

(#1) You've heard it said "There's no use reinventing the wheel." Which means when dealing with a problem there's no need looking for a new solution when a perfectly good one already exists.

But consider the statement literally. It implies that the wheel, one of our oldest inventions, has not been superseded. Indeed, the wheel has been around a long time. Genesis mentions both wagons and chariots. First Kings includes a detailed description of wheels crafted for the bronze stands used in the temple. The oldest wheel found to date was in use over 5,500 years ago.

There's really no point in reinventing the wheel, but people keep trying. The US Patent office has three people assigned just to examine applications for wheel patents. Literally hundreds of them each year.

Patents for plastic bicycle wheels with only three spokes, aluminum car rims toughened by improved welding procedures and inline skate wheels with tiny brakes inside that are activated by tilting your foot.

None of the applications, however, is for replacing the wheel. Make it from different materials, yes. Add smoother bearings, yes. Connect it to the axle differently, yes. Make it decorative in some way, yes. Use it in conjunction with struts or shock absorbers, yes. Add a thingamabob or a doohickey or even a whatchamacallit, yes.

But in the end, the applications all include a circular device that moves itself and whatever is mounted above it by rolling — exactly what it did 5,500 years ago. Some things meet the need so well, that while they can be perked up and prettified, they cannot be rendered obsolete.

(#2) Now think about what cannot be made obsolete while reading Ephesians. This section of the letter is filled with practical advice about how to live a Christian life. In other places he spoke about right belief, but here Paul simply talks about the business of living in a community with other people. Listen again to his words, but this time, do it with these questions in mind: Which of the things Paul says here are now outmoded, out-of-date, old-fashioned,

hopelessly out-of-sync with postmodern sensibilities? For which of these have we come up with something better? ...

Talk about non-obsolescence! Can you find even one thing there that you'd declare a quaint relic of the past — something to be admired and appreciated for its former glory and utility, but of no practical value today?

Sure, there are things we might say differently today. Instead of "... do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil." we might say "Try to resolve your differences right away rather than wallow in bitterness," but is that really an improvement? And instead of "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption," we might paraphrase it as "Don't do things that make God sad, for you belong to God and have been promised eternal life." We could probably go on for two more paragraphs about what that means, but again, have we reinvented anything?

And what would we discard from Paul's prescription? Be truthful, don't let anger turn sinful, don't steal, work honestly, share with the needy, don't talk trash, deal with others with kindness and forgiveness, live a godly life, and so on are the right advice for life together.

But of course, many people don't live together that way. We need only look to the Middle East where neighbors attack and kill one another. In less extreme situations, neighbors seethe with quiet rage at one another. Forgiveness is taken as a sign of weakness and aggression as a mark of strength. And whole industries, including some publications and TV shows, have made trash-talk their currency.

(#3) In much of life, it isn't that we need to reinvent the wheels of community, but rather that we need to put them in service.

One could argue that we live in a culture in which the wheels have come off.

Or you could say that although the wheels are fine, they're the wrong wheels for what we're driving. Such

as Churches trying to be something they are not.

Or, we simply need fresh wheels. If you watch NASCAR a critical moment in every race is when the driver heads for the pits to get his wheels changed. At some point, it must be done. Period.

(#4) We don't need to reinvent the wheel, but we may need to mount a different set. We run our lives on the wheels of \*ambition, \*arrogance, \*acidic talk and \*acrimony, which clunk and bang along and disrupt fraternity and fellowship, while the smooth-rolling tires of charity, compassion, clemency and commitment, remain in the trunk.

(#5) Those are the wheels we need to mount. Let's consider them.

**\*Charity:** in Ephesians, Paul speaks of sharing with the needy, and of course that is a form of charity that community should include, but the older meaning of charity applies as well. Charity, in its earlier sense, means wishing good for others and behaving so that good will befall them. Charity does not require feeling

affection toward the other person. But it does require us to act charitably. Paul refers to charity, when, in addition to mentioning sharing with the needy, he also talks about stanching evil talk and being kind.

**\*Compassion:** Though usually considered a feeling, compassion is really a way of seeing. It implies empathy that allows us to envision ourselves in the place of another person. That brings awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve that suffering. Paul was talking about compassion when he called for tenderheartedness.

To be tenderhearted, to have compassion, requires us to see ourselves in the position of another. To illustrate: A couple returned to the United States after serving as missionaries in Guatemala. The husband went to school and his wife, for extra income, did typing for college students. Most of her clients were foreign students for whom English was not their first language. Many were from Nigeria.

In talking with them, the woman found that many were struggling with the tension from living in a new culture

where some values were different from the traditional ones they had grown up with. Although she had no experience of Nigeria, she had lived in Guatemala, and so she had some sense of what living in a foreign culture is all about. She could see herself in the circumstances of these students, and she had compassion on them.

She talked to her husband about making time in their schedules and room at their table to include some of these students in their family events. Their compassion helped alleviate the culture shock these students felt.

**\*Clemency:** Paul alluded to clemency (or mercy) when he urged “forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” That we have something to forgive implies that we need to show clemency. Indeed, community simply does not work without mercy.

According to an old legend, God himself discovered this by trial and error. As the story goes, when God decided to create the world, God first planned to have

Justice rule it. So God said to Justice, “Go and rule this earth which I am about to create.”

But, it just didn’t work out. The legend says that God tried, seven times, to create a world ruled effectively by Justice, but each attempt was a failure that had to be discarded.

On the eighth attempt, God tried something different; he called in Mercy and said to Mercy, “Go, and together with Justice, rule the world that I am about to create, because a world ruled only by Justice cannot work.” And behold, this creation was good.

It’s only a legend of course, but like the best legends, it embodies a significant truth. Without mercy, we have a world that makes no more sense than a world in which ducks climb trees and squirrels take swimming lessons. So we, too, for the good of all the communities of which we are a part, need to have the wheel of clemency on our vehicle of life.

**\*Commitment:** This is surrender of ourselves upward to Christ. As Paul put it in Ephesians, “Be imitators of

Christ ... live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” Commitment is the decision to follow Jesus, but like most promises, it does not do well as a once-for-all-time pledge. Commitment, like the other tires on the vehicle of our life, needs to be reinflated from time to time. Commitment needs the renewal of fresh prayer, new immersion in Scripture, faithful attendance at worship, the ongoing fellowship of kindred minds and the continued experience of sacrificial giving and service.

There’s no need to reinvent the wheels of life. Paul described them 2,000 years ago, and nobody has been able to improve upon them since. Our job is to make sure the wheels don’t go flat.

## Children's Sermon

locate a piece of rope. Tell the children that some things we know, not because we learned them, or we figured them out, but just because they make sense. For instance, you can’t push a rope, but you can pull it. Other things just make sense, like treating other people the way you want them to treat you. Be kind, share, and don’t tell lies about them. In Ephesians the Bible tells us that these things just make sense, but as Christians we do them not only because they make sense, but also because God acts that way toward us.

## Ephesians 4:25-5:2 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

### Rules for the New Life

25 We are part of the same body. Stop lying and start telling each other the truth. 26 Don't get so angry that you sin. Don't go to bed angry 27 and don't give the devil a chance.

28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Be honest and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need.

29 Stop all your dirty talk. Say the right thing at the right time and help others by what you say.

30 Don't make God's Spirit sad. The Spirit makes you sure that someday you will be free from your sins.

31 Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. 32 Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.

5:1 Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. 2 Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.