

EPHESIANS – “PAUL’S INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING BEGINS”

Ephesians 4:25-5:7

July 31, 2022

Starting in **Ephesians 4:25** – Paul begins this section on his instructions for Christian living, which will take us to the end of his letter. However, before Paul starts giving these instructions, in Ephesians 4:17-24 he once again feels that it’s necessary to remind these Gentile believers, who were once separated from God, on how God reached down to them by grace saving them from a life of utter darkness and depravity, enlightening them from their ignorance, hardened hearts and giving of themselves over to sensuality, indulging in every kind of impurity and greed. Because of their enlightenment they have a new identity in Christ, Paul appeals to them to live a life totally different from their former sinful way of life by taking off the “*old self*,” and putting on the “*new self*,” as a daily routine. And be committed to travelling down that narrow less-travelled road that will lead them to an abundant victorious life in Christ, and no longer on that wide well-travelled path of this world that only leads to destruction, loss and heartache! Don’t be tempted to return to your old former ways!

Paul’s words in these verses remind us that life is vastly different for the mature believer – their encounter with Jesus has changed the way they think, what they say, what they do, and how they see life. Mature believers have turned 180 degrees from a life of self-centeredness, no longer pursuing pleasure, fame, power and influence, and wealth as their ultimate purpose and goal in life, which is nothing but “*chasing after the wind*,” here today and gone tomorrow. Mature believers have decided to choose those kinds of things that will last for eternity, being committed to getting rid of those old clothes they used to wear that no longer fit and are no longer comfortable, becoming a new man/woman, as they now take on Christ’s righteousness and holiness. A new creation!

In **verse 25** Paul begins this section with the word “*THEREFORE*,” which always refers us back to the previous verses, in this case **verses 22-24**. So, now Paul is going to show us what putting off the “*old self*” looks like. How by putting off the “*old self*” and putting on the “*new self*,” we can make a difference in the world around us, becoming an example to others on how to live in peace and harmony with God and with each other. Paul’s concern in these verses is that we need to be aware and reject those things that not only alienate us from God, but also destroys

community, because they grieve the Holy Spirit which lives within every believer. So, in these verses that we will look at today, Paul mentions specific behaviours Christians are to avoid – in their taking off the old and putting on the new. Only putting on those things that will build community and makes the Holy Spirit smile!

The very first issue Paul tackles is taking off LIES and putting on TRUTH – ***“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are members of one body”*** (verse 25). Satan is a liar, and he delights in telling us lies either through others or by putting into our minds thoughts that are not truthful according to God’s Word. Lies distort reality and deception and lying or stretching the truth is motivated by self-preservation: keeping people at a distance, or to get us out of a tight spot, or to lead someone astray for our benefit. And lies usually come in bunches because it’s very difficult to tell just one lie. The problem with lying is that once truth is lost in a relationship, it’s almost impossible to recover trust again, because a healthy relationship can’t exist without truth and trust. However, we need divine wisdom here because we are not to bring unnecessary harm to others, so this doesn’t mean that we are required to tell all we know to everyone we meet, especially when we are to hold something in confidence. Privacy is appropriate and a necessary part of life when we need to protect an individual, especially if it will only lead to gossip! There are examples in the Bible of those that hid the truth to protect lives from evil, such as Rahab who hid the spies in Jericho!

And telling lies or stretching the truth will get you into trouble. There’s a story about a butcher who lived in a small town. It was near the end of the day when a lady came into his shop wanting to purchase a two-pound chicken. The butcher only had one chicken left in his icebox, so he reached in among the ice and pretended he was feeling among all the chickens for one the right size for his customer, and pulled out the only chicken he had left, and held it up, saying: *“How about this one?”* She said, *“Don’t you have a larger one?”* The butcher said, *“Sure do!”* and he put that chicken back in and reached around in the ice some more and pulled out the same chicken, saying: *“This one is larger, will it do?”* She says, *“Yes that’s much better. I’ll take both of them.”* Be known as one who always speaks the truth, for we all belong to one another and building trust and confidence in each other is a mark of Christlikeness. One of the ways we grieve the Holy Spirit is whenever we practice deception and don’t tell the truth!

