

7 Directives to the New Self – Part 2 – *Ephesians 4:25-32*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Open up your Bibles if you will to Ephesians chapter 4 today. If you'll remember, last week we began a new section of Ephesians in verses 25 through 32 of chapter 4, where Paul provides 7 directives to the new self...7 lifestyle principles that we need to guide us as we learn to put on our new self and walk worthy of the incredible calling we've received. These 7 directives are particularly focused on how we relate to other people. Paul is getting extremely practical here and in the rest of Ephesians, giving us clear, simple and straightforward guidance on what it looks like to walk in our new self by the power of the Holy Spirit, loving God and each other.

You see what Paul wants every believer in Jesus Christ to understand is that salvation in Christ isn't just something that brings forgiveness of our sins and keeps us from going to hell...though it does do both of those things. No, the salvation that comes through faith in Christ brings new life to every part of our being and affects every part of our daily existence. Jesus Christ brings LIFE in the deepest sense of the word and that life is meant to transform the way we think and live and the daily choices we make. The life Jesus brings is infinitely practical and should affect every aspect of our daily life and choices.

Dallas Willard, in his book called, *The Divine Conspiracy*, talks about a popular Christian slogan we've probably all heard before or seen on a bumper sticker. The slogan states: "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." Mr. Willard notes that while there is truth in that statement, there's a big problem with what it implies. Clearly we all know that Christians aren't perfect. We make mistakes, we sin, and we often treat each other very badly. If anyone here is still under the illusion that Christians are perfect in their behavior, you may need counseling. However, the question is, are we really just forgiven? Is that an accurate summary of the Christian life and experience?

What that statement implies is that salvation through Christ is simply about taking care of the penalty for sin and really doesn't deal with our day-to-day behavior.

The slogan taken as a whole seems to indicate that Christians are really no different than anybody else in the world. We're just fortunate enough to have found a way to get our sins forgiven so that we don't have to pay the penalty for them.

But is that all that new life in Christ does for us? Absolutely not! Jesus Christ without a doubt takes care of our sin issue forever and frees us from the wrath of God the Father. But that's truly only the beginning. When we come to salvation through faith in Christ we come into intimate relationship with the Life-Giver...and the life he gives continues forever and promises to transform the way we think and live our lives as we walk in close relationship with him as his disciples and friends. We are so much more than just forgiven...we are transformed! And we're called to leave the dead ways of the world behind and become people who are very different from everyone else in the world. Only Jesus has the life-giving power to bring about this transformation in our lives.

I'd like to share with you a few direct quotes Dallas Willard's book that speak profoundly to these truths. He says:

“Jesus offers himself as God’s doorway into the life that is truly life. Confidence in him leads us today, as in other times, to become his apprentices in eternal living. ‘Those who come through me will be safe,’ he said. ‘They will go in and out and find all they need. I have come into their world that they may have life, and life to the limit.’

...Jesus’ enduring relevance [throughout history] is based on his historically proven ability to speak to, to heal and empower the individual human condition. He matters because of what he brought and still brings to ordinary human beings, living their ordinary lives and coping with their surroundings. He promises wholeness for their lives.

In sharing our weakness he gives us strength and imparts through his companionship a life that has the quality of eternity. He comes where we are, and he brings us the life we hunger for. An early report reads, ‘Life was in him, life that made sense of human existence’ (John 1:4). To be the light of life, and to deliver God’s life to women and men where they are and as they are, is the secret enduring relevance of Jesus...

When we receive God’s gift of life by relying on Christ, we find that God comes to act with us as we rely on him in our actions. That explains why Jesus

said that the least in the kingdom of the heavens are greater than John the Baptist – not, of course, greater in themselves, but as a greater power works along with them...

So C.S. Lewis writes, our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and 'trying to carry it out.' Rather, 'The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to 'inject' His kind of life and thought, His *Zoe* [life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin.'"

