

Putting on the New Self
Ephesians 4: 25-32

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As I invite you to open to Ephesians 4:25-32, I want also to remind you of the great truths that have been already stated and discussed in the preceding passages. Paul has opened this great letter to the church in Ephesus by reminding them that their status as believers of Christ is no accident. Neither is it due to their own wisdom or ability; it was God himself working out the plan from eternity past to bring about, in the present, a people for his own possession. He predestined us in love. He chose us in his Son before the foundation of the world. He adopted us in him, uniting us to our Savior, saving us through his blood — and all of this by grace and grace alone. We could never earn it. He gave it as a free gift. Now, having been redeemed from sin’s penalty, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. We have been seated with Christ. We have been made part of the new man!

With all of that laying the groundwork, Paul reached a pivot point in chapter 4 in showing us that we now have a role to play in this great drama. We must grow up in every way into Christ, the head of the church. We must mature. We must become what we were remade to be by more and more putting off the old man and putting on the new. That’s what our passage is about, so as we read it, let the Spirit work in you to remind you of how you were made to live. As we approach his word, let’s therefore ask his help in prayer.

Almighty God, this is your Word. It is powerful for salvation and for training in righteousness. So we ask that, in this time, you would speak again by the Holy Spirit through these words. Teach us, mold us, convict us, and empower us. For we pray it in Christ, AMEN.

[Read Eph. 4:25-32]

One of the unique joys of being a parent is getting to introduce your child to solids. Many of you understand the messy, somewhat scary, but

always hilarious early days of eating solid foods. Matthias loves just about anything that falls into the meat and fruit category. But no matter what we do to it, there's one food he refuses to eat: broccoli. And I get it, it smells sulfuric and harsh, and the textural joy of eating little trees is a strange one to me.

But while eating his steak is important — it's delicious, it's full of protein, good fats, and micronutrients — he also needs some broccoli every now and again, and so do we. If you follow me, the early chapters of Ephesians are like the steak. How can you not love it, hearing how God has loved you in Christ by grace alone? But we can't live on just that. We need a little broccoli to go with our steak. We need boundaries. We need to know what it looks like in the everyday realm to live *into* and live *out* what has been done for us. Like children, we need to clearly be told what is right and what is wrong. So what does it look like to put off the old man and put on the new?

In the passage we just read, Paul has given us plenty of spiritual broccoli to chew on together. He — and, through him, the Lord — wants us to know what habits and lifestyles need to be put off, what needs to be put on in its place, and the reason why. I think the passage fairly clearly splits into five of those categories, so let's start at the top and work our way through each.

The first directive we get for putting on the new self is right in the first verse: putting off falsehood and putting on truth. This seems like it should be an obvious one, but all too often it's not because the world in which we live is one immersed in lies. It's why we're skeptical of just about anyone. The hypocrisy, double-talk, and deceit of our leaders above us and the people around us have led us to a sad state of cynicism. But it should not be so among us.

If we listen to the Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry, he was everywhere confronting the lies and falsehoods of his day. He particularly hated religious hypocrisy and was so scathing toward those who taught lies to their people that he told them that they were sons of the devil. For, he said, Satan is the father of lies, and their conduct displayed their lineage. Rightly Jesus would say the same of much of the world today.

We tell lies, even little ones, and portray a false image so that others will perceive us in a way that isn't genuine. We tell lies to put others beneath us and seek our advantage. We tell lies to avoid the embarrassment of accountability for our sins and mistakes. And when we do so, we put ourselves more and more into the old ways, the darkened ways of those who live by lies as children of their father, the devil.

Therefore, we must put away all falsehood — all hypocrisy and deception, all pretense and posturing — because why? We are *members one of another*. He's making the point that if God has united us as one with Christ as our head, believers making a habit of lying to one another even in subtle ways would strike against the fundamental unity and mission — that of speaking the truth in love — of the body. **Put off falsehood, put on truth, for you are members of the same body.**

Moving on, verses 26-27 offer us the second set of directives. “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.” If I can rearrange this to match our pattern, Paul calls us to put off sinful anger, putting on righteous anger with humility, because failing to do so would give the devil a foothold, an opportunity.

