

## “The Lotus Effect”

### Ephesians 4:17 – 5:2

4:17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned, 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has 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.

29 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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

5:1 Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 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.

Some of you may have looked at the bulletin and wondered what in the world is the “Lotus Effect.” Well, let me begin by explaining what the Lotus Effect is. The Lotus is a flower of catch-your-breath beauty, and is revered throughout the world. It is the national flower of India, a sacred flower in Hinduism and it figures prominently in the lore and practice of Buddhism. No surprise, then, that the Lotus also pops up as a corporate symbol and is used to name a variety of commercial products.

Lotus is a brand of car, a brand of guitar, a perfume, a spreadsheet application, and a major corporation. It is the name of a yoga position. The Lotus is also a well-recognized metaphor for spiritual growth. How many of you knew that? Don’t feel bad, I didn’t either until I did my research for this sermon.

The Lotus begins life as a seed buried in the mud of a pond. It begins its growth in muddy, dirty water, shooting a tuber up to and through pond scum until its green, round leaves spread out on the surface. The stem of the flower continues to grow

another 10-12 inches above the water where the blossom with its pure white petals open, providing a stark, but beautiful contrast to the muddy environment in which it lives.

It's fairly easy to see the spiritual link here. You and I are called as Christians to be in the world of pond scum but not of it. We live in a society that is mostly non-Christian but we are called to rise above our circumstances to worship and adore our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But there are two more ways that this flower is a metaphor for spiritual growth.

First, you have to wonder how the lotus blossom is able to keep its petals so blindingly white in such a dirty environment. A scientist named Wilhelm Barthlott of the University of Bonn did an extensive study of the epidermal or outer surfaces of more than 10,000 plants, including the lotus.

He found an apparent contradiction: Smooth leaf surfaces were usually the dirtiest, and rough leaf surfaces tended to be cleaner. Normally we associate smoothness with beauty and roughness with well ... not so beautiful. It seems logically that dust and dirt would slide off the smooth surfaces but stick to the rough surfaces, right? The cleanest and roughest of all the surfaces Barthlott's research revealed was the lotus flower petal. The texture is sort of like the surface of a rough and thick velvet. Yet, when placed under a microscope the micromorphology or the shape and form of the plant skin revealed a textured, pointy surface somewhat resembling the surface of a board with a forest of nails of different shapes and sizes protruding from underneath.

Let's stay with this image of nails for a second. Think of a piece of paper floating down upon such a kind of uneven bed of nails. It might rest on it but unless the points go through the paper it won't stick at all and it would actually take less air movement to fly the paper in this circumstance than it would be to fly a piece of paper on a flat counter top. Any slight wind or even water coming along the surface would easily sweep the paper away. This is basically how the petals of the lotus stay perpetually clean in even the dirtiest of environments. Dust particles may fall on its surface, but the morning dew, a few drops of rain, or a slight breeze wash them away without even wetting the petal itself! The almond shape and form of the surface of the lotus blossom is basically self-cleaning.

Now think about our lives and where we would be without self-cleaning products? We only buy stoves and ovens if they have a self-cleaning function. You can get self-cleaning garlic presses, self-cleaning toilets, water filters, water heaters, as well as self-cleaning steam irons.

A few years ago someone developed a "self-cleaning" exterior house paint that was introduced under the brand name, ... that's right, Lotus. Maybe the most lucrative application of the lotus effect may be the possibility of self-cleaning paint for automobiles, making car washes obsolete. Think of how we can make our lives self-cleaning in this way. One way we might consider is Holy Communion in which we remember what Christ has done and receive his forgiveness of sins and hope for His coming again. **[NOTE 1]**

The other characteristic that makes the lotus a good metaphor for spiritual growth is its stalk or stem. It is easy to bend, but it is very hard to break because it has many strong sinuous fibers that tenaciously hold on to keep the plant together. This is like a church family. No matter how far away we might be apart, nothing can separate us from the love of God that binds us together. Satan may be able to bend us away from God for a time but God has ultimate say and His love never breaks. We can not lose God's love!

Now back to the "lotus effect". Let's apply this "lotus effect" to our Christian lives. In verses 17-25 of Ephesians chapter 4, Paul alludes to the dirty and muddy nature of the cultural water in which we live. Those in the world, the Gentiles in this case, do not have this ability to be morally self-cleaning. Verse 17-19 reads: "So I tell you this, and insist on it, in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." Those in the world, Paul says, do not have this ability to be morally self-cleaning. They live "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding." They live in "ignorance and hardness of heart." They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity".

