



Do's and Don'ts

Ephesians 4:25-5:2



Most people think that the Bible is obscure, hard to understand, and often irrelevant to our lives today. But, sometimes, those like the Apostle Paul write very clear, universal, and timeless words for us to ponder. This text from Ephesians is one of those. It is a straightforward list of "do's" and "don'ts" for living a Christ-like life.

The "don'ts" are concise, convincing, and convicting. Don't lie. Don't let anger fester. Don't steal. Don't gossip. Don't make God sad by cultivating bitterness, seeking revenge, being enraged, fighting, defaming people, or wishing others evil. The "do's" stand in stark contrast. Tell the truth. Let your anger be appropriate. Work honestly and share. Speak encouraging words. Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

This short section of Ephesians is a summary, Christian moral code in which we hear echoes of the Ten Commandments, where we also find a list of "don'ts" that are immediately followed by words of "doing," that together provide ethical instructions for life. These moral codes, both the Ten Commandments and the list of virtues in Ephesians, combine behavior and grace.

The "don'ts" demonstrate the hurtfulness of human sin and the "do's" reveal the beauty of a community founded on God's love. The "don'ts" are a listing of the ways we humans have found to pervert God's purposes for our lives and the "do's" articulate a way of redemption. The "do's" let us imagine a world of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness...a world dedicated to truthfulness and generosity.

None of us can enforce the "don'ts" on others. But, what we can do, should do, and must do is to live the "do's" as intentionally and gracefully as possible. Paul tells us that the "do's" and the "don'ts" combined together create an ethical map that point to both a good life for each of us individually and for the flourishing of the common good.

The "don'ts" show us how horrible the world can be, and often is. The "don'ts" point to disorder and division. The "do's" lure us toward love and woo us to be our very best selves. The "do's" open the door to peace, justice and wholeness. In effect, recognizing the "don'ts" as morally deficient and acting on the "do's" as morally desirable opens the possibility that others will join us in our efforts to live a Christ-like life.

Maybe it's not as hard as we think to turn things around. We just have to pay attention to who we are imitating so that we might be imitated. Or, to use a contemporary expression, we can be "influencers" for Jesus and help to fill the world with people who embrace both the "do's" and the "don'ts" of a Christ-like life.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,
but that which is good to the use of edifying,
that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Ephesians 4:29

