

Ephesians: *Grieving the Holy Spirit*
Ephesians 4:25-32
May 21, 2023

As we return to our journey through Ephesians, Paul has ordered the early church to no longer walk as the Gentiles do in Ephesians 4:17. Paul reminds the believers that the Gentiles—those without Christ and without the life of God—are darkened in their understanding; their ways of thinking are futile; their hearts have been calloused and hardened; and as such they are “greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” Paul then charges the church to remember how they learned Christ—how they came to hear Christ, and how they were liberated from the slavery of sin through Christ, “for the truth is in Jesus.” He reminds them that they were taught to put off the old self that was subject to corruption by deceitful desires, and to put on the new self, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

That’s where we left off last week, so please stand and let us pick up with Ephesians 4:25-32: 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let 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. 29 Let 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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let 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.

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) Put Away Falsehood; 2) The New Life in Community; and 3) On Grieving the Holy Spirit.

I. Put Away Falsehood

Paul writes in vs. 25, “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor....”

I want to tell you a story...a little ditty about Jack and Diane. Imagine if you will that Jack has deep feelings for Diane. He invites her out on dates; he buys her expensive things; and he confesses his love and devotion to her. Diane is impressed, and before long she has given her heart to Jack. There’s only one problem: Jack is already married to another woman named Sara...a small, insignificant detail that he has failed to communicate to Diane.

Now, from all outwardly appearances, Jack is a swell guy. He treats Diane like a princess. He’s courteous; he’s gentle; he’s kind; he’s polite. Amazingly, Jack is also courteous, gentle, kind and polite to his wife Sara...who has no idea that her husband is having an affair with Diane.

So, what’s the problem with this situation? Jack is happy. Diane is happy. Sara is happy. Jack is courteous, gentle, kind and polite. Nobody is getting hurt. So why should we think there is a problem?

The answer is obvious: Jack is a *liar*. He is living a double life. Jack doesn't truly love either woman...he only loves himself, right?

There are "Christians" who live like Jack...they are living a double life. They remain "married" to the philosophical underpinnings of the culture—they are "married" to habits and behaviors that are unbecoming of Christ followers—but they have become adept at "putting on" the Christian apparel and presenting themselves as those who are "married" to Christ. They have learned how to live these two lives in such a way that everything seems to be going OK...but the truth is: they are lying.

And here's what we know to be true: There can be no genuine love given and received when the relationship is based on a lie. Genuine love and falsehood are incompatible. If we are going to truly love God and love one another, we must put away falsehood. We must "speak the truth"...the whole, difficult, painful truth. Only when all the falsehood is finally revealed and put away...only when we are speaking the truth and living in the truth...will there be any genuine exchange of love. That is true in marriage...that is always true in our relationships with God and with each other. Falsehood compromises and corrupts loving relationships.

Such is why Paul writes in Colossians 3, "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."

We talked about this last week, but let us remember that the new self...the new creation in Christ...is one who is *being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. That image of its Creator...which is the template of our new self, according to Ephesians 4:24, is one of righteousness (doing what is right) and holiness (a life that is set apart from corruption).

Now, remember, the new self is given to us by grace. The new self is Christ...Christ living in me...Christ living in you. Our old self is crucified in Christ, and our new self is the resurrected Christ dwelling in us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We can do nothing, we did do nothing, to bring about the new self...we are saved by grace...we have been given new life and a new identity by grace.

But, Paul tells us, we must put that new self on. We put on our new identity in as much as we have faith in Christ and we cooperate with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. And according to Paul here in Ephesians 4, our cooperation includes putting away falsehood.

So...let's return to our little ditty about Jack and Diane. Jack is living a lie; he is deceptive; and he is self-justifying because in his estimation "no one is getting hurt." However, one day Jack decides to visit a church and he comes under the conviction that God is not pleased with his lies. He comes under the conviction that his "lies" are not loving...that his lies are wrong. He repents of his lies, and he calls upon Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. Jack is encouraged by the

grace and forgiveness he has received in Christ, but now he is charged to put away falsehood as one who is a new creation in Christ. So, what will Jack need to do in order to “put away falsehood”? He will have to tell the truth to Sara and Diane. In telling the truth, Jack will voluntarily bring pain upon his own life, and we should expect that the discovery of his treachery will inflict pain upon the lives of Diane and Sara. But there’s another problem: telling the truth about his deceptive behavior is only part of “putting away falsehood.”