**[NOTE 2]** Of course, Paul has a remedy. It involves the adoption of a radical new morphology in which Christians "PUT AWAY their former way of life, (your old self), corrupt and selfish, deluded by its lusts, and instead ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, clothed with the new self, created according to the likeness of God. The apostle Paul makes it clear that the purpose of the self-cleaning function is to restore us to the pristine image of God Himself. We are to put away or take off, the clothes of our former way of life and put on these new clothes that are ours if we choose to take them because we are NEW creatures In Christ. This is very much the same language we find in Colossians chapter 3.

IN CHRIST, we can put on a rough, pointy texture, so that the filth, the sin, the old life, rolls right off ... unable to stick to us. In CHRIST, in other words if we depend and rely on our relationship with Jesus Christ, we can become self-cleaning. We can build our lives to have the lotus effect and shed the bad habits, the bad language, the bad thoughts, and the dirt of society even though we live in a "dirty" environment.

With this passage of Scripture as a foundation let's look at some of the main ways we can build the points, skin-spikes, rough surface, etc. that we need to grow in our lives to be more self-cleaning. **[NOTE 3 a,b,c]**

- 1) We have to deal in honesty. Verse 25 tells us we are to stop lying and tell the truth. Somehow, as I watch some of the reality shows on TV I don't think people take honesty being a virtue very seriously. One of the first and worst ways that our culture adversely affects us is that it makes us think that little lies are Okay. It's Okay to just leave out most of the information. Lies hurt

both the one who is lied to AND also the one who is lying. If you think about it, trustworthiness is the foundation upon which all relationships, human and divine, flourish. When trust is damaged, the relationship is damaged.

- 2) Verse 26 tells us that we shouldn't sin in our anger. Jesus Himself astonished people with His anger, reminding us to not let the dirt of injustice stay on our petals. The verse goes on: "do not let the sun go down on your anger." The word for anger refers to a provoked anger. But even when provoked to anger the Christian is to dismiss it before the day's end and turn it over to God. Revenge and paybacks are supposed to be left to God. Now, several years ago, I had one couple that I did pre-marital counseling with take this too far. They refused to go to bed until they had settled their argument. It was 4 in the morning and they were so exhausted, frustrated, angry, and incoherent at that point that there was no way they were going to solve their disagreement. So there are times when you just have to sleep in order to muster up the wherewithal to find a way through your disagreement. But I have to confess that rarely have I had a good, or restful sleep when Amy and I have had to agree to figure things out in the morning. I want to ask you a question. Why does verse 26 read, "In your anger do not sin" instead of "never be angry"? ... Because we are **supposed** to be angry when we see oppression and injustice. Greek philosophy taught that anger was a "short madness," as in craziness. There is scientific proof that after a certain point in anger, adrenaline and stress, causes our brain to start shutting down. More and more blood and oxygen is called for by the lungs, heart, and muscles and that leaves the brain with less and less oxygen and that means less capacity to work well. Throughout the Star Wars movies the main character Luke Skywalker is constantly battling to remain calm and not to follow the path of hate, impatience, anger, the dark side. Luke's battle with the dark side of the force is much like our battle with our sinful nature, our tendency toward evil. To be angry is not a sin. Jesus got angry and made a whip with forethought and drove the money changers from the temple. It is wrong to sin in your anger by letting your anger make an important decision or cause you to do something explicitly against God's nature or will.
- 3) Don't let the devil get a foothold! Nationally known speaker and the author of one of my favorite books, "Finishing Strong", Steve Farrar shared a wonderful illustration at the Promise Keepers stadium event in Milwaukee Wisconsin several years ago. He talked about how football players and coaches spend a lot more time indoors than people think. They spend countless hours watching film of themselves and of other teams evaluating and learning about their own performance and even more film evaluating and learning about their opponents. Coaches still spend hours watching film until all of a sudden one will say, "run that back a second." Every time that team runs an outside run or

pitch out that lineman, number 78 lines up with his foot farther back than on other plays. They alert the defense and if the defensive lineman or linebacker sees number 78 put his foot a little farther back than normal they yell out, to alert their friends it's going to be an outside play. They learn things they can key on to get an edge. In the same way we should pay attention to when it is that the evil one gets us to do certain things, under what circumstances do I tend to be tempted or give in to temptation?? Sometimes I think to myself that you must get tired of hearing me tell you to evaluate your life and think about how to improve it, how to avoid some problems, how to focus more on Christ, etc. But unless you are much farther along in your relationship with Jesus than I am, all of us need to pay attention and watch the film. When are we "putting are foot back farther," for example, we are alone after 10 pm with the computer on and we are tempted to look at something we shouldn't. If that is the case, don't be alone with your computer on after 10 pm. See what I am saying? Remove every foothold satan might have. The New English Bible translates verse 27, "don't provide a loophole for the devil."

