

## **7 Directives to the New Self – Part 1 – *Ephesians 4:25-32***

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Well today we're going to move ahead in Ephesians and we'll be picking up the pace a little bit as we move on from the in-depth study we recently completed where we examined in detail the 3-step process of taking off our old self, growing young in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the beautiful new self God has created for each of us in Christ.

Today we'll be starting a new section of Ephesians that deals with the practicalities of what it looks like to walk worthy in our new self. Paul is going to share with us some essential truths that we can put into practice in our everyday lives. Up to this point in Ephesians, he's opened our eyes to our new identity in Christ and to all the blessings and gifts and tools that have been poured out on us by God.

Now, in Ephesians 4:25, Paul starts the practical application section where he shows us what these truths should mean in our day-to-day lives. He's going to show us what a walking worthy life looks like...a dramatic lifestyle change that will flow out of a heart understanding of our new identity in Christ, the deep and personal love God has for each of us, and the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells inside us.

I want to remind you that Paul is not giving us here a big to-do list or bunch of rules to follow so that we can earn God's approval. Instead he's giving us a clear and concise picture of the lifestyle God is calling each of us to, so that we will be able to discern truth from error, to identify areas in our lives that are inconsistent with who God is, and to distinguish in our day-to-day choices the direction of the Holy Spirit from the direction of our old self and Satan. Without this clear and concise picture that Paul is giving us here, we would be left to live our Christian lives by trial and error, kind of like a blind man trying to figure out how to do things in the dark.

Now our goal today and in the weeks to come is not to weigh ourselves down with guilt about how we're just not measuring up to God's standard, but rather that we would get a clear picture of where God is leading each of us as we put on our new selves, and to hopefully have the blinders taken off in those areas of our lives where we are right now holding on to our old selves and not walking the way God intends us to walk. And in those areas where we recognize sin has taken root and our old self is still in charge, God is calling us to true heart repentance and a desperate seeking of himself, where we ask him to give us the power to change and show us what we need to do to come clean and make things right with other people if needed.

As we go through our study in the coming weeks each of us may experience guilt and sorrow at times when we see areas where we haven't been walking according to God's design. And when that happens, we have at least three choices: 1) We can justify ourselves and deceive ourselves into believing that we don't have a problem; 2) We can fall into despair and hopelessness and wallow in our guilt and tell ourselves we're not worthy and can never break free; or 3) we can come to God in true heart repentance and godly sorrow, asking for and receiving his forgiveness, and drawing near to him to find the power to change and the wisdom to do what needs to be done to fix the problem.

Paul gives us a great picture of this third choice in 2nd Corinthians 7, verses 8 to 10. The context in this passage is that Paul, in his 1st Corinthians letter, had to aggressively confront the Corinthians on an issue of immorality in the church body. This confrontation had caused them guilt and sorrow when the truth was exposed, but fortunately they chose the third way of dealing with it, and God accomplished great things as they repented and were willing to follow his guidance on how to take care of the problem.

Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7, verses 8 to 10:

***8 For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it — for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while — 9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For***

***the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.***

What we see here is that a godly guilt and sorrow results in repentance without regret, leading to salvation. But a worldly sorrow results in death. And that's the option that's before each of us as we are confronted by other people about problems in our own lives or as we are confronted by the word of God and see areas in our lives that desperately need to change. We can take the way of the world and either deny we have a problem at all or sink into despair and hopelessness when we're confronted by it. Or we can take the way of God, acknowledging the problem, repenting of it, and experiencing the forgiveness and freedom from regret, and the victory that only he can provide. The sorrow of the world leads to death, but godly sorrow leads to repentance, resulting in freedom and salvation and victory as we draw near to God.

So I'd like you to keep that in mind as we begin this study of what a walking worthy life looks like in practical day-to-day living. I pray that today and in the weeks to come, God will open the eyes of the blind and cause each of us to see areas where Satan and our old selves have gained a foothold and where we need to change and grow and come to true repentance.

Let's read our passage as we begin. If you aren't already there, turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4, verses 25 to 32:

***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.***

So as we tackle this passage, I'd like to break it down into what I call 7 directives to the new self. Paul gives us here 7 lifestyle principles that we need to guide us as we learn to put on our new self and walk the way God has designed us to walk...a walk that is worthy of the incredible calling we have each received. And with the word, "therefore," in verse 22, we see that these 7 principles flow directly out of what Paul has been teaching us about taking off the old self, growing young in our minds, and putting on the new self. It's like Paul is saying, "In light of what I just told you, these are the practical ways you should walk in your day-to-day lives."

