

Speak, Think and Act as a Christian

Ephesians 4:25-32

Introduction

So far in this epistle we have learned that the blood of Christ alone sanctifies us before God. Christians stand before God without the guilt and the distinctions of their background, performance or ethnicity. We are one in Christ. But now Paul deals with the concern that grace will be abused and used as a license to sin. He knows that our sinful humanity will always seek to use the beauty of grace to deny the ugliness of our sin. So Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to live out the grace of salvation by pursuing holiness. In v. 22-24 Paul explains that one of the marks that you are a Christian is that you are in a continual process of putting off the old self and putting on Christ.

As a pastor pointed out, Christians are not robots who simply react automatically to divine impulses. Although God makes us new creatures, He also commands us in the strength of the Spirit to subdue our unredeemed humanness, which still resides in us, and to live as new creatures in submission to Christ our new Master. The paradox of the Christian life is that both God's sovereignty and man's will are at work. And the faithful believer responds positively to God's sovereign declarations and commands. In other words, GOD'S GRACE, BIBLICALLY UNDERSTOOD, SHOULD PRODUCE HOLINESS IN ONES' LIFE.

So in 4:25-32 Paul gives to the believers in Ephesus several commands that are meant to reflect several contrasts between the old life without Christ and the new life in Christ. So believers are called to a new standard of life, and here at least five practical examples that should be reflective in a believer's life. Because of Christ's salvation in their lives, the Ephesians are called to walk in a different manner as before. Specifically they are called to put off lying and speak truthfully (v.25), to put off unrighteous anger (v. 26-27), to put off stealing and put on a hard-working and generous attitude (v. 28), to put off any corrupting talk and put on words that are meant build up and honor Christ and the Holy Spirit (v. 29-30), and finally, to put off natural vices and put on godly habits (v. 31-32).

Let's try to go analyze them more in depth.

1. Put off Lying and Speak Truthfully (v. 25)

It's important to realize that Paul is not making these things up, but all of his exhortations are quotes from the Old Testament, teachings that have been already presented by God throughout the centuries through His prophets. Specifically, this phrase seems to be a quote from Zechariah 8:16-17 "16 These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; 17 do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD."

The people of Israel from the times of Zechariah were tempted like us today, to lie for personal gain or to avoid some unwanted consequences. But God exhorts them and us that His followers are not to tell lies but to speak the truth.

One theologian (James Montgomery Boice) points out that the Greek word translated “falsehood” is actually the word “to pseudos” (which literally could be translated “The Lie”). This is the same root word that John uses in 1 John 2:22 to talk about “The Liar” with reference to Satan. So Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus that when they became Christians they had rejected “the lie” and “the Liar” (meaning Satan and his lie, that we are still under his condemnation and he still has power over us), and that they embraced the Truth (and just a reminder, John quotes Jesus in 14:6 saying about Himself: “I am the truth, the life, and the way”).

There are many kinds of temptations for lying but here are some very common ones (at least in my life I am tempted by these):

- a. The first is to falsely represent one’s work – Bryan Chappel, who was the president of Covenant Theological Seminary, pointed out that “surveys that provide anonymity reveal that almost all college students acknowledge some level of cheating in their academic life. He goes on to say that “academic pressures, requirements of authorities, anxiety about the future, the concern not to lose face, and the need to compensate for lack of discipline in preparation can combine to make cheating a very common temptation.”
- b. Another temptation is to falsely represent one’s self – How easy it is to present ourselves as having positions of greater responsibility or backgrounds of greater significance than is really true. We can easily slide into the temptation of bringing glory to ourselves while rationalizing that what we are saying is for the glory of Jesus.

Some may be tempted to create controversy in the church by speaking of what they do not know or twisting what they do know.

Bryan Chappel: “The temptation always exists to further one’s perceived importance by presenting others in a way that devalues them. We might say words that approximate what someone said (without his nuance or qualifications) in order to make him look unreasonable, unbiblical, or foolish – and ourselves in contrast more spiritual, biblical and wise.”

Actually, those who study the art of persuasion speak of the need to “perfect the enemy.” That means that you portray a person so negatively that no reasonable person can help but hate them and oppose them. I find this to be one of the most dangerous threats to church unity!

- c. A final temptation is misrepresenting facts – Falsehoods are so tempting when we face expense reports, tax returns, car trades, business dealings, due dates, rents, traffic citations, spousal pressures, parental questions, and on and on. The opportunities to shade or hide the truth to avoid personal consequences or advance personal gain are constant challenges and frequent causes of sin.

These are just few ways in which our lives are tainted by lies. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to call us to live a life of speaking truth and acting with integrity. **WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN SPEAK TRUTHFULLY? FOR THE SAKE OF THE BODY!!**

Our physical bodies cannot function properly or safely if each member does not correctly communicate to the others. If our brain were suddenly to start giving false signals to our feet, we would stumble or walk in front of a moving truck instead of stopping at a stop light. If the nerves in our hands failed to tell our brain that injury was occurring, we could have our fingers burned without our knowing it.

