

Union With Christ *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

Friendships for a Healthy Culture of Dating *Ephesians 4:25 – 32*

Rescued Church Boston, July 19, 2015

Introduction: Reflection

We at Rescued are continuing in a series on Friendship. Our conviction is that true friendship is harder than we think, and that in this area, like all areas of our lives, we need Jesus. Last week we talked about cross-cultural friendships. But if you weren't convinced there, this week you will be. Today we talk about friendship in the context of dating.

There was one summer when a friend of mine and I grabbed dinner together. He asked me how I was doing, and I said, 'Good; I'm starting to get to know this girl.' As I described her, my friend got a worried look on his face. He said to me, 'Uh...What do you think about two friends liking the same girl?' I thought, 'Oh no.' How many of you have been in a love-triangle situation? (How many of you are currently IN a love-triangle situation???) I had that sinking feeling in my stomach, and I'm sure my friend did, too. So we stared at each other and said, 'What do you think we should do?' We said that if she was mature, the best thing to do was to let her decide if one or neither of us was better for her. And if she was not mature, then the best thing to do was to figure that out. So either way, the best course of action was for both of us to keep pursuing her. I couldn't believe that we decided that! But we had to same circle of friends. So we decided that we would not hide things from our friends, that we would be up front with them, and that if we would not gossip or slander the other person and ask our friends to choose sides. They could each have their own opinions, but we would be okay with anything. And if we committed to each other to call the other person if anything seemed weird or inappropriate. We prayed for each other and for our entire circle of friends: 'Father, let there be no hostile feelings, no suspicions between me and my friend, no dishonesty, and above all, let there be no gossip.' Now there were some tense moments, like the time I was at her place hanging out and my friend stopped by. We all liked to go ballroom dancing, so that was always something we had to think about in advance because we had many friends in common. Eventually our other friends found out about this because we didn't lie about it either. They asked, 'Hey, Mako, did you know that he is also interested in her?' Yup. 'We've talked. Do you have any questions? Concerns?' All of my business was out there. That situation lasted for FIVE LONG MONTHS. Basically my friend felt that there weren't enough things in common he had with the woman, so he called me to tell me that. Later, when she and I started dating, he was the first person to say that he was happy for us. In fact, he and I became better friends than before. In fact, years later, he gave me a car!! As a result of the Spirit of God being involved, there was no dishonesty, no secrecy, no bad feelings, and most importantly, there had been no malicious talk.

Relevance

Dating itself is hard. But what's also hard, and not often talked about, is friendship around the whole issue of dating. 'She's going out with my ex-boyfriend! I'm not going to be friends with her!' 'He's clearly trying to be friends with the attractive single women; what's up with that?' So what is a healthy culture of dating? And what is a healthy culture of friendship where there is dating? Or where people WANT to be dating?!?

Believe it or not, Jesus has an opinion about that. He is relevant to that issue. I'm going to read a section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians to show that his vision for friendship and community helps us develop a healthy culture of friendship where there is dating involved. Let me explain the context. The Ephesians and pretty much all the early Christians had a lot of differences – different ideas about friendships, sexuality, and on and on. Paul says that since Jesus transforms who we are, we are to live out of our new identity joined to him, as opposed to our old identity which was separate from him. What's more, the new self is who we now are 'IN GOD.' So when we're dealing with each other as men and women, if you are in relationship to Jesus, we are not trying to be something that we are not. We are trying to live out of who we already are. That's a lot more empowering.

Here's the section: ²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his

own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.'

I'm going to condense these points into a chart. There is a nice, basic structure to these commands. In each case, Paul gives a DON'T, a DO, and a WHY:

Don't	Do	Why
Speak falsehood	Speak the truth	We are members of one another (4:25)
Sin, prolong anger	Be angry, resolve quickly	To not give the devil a foothold (4:26 – 27)
Steal	Labor	So you can give (4:28)
Speak unwholesome words	Speak gracious words	To not grieve the Holy Spirit (4:29 – 30)
Be verbally bitter	Be kind, forgive	God in Christ forgave you (4:31 – 32)

A second observation I want to make about this list is that Paul works from the truth and reality that we are members of one another (v.25), to your personal emotions. In this case he highlights anger (v.26 – 27). Next he addresses what we do – our actions – towards one another, highlighting stealing (v.28). Then he addresses how we speak towards one another (v.29 – 32). What he's doing is starting with the truth and applying it into the entirety of our lives.