When it comes to “putting away falsehood,” we must look deeper than human behavior. We must look to the assumptions underlying human behavior. Jack’s behavior reveals his commitment to a particular philosophy or worldview in which “a man can do as he likes and take what he wants as long as no one is getting hurt.” In other words, Jack doesn’t yet believe that there are any moral absolutes. He rejects any notion of the moral law. Jack sees morality as a relativistic human construct designed to prevent human extinction. So even though Jack might tell the truth about his infidelity, even though Jack is sincere in his gratitude for Christ and his desire to do what is right, Jack is still married to falsehood when it comes to his worldview and his functional philosophy for living.

Again, this is a huge issue amongst many people who sit in churches today. Many of us have come so far as to believe that God exists. We believe in Jesus, and we believe that we should be loving towards other people. We believe that we should all work hard to help the poor and the outcast. But we have yet to “put away falsehood” because we continue to be married to secular philosophies and ethics. We continue to be married to patterns of thinking and behavior that are inconsistent with a biblical worldview.

Church, listen: it’s not OK to be married to Christ while at the same time having an adulterous affair with secular ethics and philosophies. As those who have been crucified in Christ...as those who have been born again and made new...we must put away *all* falsehood. That includes our secret lives, behaviors, and habits. That also includes setting aside the lies about our identity, our origin, our morality, our sexuality, our gender, the value of human life, the meaning of marriage, our commitment to self-promotion, our greed, our pride, our unforgiveness, and so on.

Now...take a deep breath and remember: we are saved by grace. There is sufficient grace for every person here this morning, so please know that putting away falsehood is not a condition for salvation; rather, putting away falsehood is the product of salvation, amen? And putting away falsehood is a lifelong process for all believers...it takes time, and that work is made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That said, putting away falsehood is assumed in our life together according to the Apostle Paul. As those who belong to Jesus, we have been called to “speak the truth in love.” There can be no genuine love in the context of falsehood. May our life together as the Church look nothing like a little ditty about Jack and Diane, amen?

Let us turn now to my second subheading:

II. The New Life in Community

Paul goes on to specifically address behaviors and attitudes that must be dealt with in order for the new community to thrive as the Body of Christ. We'll look at each one briefly but let us first acknowledge that these teachings regarding "righteousness" and "holiness" all concern our relationships. NT scholar John Stott writes:

Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced in relation to God but in isolation from human beings. You cannot be good in a vacuum, but only in the real world of people. The evils to be avoided are all destroyers of human harmony.¹ Church, keep that observation in mind. Many of us think of holiness as those things we abstain from or our piety before God. However, if you are paying attention, immediately following Paul's description of the new man 'created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness,' he writes, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Righteousness and holiness is revealed in the way that we treat other people...it is lived out and worked out in community.

Now, the Greek word translated as "falsehood" is *to pseudos*, which literally means "the lie." So we could translate this verse, "Having put away *the lie*, speak the truth to your neighbor..." When we think about Paul's description of the fall of man, and particularly the corruption of the Gentiles, you might recall Romans 1:25 where he describes the great lie: "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." It's possible, then, that Paul is saying, "Therefore, having put away the great lie of idolatry...and every derivative lie that comes from idolatry...having set aside our adoration of the created things over the Creator...let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor..."

Church, the greatest lies that we are inclined to believe are often tied to idolatry. Take any good thing and make it an ultimate thing, and there you have it. When our kids become our greatest source of meaning, we have made an idol out of our parenting. When our passion for work, entertainment, or even the outdoors leads us away from worshipping God, we have exchanged the truth for a lie...we have worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. So, as those within the Body of Christ, we are to put away the Lie...we are to put away all falsehood, all idolatry, and speak the truth with our neighbors "for we are members one of another." Paul again appeals to the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ. Every part of our bodies belongs one to another; and all the parts of the body must send accurate, truthful messages to the brain. If my hand tells my brain that the stove is not hot when in fact it is, the whole body is in peril. Which is to say, lying is a very selfish behavior that does great damage to the whole body. For those who have been made new in Christ, there is no place for lying...no place for selfishness...we must aggressively pursue the truth and speak the truth because we belong to one another, amen?

Next, Paul writes, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

Paul acknowledges that anger is a naturally occurring emotion, and we get the sense that Paul affirms that anger is sometimes necessary, even amongst those who have been made new in

¹ John R. Stott: *The Message of Ephesians*, 184.

