
The Transforming Power of Living the Truth

Part 2

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

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What is the Christian life? How should Christians live and why? You would think that the answers to that would be fairly easy and have some general agreement. Nothing could be further from the truth. While there is a general agreement about how Christians live, there are vastly different theologies of the Christian life. Many of you who are new to the Chapel are realizing that what we teach about Christian living is very different from what you have learned elsewhere.

God has chosen and saved His people to become holy and to become mature. To that end, He has sent His son to die and to be raised as the means for all that God has purposed for His people. He has then applied the work of Christ to His people through conversion and through transformation. Then, He has given abilities to people, and able people to the gathered church so that they will grow in truth, maturity, and ministry.

We have been called together in real spiritual union. Therefore, we live together as a community. Now we who prize so highly our individuality must come to the Bible and learn deeply of these lessons. Our inner real oneness must not be fragmented and fractured by the pressures of sinful anger, sharp words and lies.

To this end Paul writes with strong words to shape our lives differently from the world around us.

What is to be Rejected (v.17-19)

It is foundational to our living together as believers that we do not live as the world does in our relationships.

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

In its Command (v.17a)

We are commanded to live differently from the pagans around us. See the “must” there? This is a strong imperative. It is not intended to be heard as a suggestion or even as wise counsel. This is a from-heaven-through-the-Apostle command to us. We must no longer conduct our lives like the unbelieving pagans. I want to clearly affirm that we believe that the New Testament has a way of life that is both commanded and involves obedience to commands. Every time you see a phrase here in Ephesians beginning with “Let us” or “You must” you are hearing an imperative, a command. Now the Bible never separates who we are from what we are to do. But neither does the Bible ever, ever give us who we are without telling us what it means for living. And often what it means comes to us in the form of commands to be obeyed.

In its Cause (v.17b-18)

The reason we are different in our relations is because of what their lifestyle comes from. There is a deep darkness in their minds because of ignorance and depravity. Therefore, we are not to live like they live because we do not think as they do

In its Course (v.19)

Here is the deadening, hardening effect of their course of life. Losing their sensitivity (sense of shame) they are given over to sensuality, hungering for more and more impurity. They are never satisfied and seek ever more ways of fulfilling their pleasures. The darkness of evil ways of thinking leads to ever deepening spirals of sensual and carnal conduct.

Where does the pagan thinking and living come from? A hardened heart. What is the result of the unbelieving lifestyle? A hardened conscience.

What we have Learned (v.20-24)

We have present commands based on past facts. (Stott).

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

In its Process (v. 20-21)

I want to highlight the three verb phrases in these verses and think about them. I am deeply indebted to John Stott for what I have learned from these paragraphs.

Christ is the substance of our teaching. He is our primary subject. Who He is, what He has done, and how we are related to Him are what we must learn and know.

In the teaching of the Word you are hearing Christ. He is speaking. The Word of God is living. The Word of God is speaking. Christ is speaking in the Word

You were taught in Jesus

The change here to Jesus indicates that the teaching points to Christ as the embodiment of the thinking and living that is being called for here.

Christians must be taught, and they must learn some Christ centered truths in order to not live like the pagans in our thinking and in our conduct.

In its Principles (v. 22-24)

What then is the truth that Paul taught the Ephesian church and expected them to recall and is fundamental to practical Christian living? John Stott puts it this way, "To 'learn Christ' is to grasp the new creation which He has made possible, and the entirely new life which results from it. It is nothing less than putting off our old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on like clean clothing the new humanity recreated in God's image."¹

The truth that is taught in Jesus is what has happened to us. Here, in these verses are not commands: to put off and to put on. This is what happened to us when we were converted. The verbs here are aorist infinitives, not imperatives – something decisive that has happened. Now, he is going to go on to call for the putting on and

putting off of sinful attitudes and actions. But here, this is what God did for us at our conversion. The old self, the old person we were which was corrupted (depraved) and belonged to the old realm was put away. The new self, the new person we are was created in God's likeness, in true righteousness and holiness. This is the same teaching of Colossians 3, Romans 6-7 and Galatians 5. At our conversion, God stripped off the old clothes of depravity corrupted by the world. He birthed us again from above through the Spirit so that we are a new person clothed in His own righteousness and holiness. The underlying truth here is the same; the analogy is different. In other texts Paul talks about death and resurrection. In some He talks about a change in location, in realms.

There is now a radical change in who we are that then is sustained by an ongoing renewing of the mind. The new person we are, is growing into maturity as God changes the way we think. Initially, there is radical reorientation of our thinking that is then sustained and applied through the Christian life.

How it Works (v.25-32)

We are given some examples that work these principles out in daily living. Notice that the principles are applied through practical, intentional obedience to commands.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood [the lie, *Gr*], let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ 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. 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. ³⁰ And 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

See the "therefore"? Because of what God has done (put off the old person) and who we have become (the new man in God's holy image) then, you must intentionally work at putting off unbelieving, old man stuff and putting on holy, new man stuff. Every one of these reflects this Biblical reality and personal responsibility. All of these are connected to relationships. Each one will have something to stop, put off and something to begin, put on. Each one will have a reason; a Biblical truth to be believed from this this obedience rises

Don't continue lies, instead speak the truth (v. 25)

This is an interesting sentence with much more here than appears on the surface.

