

Ephesians 4:25–32

Life in the Body of Christ

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In our passage this morning, the apostle Paul is talking about what it looks like for Christians within the local church to live together as members of the body of Christ.

Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*”
for we are members of one another.
~ Ephesians 4:25

Paul spends the first half of the letter describing our salvation together into the body of Christ, which is nothing short of extraordinary.¹ And then, based on the fact that we are members of the body of Christ, he goes on to describe what our life should look like now. Our lives should look different than they once did. If you remember the message from last week, we used the **illustration** of a preschooler trying to wear clothes that belonged to him when he was a baby. The problem is that they no longer fit him. The same is true for us as Christians: *the life we used to live is no longer fitting for us as children of God.*

It’s really important that we consider *the second half* of the letter **AFTER** we read *the first half* so that we don’t get our soteriology switched around.² Christian living comes after salvation, not the other way around. There are many people who have this notion that you can work your way into heaven as a result of your good works.³ They have this idea that salvation is partly owing to the grace of God and partly owing to how you live your life. There are also many people who believe that you can *maintain* your salvation or *lose* your salvation based on how you live. Now, the Bible does indeed have a lot to say about how you live as a child of God (e.g., *Eph 4–6*), but Paul has already made it crystal clear that your salvation has nothing to do with your good works or your moral lifestyle. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone. There is nothing you can do to *earn* your salvation, and there is nothing you can do *lose* your salvation; it is the work of Christ Jesus alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that **NOT of yourselves;**
it is the gift of God, **NOT of works**, lest anyone should boast.
~ Ephesians 2:8–9 (c.f., Heb 12:2)

What Paul is talking about in the second half of his letter is how the local church is to live because they are saved. The way that we used to live is no longer fitting now that we are part of the family of God. Going back to the **preschooler illustration**: he’s not wearing five-year-old clothes so that he can *become* five years old or so that he can *stay* five years old. He’s wearing five-year-old clothes because he *is* five. The same is true for those who are members of the family of God: we are not living a certain way so that we can *become* part of the family of God or *stay* part of the family of God; we are called to live a certain way because we *are* part of the family of God.

Paul starts this section by saying, “**Therefore** (Διὸ)” (4:25). In other words, what I am about to say is based on the truths that you have just heard over the past four and a half chapters. And then he lists a number of things that Christians are to “**put away**” (ἀποθέμενοι). This comes from the same root word (ἀποτίθημι) that Paul used in **verse 22** when he said to “**put off**” (ἀποθέσθαι) the old person; it has the idea of taking off, putting away, and getting rid of clothes that you plan on never wearing again.

¹ One of the hard things a pastor has to learn how to do when he preaches the Word of God is not to allow himself to get discouraged by the facial expressions of his congregation, because there are many Christians who sit under the teaching of the Word, listening to the glories of their God and the wonders of their salvation, and they look bored to death. One of the prayers that Christians need to pray is that God would restore unto us the joy of our salvation (Psa 51:12). You were dead, and now you are alive (Eph 2:1). You were lost in darkness, and now you are a child of light (5:8).

² So that we don’t get our understanding of salvation (**soteriology**) upside down.

³ E.g., Mormon Teaching (**2 Nephi 25:23**, “*saved after all that we can do*”); Catholic Teaching (*mortal sins*); J.W. Teaching.

Example. Like the time that my wife took my trench coat and decided (*all by herself*) that I would never need to wear it again. She also took my favorite Timberwolves pajama shirt & my pair favorite pajama pants (*which she also decided I would not be wearing again*⁴), and she got rid of them. **ἀποτίθημι.**

So, what is the local church to take off and put away?

1. Lying (25)
2. Sinfulness in your anger (26, 31)
3. Stealing (28)
4. Corrupt words (29)

And then Paul summarizes all of these things in verse 31...

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, along with all malice.⁵
~ *Ephesians 4:31*

This was the condition of your heart and mind and attitude and actions when you were a stranger and an outsider to God's family. It made sense for you to live this way because your heart was dead. But that's not who you are anymore, and so that kind of life is no longer fitting for you. Take it off and put it away, and then replace those things with **a spiritual wardrobe** that is fitting for someone whose *heart* and *mind* and *attitude* and *emotions* and *body* belong to King Jesus.

