

Truth, Anger, & Work

Ephesians 4:25-28

October 9, 2016

A few weeks ago we talked about Ephesians 4:17-24. We spent time considering Paul's admonition to the Ephesian believers to put off the old self and to put on the new. We used a pair of tennis shoes for our illustration. Most of us have an old pair of beat up sneakers in our shoe bin. This represents our old sin nature that is still with us and still trying to find its way back into our lives. Back in vv. 17-24, Paul never got specific as to which particular issues he had in mind. However, in today's text, Ephesians 4:25-28, he gets very specific. Paul broaches 3 subjects: Truth, Anger, and Work.



Today, we'll spend some time reading over the Apostle Paul's shoulder as he teaches the Ephesian believers. We'll consider these three subjects as Christ-followers who live in Bemidji.

The first subject our text talks about is Truth. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."¹ This "Therefore" in v. 25 reminds us of the context I just mentioned in my introduction. With each subject, Paul teaches us precisely what we need to put off from our old self and what we need to put on for our new self. So, we could summarize v. 25 this way: Put off lying and put on true words because Christ-followers are connected to each other.

The first thing that is interesting to me about this text is Paul's use of the word "neighbor." Last week we learned about neighbors. The Good Samaritan was a good neighbor who showed mercy to a total stranger. But for Paul's purposes here in v. 25, he defines a neighbor more narrowly. Here a neighbor is someone who is a member of the same body; a member of the body of Christ. So Paul is saying, "Christ-followers should not lie to other Christ-followers." Now, that's not to say that we should lie to anyone who is not following Christ. But rather, Paul is emphasizing that as a Grace Community, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we should speak truthfully to each other.²

Apparently, that wasn't a given. It seems obvious to us that Christians shouldn't lie to other Christians. But, Paul feels the need to state it none the less, directly. So, perhaps it's important for us, to consider this subject as well. Sometimes Christians lie to other Christians. We shouldn't, but sometimes we do. Sometimes our old self sneaks back in. This can easily and quickly erode our confidence in other Christians. It destroys the unity and mutual love we are intended to have for each other. So it needs to be confessed and sometimes it needs to be confronted; confronted gently and with respect.³

Lying is not ok. Whether it's a BIG lie or a "little white lie." Sometimes we lie in very subtle ways. It's not always obvious like Pinocchio's nose growing every time he lied. For example, we may choose to remain quiet in such a way that someone else will believe a lie. Lev. 5:1 says, "If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible." And so, as we think about Ephesians 4:25, it's important that we recognize that Paul is not just challenging us not to lie but he is also calling us to speak up for the truth.



In Ephesians 4:25, the use of this word "each" gives us Christ-followers a clear mandate; we each have an "individual responsibility to speak the truth."⁴ As each one of us participates in this Grace Community, it's appropriate for us to expect one another to be truthful. Truth should be our standard and a distinguishing mark of a Christ-follower's speech.⁵

¹ See Zechariah 8:16-17 which specifies justice in their courts.

² Colossians 3:9 concurs: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices."

³ Galatians 6:1

⁴ O'Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 337.

⁵ O'Brien, p. 337.

We also have a corporate responsibility to be truthful as a Grace COMMUNITY. We no longer function independently. Our words and actions affect the whole, for better or worse. So, truth should be a distinguishing mark of any church. In fact, when a Grace Community gets a reputation for lying, it erodes people's confidence in God. To a watching world, the church must be a godly example of what He is like; He is the God of Truth. Honesty matters to Him. And, on the days when one of us falls short, it's important that we choose to forgive those in the church body who have lied to us. And that we do it GRACEFULLY. And, for those of us who've lied, it's important for us to confess any falsehoods we've been a part of and make amends and make things right again. As we choose to speak truthfully to one another, our Grace Community will thrive!

The next subject that our text talks about is Anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 teaches, "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold." Let's summarize it this way: Put off the sins caused by anger and put on reconciliation before the devil gets his hold on you. There is some interesting grammar in vv.26-27. Some of you may be reading from the ESV this morning. You'll notice it begins v. 26 with the command, "Be angry." Hum, really? Be angry? Where did they get that translation? Well, it comes from the fact that this word angry is in the imperative mood. But, it seems strange that Paul would be commanding them to be angry. So, the NIV translators are trying to smooth out what many think is a Hebrew idiom.⁶ They are actually both very good translations. One idea suggests that perhaps Paul here is meaning righteous indignation. Righteous anger is a right kind of anger. It's being angry about injustice and sin. But it's important for us to consider something else: maybe we should just take "anger" at face value.

We need to recognize that God created us to be emotional beings. Anger is one of our human emotions so sometimes we get angry. Even "good" Christian people get angry. And, not all that anger is bad. It's very human to get angry; that's a normal part of life. Because this is God's design, it's totally ok for us to "feel our feelings." In fact, it's unhealthy to stuff our feelings or try to hide them or pretend that they're not there. Now, v. 26 does add a 2nd imperative, "do not sin." Don't let your anger, which is a normal and healthy thing, lead to a spiritually unhealthy place. It's a tricky balance. But, it's the graceful solution for handling our anger in the midst our sinful condition.

V. 26 goes on to the phrase, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." This is a way of saying "don't let your anger fester over time." Don't sit there brooding over your anger. Because, often the longer anger sits, the stronger it becomes. And, the more it comes out sideways and heads to the dark corners of our lives. Lingering anger pulls us back to the old self. We need to beware of our injured pride, of feelings of wanting to take revenge, and of the demanding anger that grows out of our own feelings of entitlement. Brooding over our anger only leads to unhealthy places.

