



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, January 5, 2025

Ephesians 4:25-32

It's been just over a month since we've found ourselves in our journey through the book of Ephesians and so before we get into our text this morning, I'd like take just a few brief moments to bring us up to speed.

If you remember, this book is best digested in two parts. Part 1 being chapters 1-3 focuses on who we are in Christ, and then the second part - chapters 4-6 - focuses on how we are to effectively live out that identity.

If I were to sum up Chapters 1 to 3 into just a few statements, I would say that Paul is reminding us that as Christians, God views us as family. He is the One that pulled us from slavery to sonship and now calls us joint heirs with Jesus Christ. And as family, we are no longer separated as Jews and Gentiles, slaves or free, male nor female but sealed by Christ as one body. Empowered by His Spirit, we are now invited to let the love of Jesus Christ into our hearts to lead and guide us in all of His ways. And when that happens, everything changes!

In chapter 4, Paul begins to lay the foundation for how we are to live in a world filled with darkness. He reminds us that we are called to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. In other words, when you truly understand the gift of salvation and the price that was paid for it, your life should reflect that reality. We cannot take Christ's sacrifice for granted by prioritizing our own will over His. Instead, we are called to live in perfect submission, daily surrendering ourselves as a reflection of the price that was paid for us.

Paul then goes on to describe this type of living as a putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new man. It's like changing out of your old dirty and ripped up clothes and putting on fresh new ones. Or taking off your old team jersey and putting on the new team Jesus jersey - because this now represents who you are, the way you live, and the team you play for. Paul goes on to explain that this transformation starts in the mind: that we need to allow God to transform the way we

think by aligning our thoughts, attitudes, and desires with His. In other words, perfect submission - which is something that requires daily surrender and a willingness to let go of what once defined us so that we can fully embrace who we are now in Christ.

Now, as we dive into today's passage, Paul takes this challenge even further as he now shares with us what not to do as children of the Lord:

Ephesians 4:25-32

'Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour," for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

The first thing I want you to notice is Paul's use of the term 'therefore' here. As we've already learned, he uses it repeatedly throughout Ephesians, building on the truths he's already established. In Chapters 1-3, Paul lays the foundation: that we are united as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Therefore, we should live as family. As family, therefore, we should walk worthy of the calling we've received. Therefore, as those walking worthy of our calling, we are to put off the old man and put on the new man.

Paul's 'therefores' are not random though. Each one is very intentional and serves great purpose. A great visual of this is steps on a staircase - each one is integral in leading us towards what it means to live as God's people. Each one connects us to specific actions which serve as practical ways to live out our new identity in Christ. As we follow this progression, we'll eventually reach the 'finally' in Chapter 6. But until then, these 'therefores' serve as building blocks reminding us that Paul is taking us somewhere with clear, step-by-step instruction on how to live as God's people.

So as we dive into today's passage, Paul now further develops the call of laying aside the old and putting on the new by bringing 6 specific instructions to the church. 5 of which are composed in a 'negative/positive' style where Paul lays out the negative instruction followed by the positive. You are not to do this, but instead do this. Similar in style to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaching where He used the same teaching style: 'You have heard it was said.....but I say to you.' This style

of teaching is known as contrastive parallelism. Big word...simple technique. It's basically a teaching technique that focuses on transformed behaviour by comparing and contrasting that which is to be rejected with that which is to be embraced.

It's important to note that Paul doesn't just provide a list of negative behaviours that they are to steer clear from. He takes it further by providing them with the positive response. This is so important because he's trying to remind them that life is not just about avoiding sin; it's about actively pursuing righteousness. And Paul has already effectively set the stage for this in verse 17-25 by introducing the comparison between the old man and the new man. In that section, Paul emphasizes the fact that it's not just enough to put off the old man, Paul says we must replace it with the new man. It's not just enough to stop the negative behaviour, it must be replaced with righteousness.

To me, this structure is fascinating because as I'm reading this, I can't help but picture my role as father to my kids. As parents, how many times do we say to our kids: stop it...don't do that...quit it...cut it out! Like, all the time! But as parents, we need to realize that simply correcting our kids' negative behaviour without giving them a positive alternative isn't really helping them grow. Telling them what to avoid is absolutely necessary, but so is showing them what to pursue - that's what leads to true transformation.

And this is exactly what Paul is doing here. Reminding us that true transformation is the point. And the only way for that transformation to happen is when we stop embracing sin and start embracing the ways of Jesus.

