

INTRODUCTION

Paul has been insisting that the church at Ephesus should no longer live like their unbelieving Gentile friends and countrymen. The reason why they should not live like this is because they are not like them. Christians have been enlightened by God so that minds that once were ignorant and darkened now are enlightened with understanding through the gospel. The difference in our mindset will lead to a difference in our lifestyle.

The day when we were converted we learnt Christ, we heard him speak to us through His word we made a decision by the grace of God to turn our backs on our own sinful and selfish way and to follow Christ instead. We put off our own self with all its corrupt and deceitful desires and instead we put on our new self in Christ, a new way of life, which is derived from a new relationship with God through Christ.

This new relationship is a transforming one with our minds being at the heart of this transformation as they are renewed so that we now have a new mindset and new attitudes that will ultimately affect our way of life. We were created in Christ to be like God in righteousness and in holiness. Righteousness and holiness must be seen in everyday life in our relationships with others within the church and within the world.

Paul now gives us some examples of how this new relationship is worked out in practise. They are only examples they do not cover all aspects of life but they do cover very important areas of life, as we will see. Now as we look at some of these practical examples I want you to notice the structure of these verses. Paul has been talking about putting off and putting on certain things, so that we put off self and put on Christ.

Well he takes that pattern and shows us in each one of these examples things that must be taken off and certain things that we must put on in order to replace what we have taken off. But he also in every example gives us a reason or motivation for doing so. Now once we understand that structure then it will help us to follow Paul's thinking.

1. FIRST EXAMPLE - STOP LYING AND SPEAK THE TRUTH (v 25)

The word-translated 'falsehood' is actually the word 'lie.' Now this I would suggest to you is an immediate change that you would expect to see in a life of someone who has come to faith in Christ. Before conversion lying was part of his life, he would deliberately seek to deceive or would deliberately hold back some of the truth in order to put a better spin on things, particularly if it was to his advantage. Exaggeration would flow from his lips without thinking all with the intention of deceiving others. That surely is seen in our places of employment, it's seen within our government, it's seen within homes and among our children. If we are honest with ourselves perhaps we too might be guilty of such lies. For example before we say anything do we think about how best to say it?

Not in the sense of trying to find the right words that expresses the truth accurately but in the sense how do I say this so that it doesn't sound as bad as it is or so that it sounds better than it is. That is how everyone is before conversion but that should not be the case in the life of a Christian who has renounced and put off his former life and has now put on his new life in Christ.

A Christian should be known for truthfulness, which means speaking the whole truth without seeking to deceive; it means telling the facts accurately without manipulation and it means refusing to put spin on things to make things look better than they are or to make ourselves look

better. Telling the truth is really very hard to do because we are use to hearing lies within our society. Do you really believe a Politician when they tell you they will not raise taxes?

Do we really believe the news that is broadcast is the whole truth or the stories in our newspapers are totally true? Do you believe the people you work with or are the people in your family always truthful in every situation? You see it's not easy to tell the truth but the Christian is enabled to do so by the Holy Spirit and must do so. So this week watch your words carefully and see if you speak the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Paul says this speaking the truth must be towards everyone (neighbour) and not just in certain circumstances or at certain times. His neighbour includes the church; the church must be marked by truthfulness. That's not just truthfulness in doctrine but also truthfulness in our everyday speech to one another and in all our church affairs. The church must be able to trust one another the church is based on trust and therefore truthfulness fosters trust within the church.

In fact the reason why we should put off lying and put on truthfulness is because we are all members of one body. In other words we are all on the same side. We belong to one another, therefore, why would we want to deceive one another by holding back the truth. If the eye sees a brick on the footpath it does not deceive the foot by saying to it it's just a bit of foam go on and kick it. No it tells the foot to step over it.

Why because every member of the body functions for the benefit of the whole body. So every individual Christian must speak to one another truthfully for why would we want to deceive one another that only hurts the whole body. Are we always truthful in our words to one another? Have we never put spin on our words to enhance our credibility or perhaps to cast doubt on another person's credibility? Have we always told the whole truth or have we sometimes held back some of it for our own benefit.

