

Lenten Meditations for Sterry Memorial Presbyterian Church 2020
The Apostle Paul's Letter to the Church at Ephesus
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Part Three

Day 5 - Read Ephesians 4:25 -32

The new man lives according to the gospel, the central message of the whole counsel of God. The gospel liberates us from the bondage of sin and all evil - true freedom.

(25) If we are the new man, liberated by the gospel, then our speech will change from dishonesty to truth. One of the best ways for us to express our unity in Christ is to speak truth with each other.

(26-27) If we are the new man, liberated by the gospel, then we keep our anger under control. Little is more devastating to relationships than anger. The Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 4:4 verbatim - *"Be angry and do not sin."* Try it! And you will see that it is nearly impossible. For me, the application of this verse is simply - Do not be angry. What we call "righteous indignation" is a possibility. God, who is infinitely holy and thus sinless, is able to express righteous indignation - like Jesus running the money lenders out of the temple twice in three years! For us to express righteous indignation, we must not only be angry only about what makes God angry, but we must also only be angry with the right motives. David, in Psalm 37:8, informs our behavior - *"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath."*

If you do get angry, then seek closure asap - repent of your anger, most likely falling short of righteous indignation. Beg forgiveness of those who have been the target of your anger. Reconcile with those harmed by your anger. Restore relationship by not forcing others to forgive you swiftly... after all, the Apostle Paul does not tell them to make things right with you in the space of a day - rather he tells you to own your anger and put an end to it in the space of a day.

Paul cautions us against giving the devil an opportunity to use us for his evil work. Our anger that is not righteous indignation becomes a handy and effective tool of devilish destruction of relationships, not to mention our character. Worse than an angry individual is an angry church body. Paul is addressing us in this text as the church corporately. Sometimes its easier for the church to assume her anger is righteous indignation. After all, the church stands against all evil. As an individual, I readily think, "Who am I to be angry with someone else's sin. I'm just as sinful as she is and so I don't have the right to berate her." But all too often the church forgets that she is a hospital of broken, sinful people, who should pause before unleashing hate messages against sinners. He tells each member of the church to check his/her behavior so that we do not fuel a corporate dishonesty, anger, or any of the sins he warns us against.

(28) We might think of stealing as shoplifting, burglary or grand theft auto. It is, but there other forms of stealing and Paul highlights a form that might indict those of us, who have never pinched personal property from our neighbor. Paul says that failing to do an honest day's work might be more than laziness - it might be stealing. Not only must our work be for the good - productive and honest, but it must also be done to help relieve the needs of others! When we do not help those in need, using our hard earned income and productivity for the good of others, we are actually stealing. Ouch!

(29) The Apostle Paul returns to the sins of the lips. A corrupt word is not a cuss word. Elsewhere Paul tells us not to use vulgar speech - which would include expletives. Read Paul's entire sentence and you will be able to define a "corrupt word," without using a Greek Lexicon. His compound sentence supplies us with a contrast - the first clause describes the opposite of the second clause. He tells us - "Don't do this but instead do the opposite." What is the opposite of corrupt words spilling from our mouths? The answer = edifying words that offer grace to others. Healthy food nourishes our bodies. Edifying words nourish our souls and relationships.

Imparting grace to others has two parts for any Christian speaking. The first part is what we call graciousness - how we say something to another person can be loving and gentle, or it can be hateful and harsh. Graciousness has to do with the tone and the word choice, not to mention the timing and occasion. Paul has already said this in Ephesians 4:15 - "*speaking the truth in love.*"

The second part of imparting grace to others is placing whatever we say to someone in the context of God's grace toward us while we were yet sinners - Christ's dying for us. This part of imparting grace is our regular reminding of each other that we live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. What do we say to a despairing person? What do we say to a person full of guilt and shame? What do we say to a person going through a difficult time? "*God's grace is sufficient for you.*"

(30) How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? Answer = By sinning against one another. The Holy Spirit unites us together as the one body of Christ Jesus. Our union to Christ Jesus is the big theme of Ephesians. In this paragraph, Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul is addressing our behavior in the context of guarding and promoting our union in Christ Jesus. The fruit of the Holy Spirit, nine virtues, (Galatians 5:16-26), all promote our unity. BTW, this is the main work of the Holy Spirit.

A comprehensive study of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Scriptures shows his work to be as follows (truly a study for another time):

- The Holy Spirit infinitely and thus consistently brings attention and glory to the Father and to the Son. The Holy Spirit empowers and motivates us to focus upon and glorify the Father and the Son.
- The Holy Spirit teaches us the Holy Scriptures, reminding us of everything Jesus has taught from the Holy Scriptures.
- The Holy Spirit comforts us, instilling in us the certain hope of the Great and Final Day of the Lord. He "seals us," that is, he preserves us until that Day.
- The Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit - 9 virtues - in our behavior.
- The Holy Spirit fuels the proclamation of the gospel and guides/directs those who proclaim the gospel. The Holy Spirit opens minds and hearts to embrace the gospel.
- The Holy Spirit delivers to us the gifts Jesus Christ has given to us.
- The Holy Spirit anoints/ordains/commissions us to do the mission of Jesus Christ.

(31-32) Typical of Paul, he supplies us with a list of sins to "put away," followed by a list of virtues to "put on." Instead of being bitter, wrathful and angry toward those who have wronged you, be kind and forgiving toward them. Instead of causing a ruckus and speaking evil maliciously, show tenderness. As Jesus said, "love your enemies....turn the other cheek...return evil with good." When we do so, we are not grieving the Holy Spirit. Rather, we are being filled and led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus did so while hanging on the cross.