

The Rev'd Misty Kiwak
 Grace Episcopal Church
 Bath, ME
 March 15, 2026
 LENT IV, Ephesians 5

Today's Epistle to the Ephesians lays out the moral code for Christians. Ephesians asks us to conform our lives according to the model of Christ. How does that sound?

There's an implied question. *Do you submit your life to Christ?* How does that question make you feel? Annoyed? *That sounds a little religious.* Offended? *None of your business! That's private!* Convicted? *By God's Grace I do.* Humbled? *Lord, have mercy upon me.*

The lectionary begins mid-chapter, skipping over the first verse of the chapter which commands us, *Be imitators of God.* Don't just worship God. Don't just philosophize about good and evil. *Be imitators of God.* This has echoes of God speaking to Moses in Leviticus, "Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

In Leviticus, God goes on to instruct Moses what is expected of the Israelites: revere your mother and father, keep the Sabbath, have no idols, the usual boilerplate commandment stuff. But then God gives agricultural advice:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner (Lev. 19:9-10).

Leave the gleanings (the excess left after harvest). Leave grapes on the vine, and leave those that have fallen. These aren't yours. These are for the poor and the sojourner.

Sojourner, from the Hebrew גֵר (ger) translated as "a temporary inhabitant, a newcomer lacking inherited rights" (StepBible, ESV), an alien, stranger, or foreigner (Biblehub).

Caring for the stranger is morally baked into our labor and our own efforts at survival. Our harvest is not ours alone, our food is not for us alone, but a portion is to be preserved for those who don't have access to food. God doesn't ask that we gauge the worthiness of those who need our help. We just help.

Many of you at Grace live this out, feeding folks in subsidized housing, feeding the kids at MidCoast Youth, taking hot meals to Tedford House, and more recently, you are gathering food and household supplies to be taken to immigrants afraid to leave their homes.

This is good and holy, and biblically ordained. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1).

Walk in love by sustaining the needy, even the sojourner, the foreigner who lacks rights, the hungry.

During the Eucharist, when I raise the offering plates over the altar during the offertory, I pray “All things come of thee, O God,” and your response is “And of thine own have we given thee.” All things come from God and what we give was God's to begin with.

This passage on the moral code for Christians continues in v. 6, “*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient*”.

This is tricky. How do we avoid being deceived if the point of deception is to mislead us? How do we know?

Well, empty words might be a sign, words contrary to the Gospel, words which denigrate others who are made in the image of God. Words which incite violence.

V. 7 comes in strong and takes no prisoners. “Do not be associated with them.” Harsh, huh?

V. 8: “. . . for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

We hear of light in John 12, *“Jesus said to them, “The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.”³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (John 12:35-36)*

These dark times we find ourselves in require a note on what our church is and is not. The theology of “Dispensationalism,” with its end-times predictions and idea of “rapture” are a 19th century invention. *The Book of Revelation* is not a guide to war; it is a symbolic book depicting the oppression of Christians by the Roman Empire.

We are not an apocalyptic church, looking forward to, or actively promoting, the end of the world. We are an incarnational church, God with us. Our call as Christians is not to calculate the end times or incite war in the name of God. It is, as we pray every Sunday, to bring God’s kingdom to earth.

Colossians, written about the same time as Ephesians, describes what our bringing God’s kingdom to earth looks like. This is how we as individuals reconcile ourselves to God and how we in holy community reconcile humanity to God *“Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful(Col 3:12-15).

Imitate God in goodness, in the care for the person on the margins of society, in the sharing of what God has given us. Do not be associated with liars and deceivers. Find what is pleasing to the Lord.

Verse 9, *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them.”*

And then the works of darkness are contrasted with light in a portion of a hymn:

Sleeper, awake!

*Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you”.*

Throughout today’s epistle, we see contrasts between light and deception, disobedience and cooperation. Today’s epistle promises darkness and deceit do not have the last word.

Do you follow Christ?

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (Is 60:1)*