A third observation I want to make is that these are the choices Jesus himself made. Paul has just talked about the new human self (Eph.4:17 – 24), which Jesus perfected in himself through his personal choices. Jesus always spoke the truth. Jesus was angry but then dealt with it appropriately. Jesus labored and gave. Jesus spoke gracious words. And so on. Jesus is everywhere in this. So in our friendships, especially as we try to navigate dating and setting up a healthy culture of dating, we want to bring Jesus everywhere.

The final observation I'll make is what comes after this section. Friendship and ministry is in Ephesians 4:25 – 5:21. Marriage comes afterwards. That reflects something about Jesus' teaching. Friendship will last into eternity. Marriage will not, according to Jesus in Matthew 22. Repeat: There will not be MARRIAGE in eternity. There will not be DATING in eternity. But there WILL BE FRIENDSHIP. So let's not drop friends because we start dating. Let's not use friendship until we shift into dating. Instead, let's be committed to these commands.

Speak Truth, Not Falsehood: v.25

The first command is to speak truth: ²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with your neighbor, for we are members of one another.' Now I don't think Paul wants us to say, 'Let me tell you 'the truth' about you!' You ever have someone say that to you? 'Well, no one else is going to tell you the truth about how you smell, so you can thank me!' Or, 'Let me tell you 'the truth' about how I feel about you!' This is not your personal 'truth' about how you feel this morning.

I'll put forward two arguments for that. First, Paul has just talked about putting off the old self, being renewed in our minds and hearts, and putting on the new self which is in God and in Christ (Eph.4:17 – 24). It's Jesus' new humanity which is meant to cleanse our humanity. That is the truth. Second, all throughout Ephesians, Paul is talking about us being 'the temple of God' (whereas he uses the language of 'the body of Christ' more systematically and poetically in 1 Corinthians – which means the same thing but in different terms). In Eph.2:19 – 22, he says we are a new temple where God's Spirit dwells. He says Christ is the cornerstone, so we know from that that we are meant to be like Christ because every stone is cut in the same shape as the cornerstone. In Eph.3:14 – 21, he says we are a big temple building meant to house the fullness of God's presence. In Eph.4:8, he quotes from Psalm 68, which is a clever connection to the first temple in Jerusalem that King David and King Solomon built. In Eph.5:17 – 20, he envisions the singing and music of praise that is meant to flow out of us as a new place of worship, the new temple. In context, Paul is speaking truth about God, Jesus, and who we truly are as human beings, made in His image and meant to be like Jesus.

Falsehoods would be lies of some sort. LIES! Here are some examples of falsehoods that we need to lay aside to have a healthy culture of dating. *Falsehood*: You need to have someone in order to be someone. *No, the truth is*: you need Jesus. *Falsehood*: God is good when He gives you someone you like. *No, the truth is*: God is good all the time, just because He loves you and will love this whole world to its perfection. *Falsehood*: You need to have sex if you're dating because if you don't offer it, someone else will. *No, the truth is*: you are meant for oneness with Jesus first, and then relationships with other people as he defines it, and that's not how he defines it. *Falsehood*: We should hide our dating life from other Christians because the church is too broken. *No, the truth is*: the quality of our friendships is meant to lead others into worship, and still does. *The truth is* that the integrity of our friendships is supposed to be light streaming out into the darkness of our culture.

Illus: Remember my love triangle story? The truth my friend and I talked about from the get go was that our friendship was important, and the friendships in our circle of friends was important. We knew the truth about how Jesus calls us to be friends. Well, there is one more part. How did my non-Christian friends see the love triangle? I had two non-Christian guy friends who watched it all happen. They were friends with all of us. After she and I started dating and it was settled, I went with the two of them on a weekend road trip. In the car, they turned to me and said, 'WE CANNOT BELIEVE how well you both handled that! We've seen love triangles where it became a wreck. We have never seen anything like how you all handled it. How did you do that?' I said, 'Well, it was hard, but we're Christians. That means not only did we *want* to treat each other well, but Jesus was *empowering* us every step of the way. And I think everyone around us knew and respected the process.' One of my non-Christian friends was deeply shaken in his agnosticism. My other friend decided to read through the entire Bible and ask me questions. That is the impact of a healthy, Jesus-centered community with a healthy culture of dating.

