

The New Life

Living the Christian Life

Ephesians 4:25-32

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Scripture

Today I am concluding my sermon series in Ephesians 4:17-32 that I am calling, “The New Life.”

Ephesians 4:17-32 may be divided into three sections. In verses 17-19, the Apostle Paul describes the non-Christian life. In verses 20-24, the Apostle Paul describes the Christian life. And in verses 25-32, our text for today, the Apostle Paul teaches Christians what is involved in living the Christian life.

We have previously examined, very briefly, the non-Christian life (4:17-19) and the Christian life (4:20-24). Today, I would like to examine, also very briefly, what it means to live as a Christian. In verses 25-32, the Apostle Paul teaches Christians how to build up Christ’s body, based on what is true of them as Christians, as new creations in Christ.

Let’s read about living the Christian life in Ephesians 4:25-32:

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Introduction

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a marvelous letter about how God has reconciled unsaved sinners to himself through Jesus Christ and, furthermore, how God has united all Christians from all different ethnicities into one body, the Church of Jesus Christ. Having given the theological foundation for this glorious truth, Paul writes about the nitty-gritty of Christian behavior. He describes for those who have a new life in Christ how to live the Christian life. But before we dive into the five examples that he gives us in this chapter, following Dr. John Stott, we need to notice three features that are common to them all.¹

First, each example concerns our relationships with each other. The Christian life is not lived in a cocoon. We live out our new lives in Christ in relationship to God *and* to one another. We grow in Christlikeness in our relationships to one another.

Second, each example has a negative prohibition followed by a corresponding positive command. It is not enough to put off the old self; we must put on the new self. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Christians have a new nature, and they must stop doing what characterized their old nature, and must start doing what is characteristic of their new nature.

And third, each example has a reason for the command that is either

¹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 184.

stated or implied. Paul gives theological reasons for the new behavior that is to characterize the new life in Christ. And as Christians live their new lives in Christ, they are building up the body of Christ, that is, the church.

Lesson

Ephesians 4:25-32 teaches us how Christians build up Christ's body, based on what is true of them as Christians.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Replace Falsehood with Truth-Telling (4:25)
2. Replace Unrighteous Anger with Righteous Anger (4:26-27)
3. Replace Stealing with Honest Work (4:28)
4. Replace Corrupting Talk with Edifying Talk (4:29-30)
5. Replace Sinful Characteristics with Godly Characteristics (4:31-32)

I. Replace Falsehood with Truth-Telling (4:25)

First, replace falsehood with truth-telling.

Paul gave the negative prohibition in verse 25a: **“Therefore, having put away falsehood....”** The first thing to notice is that Paul said, **“... having put away....”** The Greek tense is aorist, meaning something that took place in the past with continuing results. So, these new Christians have **put away falsehood.**

The Greek word for **falsehood** (*pseudos*) means “to lie.” Paul's words were somewhat startling to his audience. Lying was commonplace in Greek culture, as well as in ancient Semitic cultures. When some of these former non-Christians got

converted to Jesus Christ, they brought their lying into the church with them. But, Paul made it clear that lying belonged to the old nature and not to the new nature. He wrote the same thing to the Christians in the Colossian church in Colossians 3:9, “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.” Clearly, Paul believed that lying was a dominant characteristic of the old self. He was unequivocal in his message that lying did not belong in the church.

But, lying was not only an issue in the New Testament Ephesian church, it is an issue even in our day. Lying, deception, falsehood, intentional misstatements are commonplace in our culture, and sometimes even in the church. Brothers and sisters, this must not be!

Paul gave the positive command in verse 25b: “... **let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor...**” Christians, of all people, ought to be known as people of the truth. Our word should be our bond.

Paul gave the reason for the command in verse 25c. The greatest reason for replacing falsehood with truth-telling is that lying is a sin against God. However, that is not the reason Paul gave. Instead, his reason was that lying was a sin against the body of Christ. Notice how wonderfully Paul put it in verse 25c: “... **for we are members one of another.**” Kent Hughes says, “Lies, false messages among the members, actually render the Body dysfunctional.”² For this reason Calvin called lying a monstrosity.³ Commentator John Mackay put it this way:

A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 150.

³ *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, Volume II, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 191.

This is so because a lie is a sable shaft from the kingdom of darkness.... There is no place in the Christian ethic for the well-intentioned lie. In the moral behavior which Christ inspires, the end never justifies the means.⁴

II. Replace Unrighteous Anger with Righteous Anger (4:26-27)

Second, replace unrighteous anger with righteous anger.

Paul begins with the positive command in verse 26a, **“Be angry....”** Paul is restating Psalm 4:4a, “Be angry, and do not sin.” The implication—and the teaching of Scripture in other places—is that there is a good kind of anger, a righteous anger. God himself is righteously angry at sinners who do not repent of their sin and seek his forgiveness. Jesus was righteously angry when he cleansed the temple and drove out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons (Mark 11:15). We may be righteously angry at sin and injustice, as Wilberforce was about slavery in England. And we may be righteously angry about theological error, as Luther was about the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, as Kent Hughes says, “Proper anger is a sign of spiritual life and health.”⁵

Paul gave the negative prohibition in verse 26b: **“... and do not sin....”** Frankly, most times our anger is sinful. We get angry because we did not get what we want, our pride was injured, or we simply want revenge. One of the problems with unrighteous anger is that we become the unwitting victim of our own anger, as Frederick Buechner expressed it so well:

⁴ John A. Mackay, *God's Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 174.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 150.

Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontation still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back; in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.⁶

Paul gave the reason for the command in verses 26c-27: **“... do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”** When Paul said, **“... do not let the sun go down on your anger,”** he did not mean that quite literally. So, if you lived in Iceland and the sun did not set for 2 or 3 months a year, that did not mean that you could wait for 2 or 3 months to address your anger issue. No. What Paul meant is that anger must be addressed immediately. Anger must not be nursed. We must seek to put right what we did wrong. The reason for doing so is that unrighteous anger gives an opportunity to the devil to exploit people into further sin. He wants to see anger turn to hatred, and hatred turn to violence, and all of this boil over into broken fellowship among believers.

III. Replace Stealing with Honest Work (4:28)

Third, replace stealing with honest work.

Paul gave the negative prohibition in verse 28a: **“Let the thief no longer steal....”** The eighth commandment says,

⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 2.

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). Every culture has some guideline regarding stealing. Kent Hughes notes, “Theft is a major problem in our land. A paper given at an American Psychological Association symposium on employee theft presented a breakdown on the 8 billion dollars that inventory shortages cost department and chain stores every year. Of these losses, 10 percent were due to clerical error, 30 percent to shoplifting, and a shocking 60 percent (sixteen million dollars a day!) to theft by employees.”⁷ But it is not enough just to stop stealing.

Paul gave the positive command in verse 28a: “... **but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands....**” Kent Hughes tells the story about the English preacher Rowland Hill who astounded the mourners at his favorite employee’s funeral when he told a story in his funeral message which he had kept secret for thirty years: his first meeting with the man had been when the man attempted to hold up Dr. Hill. Hill had argued with him, offering the highwayman an honest job if he would visit him later. And this the robber did, becoming a devout Christian and devoted worker! This man lived out the standard Paul calls the Church to in verse 28.⁸

Paul gave the reason for the command in verse 28a: “... **so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.**” Instead of stealing, the new believer in Jesus Christ must do honest work, not just to support himself, but to demonstrate God’s love by having extra to share with anyone in need.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 152.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 151–152.

IV. Replace Corrupting Talk with Edifying Talk (4:29-30)

Fourth, replace corrupting talk with edifying talk.

Paul gave the negative prohibition in verse 29a: **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths....”** The Greek word for **corrupting** (*sapros*) means “bad, rotten, putrid.”⁹ This is not only speech which is obscene and vulgar, but it also includes speech that degrades others, slanders others, or gossips about others. Never forget that Jesus warned in Matthew 12:36, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.” In fact, Augustine hung this sign on his dining room wall, as a reminder to himself and others, “He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table.”¹⁰

Paul gave the positive command in verse 29b: **“... but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion....”** That is quite a challenge, isn’t it? We should speak in such a way that we build others up.

Paul gave the reason for the command in verse 29c: **“... that it may give grace to those who hear.”** Our speech should be a vehicle of God’s grace to all those with whom we speak. We should be like Alexander Whyte, of whom it was said, “All of his geese became swans.”¹¹

Paul went on and added in verse 30: **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”** All of our sins grieve the Holy Spirit. We

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 153.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 153.

belong to him because he has **sealed us for the day of redemption**. And so, even though all that we do should build up the body of Christ, we must also remember that we are not to **grieve the Holy Spirit of God** either.

V. **Replace Sinful Characteristics with Godly Characteristics (4:31-32)**

And fifth, replace sinful characteristics with godly characteristics.

Paul gave the negative prohibition in verse 31: **“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice....”** Paul listed a number of sinful characteristics that belonged to the old self. None of these characteristics are to be seen in a Christian.

Paul gave the positive command in verse 32a: **“... Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another....”** We are to exemplify godly characteristics in our daily lives with every person with whom we come into contact.

Paul gave the reason for the command in verse 32b: **“... as God in Christ forgave you.”** We have been forgiven such a great debt. God has intervened in our lives in a wonderful way and has granted us new life in Christ. He now expects us to demonstrate to others what he has demonstrated to us.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of the Christian behavior in Ephesians 4:25-32, let us live as those who have been transformed by Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to close with something that is very important. We have asserted that in this section on the new life

in Christ (4:17-32), Paul taught that Christians are new creatures in Christ. In fact, Christians have a new self, a new nature, and the old self, the old nature has gone. So, if Christians are completely and utterly new creations, why then does the Apostle Paul teach that the Christian life still involves “putting off” and “putting on”? If we are regenerate, if we have a new nature, should we not now no longer sin?

The answer is that sin no longer reigns in our new nature as it did in our old nature. However, while we no longer have *reigning* sin in us we still have *remaining* sin in us. Until we see Jesus face-to-face, we will battle the remnants of sin in us. That is why Paul clearly explained the behaviors that are characteristic of the old self and the behaviors that are characteristic of the new self, so that we might continue to fight against the flesh, the world, and the devil.

One big difference, in addition to having a new nature, is that every Christian also has the Holy Spirit resident in him to enable him to keep in step with the Spirit and to have victory over sin. The non-Christian does not have the Spirit of God.

Moreover, for some people behaviors characteristic of the old self are put off immediately and with little struggle of reoccurrence. But, for other people behaviors characteristic of the old self seem to linger. That is not uncommon. Both believers must continue to rely on the Holy Spirit to work in them to enable them to conquer sin.

So, let us thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He has given us new life in Jesus Christ. He has given us faith in Jesus Christ. He has enabled us to repent of our sin. And he indwells us and empowers to conquer sin in our daily lives.

May God help us who name the name of Christ to live as those who have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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