Much of this depends on knowing what the difference is between sinful anger and righteous anger, so what is it? Paul, as he seems to be referencing the fourth Psalm, has a category for being angry and not sinning, so what is that? Clearly, Jesus became angry. We're told in the seventh Psalm that God feels indignation, anger, every day!

The anger we're called to put off, however, departs from God's righteous anger because it's often inwardly focused. We get angry because we're inconvenienced. We get angry because things don't go the way we expect or want them to go. We get angry because we don't feel we've gotten what we deserve. Then, as we let this anger boil, we boil over. We lash out with our words in frustration. We treat loved ones coldly. We let bitterness grow in our hearts. This is anger that's fundamentally about me. This sinful anger is to be put off and put away.

Anger that is not inherently sin, however, is totally different. Righteous anger is that anger which is felt when God is mocked, when his name is laughed at, when his people are scorned, when his creation is

abused. Righteous anger is directed, therefore, against sin, and sin — sin in us and sin in the world — should make Christians angry.

When you see the images of the harvested parts of little ones and the horrors of real abortion, you ought to be angry. When you see the blatant disdain for God's created order in the enforced mutilation of prepubescent children going through hormone replacement therapy and reassignment surgeries, you should be angry.

But even righteous anger becomes sin when we stew on it, when we let the sun go down on it. Paul calls us to recognize sin and to hate it. We ought to love what God loves and hate what God hates. But when we allow our anger to take hold of us to the point that we lash out at the offender, we've now crossed into sin. When we allow our anger to simmer in our hearts for more than just a moment, it begins to seep into our very souls. We drink the poison and the bitterness it creates is sin.

The Lord wants us to know that if we do this, even if the anger seems justified in the moment, we give an opportunity to the devil. It's a crack in the door that he's more than willing to put a foot into. When we feel anger against genuine sin in the world, we need to trust the judge of the earth to do rightly. Pray the Psalms and give your frustration to the Lord.

And if this is true for righteous anger, how much more do we need to be wary of our usually sinful anger! When anger arises because of a silly argument, a perceived slight, or a petty inconvenience, we cannot let that anger fester because it will become a rot. With humility, we need to confess our sins to one another and pluck out the anger that is a seed of division. Holding onto anger in both cases leaves an open door to the devil, who loves to cause division in the body. **Put off sinful anger, put on righteous anger with humility, for failing to do so would give the devil a foothold.**

Third, in verse 28, Paul gives a new set of directives. "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." Put off theft. Put on honest work. Why? Because you, as part of the body, are meant to share. Now many of you likely began to check out with this one. *I'm not a thief, so no big deal, I'm good here.* And while, yes, it's better if you're not

stealing outright, cheating others in business, or lying in your tax returns, there are more subtle ways we can be putting on a life of theft.

One thing God addresses through the prophet Malachi is the fact that people in that day, having returned from exile and rebuilding the land, were finding excuses not to bring in the full tithe. Yields were likely low and times were tight. God speaks to them and says, “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.” God calls them to cease stealing from him, give the full tithe, and then he promises to open the heavens and provide for them.

Now, we can rob God in more ways than not giving sacrificially of our funds. We can rob God and his people by coming to church as consumers. I go to church to get my fix, to check the box. I’ll even give money. But don’t you dare go on expecting me to live like a Christian outside of these walls. Don’t you dare presume that I should somehow serve with more than my bank account. We think that serving in the nursery, educating Christian children, and taking meals to the sick, grieving, and new mothers of the church is somehow beneath us. In doing so, in coming to church as consumers, we become thieves. Thieves not only of God but of one another. We steal the gifts we should be giving when we refuse to serve and sacrifice.

That’s why the motivation to change, to put off theft, and to put on honest work is the fact that we, as the body, are made to share. We were given gifts that ought to be used for the benefit, the upbuilding of those around us. **Put off theft, put on honest work, because you were made to share.**

The fourth set of directives begins in verse 29. “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.” Paul returns to the topic of our speech and calls us to put off corrupting talk, to put on edifying speech, that which builds up, so that it might give grace to others.