Be Angry, but Resolve Quickly: v.26 – 27

So how do we allow Jesus to shape our emotions? That's what the second command illustrates. Look at 4:26 – 27: '26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.' Now I think Paul could have tackled another emotion besides anger. But I like that he does anger. Because we very often feel angry when we have to *adjust to truth*, and what feels to us like *constraints*.

Very few things make us more angry than *dating*, watching other people *dating*, and being criticized for how *we* are *dating*. For instance, Asian men sometimes feel mad about Asian women dating outside their race. I've heard that black women might be mad at black men for doing that. Women in general might be mad at men in general for dating younger. You remember the 22 year old young man from Santa Barbara who killed 6 people in his 'day of retribution' against women who rejected him? He wrote, 'All of those beautiful girls I've desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy.'¹ But the appropriate emotion about that, over the long term, is *sadness*, not anger. You can be sad about it, because of course you can wish something different for yourself. But anger is a different response. Now this is going to feel like Jesus is putting a microscope to your heart. This might be uncomfortable.

On the one hand, Paul encourages us to feel anger in the short term. If someone else does something wrong to you, like hook up with your current (!), or lie about you, you should allow yourself to feel angry. If you don't, there's probably something wrong, like you have low self-esteem. But even Jesus got angry at times: at the Temple leadership (Jn.2:13 – 22; Mt.21:12 – 13; Mk.11:15 – 18); at religious hypocrisy (Mk.3:5); at those who prevented children from being brought to him (Mk.10:14); and at human death and its cause: the corruption of sin inside human nature (Jn.11:35). That's why Paul could say, 'Be angry.' You are as much a part of God's good creation as anyone else.

But he puts two limits around that. The first limit is: 'and yet do not sin.' So no killing people! But also, don't feel jealous; it's against the Tenth Commandment. Also, no slander; don't post on Facebook how awful 'some people' are; we all know who you're talking about even if you hide the details. The second limit is time: 'do not let the sun go down on your anger.' Paul says there's something sinful about harboring anger over a longer period of time, and rehearsing it in your own mind. Jesus first said that in Matthew 5:21 – 26. And again, this is how Jesus handled his human emotions, as a reflection of how the entire Trinity handles anger. What that means is that you cannot hold on to your anger. We've got to take our feelings to Jesus, let him process it with us, and receive the power of his Spirit.

¹ Holly Yan, Ben Brumfield and Chelsea J. Carter, 'Inside the Gunman's Head: Rejection, Jealousy and Vow to Kill 'Beautiful Girls''; CNN News; May 27, 2014; <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/24/us/california-shooting-suspect/>

Paul even says that holding onto anger, clutching it like Jesus wants to steal it from you and you're entitled to it, is giving the devil a foothold. He probably means that in two places. First, in yourself. And second, in the Christian community. Anger *can* be lethal and it is *always* dangerous, starting with yourself. Anger does not make you attractive – it just doesn't! – so it's self-defeating! What do you accomplish by staying angry?

Momentary anger? Totally okay. It should give way to sadness. Long lasting anger? No. WHAT?!? MAKO, ARE YOU TELLING ME WHAT TO FEEL? YES, I AM!! Why? Because long lasting anger contains an attitude of *entitlement*. And WHO are you entitled to in dating? NO ONE. Are you entitled to romance? No. Are you entitled to sex? No. Are you entitled to pursue someone and not have anyone know? No. And if you want to ask Jesus about how feelings of entitlement, here's what Paul tells us. 'Although [he] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself [of all he was entitled to], taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.' (Phil.2:6 – 8) Jesus deserved to be loved by every single person while he was on earth. He made us. He was entitled to our respect, our devotion, and our affection. Yet look at all he went through. And not a day in his life did he say, 'Boy, what did I do to deserve this?!?' His whole life was one long journey of giving. You can be angry in the short run. You can be sad at any time. But you cannot be angry in the long term.

You might also give the devil a foothold in the Christian community (not just in yourself). If you act sinfully out of anger, it will usually lead you to take something from someone else that you feel entitled to, but you're not. And that leads us to the third command, about stealing, the fourth command, about speech, and the fifth command, about forgiveness.

