like telling the truth and watching our anger and not stealing that we become effective Christians and have the greatest witness. If God is convicting your heart this morning about something we've talked about please don't stifle that conviction. Get right with God and get right with others. Our witness, God's reputation is at stake.

Transition

¹⁷ Reinecker, p. 534.

¹⁸ Reinecker, p. 534.

¹⁹ Reinecker, p. 535.

²⁰ Reinecker, p. 535.

²¹ G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936), British author. *Autobiography*, ch. 11 (1936).

Finally, the **seventh habit** essential to effective Christianity and unity within the church. Look at verses 1-2 of chapter 5. We must get in the habit of **mimicking God's love**.

VII. Imitate God's love (5:1-2)

A) Validation

- i) Imagine with me what life would be like among a group of people who refused to love each other; who were ignorant of God's love for them and had no desire to love others; who simply refused to sacrifice for others because of their callous cold hearts. This group could never be united, could never demonstrate a unity of spirit. We must **imitate God's love** in order to be effective Christians and build Christian unity.

B) Explanation

- i) **Salvador Dali**, the great Spanish surrealist painter said, "Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing."²² If you want to produce an effective Christian life imitate God's love. Listen to **5:1-2**. *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 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.* The command to be imitators summarizes this whole section. Why are we to imitate? We are dearly loved children. We have experienced God's rich love for us in making us his children through faith in Christ and now we must pattern our behavior after our Father's. The pattern we are to follow is Christ's sacrificial love.

C) Illustration

- i) You've all seen orangutans mimic their trainer's every move, right?

D) Application

- i) Paul's not commanding us to apishly mimic God. As talented as some of you are, I'm pretty sure you can't part waters or multiply loaves. We've been given a pattern by which we must model our lives. Christ's sacrificial love. And it's up to each of us to model and contextualize that love in our own unique positions in life. We imitate Christ's attitude of love and that love will work itself out in very different ways as each of us works to sacrificially love and serve one another. This type of behavior, costly sacrificial love for one another is to be the distinguishing mark of our Christianity. As the old song goes, *They will know we are Christians by our love.* That's what produces effective Christianity.

Conclusion

- Did you know that the word "effective" is a synonym for a soldier or a piece of military equipment that is ready for combat?²³ How ready are you this morning to serve God? According to God's word for us this morning, effective Christianity means leading holy, pure, sanctified lives. It's the holiness of our lives producing unity in our fellowship that will effectively win our world to our Savior. That's God's great purpose for this church. Let's pray.

²² Salvador Dali (1904–89), Spanish painter. *Dali by Dali*, "The Futuristic Dali" (1970).

²³ *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from INSO Corporation; further reproduction and distribution restricted in accordance with the Copyright Law of the United States. All rights reserved.