Is one of the reasons why there is often a failure to trust others within the church especially among the leadership of churches and between leadership and members is because we suspect that the whole truth is not always being told to us? This ought not to be for we have put off lying and have put on truth. But Paul's reason also applies to our falsehood to those outside of the church. If an unbeliever suspects we are not telling the truth then that lie affects the whole church.

We are all members of the same body, when your tooth hurts your whole body is affected and when you deliberately deceive others then not only is your credibility at stake but so is the credibility of the church and of the course the Lord's as well. So let us speak the truth at all times and in all situations and under every circumstance.

2. SECOND EXAMPLE – DON'T LOSE YOUR TEMPER BUT RATHER ENSURE THAT YOUR ANGER IS RIGHTEOUS (vs. 26-27)

Paul's second example does not state an express positive side, 'something to put on' but we are probably right to understand it as being a controlled and righteous anger as opposed to an uncontrolled selfish sinful and unrighteous anger. Anger itself is not sinful we have many occasions when God is angry with sin and the Lord Jesus when he walked this earth expressed righteous anger (Mark 3:5 and Matthew 21:12-13).

Paul is here quoting from Psalm 4:4 where we are told to be angry but do not sin in the process. In other words there must be times when we are rightfully angry at sin and at the desecration of the Lord's name in our world. However, rare are those occasions I would suggest to you because we are still sinful and often our best of emotions are tainted with sin. So what may seem like righteous anger can so easily be disguising what is actually sinful anger.

Our problem is if we are honest that we are angry far too often at the wrong things and for the wrong reasons. Anger that is sinful must be rooted out of the life of the Christian and if we are to be angry at all it must be at the right things and with the right motives. How often have relationships in families broken down by anger from a family member, anger that turns on people and hurts people with words and actions are full of sin. Well Christians are not to be like that, we must watch our anger it should be a rare thing in the Christian unless it is righteous anger, which I say it is so hard to be. It is probably best not to be angry at all, unless the Lord stirs up true anger within us.

How many times have churches been damaged by a fellow member given vent to his or her anger against the church as a whole or the Pastor or some other individual member? How often has the leadership within churches been split over one Elder or Deacon expressing their selfish anger in sinful ways? Such anger should not be the case in the church; we all have a responsibility to root it out.

The only time we should show anger is when it is righteous but even that sort of anger should be limited for Paul is saying do not let your righteous anger spill over into the next day. Why? In case righteous anger should become unrighteous. If what is causing righteous anger is dwelt upon for any particular period of time then it soon stirs up within us sinful thoughts and emotions.

Paul's point is don't finish a day angry, don't go to bed angry otherwise it will fester and turn to bitterness or thoughts of revenge or some other sinful thought which could ultimately led to sinful action. Paul's words of course also apply to unrighteous anger; don't let it spill over into another day. It should not really last another minute but if it does and you have dwelt upon it in your mind all day then do not allow it to last any longer. Before you go to bed confess to God and ask him to give you the grace to deal with whatever it is that is making you angry.

This is very good advice to married couples as well although that is not Paul's context, but every married couple would do well heed this advice. Deal with sinful anger towards your partner before you go to sleep at night. Don't wake up still not speaking to him or her don't wake up with whatever it is that is causing you anger in your mind. Why should we be angry and not sin and yet not to be angry for long, even if it is righteous anger?

Because the devil loves angry people and he is looking for a foothold into your life and into our church to cause havoc and hurt and mayhem if given the opportunity. Our enemy is seeking all the time to find a way into our lives and into the church to cause maximum damage, and one of the things he loves to see is angry Christians. He even loves righteous anger for if dwelt upon righteous anger becomes sinful anger. He loves a Christian to be frustrated with another Christian or even with the Lord and he will seek to play on that so that he sees us blowing our tops and giving full vent to our anger usually in hurtful words towards others. O he loves that so do not give him a foothold deal with your sinful anger now, don't wait and do not allow righteous anger which is rare anyway to become sinful by dwelling upon it so that thoughts and feelings of revenge take over our minds.

