

**For Such a Time as This**  
**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

In a recent statement, Dr. Tony Evans described that we are in the “middle of multiple, simultaneous pandemics. In fact, we are facing dual pandemics.”

The WHO (the World Health Organization not the 60’s English rock band) defines a pandemic as a worldwide spread of a new infectious disease that has spread across a large region covering multiple continents or even something worldwide. The Greek word is pandemos, pan meaning all and demos meaning people or all people.

Dr. Evans refers to the first pandemic as medical. We know it as the COVID 19. As of June 9, there have been over 2 million confirmed cases of the virus with over 113,000 deaths in the US. That number grows daily. Experts are telling us to brace for a second wave of the virus to hit our nation.

The second pandemic Dr. Evans describes is a cultural pandemic. It became evident in Minneapolis on May 25 when George Floyd died during an arrest on charges of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. The incident erupted into demonstrations in cities across the nation. The result of his death has been nothing short of pandemonium. Cities, police, military and people in general are on edge. You have watched the news footage of rioting. Businesses and buildings have been looted and burned. Victims lie bloodied in streets, and some have died from aggressive violence. The chants of “black lives matter” and “defund the police” have once again become the battle cries of the angry.

Is it okay to be angry?

Is it okay to feel frustrated?

Is it right to demand reform?

Yes, to all three.

But to say that what has transpired in these riots is a right guaranteed under the first amendment of our Constitution is fundamentally wrong. Peaceful protest is guaranteed. Violent protest is not.

I hope you have had discussions around the dinner table regarding these events. We have. We ask David because we want to hear what he thinks and

have honest and open dialogue. Quite frankly he needs to be just as much a part of the solution as any of the rest of us.

It’s easy to talk about what we think might need to be done. Many of us are armchair politicians when it comes to what reforms need to happen. And yes, we should talk. But talking is only one part of the equation. I learned in college speech class that there is also the receiver, the person listening. We need to do both if anything beneficial will result, otherwise we will have more of the same.

It’s even easy to pray that God would bring about a healing for our nation that is hurt by the explosive divisiveness. It’s easy to pray for our leaders to have wisdom in bringing calmness to the crisis and not political rhetoric that only appeases. And pray we should. We are commanded to pray for our government leaders. It’s all too easy to criticize them for any number of things: we don’t like how they’re handling things, we don’t like their policies, we think they aren’t doing anything. Instead of criticizing them we need to pray for them.

It’s easy to talk and it’s easy to pray. What is difficult is doing something about it, being part of the solution and not part of the problem. Silence on our part can be just as wrong as the actions of those who torched cars and buildings or threw bricks at windows. Ask yourself what you are willing to do to change this cultural pandemic.

But let me suggest to you this morning both of these pandemics have something in common. They stem from a deeper issue that is at the root of much of what we see happening in the world today. It’s a spiritual pandemic and we call it sin. It began near the beginning of time in a garden where God had given a simple command that was disobeyed, and the world was immersed in sin. The COVID 19 pandemic and the cultural pandemic that many claim is fueled by racism are only symptoms of a deeper spiritual issue, a spiritual pandemic that has affected 100% of humanity because of sin’s entrance into the world.

Dr. Evans makes this poignant statement: “Racism

isn't a bad habit. It isn't a mistake. It is sin. The answer is not sociology. It's theology."

I will go further and say that the answer isn't even biology or ideology. It is a matter of the heart, a heart, the Bible says, that is desperately wicked.

Dr. Evans continues by saying: "We have wandered far from the value system established by God for how human beings are to live, act and relate to one another. Across racial and class lines, we have come up with our own standards for how we treat each other, and it has not done us any good."

Many on one side cry out against the injustice of police. Some say they are the problem and should be defunded. On the other side are those who cry out for the police saying that it's only a few bad apples and we should support them. Some say racism is the most systemic problem we face as a nation, while others claim it doesn't exist.

John Stonestreet writing an editorial article for Breakpoint, which is part of the Colson Center, says: "Certainly, the debates over what exactly is wrong with this world and what must be done to fix it will continue. In the meantime, we ought not miss what the moral outrage, even when wrongly conceived or violently expressed, reveals about who we are and the kind of world we live in."