Today we'll be dealing with the first 2 principles, and then we'll move on to the remaining 5 in the weeks to come.

## II. LAYING ASIDE FALSEHOOD, SPEAK TRUTH

The first directive Paul gives us here in Ephesians 4:25 is to speak truth. He says:

***...laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.***

So the indication here is that in order to speak truth, we need to lay aside falsehood. The Greek word translated falsehood is actually a word we're all quite familiar with because it's used in the English language as well. The Greek word is *pseudos*. You've heard of the pseudoscience called evolution I'm sure. Or how about a pseudonym, which is a fictitious name that people use. The word *pseudo* in the Greek means a lie and in a broad sense applies to whatever is not what it seems to be. It also carries with it the idea of conscious and intentional deception.

When I think about this I get the idea of being two-faced: acting nice and supportive of someone to their face, but then talking bad about them to another person or working against them in the background. This is what we would call being passive aggressive: acting like everything's fine and that you're supportive of someone, but then working behind the scenes to do damage or take revenge or punish someone because of unresolved resentment.

And then of course there's just simple lying, which is so common in our world today. Telling lies is usually something we do to get what we want or to cover up mistakes we've made or to hide our own weaknesses or failures.

And what Paul tells us here is that lying and being two-faced or passive aggressive, is not something we should ever tolerate or be a part of in our own lives. Lying and pretending to be something we're not are the ways of our old self and the coping mechanisms of trying to deal with life apart from God. As the children of God we are called to lay aside falsehood in every area of our lives, and instead speak truth.

Now in the world today where the concept of sin is not politically correct, we tend to justify or excuse wrong behavior or label it as a personality type. We may think of being passive aggressive as just the way some people are or as a normal way of dealing with relational problems. But let's be clear today and biblical in our thinking. To be two-faced and passive aggressive is to live a lifestyle of falsehood and is a dead way of trying to deal with problems in our relationships. We are called to speak truth and to be brave enough by the Spirit to deal with problems in our relationships by going to other people in love and trying to resolve the issues, rather than holding them inside and working secretly to punish other people for the perceived wrongs they may have done against us.

And why does Paul say that we should lay aside falsehood and speak truth to each other? He says we should speak truth because we are members of one another. Now this is a familiar concept because Paul already talked about this earlier in our study of Ephesians. It's the concept of each person in the body of Christ being an important part of the proper functioning of the body.

Now when you think about the human body you realize that it's unified and that all parts of the body are connected to the others. The foot doesn't decide one day to start walking off on its own, or decide that it's angry and is going to kick the face. The hand doesn't decide to break the leg one day or yank the ear off. In fact if we saw a human being behaving this way toward themselves, they would probably be committed to a mental institution.

But as we think further in this analogy to the human body, we can think of some more common and acceptable ways that humans treat the parts of their body in unhealthy ways that eventually lead to serious problems in their lives. Let's take cigarette smoking as an example. When a person decides to smoke, the mind is telling the rest of the body that it needs a cigarette in order to deal with life and be able to make it through each day. And what we know intellectually is that this is a lie. There is nothing in our body that needs a cigarette in order to survive and God has promised to give us everything we need to face each day as we draw near to him. But when our mind believes the lie and allows the body to become addicted to cigarettes, the cigarettes begin to destroy our lungs and eventually we may even die from it. And this is the same thing that happens when falsehood and lies become a part of the way members of the body of Christ relate to each other.

There are few things that have such great potential to destroy healthy relationships and cause divisions among brothers than conscious and intentional lying or talking one way to someone's face and then acting a completely different way behind their back. Lying to each other and refusing to deal with issues face-to-face is toxic to healthy relationships and unity in the body of Christ. Make no mistake: when you walk this way you are not in the right place in your relationship with God and you will not be walking in step with his will. Your prayers and your ability to discern God's wisdom and guidance will be hindered.

***...laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.***

We are one body. Let's treat our body well by working aggressively to resolve issues we have with our brothers and sisters so that we can function effectively and glorify God always...so that we're not destroying our body by the bad choices we're making or the lies we're believing.