So as we move on in Ephesians today, please keep these profound truths always before your mind. Don't allow yourself to remain in the mentality that says, "I'm just forgiven and no more." Realize and believe in your heart that you're not only forgiven, but you also have new life and power dwelling within you and are invited by Christ to allow him to bring true life transformation to you in your everyday circumstances. Don't allow yourself to miss out on the life that is truly life!

So let's begin today's study by reading our passage in Ephesians 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.

II. DO NOT STEAL, BUT RATHER LABOR WITH YOUR OWN HANDS

So last week we began with the first 2 directives to the new self: 1) Laying aside falsehood, speak truth; and 2) Be angry, and yet do not sin. Today we'll finish this section of Ephesians and deal with directives 3 through 7. So let's begin with number 3, which is found in verse 28: **Do not steal, but rather labor with your own hands.**

First we see that this directive is given to those who are accustomed to stealing: **Let him who steals steal no longer.** Now stealing can take a wide variety of forms. Of course there's just the obvious crime of stealing as in taking something from a store without paying for it, or breaking into someone's home to steal their valuables. But stealing can sometimes be a lot more subtle and more easily rationalized as acceptable or normal. How about cheating on your taxes? Or how about living on government handouts, when in reality you are capable of working and earning a living? Somehow stealing from the government seems to be much easier for us to justify since it's not from an individual person and most people are frustrated with the government anyway. Or what about being lazy at work and spending large amounts of time chitchatting for surfing the Internet instead of getting your work done? That would be a form of stealing from your employer.

You see it's easy to think this third directive is simply for criminals. But we need to be careful that we aren't subtly stealing in what might be considered more acceptable ways. Paul tells us here in Ephesians that as new creations in Christ we are called to leave all forms of stealing behind and labor with our own hands in order to earn a living. We are to perform with our own hands what is good. And this applies not only to the bread-winners in the house who have a paying job, but also to those whose calling is to work at home taking care of the household and family. Whether we're paid in dollars for the job we do, or paid with the blessing of staying home and investing in our families, we are to avoid laziness and perform with our hands what is good.

Paul further tells us in Colossians 3:23-24:

23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

So as we get a vision of the kind of people God is making us to be, we see clearly that laziness is out and a healthy work ethic is in. The new self is active and gets its hands dirty and remembers that its true employer and boss is always the Lord Jesus Christ. We may be able to hide a little laziness and theft from our human boss, or a bogus tax return from the government, but nothing is hidden from the Lord. We're called to work and earn a living by performing with our hands what is good.

And that little phrase, "what is good," reminds us that we do need to be discerning about the types of work we do. There are some occupations and working environments or ways we spend our time, that are simply not appropriate for believers in Christ. The ends don't justify the means for us. If we're being asked to compromise our Christian values and beliefs at our jobs, then we need to find a new line of work. If the way we're spending our time at home is not honoring to God, then we need to make the hard changes and keep our priorities aligned with God's. Paul says we are to be working to perform what is good. We should never compartmentalize our lives like many in the world do today, putting on our church hat on Sunday and then our worldly hat at we go to our jobs or choose how to spend our free time. Instead, we invite Jesus into every part of our lives and our integrity and Christian witness should go with us wherever we go and whatever we happen to be doing.

So why is it that we should work and perform with our own hands what is good according to Paul? Should we do it just to build up our riches and our own personal kingdom? No, Paul tells us in the last part of verse 28 that we should do it so that we can have something to share with those in need. The beauty of working with our own hands and earning a living by hard work is that we can help other people that are struggling through difficult circumstances in their lives.

God's design for us is that we do everything we can by his power to work hard and be able to earn enough money not only to provide for our own family, but also to be able to show Christ's love to other people by helping them financially in hard times. And those whose job is to stay at home and care for the family and household needs can also be ensuring that some of their time is being used to help others in need and teaching the family through action the importance of caring for others in practical ways.