Now, we might ask, what qualifies as “corrupting talk?” Crude joking, gossip, slander, or just generally unkind words are all corrupting. Paul will actually continue this discussion in chapter 5, but notice the character of the speech is corrupting, the opposite of building up. In place of what our speech should be as members of Christ’s body — gracious, humble, patient, kind,

encouraging, helpful — the speech here condemned is the opposite. It is cruel, proud, impatient, spiteful, mean-spirited, unsympathetic, and selfish.

Understand that this doesn't mean that any emotion outside of perfect happiness has no place in Christian conversation. We can, and sometimes must, seek the upbuilding of the body by confronting sin with love. So we are to "speak the truth in love." There are times when we must tell someone else about wrongs done to us to find wisdom about how to proceed and find healing. At other times, our talk may be full of grief, anguish, and frustration. But the question we need to ask to diagnose our speech is, "Does it build up?" Christ's body is built up by encouragement and positivity as well as by humble confrontation, wise counsel, and grieving together. Christ's body is torn apart, however, when we rant about others for the sake of venting our sinful anger, when we would prefer to gossip about sin as opposed to actually confronting and dealing with it, when we use our words as weapons to hurt and not to heal.

After commanding us in this way, Paul adds a curious note in verse 30 not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" and this is somewhat variously interpreted. Note at least from this additional command that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a detached force. As God the Father and God the Son may be grieved, so may God the Spirit. But what grieves the Spirit? Given the context and what appears to be a connection with verse 29, it seems that Paul is referring to the fact that the Holy Spirit is what seals us, all of us, and is therefore the Spirit of Unity. When we sow seeds of division with corrupting speech, we grieve the Holy Spirit who desires our love and unity. **Put off corrupting talk, put on edifying speech, for failing to do so would grieve the Spirit who delights in our unity.**

Finally, the fifth set of directives comes in verses 31-32. In reality, Paul is almost summing up what he's already presented by calling us to put off bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice while putting on kindness toward one another, tenderheartedness, and a forgiving spirit. The center of all of this is actually what comes at the end: forgiveness.

It's a constant refrain through the New Testament to remind us that if we have been forgiven, it's not optional to be forgiving and gracious toward others. It's required. It's part of what it means to be a born-again child of

God. I should only need remind you of that petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors.*" In fact, in Matthew 6, Jesus adds a comment after he teaches the disciples that prayer by saying, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but *if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" A heart of unforgiveness — bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice — is therefore evidence of an *unforgiven* heart.

It's so tempting to live like this, though. To harbor bitterness toward others, to hang on to anger like we mentioned earlier, to insist on our own way at every turn. We feel like we deserve it. But what Paul is telling us here is that when we choose this way, the way of the old man, we're choosing slavery. Instead, as we put off the old self, he calls us to actual freedom in the new by being set free to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Last week, Gerrit used the image of going back to the old life, the old self, like putting on an old sweater that feels so comfy. Allow me to close by amplifying that example a little bit. Some of you may know that I love to run and otherwise exercise. And for running, I have a particular pair of shorts and a shirt that I prefer to wear. They fit well, they don't chafe, they're familiar.

However, as is the nature of workout garments if you work hard enough, they get a certain ingrained "funk" after some time. I've even tried to bleach the shirt. And when the clothes are dry and cool, they smell fine. Totally normal. But when I go out to run and even the slightest degree of heat and perspiration enters the fibers of that fabric, its true nature is revealed. The smell is back... with a vengeance. And once I've finally returned from my run and enter the house, though I left smelling fresh and clean, I now leave a trail of "funk" wherever I go, much to the displeasure of my wife who has a very sensitive sense of smell.

Paul is trying to tell us what my wife tries to tell me in those moments: throw it out! It feels and appears comfortable, your old sinful life. It seems like it'll be better than last time, like the "funk" may be gone, but the moment you step into that old way of living, it wreaks even worse than the last time.

Brothers and sisters, if we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, and if we have inherited such great promises as those we've heard thus far in Ephesians, how can we go on living in the old, sinful way? How can we go on in sin when we've died to it? How can we live in falsehood and deception when we've been delivered by and into the truth? How can we go on in selfish, divisive habits when we've been made members of one body? How can we live in the slavery of bitter unforgiveness when we've been set free to forgive as those who have been forgiven? Put off the old and put on the new, for to this you have been called.