The beauty of this analogy is that the apostle is reminding us that our words affect the ability of the church body to function. When trust disappears, the work of the body comes to a screeching halt until that trust can be restored. And Paul already told us that the church is the body of Christ in which the Spirit dwells and that God will use her to fill the earth with his transforming power. Our words and the integrity that gives them credibility are the means God uses to flood the earth with the power of the gospel. The apostle makes a vital connection between our godliness and the power of the Gospel. Actually **WITHOUT GODLINESS THERE IS NO GOSPEL POWER.**

Think for example at Acan's sin in the book of Joshua and how his deceit cost Israel a great loss when they wanted to conquer the city of Ai. Or think about the New Testament book of Acts, in chapter 5 we find out that a couple, Ananias and Saphira lied to the leaders of the early church and God punished them with death for that.

Mine personal integrity and holiness in speaking truth and living a life of integrity affects the whole body of believers around me. Sin always has devastating effects in the lives of the people around you. Speak truthfully, even though at times that means we don't tell everything we know without regard for its impact. Truthfulness is not in conflict with keeping a confidence or other legitimate secrets. But everything we say should absolute truth, and if we purposely withhold information in order to deceive and mislead that's another form of lying.

Another practical impact of the Gospel in our lives should be in regards to the way we deal with our emotions, specifically with anger.

2. Put off unrighteous anger (v. 26-27) – Paul carefully words his instruction to help us avoid misunderstanding. I want you to see that he doesn't say we should never get angry. Actually such a command would be impossible and even ungodly. Why? Because the Bible does commend righteous anger and we find out that God is angry with the ones who commit wickedness and injustice. Here are few passages:

Psalms 7:11 “God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day”

1 Kings 11:9 “And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice”

In John 2:13-17 we find out that Jesus was angry with the merchants who transformed the Temple in a marketplace. He made a whip and hit them and chased them out of the Temple

In Romans 1:18 “But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”

Injustice, cruelty, and insensitivity to others stir God's wrath and rightly cause anger in us who are made in his image. Because we are made in God's image we have a sense of justice and we become angry when we believe that an injustice has taken place.

But what is anger? Biblical Counselor Robert Jones states in his book "Uprooting Anger" that "Anger is our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil." Or more simply, anger is an emotion which arises out of a judgment.

But how can we determine whether or not we have righteous anger or unrighteous anger? Here are some biblical filters to determine that:

- Righteous anger reacts against actual sin – those against whom Jesus was angry were guilty of sinfully using God's temple for unholy purposes. If no sin has taken place, we have no right to be angry. For example, if we were to be angry at someone who is late because they got caught in unpredictable traffic then our anger would be unrighteous because they didn't commit any sin.
- Righteous anger focuses upon God and His Kingdom, rights and Concerns, not on me and my kingdom and my rights and my concerns – Jesus' anger against the temple merchants was motivated by a zeal for His Father's house. In contrast, our anger is usually because of the damage that we perceive has been done against us. In other words, we should always ask the question: "is my anger because God didn't get what He deserves and wants, or because I didn't get what I want?"
- Righteous anger is righteously expressed – even when a real sin has taken place and one thinks he is concerned for God's interests, anger is not righteous if it's expressed sinfully. For example, one may have a righteous anger against an abortion clinic in the community, but if that anger is expressed through hateful speech and violence against people and poverty, the anger is not righteous and doesn't serve the interests of God's kingdom.

So anger is a proper and useful emotion when it is expressed in a manner that is consistent with these principles presented in the Scripture. But we must admit that most of the times we are not experiencing righteous anger but unrighteous one, because we either don't react well to some legit reasons to be angry or we over-react or selfishly react to situations that are not going our way. And the Bible treats anger most of the times as a sin. Hence for example Colossians 3:8 says "But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips"

I want to spend few more minutes on this topic because I think it's such a prevalent problem in many families and lives.

Where does sinful anger come from? The culture around us tells us that genetics is sometime to be blamed for this (e.i. "he has a hot temper because he is Irish or Hungarian"), or a bad childhood or even chemical imbalance. Even though some of these elements might play a part in enhancing our response of anger, ultimately the Bible says something different about the origin of anger.

- From our sinful hearts - Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:20-23 "And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. **21**"For from within, out of

the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, [22](#)deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. [23](#)“All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

In the context Jesus is explaining that what goes into a man (unclean food) is not what defiles him, but that which is already in his heart makes him unclean. In the same way, our external circumstances, including what people do against us, do not make us sinfully angry. All they do is expose the sin which is already in our hearts. That means our hearts must be changed if we are to overcome anger.

Jerry Bridges rightly stated that “In facing up to our anger, we need to realize that no one else causes us to be angry. Someone else’s words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within us – usually our pride, or selfishness, or desire to control.”