And I don't want to leave this topic without speaking a bit about how Paul's teaching here applies to the current epidemic raging in this country of people spending their entire lives living off government assistance...of people, including many Christians, falling too easily into believing they can't or don't need to work anymore. Now I know that there are legitimately times in most people's lives when we need financial help from some of the government programs that are out there. Sometimes we lose a job unexpectedly or we get injured or the economy goes south and we can't find a job. And of course as we get to retirement age, we often need help supplementing our smaller incomes.

But as believers in Christ, we need to be different from the world in this area. If we're not elderly or completely disabled, we should never be content to just remain on government assistance for the long-term. At the earliest opportunity we need to find a way to work again with our own hands, even if it's at a job we may think isn't ideal, so that we can not only provide for ourselves and our families, but also have many opportunities to show Christ's love to others by sharing from the bounty we've received from our labors. Think about it, if we spend our entire lives living on government assistance, we never get to experience the joy of helping someone in financial need.

Let's learn to follow Paul's directive here...

...let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

III. LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH

As we move on to verse 29 we find the fourth directive Paul gives to the new self: **Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth.** The verse says:

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.

So what is an unwholesome word? What does Paul mean by that statement? The word translated "unwholesome" in the Greek means corrupt or rotten and according to *Vines* is primarily used of vegetable and animal substances.

It expresses that which is of poor quality, unfit for use or putrid. I get a picture in my mind of rotten apples or of a dead fish on the beach crawling with maggots. Aren't you glad I put that picture in your mind?

So an unwholesome word would be a word that degrades or breaks down or corrupts ourselves or other people. An unwholesome word is unfit for use and is worthless. Instead of using these types of words and speech, we are called to use only words that are good for edification. And to edify is to build up. So we get a picture here of using words that build others up in their walk with God, rather than words that tear down and destroy and bring strife among brothers.

I'm sure everyone in this room has experienced the power of words and how they can bring great encouragement or start a raging fire. Well as we walk in our apprenticeship with Jesus, he's going to teach us and enable us to control our tongue and choose our words wisely. He's going to teach us to build each other up with our words, rather than lashing out and destroying our brothers with harsh and careless speech. He's going to show us how to choose words that are appropriate for whatever circumstance and situation we find ourselves in. He will teach us to use words that give grace to everyone we come in contact with. And to give grace is to bring joy, pleasure and delight to other people. That is how our words as we become more like Christ will affect other people.

Does that mean that we never confront difficult issues in other people's lives because it might hurt their feelings? Certainly not. We've already learned that we are to speak the truth in love and sometimes the truth we need to speak may be painful to someone else. But when we speak this truth in a way where the other person understands that it's motivated out of our deep love for them and our desire to see them right in their relationship with God, we will be building them up and the end result will be joy and delight when they choose to respond to the truth in a godly way and learn from it instead of resisting the truth and getting angry.

Speaking the truth in love to another person can be like receiving discipline from God or our parents. It's rarely an enjoyable experience to be disciplined or to be confronted about sin in our lives, but when we receive it properly and learn from it, the end result is positive.

This concept is shared with us in Hebrews 12:11:

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

In my life I can remember a very specific case where this happened to me. It was the year after I graduated from college and I was living back in my hometown. I had made some new friends and we had started a Christian rock band together. I thought this new group of friends was pretty cool and I spent almost all my free time hanging out with them. But the problem was that I was so into my new friends that my family just kind of went to the wayside and became a very low priority for me.

Now every year my aunt and uncle and my cousin and I had a long-standing tradition of going on a family hike and picnic on July 4th. So of course we had planned to follow that tradition again and had made arrangements months in advance for where we were going to go and what we were going to do. However as the day approached for the hike, I found that my new friends also had some exciting plans for the 4th of July and pretty soon I was looking for a way to get out of going on the hike with my aunt and uncle.

When I broke the news to them that I had other plans, it didn't go so well and my uncle firmly confronted me on my recent pattern of making family a very low priority in my life. Now if this had just been a one-time occurrence, this confrontation may not have been necessary. But unfortunately there had been several other cases where I had done similar things and he realized it was time for me to have my eyes opened to my selfishness and the way it was affecting other people.