So, we know what we are to "take off". Now what are we called to "put on"?

1. Truthful speaking (25)
2. Righteous anger (26)
3. Honest labor for the sake of generous giving (28)
4. Edifying communication (29)
5. Kindness & compassion (32)
6. Forgiveness (32)

We can condense this list into **three categories**:

1. What you say...
2. What you feel...
3. What you do...

Let's take a minute to look at each of these three categories of Christian living in the body of Christ.

1. What You Say || **Cultivate Godward Speech**

When it comes to what you say... speak truth with a desire to build others up in their walk with Christ.

This is particularly hard to do in a culture that is so easily offended by everything and so quick to cancel anything and anybody they don't agree with. It seems that you can't say anything without triggering or offending somebody. And in a society that rejects God, the truth in His Word is increasingly labeled as hate speech.

- To say that there is only one way be saved...*is labeled as arrogance.*
- To say that marriage is between a man and a woman...*is labeled as bigotry and "rabid homophobia".*
- To say that God created men and women with equal value but different roles...*is labeled as chauvinism.*
- To say that life in the womb is sacred...*is labeled as hatred toward women.*
- To say that parents should raise their children to know God...*is labeled as parental abuse.*

⁴ She said something about how I had worn them so often that they were basically just rags – that were see-through – and no longer appropriate to wear around the house!

⁵ See also Col 3:8.

- To say that families should prioritize the church over sports...*is labeled as legalism.*
- To say that you should be wise with the kind of music you listen to, *you get labeled as a prig.*
- To say that the government ought to abide by the laws of God...*will get you labeled as “a right-wing evangelical [who is responsible for] destroying this nation.”*⁶

But here’s the thing: **truth is truth no matter how it makes people feel.**

When it comes to speaking truth, the goal is not to make people feel good; **the goal** is to lift their hearts and minds closer to Christ. Sometimes, that feels good; and sometimes it feels awful because darkness hates light.⁷ Jesus wasn’t executed because He was a polite person who went around doing nice things. He was executed because the truth that He spoke made people feel very uncomfortable – but it also set people free.⁸

Crowds of people left Jesus because they didn’t like what He had to say (**John 6:66**), but when He turned to His disciples and asked them if they were also planning to leave Him, they said, “*Where else would we go. You have the words of eternal life*” (**John 6:67–68**). So, **people left** because of what Jesus said, and **people stayed** because of what Jesus said. I think **the call** for the church here is to speak the truth with a motivation to lift people around us closer to Jesus – and then let God deal with the feelings that follow. You can’t control how people respond, but you can control the words you speak.

But, again, check your heart, and make sure your communication is **motivated by love (4:15)** with a desire to lift others closer to Jesus.⁹ When you speak truth, that **needs** to be your motive.

This isn’t just true when it comes to how Christians speak into the culture around us, but it is also true when it comes to how we speak to one another in our own homes and in our own churches (which is Paul’s main concern).

- *How do you speak to your spouse? Is your desire to build him or her up in the faith?*
- *Parents, how do you speak to your children?*
- *Children, how do you speak to your parents – or to your brothers and sisters?*
- *Fellow elders, how do you talk about your church members to other people?*
- *Church, how do you talk about your pastor or your elders to other people?*

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

~ *Ephesians 4:29*

This is fitting for the body of Christ. Remove the lies from your wardrobe; they don’t fit anymore. Remove the corrupt, dirty, rotten vocabulary from wardrobe; it doesn’t fit you anymore. Replace it with truthful communication, good words, and conversations that seek to build others up in their faith. That’s not always easy; but it is fitting.

⁶ Many of you probably saw how an **NFL football player** was blasted this past week for comments that he made during a college commencement speech regarding biblical manhood and womanhood, the place of government, the horror of abortion. This guy stepped on all kinds of cultural landmines, and it resulted in an immediate petition that he be kicked off the team because of how offended people were by his comments.

⁷ John 3:19.

⁸ John 8:32.

