

Ephesians 4:25

Introduction

Last week we saw that when we first learned Christ, we were taught to put off according to our former manner of life the old man, the one being corrupted according to the cravings of deceit, and to put on the new man, the one created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. We already are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. We already are a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come. But now it remains for us to be joyfully living out this wonderful reality that God has accomplished in us by His grace. This is the wonderful tension. This is the good and blessed tension. We're no longer the "old man," and yet we must still "*put off*" the old man. We're already the "new man," and yet we must still "*put on*" the new man. The tension between the "already" and the "not yet" is living in us every day of our lives. But even the "not yet" is a reminder of our hope. As we keep on striving according to God's power that mightily works within us for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord, we know that one day **God** will cause us to stand in His presence holy, and blameless, and with great joy.

We saw last week that the old man is ultimately given over to self-idolizing pleasure-seeking. All sin is the futile attempt to pleasure self (this includes not just sexual sin, but also bitterness, resentment, anger, slander, gossip, etc.). All sin is the pursuit of what feels good and right in the moment, and yet the ultimate result (and sometimes the immediate result) is *not* pleasure, but torment (bitterness). We justify our sin with thoughts and reasonings that have themselves been warped and perverted by sin. In our Christian lives, we need to realize that our struggle is not just against sinful actions and words, but against the effects of sin on our thinking and reasoning, on our ability to see straight and think clearly in the first place – to not be blinded to the truth and the beauty and the "rightness" of God's thoughts and God's ways.

But we "did not learn Christ in this way." We learned to "put off" the old man, and by the renewing of our mind to "put on" the new man. This is not legalism. This is not the bondage of trying hard to earn God's favor in our own strength. This is "Gospel law." This is the perfect law of *liberty* – it's the law of Christ who calls us to **Himself** as our perfect Savior and example. So what does this "putting off" and "putting on" look like? Paul begins now to answer this question.

I. Put OFF: "Therefore, having put off the lie"

Once again, we feel the tension. We've already put off the lie because we're already a new creation. And yet the already has implications for what we have to be continually doing today – putting off the lie. When Paul says, "Therefore, having put off the lie," it's a "not very veiled" exhortation and command to be ***always and constantly*** putting off the lie. So a number of versions translate something like this: "Therefore putting off the lie," or even, "Therefore you must put off the lie" (NIV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV).

What is "the lie"? Well, in one sense it's simple. "The lie" is just *lying*. "The lie" refers to the falsehoods or lies that we ***tell*** to each other. Paul goes on to say that having put off "the lie," we should instead ***speak*** truth with our neighbor. So most translations say something like this:

“Therefore, having put off *falsehood*...” (NET; NASB, ESV, NIV, NRSV). A few say this: “Therefore, putting away *lying*...” (NKJV; cf. KJV; HCSB). And some even translate: “So stop *telling lies*” (NLT; cf. NCV) Paul writes in an almost identical context in Colossians:

- ✓ Colossians 3:9–10 — ***Do not lie to one another***, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

The problem here is that we have a very shallow understanding of what lying really is in the Bible. And our first clue about this shallow understanding is right here in Ephesians. Paul didn’t just say, “do not lie to one another,” or “stop telling lies.” He said, “Therefore, having put off ***the lie***.” There’s something very ominous sounding about this. He speaks of the lie as though it has a whole life and character and destiny all of its own. The lies that we speak to each other include so much more than just saying that I didn’t take the cookie from the cookie jar when I really did take the cookie from the cookie jar. A lie, or *the lie* (whatever it might include), is a very horrific thing. Listen to the Apostle John:

- ✓ John 8:44 — You are of your father the devil... He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. ***When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.***
- ✓ Revelation 21:27 [NASB] — And nothing unclean, and no one who ***practices*** abomination and ***lying***, shall ever come into [the New Jerusalem], but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.
- ✓ Revelation 22:15 [NASB] — Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who ***loves and practices lying.***

Why single out the practice of lying as that which will exclude people from heaven and consign them to hell? And how many people are there really who actually *love* and *practice* lying? Paul assumes that this *love* and *practice* of lying was at one time true of ***all*** of us when we were still the old man. Paul says in Colossians: “Do not lie to one another, *seeing* that you have put off the old self *with its practices*.” For Paul, to put off the old man *means* putting off the lie, because the old man was characterized and even determined by the love and practice of lying. Once again, we see that lying in the Bible *must* be more than what we usually think.

Jesus said that our words are nothing more than the overflow of our hearts. So obviously this means that even lying words are always the overflow of our **hearts**.

- ✓ Matthew 12:34–35 — ***Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*** The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.
- ✓ Matthew 15:18–20 — ***What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart***, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, ***false witness***, slander.

Lying words are never just an isolated or accidental thing. Lying words are *always* the overflow and the evidence of *something* in the heart. But of *what*? What do lying words tell us about the heart?