So in response to his putting off the old man and putting on the new man, Paul now goes on to give 6 specific examples of what this looks like. Although these 6 examples are specifically positioned towards the church in Ephesus, they are equally as true for us here today.

Of the six, five follow the 'Don't do this, but instead do this,' format, but there is one that stands out as just a don't:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

I want you to see that this is intentional by Paul because the point of the whole section is: to not grieve the Holy Spirit. This is the anchor point to which everything else is connected.

Which again, if you're anything like me raises another question? Well, why would Paul phrase it like

that? Why wouldn't he just say that in maintaining these 5 instructions, this is how you honour the Holy Spirit?

What Paul is doing here is so significant. By using the negative imperative here instead of the positive, Paul is emphasizing the relational nature of the Holy Spirit's role in our lives. To grieve someone is deeply personal. The Greek word *lypēo*, used here for 'grieve,' conveys the idea of profound sorrow. In English, we often associate the word 'grief' with the death of a loved one - a deeply profound sorrow that comes from the breaking of a relational bond.

By using that same language here, Paul is reminding the church that the relationship that we have with the Holy Spirit is family. It is intimate and deeply connected, and our actions affect the Spirit profoundly, just as they would with someone in our biological family. So, by saying, 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit,' Paul is positioning the Ephesians to understand the seriousness of their sin - not as just breaking the rules, but the direct and painful impact it has on their relationship with the Lord.

So the other five instructions are therefore not stand-alone commands; they are directly tied to this overarching principle of not grieving the Holy Spirit. And as such, they serve as an outline of the specific ways that the church in Ephesus - and we today - can either honour or grieve the Holy Spirit through our actions and attitudes.

For example, in just a few moments we are going to take a look at the first of the 5 examples: lying. When we choose to lie, it hurts the Holy Spirit. But if we were to stop lying but not speak truthfully, that too would grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul is making the point that we need to stop lying and start speaking truthfully. For in doing so, we honour the Holy Spirit instead of grieving Him.

Now, onto the 5 ways to honour the Holy Spirit instead of grieving Him:

Stop lying - speak truth. Why? Because Paul says that we are all members of the same body. This is key. Paul is referring to his example of the church being a body with different members. If any member of the body embraces lying, then the entire body is affected.

Think about it this way: Imagine your hand is hovering over a hot stove, but your brain sends false signals, indicating that the stove is cold. Your hand will remain there, suffer massive damage, and potentially be rendered unfit for use. As a result, your whole body will have to adapt to life without a hand. Hopefully, it wasn't the right hand...lol. On top of that, this creates massive trust issues with the brain and the rest of the body? How does the rest of the body know when they can trust the

signals that the brain is giving if it did this to the hand!?!?

In the same way, when dishonesty infiltrates even one member of the church, it damages the unity and trust of the entire body, making it harder for the church to function as God intended. But Paul doesn't stop at simply telling us to speak truth. In Ephesians 4:15, he reminds us that we are to speak the truth in love.

This means that telling the truth must be about building others up in a way that reflects Christ's love. Truth spoken without love can cause just as much harm as dishonesty. But the truth spoken with love can actually strengthen relationships, build trust, and even contribute to the unity and growth of the body of Christ.

And lastly, at the end of the day, the Bible makes it clear that, 'we shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free.' (John 8:32)

Be angry, but do not sin. It's not that being angry is a sin - for there are many examples where anger is a justified and proper response. However, anger can often lead us to take sinful actions if we aren't careful. Paul goes on to say that you are not to let the sun go down on your wrath or give opportunity for the devil. You see, even though it is not a sin to be angry, Paul knows that for some people, being angry can create a lack of self-control. And in those moments, the devil seizes the opportunity to exploit our anger, turning it into bitterness, resentment, or destructive actions. When left unchecked, anger can fester and grow, causing great harm to relationships and damaging our witness as followers of Christ.

This is why Paul urges us to not let the sun go down on our wrath - because unresolved anger gives the devil a foothold, allowing him to sow division within us and among others. Instead, we are called to process anger in a way that honours God: by addressing conflict instead of suppressing it, seeking reconciliation, and allowing the Spirit to guide us towards peace.

Relate to Jordan and myself: I hate conflict and the tension that I feel when we are fighting so I am often quick to want to resolve the conflict, kiss and make up and move on. Not so with Jordan - she is wired very, very differently. She needs time to process.....and with Jordan, you never quite know how much time...lol. So, even though we are both wired differently, the same truth applies to us that we need to resolve the conflict and not let it sit and fester and grow. This is what is meant by the sun going down on your wrath.