⁹ **Example:** On my first day of 6th grade (at a new school), a preppy little girl from my class walked by me and said, “Yuck”! Now, she may have been expressing a true feeling about the way she viewed my appearance, but her comment wasn’t spoken with a desire to build me up. It didn’t come from a heart of love. Just because something is true doesn’t mean it needs to be spoken (at that time, at that place, in that way).

• *Is your **motivation** to pick a fight? Is your **motivation** to win an argument?*

• *Is your **motivation** to look good in the eyes of people around you? Is your **motivation** to put the other person down?*

If Godward love is not motivating your speech, then it doesn’t matter if your words are true; you are sinning as you speak to them because the desire of your heart is contrary to Christ.

2. What You Feel || *Cultivate a Godward heart.*

After Paul tells us to speak truth to one another, he gives us one of the most puzzling commands that we come across in the New Testament.

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.
~ *Ephesians 4:26*

Paul is quoting from **Psalm 4:4** when he says, “*Be angry, and do not sin.*” In other words, both in the OT and the NT, God instructs His people to feel anger. At first glance, this seems really unexpected given how often anger **leads to** sinful behavior (e.g., *Cain got angry with his brother and killed him*;¹⁰ *the riots that swept across the Twin Cities in 2020*) – or how often it is **the result of** sinful behavior (e.g., *drunkenness, anxiety, jealousy...*)

Paul’s command is surprising because we are aware of the common link between sin and anger, and it’s also surprising because many of us tend to have this idea that **negative emotions** are part of our fallen, weak, sinful, human nature: *sorrow, hatred, grief, anger.*

The reality is that God Himself experiences all of these emotions, and He is not weak, fallen, or sinful. He is perfect in all His ways – *including how He feels.* And one of the emotions that God feels is **anger**. The Bible frequently talks about the **fierceness** of His anger...¹¹

- God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom & Gomorrah because of His anger (**Deut 29:23**).
- Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because God was angry with them (**Num 32:13**).
- Sinful nations were trampled because God was angry with them (**Hag 3:8**)

God is right and just and pure in all He does, and one of the things God **does** is deal with people in His righteous anger. And this isn’t just an **Old Testament reality** (*as if God were different in the OT than He is in the NT*; He is the same yesterday, today, and forever).¹² It’s also a **New Testament reality**.

- Our Lord felt anger as He looked at the hard hearts of the hypocritical religious leaders (**Mark 3:5**).
- The Bible talks about the time that Jesus entered the temple courtyard like a warrior bent on destruction because the space that was supposed to be designated for prayer had been turned into a marketplace where the wealthy took advantage of those who were poor and vulnerable (**John 2:15–17**).
 - Jesus burned with anger, acted on His anger, and He never sinned.¹³
 - People were using God as a tool to make an unfair profit by exploiting the poor and vulnerable, and it made Jesus angry, and it was right for Him to get angry. *Zeal for the house of God ate Him up.*¹⁴

A sermon like this is so dangerous because it can so easily be taken in the wrong direction. The biblical call for Christians is to be “**slow to anger**”¹⁵ because our God is “**slow to anger**”¹⁶ – we see this language everywhere. But it **doesn’t** say that we are to be “**shut off**” to anger. As followers of Jesus there are times when it is appropriate for Christians to get angry. We live in a culture that celebrates religious politeness and niceness and tolerance, but nobody would have ever used those words to describe Jesus...or any of His followers.¹⁷

If you love the things that God loves, you will also hate the things that God hates.¹⁸ Love and hate are part of the same coin. You cannot love something without hating anything that threatens it.

¹⁰ Gen 4:5ff.

¹¹ Isa 30:27; Jer 44:6; Lam 4:11; Job 4:9; Psa 21:9; Ezek 43:8; Nah 1:6.

¹² Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8.

¹³ Heb 4:15.

¹⁴ John 2:17; c.f., Psa 69:9.

¹⁵ Prov 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; James 1:19–22.

¹⁶ Num 14:18; Psa 86:15; 145:8; Joel 2:13; 2 Pet 3:9.

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, “*Of course He isn’t a tame lion, but He’s good.*”

¹⁸ Exod 32:19.

