

# The Old And New Life: In Practice

REVIEW: Last week we looked at Paul contrasting the old life with the new life in Christ. How we have taken off the old self and put on the new self. This new self is based solely around Christ. That is the basis of their learning. When we come to Christ, we have been recreated to be like God in holiness, and righteousness. To be clear, we are NOT holy like God is holy, other than the fact that we now have the righteousness and holiness of Christ on us, and we have been given the ability to say no to sin because the chains of sin have been broken!

TRAN: Today we turn a serious corner. Last week was the introduction to the practical life. We have been practically changed to be able to live a life that really displays the change in life.

INTRO: So today, Paul begins to get specific about what it means to put off the old self and put on the new self. In fact, we know these two sections of Scripture are connected because God uses the same words to connect them. Paul is being intentional when he starts off by saying “Therefore, each of you must PUT OFF falsehood...”

The flow moves from the heights of learning Christ, to the practical, rubber-meets-the-road of how Christians are to behave. The interesting part is that the practical outworking of our faith has to do with relationships with others. It shows us that sin against our brothers and sisters is sin against God.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

- I. Paul begins to outline behaviors that are appropriate for the new person
  - A. He does so in almost every instance by first stating what not to do
  - B. Then he states what to do
  - C. And finally, and in almost all cases, he gives the motivation for why the new person does these things
  - D. The behaviors that Paul is encouraging are actually behaviors that an ethicist of the day might have held as virtues
    1. However, just because ethicists encouraged these, does not mean society held to these
    2. Paul’s concern here is not for holding the right viewpoint about these behaviors, his concern is obedience to the right behavior
      - a) The reason for the right behavior is found back in Ephesians 4:1-16 (which we looked at before Advent)
      - b) The reason: That God’s people may demonstrate unity in love in practical ways

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- c) So it is the unity of this new people of God that has been created through the work of Christ that Paul is now concerned with
  - (1) This is how we should treat one another
- II. Practical “new person” behaviors - 4:25-32
  - A. First behavior - “put off falsehood”
    - 1. We already said that Paul used this phrase intentionally - he wanted us to connect the practical with the general
    - 2. This was a way that the old self was characterized
    - 3. But Paul didn’t just want to give what they should not do, he gave what should be the character quality of the new self
      - a) “Speak truthfully to your neighbor”
    - 4. This phrase that Paul uses actually harkens back to the OT - Zech. 8:16
      - a) Paul is quoting the LXX (Greek translation of the OT) - so if you look it up here, it will use the phrase “to one another”
      - b) The context of Zechariah is more important than many give it credit for here
        - (1) Paul probably used this quote to boost the weight of the teaching by showing it came for previous sources - not just from him
        - (2) In Zechariah, this is the first in a series of commands given to the new community
          - (a) Right before this verse in Zech. are divine promises about the New Jerusalem given to the remnant of the Israelites that returned home from being in exile
          - (b) It is a description of how God expected His people to behave because they were His covenant people
          - (c) The command is to speak truthfully to their neighbor - which would be others in this new community God had formed
          - (d) Back in Ephesians we have already walked through the parts that describe God having formed a new community of Jews and Gentiles called the church
          - (e) So this command that Paul gives us is very precise - it is aimed at the new community of the church, and it is how we are to treat one another to maintain unity within the church
    - c) The motivation behind telling the truth adds to the interpretation I just gave you
      - (1) We are all members of one body
      - (2) This idea of the church as the body of Christ has already been mentioned in the letter
      - (3) But think about the body - it is an example of what should be harmonious relationships

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- (4) Our bodies were designed to work together- not against itself
  - (a) In the body of Christ no eye should lie to the foot about a danger it sees
  - (b) John Mackay puts it this way, “A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ.”
  - (c) So the body of Christ is not to lie to each other
- B. The second behavior is not to sin in anger
  - 1. Anger has a detrimental affect on the harmony and unity of a church and relationships in general
  - 2. This is the one behavior that is listed differently than the negative/positive/motivation scheme we saw earlier
  - 3. Again, Paul quotes from the OT, this time from Psalm 4:4
    - a) And again, the context of Psalm 4 is instructive here
    - b) David has been unjustly accused of some sin - they are lying about him
      - (1) His instruction back to these enemies is, be angry if you like, but do not sin
    - c) The Lord turned David’s situation into joy later in Psalm 4
    - d) Paul seems to be using David’s life as a general instruction to the new community of believers in Ephesians
      - (1) In your anger, do not sin
      - (2) Even in David’s life, joy came with trust in the Lord
  - 4. Some preacher’s have said that the phrase “be angry” is a command
    - a) As if God is commanding or commissioning a righteous anger
      - (1) Now I will agree that I think too many Christians have taken anger and made it into a sin in and of itself
        - (a) Nowhere in Scripture is anger called a sin
        - (b) However, anger can lead to sin, so it needs to be handled properly
      - (2) I think the Christian church should let themselves get stirred up in anger to the point where the church will get off its collective butt and do something about it
        - (a) Injustice
        - (b) Poverty
        - (c) Sex trafficking
        - (d) Just to name a few - these are things we should get angry about
      - (3) Now, the problem with the concept of righteous anger - everyone think’s their anger IS righteous
        - (a) No one wants to say, “I’m angry and I have no right to be!” - everyone thinks they have the right