For Paul, a lie was so much more than just speaking an untrue fact – like saying I’m 21 when I’m really 18. For Paul, the essence of a lie is speaking “*insincerely*.” It’s anything that misleads others as to what’s really the case – as to what’s really true – not just about the facts, *but especially about what’s in my own heart*. In Romans 9 Paul says:

- ✓ Romans 9:1–3 — *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying*; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Why does Paul want his readers to know he’s not lying? Because he wants them to know that his *motives* in what he says are sincere and pure. In other words, he’s not just seeking to protect himself from false accusations (“you’re a traitor to your nation”). He’s not just seeking to improve his own image. He’s speaking the truth sincerely, without any ulterior or hidden motives, for the benefit and good of his readers. The lie that Paul disavows is that of leading others to believe something about his heart that’s not true. The lie that Paul disavows is that of being insincere for his own self-serving purposes. This is so much deeper than our usual simple idea of a lie. And that’s why in order for Paul to be sure he was speaking the truth and not lying, he needed his conscience to bear him witness in the Holy Spirit. It’s easy to know if certain facts are right. It’s much more difficult to discern the motives and sincerity of our hearts in the things that we are constantly *speaking* and *saying* to one another. So when Paul said that he had great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart, was he speaking the truth or was he misspeaking and misleading through exaggeration for self-serving motives. Was he being insincere? Or more to the point: Was he *lying*? Lying is such a subtle thing precisely because the motives of our hearts are so deceitful. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 11:28–31 — And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that *I am not lying*.

Once again, we can see that Paul isn’t *only* concerned about getting the “facts” straight. Once again, you can see here that the point is sincerity. Every lie (of whatever kind it may be) is a misleading of others not only about the facts, but more importantly about what’s really in our hearts. When I say I didn’t eat the cookie, I’m not just lying about the cookie, I’m lying about *me* – I’m insincerely trying to mislead someone else about myself and my own heart with self-serving, self-promoting, self-protecting motives. So what Paul wants the Corinthians to know is that he’s not trying to manipulate them in any way with ulterior motives. In what he says, he’s being utterly sincere for their own benefit and good. He says in another place:

- ✓ Galatians 1:11–12, 20 — For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught

it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ... (*In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!*)

The point here is not just making sure the *record* is accurate. The point is Paul's motives and heart. He's not saying these things insincerely in order to gain an advantage of authority over his readers. He's saying these things sincerely for their own good and for their own salvation. This is the significance, for Paul, of saying: "In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!" The reality is that even if he was telling the facts accurately, he could still be lying about what was in his heart. He could still be subtly deceiving and manipulating and misleading his readers with self-serving, self-protecting, self-promoting motives. So when Paul disavows the lie, he's disavowing not only inaccurate facts, but especially any insincerity and ulterior motives in his heart. In light of all these things, let's look again at what Jesus says in John chapter 8:

- ✓ John 8:44 — You are of your father the devil... He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. *When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

The first lie that Satan told was in the garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3. Every single word that came out of the serpent's mouth in Genesis chapter 3 was a lie, even though some of his facts were true.

- ✓ Genesis 3:4–5 — The serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it *your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"
- ✓ Genesis 3:7, 22 — Then *the eyes of both were opened*... the LORD God said, "Behold, *the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.*

So what is it that makes even the "truth" a lie? – When the truth is spoken *insincerely*. Satan wanted Eve to think that he had her best interests at heart. But, in fact, even the true things he said were intended to bring about her ruin. That's why even the true things Satan said were lies. We may not always be so blatant or so extreme in our lies, but still we should ask: "How many of the true things I say are actually lies, because they are insincere?" How often are my motives for the true things I say hidden from my own eyes? So now it should be obvious that a blatant factual lie ("I didn't eat the cookie") is more importantly a lie about my own heart – it's a lie about *me*. Maybe now we can see why the practice of lying is singled out as that which will exclude people from heaven, and consign people to hell. To lie is to be a fraud, a hypocrite, a fake.

"There is no sin more unseemly in a Christian, and more inconsistent with grace, than the sin of lying, there being no sin that makes a man more like the devil." Fergusson
I wonder if we could also say this: "There is no sin more unseemly in a Christian, and more inconsistent with grace, than the sin of lying, there being no sin that makes a man more unlike God."

- ✓ John 3:33 — Whoever receives [Christ's] testimony sets his seal to this, *that God is true.*
- ✓ Hebrews 6:18 — *It is impossible for God to lie.*

✓ Romans 3:4 — Let God be true though every one were a liar.”