Now my initial response was to get angry and defensive and to justify myself. But in my heart I knew it was true, though I didn't want to admit it. I eventually made a halfhearted apology and we ended up moving on, but we definitely had a strain in our relationship for quite a while. However God used that confrontation in my life, along with other circumstances, to open up my eyes to my selfishness and the end result was that I learned a valuable lesson that has stayed with me all these years.

It was not a fun experience, but in the end it yielded the peaceful fruit of righteousness and taught me to be on guard against selfishness and allowing my priorities to get misplaced. I became more aware of my desperate need for God.

So the important thing to remember here in this area of choosing and speaking words that build up other people and contribute to their growth, is that our words need to be bathed in love and humility. Our words need to be constructive and not flowing out of our anger or desire to hurt someone for what we think they've done to us. The new self is an encourager and chooses words that spur other people on in their growth in Christ. The new self does, at times, need to say hard things in love, but our words must always be motivated by a desire to see people on the right track with God and not by a desire to justify ourselves or unload bitter anger.

Lord, teach us to be people who speak words of healing and encouragement and truth in a way that contributes to our growth in you. Teach us to wisely choose words that give grace to those around us.

IV. DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

This brings us to the fifth directive Paul gives to the new self: **Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**. Now this directive, I believe, is tied in closely with the next two directives. In studying this passage it seems to me that Paul is saying, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit and I'll summarize how to be sure you're not grieving him in the next two things I'm going to tell you." But clearly the Spirit will be grieved when the new self is not walking in accordance with any one of these 7 directives. God wants all of us inside and out, every part of our being. The promise of life is for the whole person and brings wholeness to every part of our lives. We like to try and keep certain areas from him, but God wants to bring life to it all.

But what we see here first off in this fifth directive is that the Holy Spirit can be grieved. There are behaviors and actions and words that cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit living inside us.

Paul makes this very clear in 1st Corinthians 6:19-20:

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Our body is a dwelling place of the very Holy Spirit of God and he is grieved when we allow sin to take up residence there with him. We've been bought with the precious blood of Christ... We are his and set apart for his glory. We've been sealed by the Holy Spirit, meaning we are marked or stamped by him. In giving us the Holy Spirit when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, it's like God put his brand on us. And my guess is that God's brand would be in the simple shape of a cross, or perhaps a dove to represent His Holy Spirit. We've been permanently marked as God's through the Holy Spirit we've been given. It's a done deal...past tense. As such Paul reminds us not to grieve the One who has marked us for that beautiful day of redemption, the day of release from the penalty of sin that has been made possible by the ransom paid by Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

So how does Paul summarize for us how we can avoid grieving the Holy Spirit? Well that brings us to the last 2 directives Paul gives to the new self.

V. PUT AWAY FROM YOU ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THINGS: BITTERNESS, WRATH, ANGER, CLAMOR, SLANDER AND MALICE

Directive number 6, that is so very essential to the goal of not grieving the Holy Spirit, is this: **Put away from you all of the following: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice.** So directive number 6 deals with things we need to get rid of in our lives, while directive number seven deals with what we are to replace these things with. Verse 31 reads:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Clearly none of these things are to have a place in the life of the new self. In looking at what each of these words has in common, we realize that they all relate to hard feelings directed at other people. They all grow out of an improper

response to experiences we have with other people. Now there are a wide variety of reasons why we might feel this way toward other people. It could be that we're feeling these things toward other people because of our own pride or selfish ambition or jealousy. Or we may be feeling these things because we feel like someone has hurt us or done us harm.

But whatever the reason that any of these things have been allowed to take root in our lives, they are never godly when we hold onto them and allow them to influence the way we treat other people. Notice that ALL of each of these things needs to be put away from you. They have no place in the life of the new self and when they're allowed to take root they grieve the Holy Spirit.

