

Principles of New Life

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25–32

Code: 1930

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

Ephesians 4:25-32 says, "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more but, rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

In Ephesians 4:17-24 the apostle Paul makes the point that Christians are to be different. We are not to walk as unbelievers walk, that is in the blindness, darkness, and hardness of their hearts (vv. 17-18). They tend to be insensitive, immoral, unclean, and greedy (v. 19), but we're to be like Christ. We are to put off the old man (v. 22) and put on the new man (v. 24). We are to exchange our old lifestyle for a new one. Verses 25-32 list specific categories in which the exchanges are to occur.

I. LYING VS. TELLING THE TRUTH (v. 25)

"Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another."

The Greek word translated "put away" (apotithemi) speaks of throwing something off like an old coat. It is used in Acts 7:58 when the Jewish leaders threw their coats at Paul's feet before they stoned Stephen. The phrase "speak every man truth with his neighbor" is a quote from Zechariah 8:16. Paul related the Old Testament to this important truth.

A. The World of Lies

1. The future of liars

Revelation 21:8 says, "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." One thing is certain: liars will go to hell. Conversely, those who go to heaven are not liars. Lying is not characteristic of a believer. There may be times when a believer lies, but if a person continually lies, there is no basis for believing he is a Christian.

2. The father of lies

John 8:44 tells us that the devil is a liar and the father of all lies. Therefore habitual liars give indication of having the devil as their father and hell as their destiny. No matter what they may claim or how religious they may be, they won't be a part of God's kingdom because liars don't go to heaven. Instead, believers forsake lying and speak the truth.

Lying is characteristic of our world. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, preachers, salesmen, secretaries, bosses, advertisers, and politicians all lie. The system operates on what's expedient, and lying is expedient--but only for the moment.

People lie because their nature is depraved. Their father is the devil, who developed a world system based on lies. Religious systems apart from Christianity are for the most part lies mixed with shades of the truth. Satan lies about life, death, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, heaven, hell, good, and evil. The entire world system--religious, economic, and governmental--is based on lies.

B. The World of Truth

When God comes into a person's life, the truth becomes real to him. Romans 3:4 says, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit, who takes up residence in the believer's life, is called "the Spirit of truth," who guides us into all truth (John 16:13). Of God's Word Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). When a person becomes a believer he leaves the domain of lies and enters the realm of truth. He now knows the true God, is redeemed by the true Messiah, is indwelt by the true Spirit, possesses the true Word, and lives a true life. Whenever a believer speaks, he should be speaking the truth (Eph. 4:15).

1. The enemy of truth

A Christian should not tell any type of lie. The most familiar type is to say something that isn't true. But there are other types. Exaggeration is one. A certain Christian man had a powerful testimony, but one day he stopped giving it. When asked why, he said that through the years he had embellished it so much, he had forgotten what was true and what he'd made up.

Cheating in school, in business, at work, and on your taxes is a form of lying. So is the betrayal of a confidence, flattery, making excuses, and remaining silent when the truth should be spoken. There's no place for lying in the Christian life. One of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (ex. 20:16). We are to tell the truth.

However, beware of psychological "honesty" that's used in sensitivity training. One of the exercises used in that training requires one person to tell another what he doesn't like about him. If as a Christian you feel hatred toward someone, you don't need to express it. Instead you need to go to God and deal with the hate in your heart, asking Him to replace it with love. We are to eliminate lying from all our relationships, but that doesn't give us license to expose our hatred.

2. The importance of truth

Why is it so important to tell the truth? Ephesians 4:25 says, "We are members one of another." Ephesians is a book about the Body of Christ and the unity of the church. When we don't speak the

truth with each other we will harm our fellowship. For example, what would happen if your brain lied to you that cold was hot and hot was cold? The next time you took a shower you'd either freeze to death or scald yourself! If your eye decided to send false signals to the brain, a dangerous curve in the highway might appear straight and you would crash. You depend on the honesty of your nervous system and every organ in your body. God has built into you a system that senses pain and fights disease. Accurate signals are what allow our bodies to function.