The second issue Paul speaks on is ANGER – ***“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold”*** (verses 26-27). Anger is an emotion we all experience – and YES, at times, we do need to get angry at sinful behaviour and sinful practices. Jesus was angry when the religious leaders turned God’s holy Temple into a marketplace that took advantage of others for personal gain; turning over the tables and driving out the animals to show his displeasure; however, the point is that Jesus never showed anger towards an individual and neither should we. ***“Do not let the sun go down while you are angry,”*** is a way of saying that anger must not endure over a long period of time. Long-lasting anger or aggravation that lasts more than a few hours or a day is NOT an emotion that identifies the new person in Christ, who has taken off the old and put on the new. And the real danger of anger is that it becomes fuel for revenge and allows the devil to come into your life and set up a base camp from which he not only brings about destruction to relationships, but also leads a person to other sins. Uncontrolled anger is not easily hidden – as it reveals itself in destroyed marriages, family relations, and friendships – being an embarrassment to our Christian witness. Unresolved anger seems to be the number one issue in most marriages and relationships, because believers don’t follow this simple principal: *“Never go to bed angry! Never go to bed with unresolved issues!”* A husband and wife who go to bed angry at each other is like an open wound that gets infected, getting worse-and-worse over time, until it threatens to destroy and kill the life of the marriage. Paul is telling us that unresolved anger that is left to simmer is deadly!

Unfortunately, many believers have a problem with unresolved anger. One summer day a fly was buzzing around at a picnic and landed on a knife that was sticking out of a big piece of bologna. He crawls down onto the piece of bologna and eats all the bologna he wanted, because no one was around to chase him off. Then after having his fill, he crawls back up to the top of the knife and tries to fly off, but he only makes a couple of loops and then ***“SPLAT!”*** Falls to the ground dead. The moral of this story is this: *“Don’t fly off the handle when you are full of bologna.”* That is what Paul is telling us about anger: *“Don’t fly off the handle and get angry when you are full of the wrong things.”* People who are full on Jesus don’t fly off the handle and get angry. So, we grieve the Holy Spirit when our anger and temper is not controlled – we are to take off ANGER and become PEACEMAKERS!

With this third issue in **verse 28**, Paul gives us an example of turning our backs on an old lifestyle that once defined us: ***“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”*** Selfishness and laziness may have urged a thief to steal, but now the new you is to be productive and self-supporting. If a person is physically and emotionally capable of doing so, they must work, and not become dependent or a burden on society or on others, but now share with others, giving back in the way that God has blessed them, so others will also be blessed. However, this principal goes much further than that – you may not consider yourself a thief, but have you ever cheated on anything or stretched the truth in any way. For example: in reporting your income tax to the government, or cheated on a test, or steal time from your employer by taking long coffee breaks or not putting 100% into your work. That’s all theft according to God! A study was done on why businesses always come up short on their year-end inventory, and it was found that most of it was not due to clerical error, but as a result of employee theft, all because employees can usually get away with it. As well in the hotel industry, one-out-of-three guest steal from hotel rooms. Christians are called to be people of integrity and honesty by putting off the old and developing new habits by becoming faithful employees and faithful citizens, who never practice any form of theft or deception because all forms of theft grieves the Holy Spirit that lives within us!

The fourth issue is the power of our words used to hurt others – ***“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful in building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”*** (verse 29). The Greek word Paul used here for *“unwholesome”* describes spoiled fish or rotten fruit, meaning something *“foul”* or *“bad.”* Our words can be rotten, turning people away in disgust! And *“unwholesome talk”* means much more than profanity or the colourful vocabulary we often hear around us. It also refers to speaking destructive words that tears people apart, or words of criticism that promotes negative things about the person’s character, or words that can actually bring curses, and also gossip is included which we can easily get caught up in as believers. Listen to these words: *“I am more deadly than the screaming shell of a cannon. I win without killing. I tear down homes. I break hearts. I wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me. No purity pure enough to deter me. I have no regard for truth. No respect for*

justice. No mercy for the defenceless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea. I never forget. I seldom forgive. My name is GOSSIP!” We are to put off gossip and corrupt speech and put on kind speech that always speak positive, encouraging words. It is sobering to realize that our gossip and inappropriate and wrong words grieve and sadden the Holy Spirit of God!