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis stated that humans are overwhelmingly moral creatures. We believe in a thing called justice and will protest when we believe that justice is not served. Lewis says, "a man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."

What he is saying is that our sense of morality has to come from somewhere. A person who holds to evolution can't answer that question. If we are just the product of random chance or natural causes, justice and morality make no sense. Lewis goes on to say that "Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him, he will be complaining 'It isn't fair' before you can say Jack Robinson."

John Stonestreet adds that "there is an expectation that such a thing as justice exists, and that it should be done."

Atheism can't explain the existence of morality and justice and neither can Eastern pantheism which cannot distinguish between right and wrong. The answer to the question of where morality and justice came from is ultimately and only found in God. And because we were created in His image, though now marred by sin, we have that same sense of what is moral and just, right and wrong.

Tony Evans continues in his article by saying that the Bible is clear that when spiritual principles are put aside, there is no peace in culture.

**II Chronicles 15:6 "Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress."**

He says: "The Israelites had so hardened their hearts toward God and rebelled against His righteous rule, that He initiated an ongoing state of distress. (Now don't miss this next point.) If God is your problem, it doesn't matter what programs you come up with, because only God is your solution."

It doesn't matter what kinds of police reforms you enact or if you make sensitivity training mandatory for every citizen, without God, they are as fruitful as a dead pear tree. Don't get me wrong, reform of some kind is needed, but there will always be some inequity, and some injustice in it. Without God they are doomed to fail at some level.

The systemic and root problem in our nation and I will say in every nation is a spiritual problem, a sin problem. It is not racial inequality. It is not educational inequality. It is not financial inequality. It isn't a housing inequality or health inequality or even a broken judicial system. It is a problem due to sin. It's a heart issue and no legislation of any kind will ever fix the social problems of our nation when God has been dismissed from our culture.

Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council, states that "the government doesn't have the answers to brokenness. It can't tear down walls

and fix what's wrong with the human heart. Only God can."

In his interview with Bishop Vincent Mathews, he noted that our problems are rooted in a rejection of basic truth. Mathews said "It is no surprise the incomprehensible depths of man's inhumanity against man when we have turned away from centuries of teaching that we were created by the hand of God who loves us and sent His Son to die for us. Without that truth, without that certainty, mankind has lost meaning and value the results of which we have seen in the streets of our cities across the nation." Instead of respect there is only contempt and they dare someone to get in their way.

In another article, Tony Perkins adds that "mob violence and police brutality spring from the same fountain: moral bankruptcy... The abuse of power, disregard for human life, and uncontrolled rage we're witnessing in cities across our country, all flow from a society that is rapidly losing a sense of right and wrong, of transcendent truth. If there is an upside to this, it might be that in the quiet of our hearts, we'll finally realize that goodness, truth, and beauty only comes from God. He's the One who delivers hope – and in the midst of this crisis – the One who delivers healing."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." We can't sit this one out.

Coming back to the article written by Dr. Evans, he writes: "Everyone knows what it's like to suffer for a long time from stomach pains only to later throw up and feel better relatively quickly. The throwing up is a messy situation, but the reason you feel better is because you have purged the toxins.

There are a lot of toxins in our culture today. We have toxins of injustice, toxins of racism and toxins of hate. We have a multiplicity of toxins coagulating in the same space at the same time. But if we miss the reality that God has allowed this in order to bring about a correction and a cleaning, then we will just move from one symptom to another symptom. We will miss the opportunity to

address the root that has produced the fruit which has led to the confusion of hopelessness on display.

God has spoken on the issues at hand, and He has not stuttered. He has spoken about racism. He has spoken about systemic and individual injustices. He has spoken about classism. He has spoken about culturalism. He has spoken about politics. He has spoken about freedom. He has spoken about all of these subjects. But until we align our hearts, thoughts, words and actions underneath His overarching rule based on what He has said, we are living in rebellion.

What many people do today, unfortunately, is pick and choose what they will obey. As a result, we are experiencing a dearth of kingdom disciples who observe all that He has commanded, not just the parts they like. From God's throne come both righteousness and justice. These are not see-saws to go up and down on. Rather, these are twins who are joined at the hip. You don't skip justice and call for righteousness. Likewise, you don't skip righteousness in the name of justice. We are called to a higher calling, that of following the whole counsel of God.

