

## **Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

<sup>25</sup>So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup>Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup>Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup>and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup>and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **John 6:41-50**

<sup>41</sup>Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup>They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup>Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. <sup>44</sup>No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. <sup>45</sup>It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. <sup>46</sup>Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup>Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

## **We Are the Bread of Life**

So this guy walks into a church and says, "I'm the bread that came down from heaven. Eat my flesh and you'll live forever." Do you believe him? Hardly, right? And suppose that this guy grew up down the street from you. Suppose you went to school together, played at the same park together? You know his mom and dad. What are you gonna think? If you're a nice enough person, you'll probably feel some pity for this poor guy; maybe he drank some bad wine. Maybe he was

out in the sun a bit too long. Whatever you might think, you probably won't take him too seriously. No one you know has ever come down from heaven. You're not interested in eating this guy, and even if you did, you don't believe that doing so would give you eternal life; you'd probably just feel nauseous. Yes, let's give the Jews a break here. If you heard what they heard you'd be a bit skeptical about this character Jesus for very good reasons. In fact you have to witness his resurrection before you could finally come around to believe what he was telling you.

But have you actually seen Jesus resurrected? I would guess you hadn't. I haven't. And so the question must be asked, "Why do you believe?" There has never been any irrefutable proof that belief in Jesus leads us to eternal life. All we have is testimony from the Bible and from other believers. That's not very much.

Yet there is something else. Whether you've been raised in the Church or not, you've heard the testimony of those who believe, and you yourself have come to believe. As crazy as the whole story sounds, you have come to believe it. Perhaps it's because something known as the Holy Spirit has spoken to your heart and led you to believe. Perhaps, in fact, you have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus in your own heart.

None of that could have happened without the Church, which is what Paul calls the body of Christ. The Church bears witness to Christ's resurrection. Every believer through the ages has born witness to Christ's resurrection here, in our hearts. Sometimes we have done a great job bearing witness; sometimes not so good. Sometimes people could look at the Church and clearly see Jesus at work. Other times people looked at the Church and asked, "Where is Jesus?" In the end that's what determines whether or not we are the Church; is it evident that Jesus is alive and building his kingdom in this world through the Church?

And this is why Paul goes into such detail in our Epistle lesson about how a church needs to conduct itself. You see, once we see the light, once we meet the resurrected Christ, we are a new creation; we sense it. We know that our lives are irreversibly changed. That's what happens when we repent and we feel the flood of forgiveness bathe us and wash us clean. But our new lives are only just beginning. The process of our sanctification has only started, and the Church is a collection of works in progress. Paul has to instruct thieves in the Church – yes in

the church – to stop stealing and earn an honest living. He has to tell people to stop their wrangling, their slander, their malice, their boasting, their rudeness, their bad language, their carousing, their gossip. Not only that but he tells them to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

To be imitators of God, and we can't imitate God if we don't know God, and we can't know God if we don't know Christ, but we do know Christ because he is alive within us. He hasn't taken charge of our lives yet – we resist giving him full authority, and that's a process that takes time and effort on our part to submit to his authority. And in the meantime, the Church will be evaluated based on just how well we submit to Christ's authority. Within our walls how forgiving are we of one another, how graciously do we treat one another, and how kind and tenderhearted are we toward one another? Does the sinner feel welcomed? Do we nurture him and guide him in his discipleship? Does he consider us the body of Christ, the very bread of eternal life?

Understand that Christ is alive and the Church bears witness to that fact. Understand too that God's kingdom comes with or without our cooperation in the process. But we are invited into abundant life, into eternal life. We are invited to participate in kingdom-building. Let us do our best as Christ's own body, the Church, to bear witness to Christ's resurrection by imitating Christ, the God who is with us, and God who is in us, and God who is over us and all creation eternally.