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- (b) Remember that when you stand too hard on your rights, God may stand on His.
- b) I have to disagree that this is a command toward righteous anger
- c) It is more like permission to be angry
  - (1) There are things in life that upset us
  - (2) There are even things in life that it is perfectly fine to get angry over
    - (a) Jesus got angry
    - (b) So anger is not the problem - we have permission from God's Word
- 5. However, Paul does give a limitation for anger - he gives it boundaries
  - a) The first is do not sin
    - (1) Don't let the way you react to your anger become sinful
    - (2) The phrase is best rendered "in your anger, do not sin"
  - b) The second limitation is most likely an idiom
    - (1) "Don't let the sun go down on your anger"
    - (2) In the ancient literature, sundown was the limit for a range of various activities
    - (3) So it was common to hear that about not letting something continue past sundown
    - (4) Paul's point would be simple - no brooding, no nursing a grudge, no fixating and becoming even more angry - that is what too much time does
      - (a) You might need time to cool off some
      - (b) But deal with things in a timely fashion before they begin to fester
        - i) I talked with the superintendent of our schools when I had a tough phone call to return once
        - ii) He told me he always gives 24 hours before dealing with someone so the initial burst of frustration dies down - too much more time and then you get other problems
- 6. The motivation, so it seems, comes from the phrase, "do not give the devil a foothold."
  - a) The word for foothold literally means "place"
  - b) The verse could be legitimately translated "Do not give the devil a place to exert his influence."
  - c) A similar expression that plays into this is in Romans 12:19
    - (1) "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave ROOM for God's wrath."
    - (2) Room means a place, or chance

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- d) When we get angry, when we let that anger simmer, we are giving the devil a place, a chance to mess things up, and in context, what the devil is messing up is the unity of the new covenant family, the church
  - e) Which is why we need to watch ourselves when anger comes around, and follow the guidelines God gives us through Paul
- C. The third behavior - anyone who steals must steal no more
- 1. This really should be a “sign of the times” type command
    - a) It shows us what this part of the ancient world was like
    - b) This was what they WERE like
      - (1) It shows us a little of the character of those that became Christians
      - (2) And it shows us how basic discipleship had to be back then - don’t steal - most of us would know that is wrong
  - 2. So they are not supposed to steal (the negative) BUT they should work with their hands (the positive)
    - a) Work with their hands does not mean only manual labor
    - b) It simply means to be productive with their hands
    - c) It was a means of contrast to stealing
  - 3. The motivation is so they would have something useful to share with others
    - a) Either by their own production
    - b) Or by earning a wage they could share
  - 4. This too was for the purpose of unity
    - a) Stealing from your brothers or sisters was wrong
    - b) You should instead, be productive so you can help those in need
- D. The fourth behavior - no unwholesome talk
- 1. The first time he mentioned speech it was about truth or lying, this time it is about good or bad speech
  - 2. The words he is using give a comprehensive view of speech
    - a) No words that a Christian utters should be harmful
    - b) The word for “unwholesome” is used in other places in the NT to describe decaying trees, rotten fruit, and rotten fish
  - 3. So what is prohibited is harmful speech like abusive language, vulgar speech, slander, etc.
  - 4. The positive - only speech that helps build others up
    - a) Given that as our guide, I have to ask, does that mean we are not supposed to hold people accountable if they are erring in some manner?
    - b) The answer would be “no” for two reasons

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- (1) First, earlier in the chapter we were given the directive to speak the truth in love - truth is our measure
    - (a) There are, of course positive ways and negative ways to speak the truth
    - (b) So you have to choose the most positive manner to relay the truth
  - (2) Second, we are to speak what builds people up
    - (a) If someone is erring in some way, how are they being built up if we hide the truth from them?
    - (b) We tell them the truth, we confront them positively so they can grow
  - c) And that, in fact, is the motivation - “that it may benefit those who listen.”
- E. The fifth behavior - do not grieve the Holy Spirit
1. The verse starts with a most important word - AND
    - a) Why is it so important? - It links this verse with the previous
    - b) So the verses could have been written, “do not let unwholesome talk come from your mouths...and do not grieve the Holy Spirit”
  2. Why are unwholesome talk and grieving the Holy Spirit linked in this way?
    - a) Honestly, this verse of “grieving the Holy Spirit” has been used to abuse others
      - (1) People have put all category of sins under this heading
      - (2) Even several things that are not sins
    - b) Sadly, they miss the point of the text: grieving the Holy Spirit in the context, and being linked to verse 29 means doing things that bring division and pain to the body
      - (1) The Holy Spirit is the divine reconciler, and unity within the body
      - (2) He is especially grieved when members of the body say unwholesome things to one another
      - (3) Wider than just our speech, the Spirit is grieved when anything disrupts the unity of the body of Christ
        - (a) Sadly, the Spirit must often live in grief
        - (b) We, the Body of Christ, I think have done more harm than good to our own body with church splits, grudges, and all kinds of horrible things
      - (4) What is interesting is grieving the Spirit is not an attack on the Spirit - it is sinful activities which harm the church
  3. Paul again draws from the OT in Isaiah 63:10