### III. BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN

The second directive Paul gives to the new self in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 26, is that we are to be angry, and yet not sin. It's interesting to be commanded to be angry, isn't it? We tend to think of being angry as always a negative thing. But here we learn from Paul that being angry is not wrong in itself.

But the key thing with anger is that we deal with it in a godly way...that we don't allow it to become sin.

Now in looking at the vast number of references to anger in the Bible, what I found was that the vast majority of them are references to God's anger... What we would call righteous anger. The passages also frequently talk about the burning of anger. In discussing anger its most often described in terms of burning..."his anger burned." And when we think about our experience with anger I think we can easily visualize in terms of burning. Anger tends to rise up quickly and can easily burn out of control if we don't deal with it in a godly manner.

Now we know that anger is an emotion and, as such, we can't keep ourselves from experiencing the emotion of anger. It's just something that happens like all emotions and there's very little we can do to keep from experiencing it from time to time. And the fact is: we need to be angry sometimes. There are some terrible things that happen in the world that should arouse our anger and our passion to do something about it.

Some things that come to mind that justify righteous anger are: child abuse, abortion, the senseless mass shootings that have become so common in our world today, domestic violence... These things should arouse anger within us and motivate us to pray and to take godly action. We should never become numb to these things and just begin to see them as normal and acceptable. But in dealing with our anger toward these things and toward other issues in our lives, we need to be sure we are always responding to and dealing with our anger in ways that are consistent with who God has made us to be in Christ.

Sometimes there are things going on in our own church body that can arouse anger within us. One thing that angers me and that I believe is justified anger is when I see believers more concerned about their own feelings or their own personal agenda, than about the unity of the body and about upholding the reputation of God in our community. Or when believers allow themselves to get offended at someone, and rather than going to the person and trying to resolve it, the anger is allowed to remain in their heart and fester and cause a rift within the body.

I would like to challenge anybody in this room today to show me a passage in the Bible that justifies being angry with a brother or sister in Christ and doing nothing to try to resolve it. My personal policy has always been that if someone hurts me, I either need to let it go and forgive and move on, or I need to go to them and try to work out a resolution. And I believe that is a 100% biblical approach to dealing with relational problems in the body of Christ. We don't need to confront every perceived offense, but when something is so deep that we can't let it go and it's affecting the way we treat people, the problem needs to be addressed.

Do I think it's easy to go to someone and try to resolve a problem? Absolutely not. It's uncomfortable, it creates uneasiness within me, and it may not always go well. But what I've found is that when I go with humility and gentleness, avoiding attack mode, most problems can be resolved and relationships can continue. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." And when problems can't be resolved because of unwillingness on the other person's part, at least I know I've done my part and can hand it off to the Lord and spend my energies on praying for the other person, rather than allowing anger and frustration to fester in my heart.

Now as we already discussed, in verse 26 Paul tells us to be angry and yet not sin. So we've established that we can be angry, but what is it that makes the emotion of anger work its way into becoming sin? Clearly there are some obvious ways that anger becomes sin. For instance, we should never resort to violence in dealing with our anger. Scripture is also very clear that we should never allow our anger to lead us to take vengeance. That is always God's job, not ours.

But Paul gives us more insight on another way that anger can become sin in verses 26 and 27 of Ephesians chapter 4.

Paul tells us:

***Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.***



Now we're all probably very familiar with this advice that is often given to married couples. But in reality the principle applies to ALL of our relationships. Paul's not just talking to married people here in Ephesians, is he? Definitely not.

Well the principle Paul gives all of us here is that we should not allow anger to remain in our heart. When we experience the emotion of anger, we need to be sure that we aren't hanging onto it and allowing it to fester and take root in our hearts. If you find that you've been angry at someone for a long period of time and you've done nothing to try to resolve it, you can know that your anger has become sin.

Other Scriptures that speak of anger are also very clear on this point. They speak of the dangers of holding on to anger and laying it up in our hearts. Job 36:13 says:

***But the godless in heart lay up anger; They do not cry for help when He binds them.***

This verse tells us that it's a godless practice to store anger in our hearts. This passage is specifically speaking of people who are responding to the discipline of God by being angry with him instead of repenting and crying to him for help. They are essentially being stiffnecked and resisting God, choosing instead to lay up anger in their hearts and hold onto it.

