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SERMON TITLE: Talking Our Beliefs or Acting Our Beliefs?

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

DATE: March 10, 2019

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Psalm 37:3-9

We have some statistics about faith in America. Last week at The Fellowship Gathering a man named Ed Stetzer spoke. Ed holds the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair for Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College. He also serves as Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center. He writes for Christianity Today and is frequently cited for CNN and USA Today and other news sources. Ed tells them truth, regardless of political persuasion. That in itself is refreshing! He talks a great deal about the church. He says 75 percent of people in America identify themselves as Christian.

Now that statistic drops when you start talking about whether they go to church on a regular basis, whether they pray, or if faith defines them and shapes their lives. But let's take that 75 percent who say that they identify as Christians and imagine something. Let's imagine 75 percent of people in our culture being influenced by the following. In fact, as I read it, let's close our eyes and think about what would happen in our nation if 75 percent of the people would follow this advice:

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph 4:25-27).

That's fantastic advice for us, if we are all willing to follow it.

Do you have a problem holding on to stuff that you no longer need? What if some of that stuff you hold on to is anger or resentment or past insults? Hold a garage sale with God! Put each resentment in a mental box and get rid of it! Ask God to take it and give you back some forgiveness and peace.

If this works with old grudges, how much more would it change your street if 75 percent of residents would think of themselves as "in this together?" How would it impact your neighborhood if even 50 percent of Christians would consider settling differences in a day—and refuse to harbor resentment and anger. It takes more than one person to change a household or to change a street or a neighborhood, of course, *but it does take the willingness of one.*

Let's go on. What if the 75 percent of our citizens who call themselves Christians follow this advice:

"Those who have been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (4:28).

There's an old saying, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is my own." When I was young, it was considered funny—except when it happens! Has your credit card been compromised? Has a mail order delivery been taken off your porch? Have your golf clubs not shown up at the airport baggage claim when you checked them? Has your grandmother's diamond wedding ring been stolen from your mother's finger in a nursing home?

My family has experienced all of the above, and I am sure you can name a few injustices of your own. Many people believe "what's yours is mine and what's mine is my own."

What if even 50 percent of people who are active Christians have the new attitude of "I'm going to work so that I may have something to share with those in need." Then, what if we ask the Lord, *show me what need I can help someone with today.* Even here in Duncanville through First Presbyterian Church we could change the community. It takes more than one person to change a city from one of "what's mine is my own" to one of plenty for all, but it does take one.

We tend to think: *if I don't have much and give something away, I will have nothing—or at least not enough.* But there's another Scripture with a different principle that says this:

"The measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" (Mark 4:24b-25).

Here Jesus shares this principle in terms of money but elsewhere he tells it in terms of using your talents and gifts that you have been given, whether they are many or small. Jesus says 'use what you have and you will be given more.' This is true whether it is your money or your skills and talents.

What might we give, especially if we do not have a lot of money?

At the youth Valentines Dinner which many of you attended, we watched the movie, "War Room." In that movie was an elderly lady who had not done so well with her resentment toward her husband. She held onto grudges her whole marriage, until he died. Later she realized her mistake,

and she admitted it to the Lord. And as she did so, God became very real to her. She began a life of prayer. Then she asked the Lord to bring her someone to help.

The Lord took her up on her request. He brought her a young woman whose marriage was in trouble. The elderly lady began sharing her wisdom with the young woman, teaching her to pray for her husband, teaching her to let go of her resentment and be generous and gracious to her husband.

The young woman changed her attitude to “*show me what need I can help with today.*” When her husband lost his job due to his own attitude of “what’s mine is yours and what’s yours is my own,” (he was stealing from his company), his wife stepped up and prayed and asked the Lord to increase her sales (she was a real estate agent) so that she could help meet their monthly bills.

God did! She sold more homes, with the result that eventually her husband returned to his faith and got a new job. Her changed attitude began to change her family environment.

It takes more than one, but it DOES TAKE ONE!

Paul continues on with more practical advice:

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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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. (Eph 4:29-32)

What if we and our politicians and journalists, who are among that 75 percent who identify as Christians took this principle to heart? What if 50 percent who are actually practicing Christians acted out these beliefs? How might it change the entire attitude of our nation? While it might not change all the problems, it would certainly change the greatest problem, that of division.

What if we, as members of whatever political party you belong to—what if we changed our unwholesome talk? What if we built up others instead?

That’s what Paul is insisting upon. He, too, experienced division among the Jews and Greeks—non-believers would have nothing to do with each other—and he wanted to change that because to survive, he knew it was needed.

It takes more than one but it does take ONE.

Now a word to you, the believer:

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way 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).

Love for God is the only motivator that will carry you into following this advice. But you are not in this alone. Whatever you struggle with, whether it is anger or greed or not having enough, or not accomplishing a goal, take the Psalmist to heart:

“Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don’t worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper-- it only leads to harm.” (Ps 37:5-8)

There are plenty of resisters to the Lord. There are plenty of people who say they are Christians. But there is another saying, “All talk but no action.”

But you have a gift you have been given, the gift and example of Jesus Christ.

That’s given to you so you can be the ONE in your area of influence to lead your family, your co-workers, your friends, at the place where you volunteer, your neighbor. It does take ONE. Are you willing to be that one?

Now let’s listen to the passage once again all together. This is Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ’s body we’re all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself. Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry. Don’t give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life. Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can’t work. Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift. Don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

AMEN