Don't Steal, Work So You Can Give: v.28

The third command is this: ²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

How do we steal from one another? There was a recent New York Times Magazine article called *Confessions of a Seduction Addict*. The author, a woman named Elizabeth Gilbert, writes about how she had become addicted to seducing men, any man. When she recognized it as theft, she says, 'For the first time, I forced myself to admit that I had a problem — indeed, that I was a problem. Tinkering with other people's most vulnerable emotions didn't make me a romantic; it just made me a swindler. Lying and cheating didn't make me brazen; it just made me a needy coward. Stealing other women's boyfriends didn't make me a revolutionary feminist; it just made me a menace. I hated that it took me almost 20 years to realize this. There are 16-year-old kids who know better than to behave this way. It felt shameful. But once I got it, I really got it: There is no way to stop a destructive behavior, except to stop.'² Yes, indeed.

So even though Paul was primarily referring to actual physical things like money or objects (which, by the way, if you do steal that, please stop), I think we can definitely apply this to friendships. Do we steal FRIENDSHIPS from each other? Yes, we can. But hear me on this. Sometimes we go really far in the other direction. We can steal OPPORTUNITIES from each other. And that's stealing, too. (1) The very farthest we could go is to say there should be no dating here. 'I'm coming out of something, and I don't ever want to deal with awkwardness, or messy feelings, or messy situations here!' But that's actually stealing other people's opportunities to date just because of how you currently feel. 'Marriage should just magically happen to people!' Well, no. (2) 'Men can ask women out but women cannot ask men out.' Perhaps you've heard of Christians who believe that. I think that's also stealing opportunities from both men and women. In Scripture, Ruth initiated with Boaz (Ruth 3); the woman in Song of Songs initiates with her fiancé (Song 2:5; 3:6); Esther initiated with her husband the King of Persia (Est.5:1), as entering the throne room before he permitted it could have brought the death penalty; in a weird sense Tamar initiated with Judah (Gen.38) although we wouldn't want to imitate that; and in general, passivity is not the mark of a healthy friendship. So I see nothing wrong with a woman asking a man out for coffee, or organizing an event and inviting men. (3) 'You can't ask her out because I have feelings for her.' Well, we can't avoid love triangle situations, either. (4) 'You can't ask her out because she's my ex-girlfriend.' Same thing. If you still have feelings

² Elizabeth Gilbert, 'Confessions of a Seduction Addict,' *New York Times Magazine*, June 24, 2015; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/magazine/confessions-of-a-seduction-addict.html>

for her, then it's a longer conversation about what that means, but you still can't tell another person to stay away. That's stealing someone else's possibility. (5) Then if you build a coalition of your friends against someone because of dating, you're trying to steal friendship possibilities from that person. So, stop stealing!!

Speak Good for the Need: v.29 – 30

But if you're angry, and you try to steal friendships or opportunities from another person, how do you do that? Through your speech. You say things that are inappropriate. So Paul tackles speech in his fourth command in v.29 – 30. This is again an issue of speech. Say something good for other people's needs. ²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. [So that you] ³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' The idea here is that the Spirit of God breathes out words of life. God gives life by His Spirit and His word, from Genesis 1 onward.

What does it look like to speak edifying words that give grace for friendship and dating? I'll tell you what it does not mean. It does not mean saying, 'Oh, any person would be lucky to date you.' That might be true, or it might be shallow flattery. Either way, that is not what Paul is talking about here. Edifying means educating. Give grace means to give power or strength to honor Jesus, because the Greek word for grace is *charis*, which is the root of *charisma*, i.e. strength. So we want to speak educating words that strengthen each other to honor Jesus. I'm going to give some examples of edifying words that give strength and power.

Here's the first. It was said to me. 'Mako, I'm not saying that you need to know you want to marry her. But if you know you can't marry her, you need to stop pursuing or break up. And if you can't articulate godly reasons why you think you'd be a good couple, your reasons aren't good enough, and you're not ready to date.' When I was in college, there was a girl who I thought was really cute. We were decent friends. But she wasn't a Christian, so I wasn't going to date her. Then she became a Christian!! I thought, 'This is great!! Now I can date her!!' But I knew, like I know the sun is warm, that I was lying to myself. That she became a Christian was a technicality. I just thought she was cute, and that was mostly it. I knew the attraction was no deeper than that. The Spirit of God was convicting me. I knew God wanted her to have space in her life where she could relate to Him, and know His love, and grow spiritually in love for Him. Especially as someone brand new to faith. Not only that, but what would happen if her first experience of dating a Christian guy was shallow? What if it was just an excuse to be physical? So Jesus had his finger on my heart and stopped me. And I told some older mentors to help me be a friend but not anything more. They told me this word, above.

