

Series Title / The Blessed Life

A study through the letter to the Ephesians

12-9-18 The Way to the Blessed Life

The Main Text: Eph. 4:20-32

20 But you did not learn about Christ like this, 21 if indeed you heard about him and were taught in him, just as the truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and to put on the new man who has been created in God's image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.

25 Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger. 27 Do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 The one who steals must steal no longer; rather he must labor, doing good with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need. 29 You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, 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 You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and slanderous talk—indeed all malice. 32 Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

The Main Idea: Accurate teaching about Jesus is the key to the blessed life.

In the church, we learned the right way...

1. We are taught accurately about Jesus (4:21-24).

20 "But you did not learn about Christ like this, 21 if indeed you heard about him and were taught in him, just as the truth is in Jesus."

Learn= is the past tense verbal form of the word "disciple" *mathetes*. It means to gain knowledge and skill as a student, an apprentice.

Learn accurately the truth about the nature of Jesus.

- **Pre-existent state:** Prior to the creation of the world he was with God and was essentially as to his nature—*was God*. So we must always begin in the faith by learning the propositional content of it.
- **Incarnate state:** This eternal Word who was with God and was God *became flesh and tabernacled* or housed in a human life. Jesus is the embodiment of God's truth—notice Paul says you were taught in accordance with the truth *that is in Jesus* (21b). **The truth of God is always in Jesus. Jesus is the consummating and integrative focus of the Scriptures. So the truth about God's nature, his purpose and will—everything is in the Person of Jesus the Messiah.**

If you have not been taught the truth of God in Christ to begin with—you haven't even begun to get on the map in living the Christian life. You may even think that Jesus is a prophet, as some religions do. You may think quite highly of him in many respects. But if you have not been taught accurately about Jesus of Nazareth, you haven't even started the Christian life. Paul says to the Ephesians "you didn't learn Christ through false religion and through empty and deceptive man-made philosophy. You heard his Word—that the Son of God who is also God the Son, embodied in a human life, living a sinless life as God's sacrificial lamb, being sentenced and crucified as a dangerous rebel, and having been resurrected from the dead forever seated at the right hand of power enthroned in heaven—that's the Jesus you learned about.

But, it would be negligent to make teaching about Jesus a mere matter of high Christology. Lofty beliefs about his nature and his work.

- You were also taught to put off the old man.
- To be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

To put on the new man created in the image of God—the new life is characterized by righteousness and holiness which comes from the truth.

So now, Paul is going to unpack some very practical ways in which we can put off the old man, renew the mind, and put on the new man—live the Christian life in accordance with the truth.

2. We intentionally put the old life behind (4:25-32).

- **in truthful speech (4:25):** “Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

Illus. I had this young guy in our church who was constantly lying about stuff in his life. He would make stuff up whole cloth out of thin air. He told our Bible Fellowship group one night that he was getting some tests run and that we should pray that his tests all came back good. He couldn't quite explain what the symptoms were, something to do with his stomach. He couldn't quite remember what clinic or hospital or doctor he'd seen. But in tears, worrying about his health and safety, all the men of that Bible study laid hands on him and prayed earnestly for his healing.

I talked to his wife the next week and asked how his tests had gone. She had no idea what I was talking about. He was busted and in trouble. He apologized, but I asked him, Man, why would make that up? I had a sense that it was for attention.

When we make stuff up we hurt the body. We cause it discord and it throws a wrench into the work the Spirit is trying to do through all of us.

And we intentionally put the old life behind...

- **in resolved anger (4:26): Resolving conflict might be the single most important discipleship skill that you and I will ever learn.**

26 “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger. 27 Do not give the devil an opportunity... 31 You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling...”

Unity in the body is not possible when parties are resigned to living with unresolved anger.

Illus. Kerri and I years ago had this friend who was kind of known for unloading on our circle of friends. And in her immaturity she really damaged some relationships. Including her relationship with us. She justified her going sideways on all of us with this passage and Eph. 4:14-16. She would often say “well, I'm just speaking the truth in love as Paul said.” Which has less than nothing to do with his context. And she would say, “Paul commanded us to be angry but then not to sin.” Um. Wrong. That is not the force of what he's saying.

- **He wants us to avoid going sideways on each other at all costs**, but if we do become angry (which happens to Christians on occasion) we are to be quick to reconcile.
- **Unreconciled anger becomes a tumor of resentment.**
“in the event of anger” or “if angry” more concisely. *That is, anger should be avoided at all costs (Jas. 1:19-20; Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:18; Prov. 15:1, 18 etc.).*
- **This is not a command, it is a concession for the fact that people on occasion do experience anger**, but anger is to be avoided. And if we do, then we are to deal with it quickly “before the sun sets” as it were. So that anger does not turn bitter, and bitterness turns into long-term resentment and rage--which is out of place for God's people. This kind of wanton anger is destructive to harmony within God's community.
 - **If you find yourself becoming angry and losing it, then be quick to reconcile.** *But don't be quick to repeat that pattern and then blame it on this passage.*

The next way we put the old life behind us...

- **in honest and generous labor (4:28):** Another issue he deals with here is the sketchy past that some of the Ephesians had before their conversion to Jesus. 28 “The one who steals must steal no longer; rather he must labor, doing good with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need.” The word for “steal” is *kleptown* where we obviously get the word “klepto” referring to a thievery.

Rome generally had a grip on local theft and attempted to address that issue from three angles:

1.) Legally. It of course was against the law to steal or rob someone and this activity could be addressed with imprisonment, or if you were a non-citizen you could be flogged and crucified.

2.) Social Stigma. So another way they came at this was through the prism of **social disgrace**. People who stole were dishonored and shamed and Rome instilled the value of honor in society.