The Body of Christ can't function with any less than that. We can't shade the truth with others and expect the church to function properly. How can we minister to each other, bear each other's burdens, care for each other, love each other, build up each other, teach each other, and pray for each other if we don't know what's going on in each others' lives? Be honest, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

II. UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER VS. RIGHTEOUS ANGER (vv. 26-27)

A. The Command (v. 26a)

"Be ye angry, and sin not."

1. Anger defined

Three Greek words are often translated "anger": thumos, parorgismos, and orge. a) Thumos refers to a fury out of control. It sometimes refers to something that went up in smoke. b) Parorgismos is an internal seething, a fuming resentment that most often arises out of jealousy. c) Orge refers to anger based on a settled conviction. People have certain priorities they're committed to, and when something violates those priorities, they respond. For example, you love your children with all your heart, but if someone hurts them, you will be angry.

You can be angry and sin or be angry and not sin. Your motive is the issue.

2. Anger discussed

a) Unrighteous anger

Thumos is never to characterize a Christian. In the New Testament it refers to unregenerate men or someone engaging in sin. It's also used of Satan (Rev. 12:12) and God's ultimate wrath on sinners (Rom. 2:8). Only God can go to the extreme end of anger and still be righteous because He is always under control. But to us thumos is unrighteous because we are unable to control it.

b) Righteous anger

Sometimes parorgismos and orge can rightfully characterize a Christian as long as the anger is for other than selfish reasons. We can be angry over what grieves God and hinders His causes. But we are not to be so angry that it results in sin. Don't be angry for your own causes. Don't get angry when people offend you. Don't let your anger degenerate into personal resentment, bitterness, sullenness, or moodiness. That is forbidden. The only justifiable anger defends the great, glorious, and holy nature of our God.

(1) Exemplified by Jesus

In John 2:13-17 we see the majestic indignation of Christ on display as He cleanses the Temple.

God's holiness was at stake, so Jesus took decisive action against the unrighteousness He found in the Temple.

John 11:33 says Jesus "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." It's quite possible that Jesus was experiencing inner fury over the consequences of the Fall when He saw that His friend Lazarus was dead. Seeing Lazarus may have brought to mind the terrible things He would endure on the cross when He bore the sins of the world in His own body. Jesus was angry about sin--and He had a right to be.

(2) Exemplified by Paul

The apostle Paul became angry with the Corinthians because they didn't get angry over sin in their congregation (1 Cor. 5:1-2). They tolerated incest in their fellowship and didn't become angry about it when they should have.

In 1 Timothy 1:20 Paul apparently was so angry at Hymenaeus and Alexander that he threw them out of the church and delivered them over to Satan.

(3) Exemplified by the psalmists

Psalm 97:10 says, "Ye who love the Lord, hate evil." David said, "Zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of those who reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Ps. 69:9).

What people do to God's name ought to infuriate you. But according to Matthew 5:21-22 the wrong kind of anger is the first step toward murder. I admit to getting angry sometimes. I hope to God that I never get angry about what happens to me, but only about any abuse of God's holy name.

Anger that is selfish, passionate, undisciplined, and uncontrolled is sinful, useless, and hurtful. It must be banished from the Christian life. But the disciplined anger that seeks the righteousness of God is pure, selfless, and dynamic. We ought to be angry about the sin in the world and in the church. But we can't let that anger degenerate into sin. That's why Paul said, "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Eph. 4:26).

B. The Commitment (vv. 26b-27)

1. To deal with sin (v. 26b)

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

That refers to the wrong kind of anger. If our anger has become sin, we are to deal with it now and not sleep on it. The New Testament continually exhorts us to face sin and deal with it now by confessing and repenting of it. If we don't and we harbor an unforgiving spirit, Satan will "get an advantage of us" (2 Cor. 2:11).

2. To deal with Satan (v. 27)

"Neither give place to the devil."

The Greek word translated "devil" (diabolos) means "slanderer." Anger will inevitably lead to slander--either in speech or thoughts. That gives a place to the slander. As John 8:44 indicates, when a person constantly lies he gives evidence that his father is the devil. Similarly, people who are continually angry reveal that they too belong to him.

III. STEALING VS. SHARING (v. 28)

"Let him that stole steal no more but, rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Theft is a common problem in our world. Shoplifting has become such a problem that a significant percent of the cost of items in the store covers the amount lost from stolen goods. Whether grand theft or petty theft, robbing from the store or the market, or stealing money from a rich man or a family member, it's all stealing because none of it belongs to you.