Why do we have all of these churches with all of these leaders and all of these believers but still have all of this mess? Because we have failed to bring God's perspective to bear on the situation. If we are to ever fix this madness and solve this mess – on these issues of injustice, the pain of our shared history and the systems which perpetuate inequity generationally – it will only be due to a right response, collectively as His body, based on God's Word... This is a defining moment for us as citizens to decide whether we want to be one nation under God or a divided nation apart from God. If we don't answer that question correctly and if we don't answer it quickly, we won't be much of a nation at all."

Harvard philosophy professor George Santayana once said "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

What occurred two weeks ago has happened before,

many times, and unfortunately, I fear it will happen again. **So how can we affect change? How can we be part of the solution? How are we to respond? How are we to act?**

For that, take your Bibles and turn with me to **Ephesians 4**. In the verses we will look at, I see six ways the Christian is to respond. **Chapter 4** begins the practical application of **chapters 1-3** where Paul addresses our spiritual blessings as believers, understanding the power that is at work in us, how we have been made alive in Christ – saved by grace through faith, our unity as members of the same body – both Jews and Gentiles combined into one spiritual family through Christ.

**Chapter 4** begins with an admonition to every believer to be completely humble, gentle, patient and forbearing with each other and we are to do it in love. That means in the characteristics mentioned love is to the motivation and foundation behind it. We don't treat others with gentleness and patience and so on because we have to or because we are forced to. We do so out of God given love. When you compare this list with **Galatians 5:22-23**, which is the fruit of the Spirit, we see there that love is the foundational or key ingredient for displaying characteristics that are produced in us by the Spirit. It should be assumed as we read **Ephesians 4:2** that these are not characteristics inherent in us or developed by us but only through the empowering and indwelling Holy Spirit.

If you are inclined to mark in your Bible, circle that word **"completely"** in **verse 2**. It doesn't mean a little or some or mostly or even when we want or to whomever we choose. It means all parts, lacking nothing, wholly, fully, entirely, to the fullest extent and do so in an ongoing fashion or all the time and is to be evident in how we treat everyone. Now in the context Paul is referring to how we treat other believers because he speaks of keeping unity of the Spirit. But I want to say that in the broader context of the community we live in and by that I mean the world, not just our neighbors or the town we live in, as a believer or because we are a Christian, our treatment of humanity should be the same. Just

because this person is a Christian and that person is not doesn't mean I can treat them differently. James speaks about unity when he says we shouldn't show partiality. We may not see eye to eye on certain issues, but I am still to be kind, patient and so on, and we are to do so in love.

Now I want us to skip down to the passage I have selected for today beginning in **verse 25**. Paul has just spent a few verses discussing how a Christian should live by putting off characteristics of the old nature or how we lived before trusting Christ as Savior that are contrary to His holiness and how we are to **"put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."**

The word **"therefore"** which opens up the verse connects what Paul just said with what he is about to say. If you want to live as a Christian, here are some guiding principles or prevailing characteristics that you should be clothed with that help us respond to the things we are encountering today.

The first way we are to respond is in genuine truth.

## I. RESPOND IN GENUINE TRUTH – v. 25

Paul gives a negative and a positive command here. Don't lie. Speak the truth. Seems simple enough.

I think we all understand lying to mean a statement that is contrary to the fact, spoken with the intent to deceive. Let's remember where lies come from.

**John 8:44** reminds us that Satan is a liar. It was his first sin in the garden of Eden when he lied to Eve about what God had said.

In **Exodus 20:16** the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment says we are not to give a false testimony against our neighbor. Simply put, we aren't to lie about them.

**Leviticus 19:11** gives three admonitions, two are about lying: don't lie and don't deceive.

**Colossians 3:9** **"Lie not one to another seeing you have put off the old man with deeds."**

I can only speak for myself, but I am tired of the news because I don't know what is a lie, what is a half-truth or what is an exaggeration.

The Greek word used here means to put off habitual lying, meaning it's a practice. Lying is not compatible with the Christian life. If we want people to believe our message about Christ, we need to make sure we tell the truth. Now there is a right way and a wrong way to speak the truth. There are a lot of people who are speaking truth over what has happened, but in a negative way. They're angry, their language is laced with colorful metaphors, they're yelling and speaking the truth with violence. Compare that to **Proverbs 15:1** "A gentle answer turns away wrath."