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- a) Isaiah had just been talking about how God led the Israelites by His presence out of the wilderness into rest, but they grieved the Holy Spirit
- b) Paul, by using this as the backdrop is subtly saying, “Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit like Israel did back then. His presence is with you, and in fact, you have been sealed until the day of redemption by His Spirit.”
- 4. And the sealing until the day of redemption - big idea
  - a) It shows more of this now and not yet theology we are talking about
  - b) We are sealed by the Holy Spirit now, and we will receive full redemption later because of that sealing
- F. Verses 31-32 return to the second behavior - anger
  - 1. We again see the negative, positive, motivation pattern
  - 2. We also see Paul heaping up adjectives again as well
    - a) Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling (which actually has the idea of shouting - so if you think God never forbade shouting matches in anger, think again), and slander (which is more a result of anger)
  - 3. Then Paul lists the flip side - kind and compassionate, forgiving
  - 4. And the motivation - just as God in Christ forgave you
    - a) When you have trouble forgiving someone, remember what Christ forgave you for
- III. Eph. 5:1-2 actually is the conclusion of Paul’s thoughts in chapter 4 (the chapter and verses divisions are not original)
  - A. All of what Paul has just said can be summed up by following God’s example
    - 1. We are to “walk in the way of love”
      - a) It means to live in love - that is our purpose and how we respond to things
    - 2. The reason - because we are dearly loved children
      - a) And because Christ loved us
      - b) And gave Himself up for us
  - B. I find it interesting when people attempt to reduce all of the commands of the Bible down to “love God with all your heart and love your neighbor”
    - 1. True, Jesus says that summarized all the commands
    - 2. But according to this passage, Paul delineates what love looks like with some practical examples
      - a) So to try to throw out specific ways in which we love one another in favor of a generalized statement seems silly
  - C. This is the only place in the Bible we are called to be “imitators of God”
    - 1. The Bible assumes that God’s people will take their character from Him
      - a) The OT repeats it often, “Be holy as I am holy”

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2. Have you ever noticed that a person takes on the characteristics of the family they belong to?
  - a) So if you belong to God's family, you take on those characteristics

## IV. Application

- A. This passage can bring up questions that we have not yet addressed, and honestly will not have time to fully address today
- B. The first question: Is it ever right to lie?
  1. This is a question that has baffled man for centuries
  2. Often it is thought that it is okay to lie to preserve life
    - a) However this can become a slippery slope
    - b) Does that mean I can lie to preserve my life as I want it?
    - c) Justifications can be made all too quickly when it comes to this idea of lying to preserve life
    - d) And the reality is that few of us, if any, will ever be put in a position to have to lie to preserve someone's life
  3. I understand that I have not answered this question, and have only scratched the surface of it
    - a) But that is why we interact with the Bible
    - b) That is why we pray over difficult decisions
    - c) That is why we wrestle with questions like these with our fellow believers
- C. The text calls us to be forgiving
  1. But is forgiving kind of wimpy? Won't we be run over by a hostile world?
  2. The fact is that sin produces more sin in our world
    - a) The concept of forgiveness is something that breaks the cycle of sin and violence in the world
    - b) The reality is wimpy people should not become Christians
      - (1) We are called to do the difficult thing and forgive
      - (2) To break the cycle of sin and display the love and forgiveness of God
  3. The difficulty comes in because it can be hard to forgive
    - a) But often lack of forgiveness comes not from a sense of justice, but from self-centeredness
    - b) We are asked to act like Christ acted - in love and forgiveness
      - (1) Forgive as He forgave us
      - (2) That is the standard
      - (3) That is what we should look at each time we are faced with the moment to forgive someone
- D. The final area - Unity

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1. We learn that the Spirit is grieved because of the family not getting along with one another - hurting each other
  2. How are you doing with maintaining the unity of the Spirit?
    - a) The Spirit gave us the unity
    - b) He made us into one Body
    - c) But we are to maintain the unity
  3. Are you guilty of any of the things mentioned here against your brothers and sisters in Christ?
    - a) Lying - even little white lies
    - b) Anger that has not been dealt with properly?
    - c) Not working to produce something for the benefit of others?
  4. Is there someone that you need to seek forgiveness from?
    - a) Maybe even the whole Body of Christ at FCC
  5. If there is, will you make the commitment today to repair the unity of this Body, and seek to maintain it for the future?
- E. That is a commitment we all should be making - seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit here at FCC