A. A Scriptural Overview on Stealing

The Bible discusses many different kinds of stealing.

1. Non-payment of debts (Ps. 37:21)
2. Falsifying account books (Luke 16:1-13)
3. Cheating on taxes (Matt. 22:17-22)
4. Using improper measurements (Amos 8:5; Hos. 12:7)
5. Not paying a fair wage (James 5:4)

For those who steal 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 offers this warning: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (emphasis added).

B. A Scriptural Overview on Working

Ephesians 4:28 says, "Rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." The Greek word translated "labor" refers to hard, manual labor. Hard work is honorable.

1. Exodus 20:9--"Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work."
2. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11--"This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all but are busybodies."
3. 1 Timothy 5:8--"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

As Christians we should work hard so that we will have enough to give to those in need, not so we'll have more of what we don't need. The worldly approach to wealth is to hoard what we acquire. But the New Testament principle is to work hard so we might do good and give to those who have needs.

In Luke 14:13-14 our Lord says, "When thou givest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the

blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee." In Acts 20:33-34 Paul says, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Paul took care of his own needs and of those who traveled with him.

IV. CORRUPT SPEECH VS. EDIFYING SPEECH (vv. 29-30)

A. The Contrast (v. 29)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

1. The uselessness of corrupt speech

The Greek word translated "corrupt" (*sapros*) means "rotten." It refers to something that is worthless, useless, or diseased. Rotten fruit smells terrible and is worthless. You wouldn't want to get near it, let alone eat it. The same thing is true of rotten language. Whether it's in the form of off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, or crude speech, none of it should characterize a Christian.

a) The elimination of rotten words

(1) Psalm 141:3--"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." If Jesus Christ is the doorkeeper of your lips, He will be the one to determine what comes out of them.

(2) Colossians 3:8--"Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

(3) Ephesians 5:3-4--"Fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking."

b) The source of rotten words

(1) Matthew 12:34--Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." You can tell a lot about a person's heart by what comes out of his mouth.

(2) Romans 3:9-14--In Paul's discussion of the depravity of mankind, he shows how depravity begins inside us and proceeds out of our mouths.

2. The benefits of good speech

Ephesians 4:29 contains three features of the speech of the new man.

a) It is edifying

If you allow the Lord to keep watch over your lips, whatever you say should build up others. You should encourage and strengthen others spiritually. Is that what happens when you talk with people? Do they go away built up in Jesus Christ? Mothers, when you're with your children throughout the day, does what you say to them build them up? Fathers, when you take your children out for the day, are your conversations with them edifying and encouraging?

b) It is necessary

In verse 29 the phrase "to the use" means "as it fits the need." When I was growing up, any time I'd say to my mom, "Do you know what so-and-so did?" she would respond, "Is that necessary?" Often it was interesting, but it certainly wasn't necessary.

c) It is gracious

Verse 29 also tells us our speech should "minister grace to the hearers." Do your words bless those who hear them? Is there graciousness in what you say?

(1) Luke 4:22--"All bore [Jesus] witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

(2) Colossians 3:16--"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." If you allow the Lord to set a watch over your tongue, and His Word dwells in you, your words will be the gracious words of Christ.

(3) Colossians 4:6--"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." Do your words act as salt and retard the corruption in the world, or do they contribute to it?

B. The Command (v. 30)

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

"Grieve" is another word for "sadden." The Holy Spirit grieves when believers don't exchange their old lifestyle for the new one. He is grieved when believers lie and obscure the truth, when they're angry and unforgiving, when they steal and refuse to share, and when they speak corruptly and lack a spirit of graciousness.

When you were saved, the Spirit of God put a seal on you declaring that you belong to God forever. Since the Spirit of God has been so gracious to give you eternal salvation, seal you forever, and keep your salvation secure until the day of redemption, how could you willfully grieve Him? He has done so much for us that out of gratitude we ought not to grieve Him.

V. NATURAL VICES VS. SUPERNATURAL GRACES (vv. 31-32)

A. The Natural Vices (v. 31)

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

1. "Bitterness"--smoldering resentment that results in a brooding, grudging, unforgiving spirit.
2. "Wrath"--a wild rage arising from selfishness.
3. "Anger"--a settled, internal resentment.
4. "Clamor"--violent public outbursts.
5. "Evil speaking"--slander.