Here's the second word. 'If you're dating someone you know you can't or shouldn't marry, you are either (1) uninformed, as in you don't know what Jesus' vision for marriage is, that he be in both people who are committed to him, and you're just running on your own vision, like 'I just want to be married by age 26'; (2) being dishonest, as in you're not telling the person that you're actually planning on breaking up with them; (3) being manipulative, as in you're trying to change them, so that you might marry them; (4) being short term and selfish, as in you're just in it for the summer, or the school year, or until someone better comes along; or (5) you're planning on disobeying Jesus, as in you're just going to marry that person anyway no matter what Jesus says.' If that word is hard for you, just think about it this way: What if you're dating someone, and you ask them, 'Hey, what do you think about us, you know, maybe getting married.' And then the person says to you, 'Actually, I always thought we would break up. I've known that we would break up.' Then you say, 'What?!? How long have you 'known' this?' And the person says, 'I don't know... about two years ago I knew it.' TWO YEARS AGO?!? You'd be furious, right? Why? Because it's always easier to break up sooner rather than later! After you've invested all this time and energy? It's not *kind*. That's not doing your best to have a friendship after breaking up. The purpose of dating seriously is discernment for marriage. There is no other purpose that respects Jesus, the other person, and your community of friends all together. And if and when you discern a NO, it's time to break up and just be friends. And if you are hurt, or the other person is hurt, but for the right purpose, then you can accept it fully, learn from it, and move on.

Here's the third word. 'If you think it's bad to be single your whole life, there is one thing much worse: being married to the wrong person, a person Jesus would not be happy about.' When you look at it from that perspective, everything makes sense! So if you're dating or want to be dating, uncertainty is your friend. If people ask you good questions that make you a little uncomfortable, they are being your friends. If the person you're dating has serious questions about you, those questions are your friends. They're there to help you discern. Pretending uncertainty doesn't exist is not wise. It means you want to rush in.

Here's the fourth word. 'If you want Christian accountability for your relationship, and the other person doesn't, that person is not your spiritual peer and you should probably break up.' Or, the sun is the best disinfectant. When Ming and I were introduced by mutual friends, one of our mutual friends told Ming was about my breakup with the girl I dated before. That was the love triangle situation. Ming was willing to get to know me partially because they told her about that past breakup. They said they had never seen a breakup as clean and clear, that had integrity. And part of the reason is that there was accountability for us all the way through before that point. I think if your ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend comes up to the person you're dating now and says, 'Hey, I want you to know that I wish you the best. I'm not in the picture. But I want you to know that when I dated the person you're dating now, he or she wanted too much privacy, not enough accountability, and didn't want friends to speak into what we were doing. I hope you don't experience that dynamic. But I care about you and wanted you to know that I did.' That is true Christian friendship.

Now if you are not comfortable with that, I would ask why not. Do you feel entitled to have your ex keep their mouth shut, and not talk about their experience?!? No, you're not entitled to that. Do you feel entitled to *prevent* a friendship from happening??? No, you're not entitled to that. Either you want to date as an excuse to get physical. Or you feel defined by your past mistakes. In either case, it means your identity is not in Christ, and **YOU NEED TO DEVELOP YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST.**

One of the challenges I'm most grateful for from my love triangle situation to my relationship with Ming is that pretty much everything in my life was public. It was out in the open. When Ming and I were dating long distance, we introduced each other to our friends. Eventually, here in Boston, before we got engaged, Ming and I met with three other Christian couples over dinner so they could ask us some tough but meaningful questions about how we were doing as a couple. I jokingly call it 'the Inquisition,' but it was really good accountability. And what I learned is that the sun is the best disinfectant.

Not easy to hear this, is it? But they are edifying, wouldn't you agree? You can take **ACTION** on them. That means they give you **STRENGTH**. These words will help you follow Jesus, whether you're the one dating, or giving advice to someone who is.