For example: God loves marriage between a man and a woman; **therefore, God hates** homosexuality because it destroys that which God loves.¹⁹ **God loves** life, **and so He hates** abortion.²⁰

Righteous anger is part of the Christian's wardrobe.

*“There is a great need in the contemporary world for more Christian anger...
In the face of blatant evil we should be indignant not tolerant, angry not apathetic.*

*If God hates sin, his people should hate it too.
If evil arouses his anger, it should arouse ours also.”²¹*

~ John Stott

- *It's right to feel anger* over those who are making a profit off of the murder of unborn babies.
- *It's right to feel anger* over countries that use their orphan population as a means of making money.
- *It's right to feel anger* when professing Christians prioritize health & safety over the gospel.²²
- *I think it's right to feel anger* when people prioritize sports & hobbies over the local church.²³

But there are two warnings connected with anger...

1. Do not **sin** in your anger. Make sure that your anger is not arising from sinful motives: like bitterness, jealousy, envy, wounded pride. That kind of anger is never appropriate (4:31). And make sure your anger never causes you to pursue vengeance (Rom 12:19) or to repay evil with evil (Rom 12:17). Rioting is not the way of Christ.²⁴
2. Do not **stay** in your anger. *“Don't let the sun go down on your wrath.”* Don't let the devil get a foothold in your heart or in your church or in your home through lingering anger.
 - a. Our Lord got angry, but He didn't set up camp in His anger. He wasn't known as an angry person. He was known for His love, compassion, patience, gentleness, humility...not for being angry.
 - b. To stay angry is to open up the door of your life and your relationships to all kinds of sin & hurt.

When it's right to get angry, get angry, but there are other clothes in **the Christian wardrobe** that we should be wearing much more often...

- **Kindness:** cultivate kindness toward others just as God has been so kind to you.
- **Forgiveness:** cultivate a heart that is quick to forgive just as God has forgiven you from His heart.
- **Tenderheartedness:** cultivate a heart that is tender toward those around you (especially in the church).

3. **What You Do** || **Cultivate Godward actions.**

**Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hand what is good,
that he may have something to give him who has need.**

~ Ephesians 4:28

¹⁹ Gen 19:1–13; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10.

²⁰ Paul is quoting from Psalm 4, which is talking about people who love worthlessness, who seek falsehood, and who turn glory into shame (4:2). If you remember the description of Ephesus, it was a city full of falsehood. Idolatry was big business. People loved worthlessness. And David and Paul both said that that should make you angry

²¹ John Stott, *Ephesians*, 186; quoted in Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 301–302.

²² Matt 16:21–23.

²³ Heb 10:24–25.

²⁴ What about the fact that Jesus built a whip and turned over tables (John 2:15)? First, in the Greek, the text is clear that the whip was used to chase the animals out (it wasn't used on people). Second, it was His house (Matt 21:13). He had a divine & prophetic right to act this way because He was cleaning out His house. This same Jesus would willingly go to a cross at the hands of these people and say, “Father, Forgive them for they don't know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

As human beings, we were created to glorify God by using our head and your hands to do honest work (Gen 2:15, 18). And as a Christian, you were created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10). Hard, honest work is part of **the Christian's wardrobe**. It's fitting. There are many implications and applications that we could draw from this command, but the big idea here is that Christians would see it as their calling to engage in honest work **so that** we would **not only** be able to provide for our own homes **but also** that we would have opportunity of giving to those in our church family and in our community to have need.²⁵ *Do you work honestly so that you can give generously?*

CONCLUSION:

Does my spiritual wardrobe make me look more like Jesus Christ or more like the world around me? Does my life look different than it used to? Does my speech sound more like Christ? Does my heart feel more like Christ's? Do my actions reflect the actions of Christ? Would the world look at our church family and say, "There's something different about they way they talk to one another"; "there's something different about the way they respond to one another"; "there's something different about the way they work for the good of one another"?

May God grant us grace to continually "put off" the wardrobe of this world and "put on" the life of Christ.

PRAY

²⁵ **Example:** the many families giving money and food to the Farish's as Jess was going through her radiation treatment.