

The New Way of Life (part 2)

Ephesians 4: 28-30

C. H. Spurgeon relates a conversation that he had with a Wesleyan man who believed that he could attain spiritual perfection on this earth. The man had invited Spurgeon to his home, but Spurgeon told him that there probably would not be room for him, because the house would be so full of angels. After Spurgeon made a few more playful remarks, the man flew into a rage. When Spurgeon asked him if perfect men get angry, the man denied that he was angry, although Spurgeon says that he had a peculiar redness about his cheeks and a fiery flash in his eyes. Spurgeon says he thinks that he rather spoiled the man's perfection!

Then Spurgeon writes, "My own experience is a daily struggle with the evil within. I wish I could find in myself something friendly to grace, but, hitherto, I have searched my nature through, and have found everything in rebellion against God."

It would be wonderful if we could reach a place in the Christian life where sin was no longer so tempting! It would be nice if the longer you were a Christian, the more immunity to sin you built up, so that it just glanced off you. But the fact is, a man after God's heart such as David, after years of walking with God and writing many inspired Psalms, succumbed to the temptation of adultery, deception, and murder. The wisest man on the earth, Solomon, who had several personal encounters with God, fell into the sin of idolatry. If you think that you've arrived at a point where certain sins no longer tempt you, remember Paul's warning (1 Cor. 10:12), "let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."

That's why we must continually yield ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Remember as we have studied Ephesians chapter 4 we have discovered from God's Word that :

1. **Every believer** is **Called** to a new life in Christ, 4:1-6
2. **This change** makes us progressively more **Christ**-like. Ephesians 4:1-6
3. **Christ's power** through His Spirit makes change **Possible**. Ephesians 4:7-10
4. **The church** is God's primary **laboratory** for change in our lives. Ephesians 4:11-16. We all grow more Christ-like as we build each other up and serve one another.
5. We live-out this life-change by God's **three-fold principles of transformation**: Ephesians 4:17-24
 - a. **"Put -Off"** the old self. Day by day, moment by moment I decide to live in the reality that my old self died with Christ and everything associated with that old way of life has to go.
 - b. **"Be Renewed"** in the spirit of your mind. I must allow the Holy Spirit through the word of God to change the way I think. Change happens from the inside-out.
 - c. **"Put -On "** the new self. Living the brand new life is like putting on a brand new clothes. It's conforming my outside to what God is doing on the inside.

Then Paul moves on in verses 25-32 and begins to show us what the new life looks like in some specific areas. We studied the first of these last time when we saw that the new life in Christ is characterized by:

- I. **A Transformed Tongue.** We put off lying, put on speaking the truth, because we are all members of one another.
- II. **A Transformed Temper.** We put off misplaced anger, put on resolving angry feelings quickly by forgiving, so that we do not give the devil a foothold in our lives.

Next Paul says that the changed life, the Christ-like life is one where selfishness is transformed into generosity.

III. Selfishness Transformed into Generosity.

He simply in verse 28, **“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”**

At first glance, you may wonder why Paul included a verse about stealing in a letter to Christians. After all, isn't stealing just a problem for unbelievers, not for us in the church?

While few of us would be tempted to pull off an armed robbery, if the situation is just right, it can be very tempting to take what does not belong to us. I was listening to preacher Chuck Swindoll on the radio last week. He told about a few years ago when he moved to Texas to fill the position of President of Dallas Theological Seminary. One day as he was browsing through the seminary bookstore he noticed that there were security cameras installed there. Asking the manager about it he was told that before they installed the cameras they had a significant problem with theft. “But aren't all the customers here seminary students or professors at our school?” asked Swindoll. “Yes” replied the manager. He said, not only did they have a problem with merchandise disappearing, but some of the thieves would actually take a new Bible out of the box and replace it with their old Bible, then walk out of the store with it.

Paul knew that part of the old man, the old self, is the propensity to take what does not belong to us. In the 1st century, there were many slaves and indentured servants. Their masters often poorly treated them. Slaves often stole from their masters in revenge. How many people are like that today? They feel unfairly treated at work so they take things... a little time here, a few supplies there... who's going to miss it? Now, many of these slaves had become Christians. To them and to us Paul says, put-off stealing.

A. Put-Off: Stop Stealing.

Paul wrote in Titus 2:9-10, **“Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”** How will you be a witness of our Savior if you are taking what does not belong to you?

Satan is a thief. Jesus said in John 10:10, **“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** When we lie, have misplaced

anger or steal, we are following him not the Holy Spirit. He turned Judas into a thief and he would do the same to us if he could. When Satan tempted Eve, he led her to steal by taking fruit that was forbidden. The first Adam did the same becoming a thief and was cast out of paradise. But the last Adam, Jesus Christ, turned to a thief and said, "Today you shall be with Me in paradise," (Luke 23:43).