In the state of Washington there is an area called Puget Sound. It is a wet, rain-drenched area. Usually, the spongy land is well-suited to absorbing this vital liquid, producing one of North America's great temperate rain forests. But occasionally, torrential storms will soak the soil so thoroughly that it loses its cohesion and starts to fall apart. If you examine the land after such a storm you will see long cracks running across the top of the soil which is evidence that down below, the process of virtually unstoppable erosion has begun. Through these cracks, rainstorms begin to eat away at the topsoil, until finally, its integrity is compromised, the ground cracks wide open and half a hillside can wash away almost instantly. You may hear about this kind of event on the news as a mudslide. In the same way little cracks in our conscience and small fissures in our faith can give evil a foothold or open window, or a loophole into our soul and give destructive leverage to the devil. Is there any wonder why we are encouraged to watch our lives closely?

**[NOTE 3 d,e,f,g]**

- 4) Verse 28 reads, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." God is telling us through the apostle Paul that we should be gainfully employed. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. Paul warns us not to return to our former way of life. We need to always be finding ways to serve others. If we get to some point of retirement and think, now we are done serving, we will fall down the path of a self-serving life and cease to live God's way. Now I am not saying that people shouldn't retire. I fully plan to retire at 67 ... from full-time employment, but I

will never stop playing music, preaching, and doing ministry, missions, serving others, making disciples, etc.

- 5) Verse 29 tells us to avoid hate speech: bitterness, wrath, slander, malice. Here is another reminder of the power of words and passion and how they can hurt others deeply. Gossip and slander rip at the fabric of community life. Words can hurt. Sometimes, words ... spoken flippantly or in anger can echo in a person's life for years and even decades affecting their decisions the whole time.
- 6) Find a way to build in to your life kindness and compassion. Forgive one another and leave paybacks to God. We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us. If you refuse to forgive others God will refuse to forgive you. It is simple, but certainly not easy.
- 7) Finally in the first few verses of chapter 5 we are told to be imitators of God. We are encouraged to live a life of love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. That is the challenge of discipleship: living your life in such a way that people see you imitating Jesus and learn to do the same thing in their lives. Jesus promises us in His Word that if we are plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit and focus on Him that we will do the same things Jesus did and even greater things. **[NOTE 4]**

These are the kinds of things that we need to apply to grow more and more to be like Jesus. The big word for this process is sanctification. If we can begin to build into our lives these 7 things we will move more toward being self-cleaning. Only after putting these things into practice can we even approach being "imitators of God." Lotus Christians may live in the muck and mud of a broken and hurting world. But we are not of the mud. We were created from the dust but IN CHRIST we can live always, like the Lotus Blossom, ABOVE the mud. Seek to lead a self-cleaning life, build into your daily routine and habits a mechanism for letting the Holy Spirit work in your life, in your heart and in your mind. **[NOTE 5]** Let's pray ... AMEN

**Sermon Notes for “The Lotus Effect”**  
**Based on Ephesians 4:17–5:2**  
**given July 21, 2019 and then October 16, 2022 in Doster**

- I. The Lotus Flower is a good metaphor for our spiritual life because it is essentially “self-cleaning” it stays clean even in a dirty environment and it has a stem that bends but doesn’t break. We are “self-cleaning” when we confess our sins to the Lord and receive His forgiveness.
  
- II. We must put away the old self and put on the new clothes, of redemption, forgiveness, love, and grace that are ours because we are new creations in Christ.
  
- III. These are points or ways that we can grow towards approaching a “self-cleaning” life and imitate God.
  - a. Deal with one another with honesty and integrity.
  - b. Do not sin in your anger
  - c. Don’t let the devil get a foothold or find a loophole.
  - d. Don’t let your hands be idle for long. Seek to be gainfully employed.
  - e. Avoid hate speech, speak only what may build another up in Christ.
  - f. Build into your life kindness and compassion.
  - g. Live a life of love
  
- IV. Lotus Christians may live in the muck and mire of a broken and hurting world, but we are to live In Christ, above the mud of the world.
  
- V. What is God saying to you? What verses in this passage of Scripture stand out to you? What does Eph. 4 say about God? What does it say about people? How does it apply to you? What are you going to do about it? Write an “I will ...” statement.