Christ. NT scholar John Stott writes: “True peace [in the loving community] is not identical with appeasement.²”

E.K. Simpson writes: “The truest peacemaker may have to assume the role of a peace-breaker as a sacred obligation.³” Jesus certainly experienced and expressed anger at times so we know that even God gets angry; and, at times, in light of injustice and blatant evil, we should be angry as well.

Be that as it may, anger does not justify sin. Paul writes, “Be angry and do not sin.”

As a parent, I will admit that I have failed in this regard. There have been a few occasions when one of my children (who shall not be named) made me so angry that I absolutely sinned. I lost my cool; I lost my temper; and if I could have caught him, it would not have gone well! I think we all know that there is a fine line between feeling anger and then acting in a way that we soon regret.

At the same time, I know what it is to feel anger...to be angry...and then not sin. Many years ago our congregation was sent a hostile letter by our former denomination threatening to take our property if we attempted to affiliate with our current denomination. That letter made me very angry. The people responsible for the letter were threatening and bullying my beloved congregation. That day I resolved to fight the good fight to defend my flock whatever the cost. I did not sin, but the anger I felt increased my resolve to do something about it. God can leverage our “righteous” anger for noble purposes; but, generally speaking, anger is dangerous when it comes to our life together. Such is why Paul writes, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

It is one thing to feel anger; it is quite another to nurse anger. The longer we nurse anger, the more corrosive the effect on our soul. NT scholar William Barclay comments: Paul’s advice is sound because the longer we postpone mending a quarrel, the less likely we are ever to mend it. If there is trouble between us and anyone else, if there is trouble in a Church or a fellowship or any society where men meet, the only way to deal with it is at once. The longer it is left to flourish, the more bitter it will grow. If we have been in the wrong, we must pray to God to give us grace to admit that it was so; and even if we have been right, we must pray to God to give us the graciousness which will enable us to take the first step to put matters right.⁴

Church, the Enemy of our souls prowls like a lion, waiting for an opportunity to devour the redeemed community. Make no mistake: whenever we are angry, we are incredibly vulnerable to the lies of Satan. We must be particularly aware of those times when our anger is attached to our wounded pride...that rarely ends well. As James writes: James 1:19-20 “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

One final word on anger and then we’ll move on. Many of you know that we are a congregation blessed with many strong marriages. We’ve had couples married over 75 years, and even today

² Stott, 186.

³ Ibid., 186.

⁴William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians*, 157.

we have many, many couples who have been married for over 50 years! It's been my practice to ask these seasoned saints to share what they've learned and how they've managed to cultivate strong marriages that last, and almost to the number they will quote Ephesians 4:26 as a commitment they made in their marriage. They made it their practice to resolve their conflict, or at least to defuse the anger, before going to bed. If you are a young couple just getting started, take this wisdom to heart.

Moving on, Paul writes in vs. 28, "Let 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." Theft was a huge problem in the ancient world, particularly at the shipping docks and the public baths. The public baths were the social clubs of the time; and stealing the belongings of the bathers was one of the most common crimes in any Greek city.⁵ Paul knows that some of those who now make up the early church in Ephesus were once scoundrels who thought nothing of stealing from others. But notice: Paul does not simply restate the eighth commandment. Paul instructs believers who once stole to labor with their own hands, engaging in honest work in order to be generous towards those with needs. Think about the powerful testimony of a man who was once a burglar who is now a benefactor...only Christ could account for that kind of a transformation!⁶

Paul next addresses the use of words in the Christian community. In vs. 29 he writes: Let 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.

Many of us were raised with the little rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Sadly, that is simply not true. Words are what set us apart from the animals. Words can create and destroy. In fact, words have more power than nuclear bombs, hurricanes, and tornadoes put together. The words of Karl Marx inspired the great godless experiment of communism in the 20th century...an experiment that led to the systematic murder of over 20 million souls. The words of Charles Darwin inspired Hitler to create a superior Aryan race...we all know how that turned out.

The Apostle James writes: The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell...no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God...these things ought not to be so.

⁵ Barclay, 157-158.

