

WHO AM I?

Ephesians



THE CHURCH'S NEW CLOTHES

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 4:25-32

Words hurt. It is astonishing how long the effects of an unkind comment can endure. Often words spoken carelessly are as painful as a physical attack. Proverbs 12:18 compares such words to "sword thrusts."

In Ephesians 4, believers are instructed to "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). One of the ways we "put off" the old self (v. 22) is by refusing to speak in ways that do not reflect Christ. Paul 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. (v. 29)

The Greek word *sapros*, here translated "corrupting" is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe bad fruit (Luke 6:43) or bad fish (Matt. 13:48). It means *rotten*. Gossip, slander, coarse jokes, insults - all of these things have no place in the life of the church. Our speech should, without exception, have the effect of edifying and building up our fellow believers.

Make no mistake: obeying this command of Scripture doesn't come naturally to us. It requires daily submission to God. We must depend on him to guide our conversations. We must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, knowing that he is grieved when we speak poorly to or against another individual whom he indwells (v. 30). We must "be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). And we must be ever mindful of the fact that what comes out of our mouth is a reflection of what is in our heart (Matt. 12:34-37). God has spoken a gracious word to us. We are called to speak gracious words to others.¹

OPEN IT

1. What's the worst mess you've ever gotten on your clothes? How eager were you to change?

¹ Allen, Erika. ESV Women's Study Bible, Speaking as One Made New. Crossway. 2020.

11. Practically speaking, what kind of talk should Christians consider “corrupting?” (v. 29)

Appropriate Anger Matters in Community

Anger is different from the three other vices that Paul warns against in this series. He sees an appropriateness to anger. He regards it as a proper and even essential emotion. At the same time, however, he considers it as highly volatile and dangerous. Instead of prohibiting anger, Paul commands it using the present imperative verb. The tense should be interpreted as iterative, that is, anger should not be an ongoing characteristic of one's life (customary present), but rather should be felt and expressed on certain occasions (iterative present).³

12. Write out the top 3 or 4 things that really make you angry. Why do those things make you mad?

13. Read Proverbs 6:16-19. How do we reserve our anger for things that truly anger God rather than the things that make us mad for selfish reasons?

³ Arnold, Clinton E. Ephesians. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Zondervan Academic. 2010.

Hard Work Matters in Community

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul uses the thief to illustrate how repentance impacts lifestyle. Repentance involves both stopping (negative) and starting (positive). The thief must stop stealing and start doing honest work. Stealing arises out of laziness and greed, so notice how Paul counters these evil traits by saying that the repentant thief must be the opposite: diligent at labor and generous to share. It is easy to extend this example to other lifestyle sins we are to stop and to positively develop with contrasting, holy lives (see also 4:31–32). At the heart of all Christian behavior is a focus on Christ's sacrifice as our substitutionary mediator which Paul in 5:1–2 casts in terms of an OT animal sacrifice which fulfills them and is the supreme model for our grateful, self-sacrificial love.⁴

14. Share what hard work looks like in your current vocation.

15. Dream a little. How would you like your hard work to benefit someone in need? Is there anything you'd like to do that would require teaming up with others from our church?

⁴ Bough, S. M. Ephesians. The New Creation Walk in Love (4:25–5:2) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/ephesians/#section-18>

Forgiving Others as God Forgave Us

Instead of a bitter, angry heart that spews hurtful comments, Paul commends a tender heart that is not only kind to one's brothers and sisters, but is also forgiving when they offend. Believers should always look to the cross and emulate the way that God has bestowed his forgiveness on us.⁵

16. Forgiveness is an indispensable part of Christian relationships. How do you think confessing our sins to God (1 John 1:9) should impact the way we forgive others?

17. We've studied a wide variety of moral exhortations for Believers. Has the Holy Spirit convicted you of one in particular? Write a short prayer asking the Spirit to change your actions to match your new identity.

⁵ Arnold, Clinton E. Ephesians. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Zondervan Academic. 2010.
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