In addition to that, we must learn to channel our anger constructively and surrender it to God so

that it doesn't control us or lead us into sin. In doing so, we reflect Christ's example of righteous anger, which was always rooted in love and aimed at restoring justice and truth, never in tearing others down.

Stop stealing and start earning. At first glance, this might seem like something that should be generally understood, but Paul addresses it specifically because historically, it was a real issue in the church at Ephesus. Historians suggest that during this time, some people in the church were losing their jobs, and the temptation to steal in order to provide for their families became a pressing challenge. It might have seemed like the easiest or quickest solution.

But Paul is clear - stealing is not the answer. Instead, he offers a better way: work honestly so you can live generously. Listen to what Paul says: 'Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.' Which at first glance can seem confusing after all, someone might argue that stealing could provide more resources, which they could then justify by giving to those in need. But that's not Paul's point. Stealing violates the trust, unity, and dignity of the community, no matter how it's rationalized.

To 'work honestly so you can live generously' means embracing a lifestyle that sees work as a way to both honour God and serve others. It shifts the purpose of work from using the fruits of one's labour to meet not just personal needs but also the needs of others, demonstrating the love of Christ in action.

Don't tear each other down, but build each other up. As a father, I see how words can quickly become weapons in the hands of my super sweet and totally innocent children as their bickering can sometimes turn to full-blown arguments. And it's true, sometimes those words can cut deeper than a 6-inch blade. And when they get going....it can be bad...no idea who they all learned that from.... definitely not us, right hon...?? And I'm like - but you guys are family?? You wouldn't treat your friends like that would you??

There's a deep truth here: that often times we hurt the ones we love, the most. Why? Because in order for love to work it requires an open heart and in order for a heart to be opened it must become vulnerable. You see, love requires vulnerability. And no greater place do we see this vulnerability than in family. The very thing that makes family relationships so meaningful also makes them so fragile. And because family is where our deepest bonds are, it's also the place where the potential for the deepest wounds lie. This is why an offhand comment or a harsh word from a loved one can sting far more than the same words from a stranger.

And because Paul continually refers to the church as family, this is why he uses this example here.

The vulnerability created by love in the church makes it both beautiful and delicate. Careless words or selfish actions in the church can hurt deeply, causing division and mistrust. So brothers and sisters, always aim to speak life, not death.

And lastly: Don't be mean, be kind. Paul says that we are to, 'Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.' This isn't just about being polite or nice on the surface; it's about a true heart transformation: one that reflects the grace we've received from God. Paul reminds us that our ability to be kind and forgiving isn't based on how others treat us but on how God has treated us. As he says, 'Just as God in Christ forgave you.'

This is beautiful because this was the heart of Jesus on the cross. Some of His last words were, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Even in that moment, when Jesus was fully in the right and could have demanded justice, His heart was positioned towards kindness, tenderheartedness...forgiveness. Why?? Because ultimately He was teaching us that true freedom is found in forgiveness - letting go of our right to vengeance and entrusting our hurt and justice to God.

I'm not much a new years resolution kinda guy - and I'm not really sure if that's still a thing or not. But I can't help but think of the incredible timing of this message and the fact that on the very first Sunday of 2025 that we would find ourselves in this passage. It's incredible to me because if there ever was a passage that would line up for a new years resolution kind of a theme, this would be it. What if....what if Paul has laid out our new years resolution right here for us? Think about it! I think God knew exactly what He was doing when He put it on my heart to preach Ephesians. And He alone knew this would be the passage for the first Sunday of 2025. Only God could have orchestrated this timing... I certainly couldn't have planned it! Since I believe this to be the case, I also believe this moment is pre-ordained by God for us here today.

And as we reflect on these six instructions, the overarching message becomes clear: our transformation in Christ isn't passive - it requires action. It's not just about avoiding sin but about embracing a new way of living, one that honours the Holy Spirit. It's an invitation to a transformed life - a life where the old is gone, and the new has come. A life shaped by truth, forgiveness, kindness, and love - all reflecting the heart of Jesus. So church, it's time to put off the old self and put on the new self in Christ Jesus. Get rid of that old sin nature and envelop yourself in the cloak of His Spirit as we commit to true transformation - the kind that only comes through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

So as we close today, maybe the question we need to ask ourselves is: What old habits, attitudes, or

sins do I need to put off? And what new Christlike attributes do I need to intentionally put on? For many of us, I pray that this will be a turning point - a moment when we fully embrace the new life we've been given in Christ and walk boldly into 2025 as transformed people, ready to reflect His glory in all we do.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Blessing

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