Be Tenderhearted, Forgive: v.31 – 32

Paul says in v.31 – 32, ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [Notice that those are *verbal* actions, since clamor and slander are verbal. Paul is describing an atmosphere that is *verbally* unforgiving. Otherwise he would be contradicting himself about anger between v.26 and v.31. And in contrast to that, he says...] ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.' Paul is talking about the verbal culture of Christians.

Illus: There's a young woman I know who does something I admire. She really makes an effort to shape the culture of her church. At her church, many single women complain that the Christian men don't ask the Christian women out. But at the same time, she has realized that single Christian men look at a church and think, 'I probably have 2 chances to seriously date women here, and then people will think I'm sketchy and flirtatious. It might even get divisive. So I'd better be really careful here.' Especially in Boston where the churches aren't that big. Now my friend is fairly attractive, and gets asked out casually quite a bit. So when the women get together and talk, there is sometimes awkwardness. So at some point, she will say, 'I think you should get to know him; he's great. We can't fault a guy for wanting to get to know us friends, as long as he's not trying to hide something. If I have feelings I'll tell you. I want to encourage you in dating, and I want to be your **FRIEND**.' Instead of subtly trying to turn the women against one guy for the fact that he got coffee with two different women, or turn some women against other women, my friend is doing her best to avoid 'all malice,' which Paul targets in v.31. Malice. None of this 'Well, it didn't work out between me and him, so if it works out for him and her, I'm just going to ignore her.' Walking in kindness and forgiveness means, I think, walking with open-handedness emotionally. Wanting the best for others even if you're not in the picture any more, or never were. Living with integrity and honesty all the way, even if there are things about yourself you would rather hide. Acknowledging feelings if you have feelings, but being open-handed emotionally. Your emotions are important, but other people's emotions are important, too. And ultimately, God's feelings are most important. As Paul says in Ephesian 4:30, we can grieve the Holy Spirit. You do not control people, and neither do they. None of us is entitled to have our feelings be the center around which everyone else dances, just to make you feel better.

If we want a healthy culture of dating and friendship here at Rescued Church Boston, we have to have an explicit verbal culture about dating and friendship. When Paul says, 'Be kind, tender-hearted,' it means we don't make fun of people's feelings. Starting in elementary school, if you liked someone, you were afraid of other people knowing because you felt vulnerable. And if you knew that someone else had feelings, you probably made fun of that person. If you knew someone had feelings for you, you probably felt really weird. Part of maturing is recognizing that being vulnerable is okay. Those feelings might contain God's touch somehow. So we don't laugh at them. We are kind, tender-hearted about it.

In v.32, along with those words, Paul mentions forgiveness. We need a culture of forgiveness. If you do struggle with feeling defined by your past mistakes and hiding them, this is an important verse. 'God in Christ has forgiven you.' The God of the universe forgives you. He knows everything about you. Jesus has already publicly exposed you for having a sin-sickness, so why would anyone else be surprised that you're a sinner? Your actual mistakes are just details! And Jesus has already exposed God's love for you, and that God's destiny for you is oneness with Himself, because in Jesus, God's divine nature and our human nature have already become one. And if that's true of you, if God's forgiveness of you has already taken hold of you in Christ, then we are already becoming friends, and we are members of one another (v.25). Forgiveness on your part means honesty, not hiding your past. On my part, it means that I am completely prepared to believe that with Jesus, you can grow and mature. So I expect growth and maturity.

Conclusion

Now if it sounds to you like I'm calling you to a completely different culture of friendship and dating, it's because Jesus is adjusting us to life in the culture of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are members of one another. They are completely transparent to each other in the most vulnerable and precious feelings. If this feels strange and vulnerable, we are glimpsing GOD IN HIMSELF. And if it sounds like a complete transformation of our humanness, it's because Jesus transformed our humanness in himself. He adjusted his human nature to the life of the Trinity. He purged out of himself jealousy, bitterness, and so on. Now he shares himself with us so we can live in him. When we look at this sequence of commands, we have to see Jesus in it. He lived the truth. He brought all his emotions in line with the Father's love. He never took from anyone. He gave himself. In the way he acted and spoke, he was always in line with the Father. So in Jesus, we CAN be a people where others look at what's happening here and say, 'WE CANNOT BELIEVE how well you handled that! How did you do that?' And we'll have the chance to say, 'It's Jesus.'