Then in **verse 30** – Paul turns his thoughts to the Holy Spirit – **“*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*”** The Holy Spirit is a gentleman and easily grieved when we ignore Him, or take Him for granted, or limit His reach or scope, not letting Him take us where we need to go to become mature. We learned back in **Ephesians 1:13-14** that every believer is marked with a seal once they came to believe, and that promised seal is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, who is sent to us by God as a guarantee of our salvation, proof that we now belong to Him, and our destination is eternity. Paul believes that we can grieve the Holy Spirit, and this is very serious business to God. God will definitely not put up with one of His children misbehaving against the Holy Spirit and will bring discipline by allowing the consequences of our actions to get our attention before it’s too late to turn back. We have to remember that since our names have been written down in the Book of Life, it also means that our names can be erased from the Book of Life. God will pardon all sins except sins against the Holy Spirit!

This is a stern warning from Paul that the seal of God’s protection can be removed. There are conditions of the heart that can lead us down that path to having our names erased from the Book of Life. Paul lists these things we need to get rid of in **verse 31**, **“*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*”** When Paul says “*get rid of*” it implies that it’s up to us, it’s our responsibility to get rid of these things in our lives before they take hold and set up bad habits. We can pray to God all we want, but it’s up to us to make things right in these areas. You will notice that these behaviours listed here are linked with the verses before them, because these sins come about as the result of lying, anger, stealing, and using hateful words in a shouting match, as a weapon to destroy another.

All of these behaviours that Paul warns us about here are ways in which we express our hostility towards others. These sinful actions destroy human relations,

which goes against what Paul spoke about earlier at the beginning of **chapter 4 in verse 3**, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* Peace, unity and harmony in a relationship is so fragile that it must be protected at all costs, and Paul in **verse 32** tells us how to do that: *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* We are reminded about this every time we say the Lord’s Prayer. Praying the Lord’s Prayer can be dangerous, because of what we ask of God. So, every time you pray the Lord’s Prayer, this is what you are asking of God: *“if I can’t forgive that other person, then don’t forgive me.” “If I don’t seek reconciliation with that other person, then hold my sins against me. If I’m not kind and compassionate with others, don’t show kindness and compassion to me. Lord treat me in the same ways that I treat others.”* This is very serious business to God, and we are reminded of it every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. So, if we can’t forgive others and be reconciled to others and hold tightly onto bitterness and grudges, and withhold kindness and compassion, then we grieve the Holy Spirit and are in danger of all the good we did in this life will being forgotten and suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ!

As we move into chapter 5 Paul tells us that we are to follow God’s example as His children. Anytime someone tells a father that his child looks like him or acts like him, it gives him joy. I’m sure our Father in heaven feels the same way, so Paul is calling us to the highest standard we can possibly achieve when he says we are to be imitators of God in **Ephesians 5:1-2 (the Passion Translation)**, *“Be imitators of God in everything you do, for then you will represent your Father as his beloved sons and daughters. And continue to walk surrendered to the extravagant love of Christ, for he surrendered his life as a sacrifice for us. His great love for us was pleasing to God, like an aroma of adoration – a sweet healing fragrance.”* We should imitate Christ in conduct, purity of thought, speech, and holiness in all of our ways, surrendering our will to His will as we represent Christ, being a sweet fragrant to others. Living to please God is one way we can show our love and appreciation to Him for all that He has done for us. In numerous ways our heavenly family should be similar to an earthly family. A person often takes on the character of the family to which they belong; therefore, since Paul’s readers belong to God’s family and have received His love, they should be like their heavenly Father and show unconditional love to one another. Thereby, sacrificial love is the way in which every believer walks and lives, and

the standard we use is the same self-giving sacrificial love that Jesus had on the cross. Here again is that reoccurring idea of dying to self and taking up our cross in following Christ's example that comes up so often in the New Testament!

Now as Paul continues his list of behaviours that should be avoided in chapter 5, and sexual immorality is on the top of his list in **Ephesians 5:3-4**, ***“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”*** Understanding the culture of these people to whom Paul gave this message about sexual purity helps us to understand why he repeated this message often. Paul told the Corinthian Christians to flee from sexual impurity (1 Corinthians 6:18). Paul told the Colossians to put sexual immorality to death (Colossians 3:5). Paul told the Galatians it was a work of the flesh and warned them to stay away from it (Galatians 5:16-21), and that’s why this letter is also very relevant to us today. All of these Gentile believers lived in a culture very much like ours, sexual deviations, corruption and immorality of all kinds was rampant and found everywhere and celebrated much like it is today, especially among our youth. Paul said that immoral behaviour of any kind, whether it is indecent sexual behaviour, greed, or coarse and vulgar language, is not appropriate for the Christian.