Each of those vices illustrate how not to relate to others. As Christians we must not be bitter, full of wrath, resentful, violent, or slanderous. We must get rid of those attitudes. In fact Paul tells us to put away "all malice." The Greek word translated "malice" (kakia) refers to evil in general. We need to eliminate all forms of evil in our relationships with others.

B. The Supernatural Graces (v. 32)

"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

God was kind and tenderhearted toward you, forgiving you even when you didn't deserve it. If you base your attitude toward people on what they deserve, you've missed the point. Don't yell at people, slander them, or get angry at them even if they deserve it. Those who exemplify God's character are loving, kind, tender, and forgiving. That's the kind of attitude God expects from those who are new creations in Christ. Conclusion

If Christians never lied but always spoke the truth; never became angry in a sinful way but always acted in love; never stole but always shared; never spoke in a coarse manner but always spoke edifying words; never were bitter, wrathful, resentful, violent, or slanderous but were always characterized by kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness; don't you think the world would pay attention to our message?

Examine yourself: Do you speak the truth? Do you have control over your anger so that it operates only in righteousness? Do you share your resources with others? Do you speak graciously? Are you kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving? If you are a new man or woman in Christ, you will live like that.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What can be said about habitual liars?
2. Why do people lie?
3. How does a person's life change with regard to truth when he becomes a Christian?
4. Cite different ways people lie.
5. Why is it important for Christians to tell the truth?
6. What three Greek words are translated "anger"? Define each.
7. What type of anger should never characterize a Christian? Why?
8. What type of anger is tolerable for Christians? Explain.
9. Cite some examples of people who exemplified righteous anger.
10. The wrong kind of anger is the first step toward _____ (Matt. 5:21-22).

11. What should believers do when their anger turns to sin (Eph. 4:26)?
12. What different forms of stealing does the Bible discuss?
13. What does Scripture teach about work?
14. Why ought Christians work hard?
15. Explain what "corrupt communication" is (Eph. 4:29).
16. What is the source of corrupt communication?
17. What characterizes good speech? Explain each one (Eph. 4:29)?
18. What makes the Holy Spirit grieve? What should motivate us not to grieve Him?
19. Cite and define the natural vices Paul refers to in Ephesians 4:31.
20. What are the supernatural graces (Eph. 4:32)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Review the various types of lies (see p. 3). As you will note, some lies are subtle. Make a list of those types of lies plus any others you can think of. Next to each, indicate if you have lied in that way since you've been a Christian. Also indicate if you are presently engaged in one or more of those lies. If so, what do you intend to do about it? Ephesians 4:25 says we are to speak the truth with our neighbor. Therefore if you have recently betrayed a confidence, you need to go to that person and confess what you have done. Telling the truth can be painful at times, but it is the right thing to do and God will bless your obedience to His Word.
2. Although it's comforting to know there is a biblical basis for being angry, if we're honest with ourselves we'd have to admit that most of our anger is the result of sin. Review the types of anger (pp. 4-5). Are you angry about something or at someone right now? How do you normally handle your anger? The next time you become angry in a sinful manner, follow the exhortation of Ephesians 4:26: don't carry your anger into the next day. Instead confess it right away. If need be, go to a person you were angry with and confess your sin. Make it your goal to deal with your anger--don't give the devil an opportunity to wreak havoc in your life.
3. According to Ephesians 4:28, why are we to work with our hands? Is that your motive as you work, or is it your goal to satisfy your needs exclusively? When you receive a raise, what do you do with the additional income? How do you use your discretionary income (that which is above what you need to meet your basic needs)? Make a careful examination of your answers to those questions. If you are continually seeking a better home, a better car, better clothes, and better possessions, it's possible that you're not looking to advance God's kingdom. Reflect on Matthew 6:19-33 and ask God

to help you see what changes in priorities you need to make.

4. Are most of your conversations edifying, necessary, and gracious? After your next conversation, reflect on what you said. What parts were edifying, necessary, and gracious? What parts weren't? So that you might glorify God in all your conversations, memorize Ephesians 4:29: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear" (NASB).

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