- From wrong desires - So we become angry because we want something and we don’t get it. We become even more angry when we want something badly and we don’t get it. Angry people tend to feel that they are morally right, and that any blocking or changing of their plans is an unbearable indignity and that they should not have to suffer this way.

James 4:1-3 says “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? [2](#)You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.”

Do you see the progression here? A person wants something for his own benefit. He doesn’t get it, so then he feels evil passion, he fights and he rages with anger. Think about the last time you got angry? What did you want that you were not getting?

Now let me just say that sometimes what we want is something righteous and legitimate. For example a mother wants her children to be obedient and respectful; or a husband wants his wife to be supportive and affectionate; or a wife wants her husband to pay full attention and understand her; or a boss wants his workers to perform with excellence.

But a legitimate desire becomes sinfully idolatrous desire when it becomes a controlling desire. We know a desire is idolatrous when we are willing to sin in order to get what we want or we become sinfully angry if we don’t get what we want.

Robert Jones points out that “our anger is a response against something. It does not arise in a vacuum or appear spontaneously... our active hearts are always responding to the people and events daily life.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH HAVING UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER?

- You sin against God – you are putting yourself in the place of God. You are judging others forgetting that you are not ultimately in charge. You are contending for God’s place!
- You sin against God – angry people learn that their anger often gets results. There are many bullies in families, neighborhoods, workplaces and even churches who use anger to control others and get their way (Remember James 4)

- You end up living miserably – in the end angry people experience loss, including the loss of what they fight so hard to get through anger. Even though sinful anger seems justified in the moment and despite the fact that sometimes anger produces desired results in the short term, angry people wind up suffering the consequences of their sin (Galatians 6:7-8 says “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”) The angry person often experiences overwhelming stress, lack of peace, financial loss, and broken relationships as a result of his/her sin. Angry people often find themselves alone and the very desires and demands for which they were willing to fight remain unmet.

So is there hope for someone who is an angry person? Of course!!! What’s impossible with man is possible with God! Through His grace, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can change!

So how can we overcome unrighteous anger?

1. The first step toward overcoming our sinful anger is admitting that it exists and cry out to God for forgiveness. You need to admit that you are a sinner and you need someone to save you from this situation. Stop blaming others around you and own your sin!

But once you become a Christian, how can you get rid of the old habits? Remember some key biblical truths!!

- a. God is God and He is the Ultimate Judge, not me – Romans 12:17-21 “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

When others wrong us, we feel that the balance of justice is out of ... balance and we want to make it right again. The angry person thinks to himself “you wronged me, so you deserve to be punished”. And we usually punish the “guilty party” through hateful speech, acts of violence, slander, or more subtly through being cold, quiet and withdrawn. All of these expressions of anger are sinfully judgmental and contrary to what we might feel, they actually don’t achieve the righteousness of God (read James 1:20, where it says that the “anger of man doesn’t achieve the righteousness of God”

- b. God has been very gracious to me in Christ – when we realize that each of us is “chief among sinners” and that we have been forgiven an overwhelming debt, our hearts will be moved to show grace to those who have wronged us.

Secular anger management techniques involve suppressing or redirecting the fires of anger. The Gospel actually puts out the fires of anger and replaces them with the living water of grace.

If you remember in Matthew 18 Jesus uses the example of a servant who has been forgiven a debt of billions of dollars and then that servant goes on and refuses to show mercy to another fellow servant who owed him couple of thousands of dollars. Now the debt of the second guy wasn't pennies and was important, but it was insignificant when compared with the amount of debt he owed to the great master.

This illustrates that during the course of life in a fallen world, our fellow sinners may hurt us in significant ways, A spouse might be unfaithful. A child may become wayward and cause great heartache and expense. A friend may betray our trust. A business partner may cheat you out of a substantial amount of money. These are not small things. BUT none of these compares however with the debt God has forgiven us in Christ. The Gospel has enabled believers to overcome anger and bitterness and offer forgiveness and grace.

c. God is in control and is doing good for us – Romans 8:28, Genesis 5:20

Angry people want to be in control and become upset when things don't go their way. The angry person must submit to God, trusting that He is exercising His sovereignty for His glorious purposes and for our good. When people fail you and circumstances go against you, God is still at work. He uses trials to produce maturity and patience and Christ-like character.

d. Remember that you are a new creation in Christ – 2 Cor. 5:17

Angry people often feel stuck in their patterns of rage and helpless to change. While is true that non-believers are enslaved to sin, those who are united with Christ by faith have been set free from sin's bondage. We are no longer controlled by the flesh and we can change. Listen to Romans 6:11 "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

When we are tempted to respond to people or circumstances with sinful anger, it is the renewal of our minds with these biblical truths that will empower us to walk in grace and humility.

e. Discipline yourself on self-control – 1 Timothy 4:7

Sadly we learn how to control ourselves in some situations but most of the times the closest ones to us feel the brunt of our rage. And if we say that we cannot have self-control with our family members we should remind ourselves the first four steps 😊