Paul explains earlier in **verse 15** that the Christian is to speak the truth in love. At times that takes a lot of restraint. The bottom line is that when we speak the truth in love, God is at work, but when we tell a lie, Satan is at work since he is the father of lies. By speaking the truth in love we build unity in the body and the reason we are to tell the truth is because we all belong to the same body in Christ. Lying is not loving and doesn't build the body. Whether it's the media or a politician or our neighbor, when they don't tell the truth, it rips the nation apart rather than unifying it.

We are told to be truthful to our neighbor, regardless of whether they are a Christian or not.

Second and with this one you might be surprised. We are to respond in grievous anger.

## II. RESPOND IN GRIEVOUS ANGER – vs. 26-27

It's right there in the text. Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. Anger itself is not a sin. If it is a sin, then Jesus was sinning when He was angry throwing out the money changers from the Temple. He was sinning when He was angry at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. If anger is sin, God is not holy when we read about His anger in the Old Testament over sin. But it is by anger that He justly judges sin.

There are three words for anger. One speaks of anger as a turbulent commotion, agitation that boils up and subsides. That's the kind mentioned in **4:31**.

Like a volcano, it is an explosive rage.

The second word for anger can also be translated wrath. It's the word used later in **verse 26**. Like the first word, it also is forbidden or sinful. It is accompanied by exasperation and bitterness.

The third word for anger, the one used here, is an abiding and settled habit of the mind that is aroused under certain conditions. You might wonder what those conditions might be. This kind of anger is ok. How about anger over injustice. I hope you have a sense of moral anger over how George Floyd was treated and how he died or anyone for that matter who has been treated unjustly.

I hope you are angered over immorality, sin.

I hope you are angered over the death of the innocent unborn through abortion.

I hope you are angered by human trafficking.

I hope you are angered by drug trafficking.

Those are justified reasons for anger, but Paul continues by saying in your anger don't sin. Don't let it become a violent outburst or an embittered spirit where you hold a grudge or become filled with rage, hatred, resentment, and revenge. Much of what has happened on the streets of our cities is unjustified violence. It isn't about the ill treatment of a person who was brutally mistreated, it's about an excuse to spread hatred in a violent way.

Roman poet Horace wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. that this kind of "anger is momentary insanity."

Kenneth Wuest writes that "when guided by reason, anger is a right affection, so Scripture permits it, and not only permits it, but on fit occasion demands it."

We can be angry but don't sin in our anger. The way we do that Paul says is keep a short account by not letting the sun go down on our wrath. If we let such anger brew it can cross the line to sinful anger. Satan wants to intensify the anger and turn it into sin. That's why in **verse 27** Paul warns us not to give the devil a foothold, a place or opportunity to turn what is justifiable anger into sin. What we have witnessed for the most part in these past couple of weeks is anger controlling the person, rather than

the person controlling the anger.

Anger under the right circumstances is justified, but be careful that it doesn't cross over to sin. Being angry about abortion, for example, is one thing, but going and burning down an abortion clinic is wrong kind of anger.

We could say a lot more here, but let me quickly move to the others.

### III. RESPOND WITH GENEROUS HELP – v. 28

Stealing or taking what does not rightfully belong to you is never right. There is no justification for it. God gave the right of private ownership as a law, a law we still honor today. In the law if you stole something you had to pay back four times what you stole. We see that in the story of Zacchaeus. I read this week that up to 1/3 of the cost of what you purchase is to cover loss by theft.

Paul's advice is that instead of stealing, we should work. Work does three things. It provides for your personal needs. Work gives you something useful to do. You have maybe heard the old saying that "idle hands are the devil's workshop". Being active in a positive way keeps you out of trouble. The third thing work does according to this verse is give you a means by which you can help others. Stealing only benefits the thief. Working benefits others. Stealing harms others. Working helps others. We are to respond with generous help.

### IV. RESPOND BY GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT – v. 29-30

We have all heard and probably said at one time or another that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

That a flat out lie and don't you believe it for a minute. Of course words can hurt and they can hurt deeper and leave greater scars than sticks and stones. James tells us that the tongue is a destructive force. My brother, who teaches anatomy and physiology, says that the tongue is the most powerful muscle in the body.

