

Opening Words

We have three solid underpinnings for the Christian life – and the third one is – doing it all in community. We cannot live this life alone.

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Practical instruction without theology is incomplete, and theology without practical instruction is incomplete as well. God wants us to have both. As we move forward in chapter four of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are going to see some of Paul's most practical instruction for living in a Christ-pleasing manner.

He has given us the theological background in the preceding verses. He told us that when we came to Christ, at that moment we put off our relationship with the old man, Adam, our guilty status before God. That is Ephesians 4:22. At that same moment we put on our relationship with the new Man, Jesus Christ, our justified standing before God. The old is gone, the new has come. And in verse 23 he told us that we are being renewed at the very core of our being. We are being renewed in the spirit of our mind. Because of what Christ has done in transferring us from the old man, the old status, to the new man, the new status, and considering what the Spirit of God is doing to renew us, Paul then lays out the kind of life every believer should live, the kind of life consistent with our new status in Christ.

Paul begins verse 25 with the word "therefore." He is saying, because of what God has done for us in rescuing us from the condemnation of the world, therefore, live this way. Let's look at our passage. We begin in Ephesians 4:25 and I will read through 5:4.

²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. ²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ 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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

³ But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

I would like to make a few general observations about this passage before we take a closer look. First, notice how Paul has a balance between negatives and positives. For example, in verse 25 he tells us, negatively, to lay aside falsehood and positively, to speak truth. In verse 28 he tells us, negatively, not to steal and positively to work and to give. In verse 29 he tells us, negatively, not to let unwholesome speech come from our mouths and positively to speak edifying words.

This is an important principle we must embrace. We must search out those behaviors that are displeasing to God, that are inconsistent with our status in Christ and say “no” to them. Just as we put off our old guilty status in Adam, we must put off the behavior that goes with that guilty status. When temptation comes our way, we must say no to temptation, even if it is hard. In my book, *Dead Men Rising*, I have an entire chapter devoted to this. I spend an entire chapter writing on Romans 6:12 where Paul says, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.” Sin, which is still present and alive in us, will entice us to follow it. It will entice us by telling us that if we follow its way we will have satisfaction. It offers itself to us as a friend but once we embrace sin, we find that it is a harsh taskmaster, and it reigns over us. It dominates us. We must learn to say “no” to sin even when it is hard to say, “no.”

The flipside is just as important. We must learn to say “yes” to righteousness consistently. If we are always on the defense, we will eventually run out of energy and will give in. I like to use the illustration of a football team that has a great defense but a lousy offense. If the defense is constantly on the field, no matter how good they are, they will eventually get tired, give in, and the other team will score. The same happens with sin. We must not only say “no” to sin, we must say “yes” to the good things of God and practice the positive.

Second, as we look at this list of verses, I want you to notice how Paul reinforces the practical commands with good theology. It seems that good theology, the expression of what God has done for us in Christ is never far from his mind. So, for example, in verse 25, when Paul tells us to lay aside falsehood and to speak truth, he gives the rationale for it – “we are members of one another.” This is the great doctrine of the Body of Christ that he spoke so eloquently about in 4:4 and especially in 4:11-16.

In verse 30 he speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in sealing us for the day of redemption. This is why we should pursue this new kind of life. In verse 32 he speaks of the great work of God of forgiving us in Christ Jesus. This is why I began today’s broadcast by saying – “Practical instruction without theology is incomplete, and theology without practical instruction is incomplete as well. God wants us to have both.” A Christian who has both will be a formidable weapon in the hands of God.

Third, this passage is highly relational. Paul speaks about how we speak to one another, how we treat one another’s possessions, how we express our displeasure towards one another and many other behaviors such as bitterness, slander, anger, and malice. We are to do the opposite of these by being kind, forgiving, and speaking words of edification. This shows that pursuing a Christ-pleasing life does not happen in isolation. It happens in community. We can only grow in community. This takes us back to one of Paul’s great themes in chapter 2 where he showed us that the great

reconciling work of God was twofold. It was to reconcile us to himself and it was to reconcile us to one another. Listen again to these always relevant words in 2:14-16:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Brothers and sisters, we have three solid underpinnings to living the Christian life – learn good theology, embrace both the negative side (saying no to sin) and the positive side (engaging in Christ-like discipline and behavior), and do it all in community. Do it with others. When we base our Christian practices on this kind of solid foundation we will do much better than those who do not. I am afraid that so much teaching doesn't have this solid biblical foundation. I am afraid that so much teaching is more like modern, pop psychology that we hear on television or see in bookstores. It is these three overarching principles that I have described that distinguish us from our superficial world – good theology, embracing both the negative and positive, and practicing it in community.

Let's take a few moments and organize these verses, 4:25-5:4 into six areas of growth for every Christian.

1. We must say "no" to lies and "yes" to truth speaking with others. In 4:25 he says, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another."
2. We must say "no" to anger and resentment and "yes" to solving disputes with one another. IN 4:26 he says, "BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,"
3. We must say "no" to stealing and "yes" to working with our hands and being generous with our paycheck from our work. In 4:28 he says, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor ... so that he will have *something* to share "
4. We must say "no" to evil speech and "yes" to edifying speech. In 4:29, Paul says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification."
5. We must say "no" to unkind, bitter behavior and "yes" to loving, forgiving, kind behavior. In 4:31-32 Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath ... be put away from you [and] be kind to one another, forgiving each other."
6. We must say "no" to immorality and "yes" to a life of thanks. We find this in 5:3-4.

I hope you are ready for some rock-solid, detailed investigation of the new life. There is something in here for everyone! As I have said before on many occasions, we like to compartmentalize certain kinds of sins and sinners. We like to point out the big sins of immorality that Paul does talk about in chapter 5, but we forget the smaller ones like slander, lies, unwholesome speech, and so on. We like to look for stones to throw at the big sins and the sinners who commit them, and we forget that in God's eyes he grieves over all sin. In fact, in this section where it says the Holy Spirit grieves, it is in

the section where the so-called smaller sins are being talked about, not the bigger sins of immorality.

So, yes, there is something for everyone. But let's approach this passage humbly and let God's Spirit point out areas of need in our lives. Your need may be different from mine. Your neighbor's need may be different from yours. But let's all turn from sin in our lives and then we can help one another with grace and humility.