Also Paul is extremely firm here and unrelenting about making sure that our behaviour is in-line with the Gospel message that he starts out in **verse 3** by using these extremely strong words: ***“But among you there must not be even a hint...”*** of any sinful behaviour getting a foothold into our lives, and then Paul lists six sins that should have no place what-so-ever in the lives of God’s people. As we go about representing God as His holy ones, let no one accuse us in any way of these six types of behaviour that will definitely damage our Christian witness and make us ineffective in reaching others for Christ: sexual immorality – impurity – greed – obscenity – foolish talk – course joking. What all of these behaviours have in common is that they are all the direct opposite of love, there is no love shown for one another in any of the six sinful behaviours. These have no place in the life of a mature Christian! We don’t abuse, belittle or demean others for personal gain or benefit!

Unfortunately, there will always be some believers in every congregation who insist on living in sin – so here in **verse 5** Paul gives a strong warning to those counterfeit Christians telling them that they will receive no rewards in heaven and may not even be granted entrance into heaven. And once again, Paul uses some very strong language to make his point: ***“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”*** Sinful habits and sinful behaviours have no place in a believer’s life, and Paul goes even further by telling us neither should we associate with those who claim to be believers, but continue to live immoral, impure, and greedy lives. People who routinely do the evil deeds listed here in **verses 3 and 4** are considered as idolaters, because they are NOT committed to serving God wholeheartedly. They are immature infants in the faith! So, mature Christians must guard themselves against their influence and prevent them from polluting the church. These immature believers have no place in church leadership!

Jesus told us that we need to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves in our dealings with those that we worship with, always on guard for any destructive evil forces that may try to infiltrate our congregations, bringing about division and disunity. I strongly believe that church members can unknowingly be deceived and be used by Satan to prevent the church from becoming a reforming influence within their communities, so we are to never let our guard down. Many of us here have been affected by church splits, which took place because we lacked discernment and let our guard down and didn’t practice discipline within the body of Christ. Paul knows what he is talking about because he has had a great deal of experience with church discipline, and many of his letters were written to deal with church issues that were causing division and disunity.

Paul then expands on this idea in **verse 6-7**, ***“Let no one deceive you with empty (NEGATIVE) words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”*** Here again Paul warns us about the great damage of those empty negative words that we often speak and often hear spoken around us. The negative words that are spoken around us can suck us in and cause us to question our calling and purpose, as well as question Biblical interpretation, and this is especially damaging within a church setting. Whenever you start experiencing significant decline in church attendance,

when you start experiencing inactivity and complacency, a person can get very negative, which just makes the situation worse and spiral downward even faster. Paul is trying to make us aware that those highly vocal negative church goers can cause a great deal of damage within the church body, and actually bring a curse upon the church, whereby God will take His hands off of that church and let it die. We need to be on guard and aware of those that are questioning the Bible and being negative and critical and not partner with them, so don't allow yourself to get sucked into their way of thinking.

We are to realize that God has called us out of an ungodly and immoral lifestyle into a godly, holy and moral one; thereby, we are to hate sin and do all we can to live holy lives, because what we do with our bodies does matter. Christianity is concerned with the salvation of the whole person – spirit, soul and body according to **1 Thessalonians 5:23**, *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* We were bought with a price, and therefore we should honour and glorify God with our bodies, all because the precious blood of Jesus was the price God paid to purchase us – spirit, soul and body!

Paul's key point in all of Ephesians is that – we can only copy God if we know who we are in Christ, and we do that by getting rid of the *“old self”* and putting on the *“new self,”* behaving as a mature child of God, not influenced and dragged around by the ways of this world. Most people today don't know God and what He's like – so it's our responsibility to **SHOW** others God's character – that the God of the Bible is a good God, who is a God of love, a God of mercy, and a God of kindness. He is the God who loves people so much that He sent His **ONE-AND-ONLY SON** into this world to suffer and die in agony on the cross, so our sins could be forgiven. That's the kind of loving God we serve, and that is the kind of loving God we need to show to this world, and we can do that by putting off the old and putting on the new!

Here's the question I want to leave you with: *“If Jesus' self-giving sacrifice on the cross was a pleasing aroma to God, do our lives provide such as pleasing aroma to God as well, or is that smell that we emit rather foul, like rotten fish, not pleasant to God or to anyone else?”*