B. Put-on: Start Working.

"but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good"

Paul himself was an example of a hard worker, laboring as a tentmaker as he planted churches. Paul stated a fundamental rule in the early church in 2 Thess. 3:10, **"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."** A lazy Christian robs himself, others, and God.

C. Be Renewed in your Mind: That you may have something to give him who has need.

Paul lifted working to a much higher level. Even honest labor could become a selfish thing. As Christians we should not work merely for selfish reasons. After we have worked to provide for our family's basic needs, our motivation to work should not be to having more and more, but to give! We work so that we might be able to give to help others. How radical!

If we steal we hurt others; therefore the new person in Christ works to help others. The cure for stealing is to look for those in need and serve them by sharing what you have earned through hard work.

Imagine what our church and community would look like if we as Christians really started living unselfishly. What if, after our basic needs were met, instead of spending our income to get more stuff (and some of it stuff that hinders our relationship with God)—what if we looked for every opportunity to be generous, to help others in need, and to extend the good news of the kingdom here and around the world?

IV. Transformed Talking (4:29-31).

A. Put-off: Corrupting Speech (v.29a, 31).

Paul says, **"Let no corrupt work proceed out of your mouth."** "Corrupt" comes from *sapros* and was used to describe rotten fruit, vegetable and spoiled food.

A **"corrupt word"** is something that pollutes. It would include off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, vulgarity, coarse jesting, lying, slandering, gossiping etc... James says, **"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity."**

The mouth and the heart are connected. Jesus said, **"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"** (Matt. 12:34). Change the heart, and you change the speech.

A detailed list of corruption is in v.31. We are to **"put away... bitterness"** – the cancerous poison of the heart that comes from unforgiveness. We are not to corrupt with **"wrath"** – explosive fits of anger. We are not to corrupt with **"anger"** – deep-seated smoldering anger. We are not to corrupt with **"clamor"** – a public outburst that reflects a loss of self-control. We are not to corrupt with **"evil"**

speaking" – ongoing defamation that rises from an unforgiving heart. We are not to corrupt with **"malice."**

If you need to be reminded of the destructive power of the tongue, read James chapter 3. The Holy Spirit will use it to convict you and transform you.

B. Put-On: Edifying Speech (v.29a, 32).

The cure for corrupt speech is to make sure the heart is full of blessing. Back in v.29 we are told that which comes from our mouths is to be **"good... for edification,"** It is to **"impart grace to the hearers."** What we say should edify or "build up" those who listen.

I love that phrase **"impart grace to the hearer."** I think it means that when people speak with us, they feel a sense of God's love and encouragement. It's further elaborated in v.32, **"being kind to one another"** being **"tenderhearted"** and **"forgiving one another."**

How often it is that when we deny forgiveness and spew corruption out of our mouths that our own bitter verbal missiles come back to attack us.

C. Be Renewed: Do not Grieve the Holy Spirit (v. 30)

When you were saved, you were "sealed for the day of redemption" with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 says, **"You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."** When you were saved the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead came to permanently dwell within you. He came to fill you, lead you, comfort you, teach you, convict you, intercede for you and help you become more like Jesus. Wherever you go, He goes. Whatever you do, He is with you.

Whatever you say, He hears. Whatever you think, He knows. It just makes sense that when you lie, seethe, steal, or speak corruptly that He weeps. Just as a parent grieves over a disobedient child, the Spirit grieves. **"Grieve"** comes from the Greek word *lupeo*, which means "to distress, to sadden to cause heaviness and sorrow."

In John 3, Jesus described the Holy Spirit as being like the wind, you don't see the wind but you see the results the wind causes. I often hear people say after a service, "I could really feel the Spirit moving today." As believers, we sense the power of the Spirit. However, have you ever thought that the Holy Spirit "feels" you? He rejoices with our obedience and is grieved by our sin.

I remember that when I was still living with my parents many times I would not go out and do some of the things my friends were doing, not just because I knew them to be wrong, but because I thought, "If I do that, I will hurt Dad and Mom, and they love me so much." Sometimes their love kept me from sin.

Paul is saying, "God loves you far more than any earthly parent could. He has sent His Holy Spirit to live in you as His temple. Don't grieve Him by sinning!"

Shhh. The Holy Spirit is listening. How does He feel about what's going on in your life right now? Is He happy or grieved? Is He weeping over our lies, unresolved anger, dishonesty and corrupt language?