***Clear About the Gospel* Bible Study**
Ephesians 4.17—5.14
November 8, 2026 - Dr. Clay Brown, MDPC Adult Discipleship Pastor

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Read aloud Ephesians 4.17—5.14. (5 minutes)

3. Discuss leaving the old life behind and embracing the new life we know in Christ in Ephesians 4.17-24. (15 minutes)

- Paul begins series of vice and virtue lists by discussing how the old life is left behind and the new life is embraced
- Gentile life given as example of "futility" (ESV), of being "hopelessly confused" (NLT), in Eph 4.17, with Greek word *mataiotes,* meaning meaninglessness, worthlessness, and emptiness (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol 3, 247-251; similar to "vanity" in Ecclesiastes)
- But new life is given to all disciples of Jesus through learning and living the new way of Christ (Eph 4.20-21); literally "you learned the Christ" in ongoing, life-long apprenticeship under Him
- Language of "put on/put off " (ESV) or "throw on/throw off" (NLT) comes from descriptions of taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes (compare with Col 3.5-17)
- The new life comes from the Holy Spirit working in our minds, hearts, and attitudes, not by human achievement or performance; compare with Rom 12.2 ESV: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

4. Discuss sins especially shameful for Christians to practice in Ephesians 4.25—5.5. (10 minutes)

- Various sinful practices mentioned here: untruthfulness, anger, loose and unhelpful talk, sexual immorality and impurity, covetousness, slander, bitterness, and more
- Why are these sins so problematic? They do not express the new life given in Christ; tear apart the community of faith given to us through the Spirit
- These practices "grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4.30 ESV) and do not reflect God's sovereignty and care for us
- Call to be "imitators of God" through Christ (Eph 5.1-2 ESV), as befits those who are apprentices of Jesus, learning and living His way
- Christians instead are to be known for their kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness of each other; reminds readers of Jesus's words to disciples at start of "Farewell Discourse," "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (Jn 13.34-35 NLT)

5. Discuss relationships between those obedient and disobedient in Ephesians 5.6-14. (10 minutes)

- Distinction between those who walk with Christ in obedience and those who disobey God in the Gentile world, as previous verses have emphasized
- Do not be fooled by those who attempt to rationalize sin with "empty words" (Eph 5.6 ESV)
- Key verse: "Therefore do not become partners with them" (ESV) or "Don't participate in the things these people do" (NLT)
- Not calling for the ending of relationships with non-Christians, but for the refusal to participate in sinful practices; must be able to exhibit nuanced, thoughtful responses that show your love for the person and yet express that you will not join in the behavior
- See 1 Cor 5.9-12 for helpful distinction on how Paul differentiates between associating with unbelievers who practice sinful behavior, and associating with those who claim to be believers and yet still readily engage in these practices
- Eph 5.14 probably a confessional statement, either adapted from Old Testament verses such as Isaiah 61.1, or extracted from a church baptismal or Easter hymn current to that day; "it is said" marks the statement is not original with Paul, but no reference to its source is given

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Ephesians 4.17—5.14 is where Paul mentions a variety of "vice" lists and "virtue" lists. Why do we need to talk about vice and virtue in the first place?
2. How does "futility" (Ephesians 4.17 ESV) express well what a life outside of God's plan and purpose looks like? What other places in Scripture does this theme show up?
3. Romans 12.2 comes to mind as we read Ephesians 4.23-24. How does Romans 12.2 help us understand and practice what Paul is describing in Ephesians 4.23-24?
4. Go through the sinful practices specifically mentioned in Ephesians 4.25—5.5 and define briefly what each one is. What common tendencies do you notice about these practices? What is so destructive about each practice for a person or a community?
5. Talk about what it means to "imitate God" (Ephesians 5.1 NLT). The study outline connects Ephesians 5.1 with what apprentices do under a master teacher's guidance. How are we, then, apprentices of Jesus Christ?
6. Many sinful attitudes and behaviors today are rationalized with what Paul would describe as "empty words" (Ephesians 5.6 ESV). Pick out at least two such attitudes or behaviors and discuss how today's culture attempts to justify them.
7. How do we distinguish between our abhorrence of the sinful behaviors non-Christians practice and our love for them as persons created in the image of God who need the gospel? How do we communicate this distinction? What if professing Christians are practicing and attempting to justify these same behaviors? How do we respond then?