⁶ Most of us can honestly say that we are not thieves. However, keep in mind the far-reaching application of Paul's charge to the church. If you get paid for 40 hours a week in your job, but you only work an average of 30 hours a week, you are stealing from your company. If you fail to declare your tips and wages on your tax forms, you are stealing from the government. Some people abuse their expense accounts or file for fake reimbursements. There are many ways that we are effectively thieves, but such conduct is unbecoming of those who have been redeemed. In the end, we are sinning against God, hurting each other and hurting our witness.

Words matter because ideas matter, and ideas are formed by words. Words can also encourage and liberate. James writes, “Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted *word* which is able to save your souls.” Jesus Himself is referred to as the Word, who was with and was God from the beginning...He is the Word made flesh...He is the implanted Word that will save our souls, amen?

When it comes to our relationships at home, at school, and in the workplace, our words can either build up or tear down...and that is particularly true in the church. Too many of us talk too much and too carelessly. We should all give serious consideration to what Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-37: 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. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Paul makes it clear here in Ephesians 4. As the Body of Christ, as those who have been made new and given a new identity in Jesus, our words should reflect our changed hearts. There should be no more “corrupting talk”, but only words that serve to build up and serve as a source of grace to those who hear us.

Church, I know this is hard, but listen to me: this teaching is not optional. I want you to think about your past week. Think about the words that have come out of your mouth, particularly in the safety of your home, or the conversation with your best friend or your spouse when you are confident that no one else is listening. And then remember what Jesus said: your words are the overflow of your heart. If you really want to know the condition of your heart, pay attention to the words that you speak. Think back on the conversations you had and ask yourself: did my words build up? Did my words express grace? Or did my words start a fire? Words are a barometer of our soul. A corrupt heart will speak corrupt words. That word “corrupt” was the word the Greeks used to speak of rotten, bad fruit. Jesus said it plainly: a bad tree bears bad fruit; but a good tree bears good fruit. You will know...and everyone else will know...the quality of your heart by the words that you speak. Not only do your words affect other people, but we get the sense that our words...our attitudes...and our behavior affect the Holy Spirit as well. That leads to my third and final subheading:

III. On Grieving the Holy Spirit

Having challenged the church to behave and speak differently according to the new life they have in Christ, Paul writes: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ forgave you.

Church, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is a person. We often think of the Holy Spirit as an agency, or a power supply, but just like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is a person...with feelings. And here’s what Paul just revealed: the Holy Spirit of God, who is given to each believer, who lives and empowers the believer, can be pleased or grieved. Many of us who are seasoned believers know this is true because we have come to recognize the pleasure of the Holy Spirit and the grief of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. There have been many

occasions when I have experienced the pleasure of the Holy Spirit...it's the most amazing, joy-filled, supernatural, powerful experience a soul can have on this side of heaven. For me, the Holy Spirit's pleasure is often a tingling from the tip of my head to the soles of my feet, a rush of heat, and a profound sense of God's pleasure, presence and power. I am also far too familiar with the displeasure of the Holy Spirit which immediately leads me to repent and ask for forgiveness.

All that is to say, my relationship with the Holy Spirit is personal...and so is yours if you are a believer. Let that truth be a motivating factor in terms of your behavior and speech. Many a young man and woman has resisted temptation knowing that their poor choices would bring pain to their loving parents. How much more should we be concerned for the way our behavior and speech affect the Holy Spirit who abides in us as the giver of gifts and the one who has sealed our hearts for the day of redemption? May we live to never grieve the Holy Spirit of God. When we do grieve the Spirit, let us quickly and sincerely repent, that we might live in harmony with the Spirit and in harmony with one another as the Body of Christ.

Church, as we close, let us commit then to put away all falsehood...let us no longer live a double life. Let us speak the truth to each other. Let us deal with our anger without sinning while we work to quickly resolve our conflicts. Let us commit to honest work so that we can be generous with those in need. Let us use our words to build up and to extend grace to one another. And let us put away all attitudes and behaviors that would grieve the Holy Spirit of God...which means we love and forgive each other just as Christ loved and forgave each one of us.

These commands from Paul require first that we be renewed in the spirit of our minds every day. We must practice abiding in Christ, filling our minds with the truth of God's Word, and putting on the new self of faithful obedience, rooted and grounded in gratitude for the grace we have been so freely given in Christ. And we must do this together, in community, because we belong to each other as the Body of Christ! This is how God receives glory in our individual lives and our life together...this is how people will more and more come to see the light of Christ in us.

Will you pray with me?