The word Paul uses here is one that means something corrupt or rotten. It was used to describe fruit that had spoiled, giving off a putrid smell. The word can also mean something that is worthless or of no value. Unwholesome words are of no benefit. Words can penetrate the mind, the will and emotions and alter our mood and disposition. They can generate anger or love. They can sap strength or demoralize a person.

On more than one occasion, we have also heard that if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. Paul's admonition is that we do not speak words that are unwholesome or cutting or hurtful, but only words that will build up and encourage, words that benefit instead of destroy, words that build up instead of tear down.

To the Colossians Paul wrote "**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**" (Colossians 4:6)

Great and timely advice comes from the pen of the psalmist: "**Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.**" (Psalm 141:3)

The reason we are to speak words that builds up others is so we don't grieve the Holy Spirit. John Phillips says that "you only grieve someone you love." To grieve is to cause pain or sorrow. When we say or do things that are contrary to His character, He is grieved.

In times like this when emotions are a tinder box ready to be set ablaze, as Christians, let our words be a soothing balm that brings peace and calmness. Let our words help defuse an otherwise explosive situation. Let our words be filled with grace so that they give encouragement.

### V. RESPOND WITH GODLY CHARACTER – vs. 31-32

Get rid of bitterness which is described as a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man.

**Hebrews 12:15** describes bitterness as something that can take deep root that grows causing many to be troubled and corrupted. What has occurred in the past couple of weeks isn't something that happened overnight. Feelings of resentment have been growing for a long time because of long held grudges.

Wrath is wild rage that explodes in the moment. Anger we have already talked about.

Clamor or brawling is an outcry of strife that reflects public outburst that reveals loss of control. Let's say a person is in a fight and they have beaten their opponent, but they won't or don't stop beating the person because there is a lack of control.

Another word for slander is blasphemy. It is the ongoing defamation of someone's character or reputation. Slander often stems from a bitter heart.

Then there is malice. It's a general term for evil that is the root of all vices. It is ill will toward another.

Paul says we are to put these characteristics away, remove them. It's been said that space abhors a vacuum. So if you are going to remove something, it needs to be replaced with something else. If we are to remove ungodly character traits, then they should be replaced with those that are godly.

We are to be kind.

**Psalm 145:17** "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds."

Kindness helps to ease the suffering of another. From the two pandemics occurring there have been and still are plenty of opportunities to display kindness to others. This verse is all inclusive.

Be compassionate, which is defined as sorrow for the suffering of others that is accompanied by an urge to help. We should not only feel anger for the injustice done, but we should have genuine sorrow for the Floyd family and yes, even for the Chauvin family. The least we can do is pray for them. Pray for God's grace, peace, forgiveness, strength, comfort, salvation. We should pray out of compassion for business owners whose property

was looted and vandalized; for police officers and families of the other victims killed during the rioting. Pray for those hurt by racism. Model Jesus. **Matthew 9:36** "When Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them."

It's too easy to judge the officers or the vandals and cry for justice to be served on all of them because they deserve it, but we should also express compassion for them just as Jesus did.

We need to be willing to forgive one another, rather than hold a grudge and become embittered by inequities whether perceived or real. Unforgiveness is the seed of bitterness that bears the fruit of vengeance that stands on the stem of anger.

Forgiveness for others is to be to the same degree that God forgave us through Christ. When people are unwilling to forgive there will always be the kind of violence we have witnessed in recent weeks.

Finally, let me conclude with a just a thought from **5:1-2**. We are to respond with godly love.

## VI. RESPOND WITH GODLY LOVE – 5:1-2

Paul made it very simple: as God's children, we are to imitate Him by living a life of love. He demonstrated love for us by sending His Son when we were still enemies.

**I Peter 4:8** "Love covers a multitude of sins."

It doesn't matter what your political views are, as Christians we have a mandate on how we are to respond to the atrocities around us. I listened to a number of interviews this week, but I think it was Senator Tim Scott from South Carolina who said "It is time for the church to be the church." Let's be part of the solution in how we respond as Christ's body rather than be part of the problem because we are silent or remain unconcerned.

With almost 7.5 million confirmed cases globally this pandemic has affected so many, but the spiritual pandemic of sin has affected everyone. Let's point others to Christ who is the cure. It is very apparent that we need God in America again.