There's an interesting OT parallel to this in Psalm 4. Paul is very likely remembering this Psalm as he writes to the Ephesians. This Psalm calls out to God for relief from distress. The particular distress seems to be that the king is being publicly slandered for the nation's troubles.⁷ Rather than getting angry or letting his anxiety get the best of him while he lies awake in bed at night, this king decides to put his trust in the LORD. Psalm 4:4-5 says, "Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the LORD." This word "Tremble" reveals that the king feels his feelings. But, he chooses to trust God.

Now, I suppose rather than trusing the LORD, the other option would be to worry and fret. Or, to seeth with anger and plot revenge against those who have slandered us. Either way, bitterness can grow in our hearts as we lie in our beds at night. If we are not careful to guard our hearts and minds, our old self can find a way to gain control of our emotions and cause us to think and do things we ought not to think and do.

⁶ O'Brien, p. 339.

⁷ *NIV Study Bible* 2011, p. 860.

Ephesians 4:27 adds the warning, “And, do not give the devil a foothold.” It’s interesting to note, in light of the slander that we just talked about from Psalm 4, that the word “devil” is literally translated “The Slanderer.” That’s something worth pondering. Has anger led any of us to slander a fellow believer? If so, perhaps the devil has gained a foothold in your life.

Notice that the devil “is not credited with producing the anger.”⁸ He just takes advantage of it as his opportunity to use it for his purposes. We shouldn’t blame our anger on the devil but we should guard against allowing it to become his tool. The devil can use our personal sin to work an even greater evil than our own sin nature originally began.⁹ There a great quote from Yoda in the Star Wars saga, “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” Star Wars did not come up with this idea on their own though. Psalm 37:8 urges us to, “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”¹⁰



Anger, can lead us to the sinful attitudes of our old self and to evil actions. It not only hurts you and the person you are slandering, but it also hurts the unity of the body of Christ as a whole. When the devil gains this foothold, we allow him a way in to disrupt the unity of God’s people. The devil loves this kind of stuff. But, here’s the cool thing; here’s the great thing! When we handle our anger in a godly way, it is nothing less than a spiritual victory over sin and the devil. Two chapters later, Paul writes in Ephesians 6:10-11, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

The 3rd subject in our text this morning is Work. Ephesians 4:28 says that, “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.” We could summarize it this way: Put off stealing and put on useful work so that you can help the needy.

Some of us in this room have stolen from others. I know that for a fact because I will never forget the time as a young boy when I stole some fireworks from a store. I took something that wasn’t mine; something I didn’t pay for. And I still regret it. Thankfully, God forgives repentant thieves.¹¹ In fact, it’s a powerful image for those of us who struggle with stealing to remember the thief who hung on a cross next to Jesus. That man was repentant and Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”¹²

Some of us have been stolen from. This can be a hard thing to forgive. After we’ve worked so hard for what we have, to be a victim of someone else’s selfishness and laziness can really tick us off. We struggle to tolerate this kind of behavior. We want thieves to pay for their sin. This is the kind of occasion where we need to apply grace though. We each have our own struggles with sin. Perhaps stealing isn’t yours. But you have your own, so remember our Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”¹³

It’s interesting to note that v. 28 doesn’t stop at simply “don’t steal.” But, it goes on to say “do something useful.” Work is God’s solution for those of us who struggle with stealing. Do something useful!

Rather than putting your ingenuity and effort into stealing, instead use it in doing honest work.¹⁴ Take those same hands that you’ve been using to steal, and put them to useful work. Back in Ephesians 4:19, Paul taught us that a calloused heart is a bad thing, but here in v. 28 we learn that calloused hands are a good thing.

Look at your hands. Some of us have lots of calluses, especially those who work as carpenters, masons, or mechanics. Some of us work on keyboards, guitars, or sewing and we have calluses mostly on our



⁸ O’Brien p. 341.

⁹ In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Paul warns of another potential foothold: “Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

¹⁰ I can’t help but think of Yoda: “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

¹¹ Note 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, esp. v. 10

¹² Luke 23:39-43

¹³ Luke 11:4

¹⁴ O’Brien, p. 343 citing E. Best in *Thieves*’ p. 183.

fingertips. Still others, like teachers, nurses, and parents have callousing on our feet from standing all day. Or some of us even have blisters because we ran in the Blue Ox Marathon yesterday. Those of us who are students, who've had far too much homework lately, feel like we have calluses on our brains. Calluses aren't the only way to show we've been working hard. But they are an illustration of good, honest work that is commendable before God.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 puts it this way, "... make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 is even more direct: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Paul concludes v. 28 by explaining that what should drive us to useful work is the ability it gives us to help others. It's not just about helping ourselves or getting our own bills paid. It's a 180-degree shift. We go from using our hands to take to using our hands to give. This was not only Paul's talk; it was his walk. In Acts 20 we read about Paul's farewell address to the elders at the church in Ephesus. Acts 20:34-35, "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji, we are a Grace Community. We are here to work hard together; to serve and care for one another. In order for us to dwell together in unity, we must live lives worthy of the calling we have received.

Here is my prayer for our church: Lord, help us to put off our old selves. Help us put off lying and any sins that are caused by anger. Teach us to stop stealing and to do something useful with our time and energy. Lord, help us to be people who speak the truth in love, who pursue reconciliation with each other, and who do useful work that allows us to bring blessing to others. Lord, may You be glorified, as we become the beautiful Grace Community that you intend us to be. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

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