Whatever may be the case do not let today's anger be there tomorrow otherwise the devil will also be there tomorrow causing damage to us personally to our church and ultimately to the name of our Lord.

3. THIRD EXAMPLE – DON'T STEAL BUT WORK AND GIVE (v 28)

It is tempting to go along with translations like the GNB, which says "the man who used to rob must stop robbing" but it overlooks the force of the present tense here. Though we might like to think of the early church as full of upright and decent people this might be an exaggeration.

Certainly some of the Christians came from the lowest end of the economic ladder and they may well have had many unpleasant habits when they were first converted.

They may have found these habits hard to break. Stealing may well have been one of them. After all if you were poor and were use to stealing in order to survive then that particular habit became hard to break. But Paul says you have learned Christ you have turned away from your former way of life therefore stop stealing. Now if you are a Christian here this morning you will find it hard to relate to this instruction. You have a good standard of living and have no real need to steal anyway. But are there other ways that we could be guilty of stealing?

What about your work patterns do you always work hard for the agreed time that you are at work. Do you ever take a longer lunch or Coffee break do you ever feel that helping yourself to something that belongs to your company is a perk of the Job. Do you ever feel that because you are underpaid then you should not give your very best for your employer after all they do not appreciate you? If we do such things are we not stealing?

It must stop it is not in keeping with knowing Christ. What about paying our Income Tax do we resent paying so much tax? Perhaps we like to fiddle our tax returns or if you are claiming benefits do you always declare your savings or shares for to do so might affect your benefits? Well such practices must not be part of Christian living, our employers must know by our honestly that we would never try to cheat or steal from them whether that is goods or time.

We must be known as honest people perhaps the only truly honest person in our office or factory. We might have stolen like others before we were saved but not now, we are finished with such a way of life now that we have learned Christ.

But if Paul says that we are to put off stealing what are we to replace it with? We are to replace it with work and the word that is used for 'work' means 'hard labour.' We are to do something useful with our hands rather than stealing off others. So every Christian must work if they are able too.

I know that sometimes that is not always possible because of ill health or the employment situation but Christians must do all that they can to find work for if nothing else working hard will reduce the temptation of stealing. So if you are in work are you known for your hard work, or do you only work hard when you have too or when the manager is watching you. But what is the reason for working hard. It is so that we can indulge ourselves in all types of material goods and pleasures? No it is not.

Our motivation for working is so that we will have something to share with someone in need. We work not just for our own benefit but also for the benefit of others. So the Christian is not only known for his hard work but for his giving as well. When we get our salary what do we do with it? Well we have bills to pay, and we have to feed ourselves and family and so on. But do we look to see if there is someone in need that could do with a little bit of financial help. Now Paul doesn't state whether this person who needs help is inside or outside the church but I think it does not matter.

If someone is in need and we are able to help then we simply should do so because we are now living a new life with God through Christ and this new life is marked by giving. What about within the church? Are there people here who could testify to your generosity? Even if no one else knows about your giving to others would the Lord be pleased with your giving? Where we first to help our brother and sister in their time of need?

Of course when we give to the church we are giving to those in need. For through this church we give in support of the Pastor and his ministry. We give to Caring for Life to help those in need and we give to various missionaries etc. So even if we do not give to any other person or cause do we

see our giving to the church as a way of giving to people in need? We get another Job, which pays a higher salary, or perhaps we get a promotion or pay increase.

Is one of our first thoughts whom can I help with this extra money? Or how much more will I be able to give to God's church or is our first thought, good I will be able to have that holiday or new furniture for my house. A person who has learnt Christ and has put off the old life will look at ways to give to those in need. It is indeed more blessed to give than receive and you don't have to wait until you reach a certain level of income before you give.

No a saved person gives from whatever limited income they may have because that is what they want to do because they have put off selfishness and have put on generosity. They work in order to give.

So as I finish let us pray that God by his Holy Spirit will help us to put off all that is not in keeping with our new life in Christ and to replace it with things that are wholesome and godly. Things like truthfulness, righteous anger and hard work. For we must remember we are all members of the same body, we must not let the devil get a foothold and we must share what we have with those who are in need.

Amen