“The conventional mode of life [the old man] with its *illusion* and deception makes truthfulness utterly impossible, unless [we are a new creation in Christ].” (Braune) But, in fact, we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. We are a new creation. When we learned Christ, we learned to put off the old man and **put on** the new man. And so Paul goes on to say:

II. Put OFF: “Therefore, having put off the lie,
Put ON: *speaking truth—each of you—with his neighbor*”

Now that we know what “the lie” is, shouldn’t it be clear what it means to speak **truth** with each other? This is actually a quote from Zechariah chapter 8 where God is promising a New Jerusalem, and with the New Jerusalem a new people – a people whose hearts have all been changed.

✓ Zechariah 8:14–17 — For thus says the LORD of hosts: “As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not. These are the things that you shall do: **Speak truth to one another**; render in your gates *judgments that are true* and make for peace; *do not devise evil in your hearts* against one another, and *love no false oath*, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.”

God calls His Old Covenant people to “speak truth to one another” because this is exactly what His New Covenant people will do – this is exactly what will characterize and define the citizens of the New Jerusalem – which is who **we** are **today**!

When Paul says things like “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1; cf. 1 Tim. 2:7), what we hear him affirming is not just the accuracy of his facts, but the sincerity of his heart. The main point isn’t just saying true things, but always speaking sincerely for the good of others without any hidden, ulterior, or self-serving motives. What a beautiful thing this is! And it’s precisely this speaking of truth that’s supposed to **characterize and define** each one of us in the New Covenant community as we are constantly putting off the old and putting on the new.

Notice how Paul inserts “each of you” into the middle of his quotation from Zechariah. Each of you, each one of us without exception is to speak always and only **truth** with one another. Notice also that instead of speaking truth **to** our neighbor (as in Zechariah), Paul has us speaking truth **with** our neighbor. Once again, Paul wants to emphasize that one major reason and motivation for speaking truth is the fact that we have all been intimately united and connected together in Christ.

III. Put OFF: “Therefore, having put off the lie,
Put ON: *speaking truth—each of you—with his neighbor,*
Here’s WHY: *because we are members of one another.*”

Calvin summarizes: “*Lying* is here put for every kind of deceit, hypocrisy, or cunning; and *truth* for honest dealing. He demands that every kind of communication between them shall be sincere; and enforces it by this consideration, *for we are members one of another.*” Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 12:14, 26 — For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

With this in mind, we can wholeheartedly agree with Hodge when he says: “As it would be unnatural and absurd for the hand to deceive the foot, or the eye the ear, so there is a violation of the very law of their union for one Christian to deceive another.” (Hodge) For Paul, one of the worst things about the lie is that it’s always a failure to love.

Conclusion

Here’s the reality: I could lie to you every week that I stand up here even as I say true things. In the Christian community, we are all to be utterly honest, transparent, and sincere in our speech with one another. Someone who speaks truth with his neighbor is someone who never dissembles or hides his true thoughts and intentions because by God’s grace he’s come to the point where there is no *need* for them to be hidden. Those who speak truth are those who speak with a *love* that is sincere, genuine, and unfeigned, without any hypocrisy, pretense, or self-serving motives. Those who speak truth are never play-acting. They’re the real deal.

- ✓ 1 Peter 1:22 – Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a *sincere* brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.
- ✓ 1 Timothy 1:5 – The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure [unfeigned] heart.
- ✓ Psalms 15:1–2 — O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and *speaks truth in his heart.*

To quote Hendriksen and Calvin together, those who speak truth with their neighbor are those whose “outer manifestation is [always] in *harmony* with their inner disposition... who take no delight in cunning, but converse sincerely with men, and express nothing, by word or look, which they do not feel in their heart.” To speak truth is to be utterly transparent and sincere in our *love* for one another.

So “to what extent are [our] actions and [our] words [perfectly] accurate reflections of what is in [our] hearts? To what extent do [our] actions and words constitute a cover-up for what is in [our] hearts?” (Carson) How much are we characterized by insincerity and pretending – even in small, “innocent” ways? How much of our love is feigned (even in the slightest little bit)? May we always be diligently cleansing our hearts of all unworthy *thoughts* toward other people so that our words to each other might be in every way sincere and unfeigned. This is what it means to speak truth—each one of you—with his neighbor. This is what God’s new creation is meant to look like. This is what it means for us to be putting off the old man, and putting on the new.

- ✓ Psalms 32:2 — Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

And yet how often have we failed? *Jesus* never failed. He never lied. With Jesus, there was nothing in His heart that ever needed to be hid. Jesus never said or did anything that was insincere – that was not a perfect expression of His loving heart.

✓ 1 Peter 2:22 — He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

And so as the one who never lied, Jesus became the sin sacrifice for all of us who have. And now as our perfect example and sacrifice, Jesus calls us to be putting off the lie and speaking always and only *truth* to one another. As we keep on striving with God's power that mightily works within us, we can know that one day these words will be true of us:

✓ Revelation 14:4–5 (NASB) — These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. ***And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.***