3.) Religiously—most official religions had strict ethical demands on adherents which required generosity.

Rome’s economy was a wealth transfer economy. Wealth was transferred from the poor to enrich the privileged, it was transferred from the conquered to enrich Roman citizens, and it was transferred from everyone except the wealthy enfranchised class in taxation. So a starving slave or non-citizen would have no choice but to turn to theft. All Greek and Roman religions disparaged thieving.

And this is what some in Ephesus were doing before they became believers.

The ethic of hard work is upheld in the Scriptures: Obviously Ex. 20:15 commands Israel not to take what doesn’t belong to them

Paul insisted that the Christians in Corinth no longer emulate the behavior of their pagan counterparts. He describes to them the kind of people who will not inherit the Kingdom of God—those whose lives are characterized and driven by all manner of sexual immorality and sexual deviance. He also described those who would not inherit the Kingdom of God.

1 Cor. 6:10 “thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Some of you once lived this way. But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

In place of thievery, work hard—be industrious. Paul warns some in Thessalonica to not continue in idleness.

2 Thess. 3:10-11 “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this command: ‘If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat.’ ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are living an undisciplined life, not doing their own work but meddling in the work of others.” Paul’s remedy for this is that those lazy, unproductive and undisciplined people should get to work.

Illus. When I was sixteen I was a really spacey teenager. I could often be found lost in ponderous thought—spending hours alone thinking about God, the Bible, the world—the problems in the world and how to solve them. I used to work for a little bagel shop—It was owned by a Jewish guy from New York City—his name was Bernie, and it was a direct and no-nonsense kind of a guy. I was usually a pretty good worker, but on occasion I could be found sitting just lost in my thoughts. And my supervisor would have to kindly remind me to get back to work.

One occasion, I went out to take all the days trash from the bakery to the dumpster. I threw the 55 gallon garbage bags in the dumpster and then I just leaned against it. It was a particularly beautiful Virginia day, and I ponderously began to gaze into the clouds and just got lost in thought. I must have been out there for quite some time because Bernie came looking for me. He popped his head out of the back door of the shop and said, “Hey! What are you doing?” “Uh, nothing.” I said. He replied, “Well, I think you’re stealing from me, because you’re doing nothing on the clock.” And he went back inside. Bernie wasn’t angry. He was being New-York-

Matter-of-Fact! And I really took his rebuke to heart. It had never occurred to me that I was stealing from my employer by stealing all these little blocks of time and these moments to space out.

Paul says to the Ephesians who used to be brigands lying in ambush of unsuspecting travelers. Who used to be pick pockets in the busy markets of Ephesus—who used to get lost and steal some private time when they were supposed to be working for their employers. **Stop stealing. Work hard so that you'll have something to share with other people.** Work hard, save smart, and become a giver a contributor not a consumer—a taker. **Turn from thievery to philanthropy.**

And we intentionally put the old life behind...

- **in helpful and gracious speech (4:29-30):** His admonition here is to avoid objectionable speech because it does not have any beneficial qualities for the building up of others.

29 “You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

“unwholesome” was used as a farming term in Greek. It means literally “rotten, rancid produce.” It was also used in the fishing industry to describe a catch that had spoiled due to staying in the hot sun in the market for too long. It can also be used in a cultic sense—that is, evil speech that was designed to curse or destroy someone’s life.

So the word really covers the gamut of unhelpful and ungracious speech—which is either intentionally or unintentionally used to tear others down rather than build them up.

- **forsaking aggression (4:31) Aggression** is out of place for God’s people. Paul now combines his imperative against unhelpful and destructive speech with the issue of anger he brought up beforehand.

31 You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and slanderous talk—indeed all malice.

James Jeffers, in his book *The Greco-Roman World of Christianity* documents how anger was used by Greek and Roman leaders as an instrument of persuasion. A hot-headed politician was praised for his passionate and visceral indignation toward others. A Roman military leader wouldn’t last long and would instill no confidence in his men were he not to have an appropriate measure of fury and ruthlessness.

Lawyers who could argue in court with fire and fury were considered far more honorable than soft and plain spoken men.

But ancient Roman historians often noted that the anger culture of Rome had gotten out of hand. They recognized the societies need to keep cool heads because anger could lead to violence, wrath, and quarreling. That anger and rage was stoked by the social acceptable practice of public slander. Your ability to rhetorically and verbally malign and destroy your rivals—not only was it not frowned upon it was encouraged.

Paul’s ethical and social demands run counter to this cultural stream. He insisted that the Ephesian believers not emulate the social world of their pagan peers. Instead they were to deal quickly with anger, seeking to reconcile and keep short accounts with believers and neighbors. Refusing to dismantle political, or social rivals through defamatory accusations and rumor.

- **in friendliness and forgiveness (4:32) Contrary to the fury and rage—to the unwholesome and slanderous talk**—the Ephesian believers were to emulate the character and likeness of Christ.

32 Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Kindness and compassion were in short supply in the Roman world of Ephesus.

Forgiveness was not the guiding ethic of Roman life either.

Ultimately they are to imitate God’s forgiveness and kindness, His mercy and compassion.

And this is what it means to put off the old self, and put on the new man.

God's plan is to restore all of creation. And the first leg of that plan, the first phase of it is to populate the world and colonize it with men and women who are themselves the new creation. People who have put off the old way of falsehood, fury, and disparagement—people who actively put on the new garments of truthful and wholesome speech, cool heads and compassionate kind hearts.

And wherever you see a group of people who not only make the good confession in love, but live that confession in the world—you can bet you are witnessing new creation in that place.

Worship Team Returns

Closing Song

Benediction