Now the meaning of each of these words is pretty clear. I don't think we need to spend a lot of time trying to dig up some deeper significance. But several of them could use some clarification. Bitterness is easily understood by each of us. However, anger and wrath are closely related and understanding the difference between them can be challenging. *Vines Expository Dictionary* gives us some good insights on the differences between wrath and anger:

“[Wrath] indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation, while [anger] suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge. [Anger] is less sudden in its rise than [wrath], but more lasting in its nature. [Wrath] expresses more the inward feeling, [anger] the more active emotion. [Wrath] may issue in revenge, though it does not necessarily include it. It is characteristic that it quickly blazes up and quickly subsides...”

So with wrath we get a picture of a sudden rise of the feelings, sometimes leading to an outburst, while anger is more a long lasting condition of the mind that often involves the planning and carrying out of some type of revenge or punishment. And neither of these ways of dealing with life should be allowed to take root in the life of the new self.

The word clamor is interesting too. It's not a word we use often these days, but what it speaks of is “the tumult of controversy.” We get a picture of people working to create strife and controversy in order to accomplish their purposes or

take revenge. I also see in my mind a mob-like crowd rushing together in anger to carry out vigilante justice.

Now the Greek word translated, “slander,” is *blasphemia*, and it involves using words to intentionally destroy another person’s good name. Slander often involves telling lies or stretching the truth in order to cast someone in a bad light or throw their reputation into doubt. When think of people blaspheming God, they are telling lies about him or trying to detract from his glory and goodness.

And finally, malice involves ill-will toward other people or a desire to injure. It often involves wickedness that is not ashamed to break laws or do things that are contrary to God’s Word. To me it is the end result of anger handled in an ungodly way, leading to spiritual blindness and a willingness to do wrong things in order to execute revenge.

And what we can know without a doubt, is that none of these ways of dealing with disappointment or hurt in our lives are acceptable to the new self. The life Jesus is bringing to each of us will lead us to leave these dead ways of dealing with life behind. Jesus wants to show us a much better way of operating out lives in him...a life that is characterized by two things: kindness and forgiveness.

VI. BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, FORGIVING EACH OTHER

And this leads us to the final directive to the new self, given to us in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 25 to 32: Be kind to one another, forgiving each other. Verse 32 reads:

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

What an appropriate summary for this section of Ephesians and for the beautiful alternative way of living that Jesus Christ is offering us...a lifestyle that is so very different from what we see operating every day in the world around us.

I don't think any of us had a hard time understanding and picturing what bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice look like. Each of us have had much personal experience with each of these things and have even had times in

our lives when we've participated in these dead ways of dealing with life. They come very naturally and we understand them intimately.

But what we may struggle to understand is how to live life in the new and perfect way that Jesus, the Life-giver and Forgiver, is calling each of us to live now that he has forgiven us and brought us to the life that is truly life. As he works within us and transforms us and walks us into freedom, he is calling us to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving in every single situation we face in this new life we have in him.

You see we've experienced all of these things personally at the hands of our precious Savior, Jesus Christ...where we deserved anger and wrath and vengeance, he's given us kindness and forgiveness and a love beyond our wildest imaginations. The question is: have we accepted it, have we celebrated it, have we immersed ourselves in it, and are we beginning to understand it in a way that transforms the way we relate to God and other people? Because the more we do, the more we will be able, by the power of the Spirit inside us, to grant to others the same things we have received from God.

This is why Paul prays, in Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 to 21, that each of us would experience what I called "The Divine Sequence" when I preached on that passage. Because only when we truly understand and experience and accept the deep and personal love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, will we then be able to grant the same things to others, and to live a life characterized by kindness, tender-heartedness and unrelenting forgiveness.

Let's close today with that powerful prayer prayed by Paul in Ephesians chapter 3, that we just can't pray enough in our own lives:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly

***beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21
to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever
and ever. Amen.***