Proverbs 30:33 says:

***For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife.***

Here we see the effects of holding on to anger and allowing it to churn and take root in our hearts. And what is the inevitable result when we allow this to happen? Strife. When we hold on to anger and refuse to resolve it, it ends up producing strife, just as surely as the churning of milk produces butter and pressing the nose brings forth blood.

And Ecclesiastes 7:9 says:

***Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.***

Notice that anger resides in the bosom of fools. Here we see anger taking up residence within a foolish person. None of us like to be called a fool, do we? But that's what the Bible calls people who allow anger to take up residence within themselves. They not only hurt themselves and their relationship with God, but that anger inevitably leads to strife among brothers. I've been a fool before, have you? Well let's not let that be what we're called anymore.

Another clear principle in Scripture relating to anger was touched on in the verse we just read and appears in many other passages of Scripture, and it is that we are to be slow to anger. As God works within us, we should be becoming people who are gracious and forgiving and slow to becoming angry. Rather than immediately jumping to conclusions and assuming the worst and lashing out in anger, we learn to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Isn't it so easy for us to believe the worst about people without giving them the benefit of the doubt or going to them and trying to determine the truth? Sadly it sometimes makes us feel better about ourselves when we can be angry with other people and believe bad things about them. It can make us feel like we're better than them.

But James 1:19-20 says:

***This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.***

When we allow ourselves to be quick-tempered and to allow anger to dwell within us, we are not walking consistent with who God is. Remember our God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth." Those are some of the words God used to describe himself when he passed by in front of Moses on Mount Sinai. May our lives reflect these same characteristics of compassion, grace, being slow to anger, full of lovingkindness, and speaking and seeking truth in all things.

A final note on anger from Ephesians chapter 4 verse 27, is that when we allow anger to take root in our hearts, we give the devil an opportunity. And believe me he's going to take the opportunity to create as much damage within you and within the body of Christ as he possibly can. Satan specializes in anger and in stirring it up and causing us to become irrational and self-focused in how we deal with it. Remember his goal in life is to bring as much damage as he can to what God is working to accomplish in the world through his church.

If we're going to be angry about something, let it be about the places where Satan gains a foothold within believers and uses it to divide the church. But let's not let that anger drive us into lashing out and destroying each other, but instead let's let it motivate us to work diligently with each other in love to confront the issues and bring reconciliation among the children of God who are going to spend eternity together and should really get their problems resolved now!

***Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.***

#### IV. CONCLUSION

My heart is breaking right now because I know there is some of this festering anger going on right now here in this body. I don't like to make people uncomfortable, but I need to express to any of you today who are holding bitterness and anger in your hearts toward me or the deacons and elders or toward other people in the congregation, the time is now to do something about it. That's not where God wants you to be and remain.

I don't think our Ephesians passage today or any of the other passages we've looked at, could be any more clear that it's never godly to hold anger and bitterness in our hearts and do nothing to try and resolve it. As uncomfortable as it may be, it's time to speak the truth in love to your brothers and sisters in Christ so that these issues can be resolved and we can move on together in unity. It's time to do business with God and seek His wisdom to determine the steps that need to be taken. It's time to experience godly sorrow that leads to repentance without regret and victory over sin in our lives.

I would like to express to you today that my door is always open. If you know me at all, you should know that I'm not scary or mean-spirited, and that whatever you have to say to me I will listen to with respect. I'm not a perfect person and I've made mistakes and I'm willing to be confronted. I also know that there are things being said in the community about me and about our leaders and about our church that are simply not true, and each of you needs to be discerning and alert and not just accept whatever you hear as being truth. Please come talk to me if you have a concern because of something you've heard.

May I remind you that we're in a spiritual battle and we need to stand strong together and fight for God's glory and his continued impact in this community. We also need to take sin seriously in our own lives or it will hinder our continued growth and communion with God and our ability to glorify him and represent him well.

I'd like to close today with a passage from 2 Chronicles 34:27, containing God's words to King Josiah when the Book of the Law was rediscovered and he realized how deserving the Israelites were of God's wrath and punishment for all they had done. Fortunately he chose the third way of dealing with confrontation and the discovery of sin in his own life. He approached God in humility and repentance and godly sorrow. And this is what God said to him and also says to us today:

***Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you hear his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.***

God will listen and forgive and give us the victory when we come to him in humility, admitting our mistakes and turning away from them. He will walk us into repentance without regret and show us how to walk forward in victory by his power!