Having put off the old person, we have put off, literally, "the lie". The ESV calls it "falsehood". The old person we used to be was in essence, a lie, a myth.

Since the old lie has been put away, we are commanded to speak "the truth". In other words, Paul does not have in mind lying per se. He is talking about stop continuing to speak or spread the myths, lies, falsehoods that you used to live by. Instead, now speak what is true. Say what is real.

One entailment is that we speak what is true so that we do not lie to one another. We ought to tell each other the truth. We should not deceive one another.

We do so because we are neighbors and members of one body, Christ. We are related to one another. We must love one another enough to stop repeating the world's lies to each other and start speaking God's truth. This is how the body builds up itself in love.

My dear friends, Christians have to stop repeating the world's myths, illusions and lies. We have put them off. Now, speak reality to one another – the truth in every area of life as God knows it and has revealed it to be.

Don't lose your temper, instead be angry righteously (v. 26-27)

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

The command is to be angry and not sin. Stop now for a moment and think about that. I have thought a lot about this over this week. It strikes me that we tend, in counseling, to misuse this verse. The point of this sentence is simply that there are times to be angry. But in those times, you must not sin. How do you know you are not sinning? You can turn it off. The sun is going down²; time to stop being angry. In other words, you stop experiencing the emotion because you stop thinking the thoughts the emotion comes from. You stop thinking about what your wife, your children, your friend did that you were angry about. Otherwise you will become an angry, bitter person.

Why must our anger be righteous? Because, if it is sinful, it will give Satan a foothold in the church. It allows him a place to start tearing down relationships. This is corporate. Your sinful anger is a trapdoor for you and it is a gateway for the devil. But it is the church, the people of God, who are in danger. Satan "loves to lurk round angry people, hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship." (Stott, p. 187).

Don't steal, instead work in order to give (v. 28)

²⁸ 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.

There are all kinds of ways to steal: from each other, from employer, from government, from God. What is commanded is to replace stealing with hard, honest labor. Go to work honestly. Rather than living off the labor of others, live off the labor of your own hands³.

But notice that the heart is addressed. The reason to go to work is changed. People usually steal to fulfill their own covetousness. Robin Hood's are myths and rare. To go to work just to satisfy our coveting may not be as evil as stealing, but the heart is still coveting. Having put off the old man who covets, we now express the new man who loves to give and share. As one commentator said, "None but Christ can transform a burglar into a benefactor!" (Stott, p.188)

Don't tear down, instead speak to send grace (v. 29-30)

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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Your speech is like a train. Every sentence, paragraph, page is a freight car carrying its load. What is it that you are delivering? Is your speech delivering rotten fish? Corrosive acids? Gasoline? Or is your speech delivering grace? When Christians speak Biblically to one another, then those words convey enabling grace to the ones who hear. This is all speech! Public, private, texting, emails, letters – all of it.

What characterizes the speech of those how have put off the old and put on the new?

It is intentional. It is aimed to build up and not tear down people. Even when it is negative and admonitional, it is done so as to help the person.

It is timely. It is spoken in the right tone at the right times. And sometimes, it is not spoken on some occasions and is reserved to be spoken later.

It is Grace-Full. It is sending grace over to the listener. Its purpose is to edify towards maturity.

Why do we speak this way? Because corrupting speech grieves the Spirit. He is grieved by our failure to recognize that we are all bought by Christ and have His stamp of ownership on us. All speech is about control. It shapes a persons heart. It draws out a response. The Spirit and Word come to us to control our hearts for the sake of Christ. So, our speech should recognize that the other Christian is owned by God, filled with the Spirit and needs to grow towards maturity. Speak godly, dear ones.

Don't be bitter, instead be forgiving (v. 31-32)

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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

There is a sense in which these two sentences embody the whole. Since we have put off the old, put away all that is associated with it in our relationships. Don't leave the dirty garments of the old person you used to be lying around. Put them away where they belong – in the grave. These vices to be put away are all too common among Christians and horribly destructive. I have watched over and over again what that nest of vipers does to people. Bitterness, wrath and anger rampage in the heart and emerge as clamor and slander. These will not only destroy relationships, but will make reconciliation and restoration very, very difficult.

But, then comes the surprise. The Christian is to be marked by kindness, tenderness and forgiveness. These are the virtues that we need *when we are being sinned against*. So even if we are right, we must act and speak in a way that reflects God's kind of forgiveness.

Forgiving as God has forgiven you is not talking about His example, His pattern. This is not intended to motivate us: "Be like God who forgives and forgive others." No, look at the sentence carefully. God has forgiven us in Christ. This is talking about the redemptive grounds for forgiveness. Forgive on the same basis as God has forgiven us. What is that? It is based on that fact that all sin will be judged. If someone has sinned against you, they deserve to be punished. God forgives us because Jesus bore our punishment for us. Sin has to be punished. Jesus took it for us. God forgives us in Christ.

Now, what does that mean for you?

You must forgive people who sin against you and confess their sin. Forgiving them is not excusing them from punishment. You are not responsible to punish them. You are responsible to forgive because punishment will happen.

Punishment has either happened at the cross or will happen at the judgment in the last days. Either the person is a Christian and their sins have all been punished already or they are not a Christian and they will suffer for their own sins against you, eternally.

You will not become angry, bitter, demanding or slandering because you have been willing to forgive those who don't acknowledge their sin and actually do forgive those who confess.

Many people struggle to forgive because they think the person is going to get a free pass. No, sin will be dealt with. Your responsibility is to entrust that to God, be poised to forgive the unrepentant and actually forgive all who confess their sin.

This is what it means to live as the new person in the community of the church, with God's people. This is what living the truth looks like. This how the new person you are and are becoming, behaves.

Centered in the Gospel (5:1-2)

The conclusion Paul draws brings us back to the gospel.

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Motivated by God's Example (v. 1)

Like children who imitate their parents, we are to imitate our God. We look at how He engages in relationships and how He responds. This is our template, our pattern, for our own relationships. So, we are to walk in love. Our whole lifestyle as Christians together is to be marked by love in how we respond to one another. What a lovely thing it is indeed to look to a perfect loving Father and seek to be like Him.

Measured by Christ's Sacrifice (v. 2)

Here is how the gospel is at the center of living the truth. Love others like Christ loved us. Sacrifice for others like Christ sacrificed for us. Give yourself up for others, like Christ gave Himself up for us. To truly live and love one another, you must be willing to die for each other. Isn't this the gospel? Isn't this the truth that we must live in relationship to one another? Once again, listen to one of my favorite Bible teachers.

"[The pagans] give themselves up to licentiousness; we like Christ are to give ourselves up to love. Such self-giving for others is pleasing to God. As with Christ so with us, self-sacrificial love is a *fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. It is thus a striking truth that sacrificial love for others becomes a sacrifice acceptable to God." (Stott, p.191)

Reflect and Respond

It is noteworthy how God-centered Paul's ethic is. It is natural for him, in issuing his moral instructions, to mention the three Persons of the Trinity. He tells us to 'copy God', to 'learn Christ' and not to 'grieve the Holy Spirit'. (Stott, p. 191)

We have been much misrepresented and slandered by a former member. This text refutes almost all of the errors he attributes to us. We teach that we are saved and we live our Christian lives by the truths of gospel. The death, burial and resurrection are essential to understanding the Christian life. What the death and resurrection have done for us is our position and our identity as Christians. This radical change is part of our transformation. We have been saved and sanctified and now are becoming holy through faith and obedience. We teach that we are to obey God and to live wisely in His ways. This text is full of commands that are to be obeyed. We obey them because God is empowering us to obey them and we set our hearts to obey them.

We will continue to teach you the truth so that you hear Christ and learn of Christ and walk in those truths. This will look like loving relationships with each other and faithful obedience to God.

Let's not lose the second focus of this text. This is how Christians walk in love and live the truth. It is not abstract theology or Christian theory. It is hard, grinding, tough, loving obedience to God in the midst of a pagan world (and sometimes pagan church) that laughs, mocks, slanders and hates it.

May God grant us grace:

To hear what we are being taught;

To live what we are being taught;

To understand who we are as God's people;

To understand how the death and resurrection of Jesus apply to us;

To love one another sacrificially;

To think, speak and behave in obedience to God;

May the love and kindness of Jesus so fill our hearts that we will be a kind, loving and forgiving people even when others sin against us.

May we grow up in Christ to the maturity He desires and calls us to. May we live the truth.

Notes

- ¹ Stott, John R. W. *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979. p. 180.
- ² "the apostle's intention is to warn us against nursing anger. It is seldom safe to allow the embers to smoulder. Certainly if we become aware of some sinful or selfish element in it (and if our *orgē*, anger, degenerates into *parorgismos*, resentment, the word used at the end of verse 26), then it is time for us to cease from it, and either apologize or be reconciled to the person concerned. In the Old Testament a moneylender who took a poor person's cloak as a pledge was required to restore it 'when the sun goes down', so that he might sleep in it, and an employer who had any servants who were poor and needy was required to pay them their wages daily 'before the sun goes down'. There are many similar situations in which it is wise to live a day at a time." Stott, p.186-187
- ³ Christians really need to think through this in an age when 1 of 7 people in the United States are on food stamps. At what point is living on the dole sin? When is it simply taking the honest labor of others by the force of government? The liberal/progressive view on these things is usually criticized because of its outcomes - a pragmatic argument. What if the whole thing is simply immoral and sinful? Yes, people ought to care for and take care of the poor as they can. But it is never the government who is paying for it. The government is using its power of force, law and police, to force those who labor to support those who do not. The sword of justice the government has been given by God should not be used to rob from honest, hard working people.