

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SIXTY-SEVEN)

“PUT OFF LYING AND PUT ON TRUTH”

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

In chapters **1-3** of his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul outlines the great **doctrines of grace**. He informs us of the exalted position to which believing sinners have been raised in Christ Jesus. In chapters **4-6**, he exhorts believers to conduct their lives in a manner which would demonstrate that they understand and appreciate all that God has done for them in Christ, all that they have become in Christ, and all the spiritual resources that are now at their disposal because they are in Christ. In other words, Paul's exhortations to the believers in chapters **4-6**, are based upon the doctrines he has outlined in the first 3 chapters. This is always the proper order, for it is in doctrine that believers are informed about their exalted position in Christ, which alone makes the exhortation to live holy lives a reasonable one.

In chapter **4**, verses **1-3**, Paul commences his exhortations with some general encouragement. In verses **4-16**, he speaks of the ministry gifts given to the Church by God. The purpose of these ministry gifts is to help believers to obey the exhortations. In verses **17-24**, he speaks of the tremendous change that is wrought in a believing sinner at the moment of his or her conversion, and of his or her gradual conforming to the image of Jesus Christ, as he or she intentionally and consistently yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit. He informs the believers of three points, first, that they have **put off the old man**, second, that they are being **renewed in the spirit of their mind**, and third, that they have **put on the new man**. On the basis of these three points, he now gives them detailed exhortations beginning in verse **25**.

Paul is never content to explain a doctrinal position or principle and then leave it. He always seeks to apply it to the believer's life. In verses **25-32**, he mentions five specific sins which he urges believers to avoid, and he explains why these sins should be avoided.

In verse **25**, he writes, *"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."* The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *"Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his*

neighbor, because we are members of one another.” Believers are to **put off**, or lay aside dishonesty and they are **put on** truthfulness.

The word “*wherefore,*” or “*therefore,*” indicates that Paul is transitioning from the principles and precepts of the faith to the personal application or practice of our faith. An old minister of yester-year was fond of saying, “**I would rather see a sermon lived than hear it preached.**” Paul provides a list of specific sins which are **not** to be characteristic of the **new man**, and the contrasting virtues which **are** to be characteristic of the **new man**. Since the **old man** with all his accompanying lusts is to be **put off**, and the **new man**, who is created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth is to be **put on**, the life-style of the believer must demonstrate that a radical and transformative change has occurred.

Brothers and sisters, **complete deliverance from the old man is demonstrated in a converted character!** The apostle John highlights this principle in **1 John 3:7-10**. The **New English Translation** renders this passage in the following way:

7 Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous.

8 The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil.

9 Everyone who has been fathered by God does not practice sin, because God’s seed resides in him, and thus he is not able to sin, because he has been fathered by God.

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Everyone who does not practice righteousness—the one who does not love his fellow Christian—is not of God.

The first of the old filthy garments that Paul urges us to put off is **lying**. As new creatures in Christ we are to display the life and loveliness of the Lord Jesus. Dishonesty has no part in the life of the **new man** in Christ. Paul says lying must be “*put away,*” or “*laid aside.*” The phrase, “*putting away lying*” is in a construction in the Greek which indicates that the action is a “once for all time” action. We could translate, “having put off once for all the lie.” In putting off once for all the **old man**, believers are to put off the habit of lying which was characteristic of that **old man**.

In **1 Corinthians 5:6-8** Paul writes the following:

6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough?

7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough—you are, in fact, without yeast. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

8 So then, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of vice and evil, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

(New English Translation)

A lie is any statement or act designed to deceive another person. The motivation for most lying is a desire either to hurt the one against whom the lie is directed or to protect oneself, usually out of fear or pride. As someone has rightly observed,

“We bend the truth in many ways. There is the half-truth. You sort of tell the truth, but not the whole truth. You tell your employer, ‘I wasn’t feeling well,’ which was sort of true. But, in reality, you were not so ill as to miss work. You just wanted to do something else... There are the lies that cover for someone or for ourselves: The boss is in the next room, but you say, ‘He’s not here right now to take your call.’ Often, the rationalization for cover-up lies is that the truth would hurt too

many people. This was the excuse behind the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon administration. It would 'hurt the country' if the truth were known!

Or, lies often go undercover as exaggeration. You stretch the story a bit to make yourself look better or to evoke sympathy. One of the easiest lies to fall into is the silent lie. This is where someone assumes something about you, which you know to be untrue. But, their mistaken view makes you look good, so you just let it go by and don't say anything to correct it. In a similar way, we use evasive lies. We change the subject or don't directly answer the question.

We also bend the truth by cheating on our income taxes, always with the justification that the government wastes so much money or that the tax system is unfair to the little guy (that's me!). We cheat on tests with the excuse, 'everyone else does it.' Or, we pilfer from our employer with the rationalization that they don't pay me enough. Or, if the clerk at the store makes a mistake to our advantage, we don't say anything to make it right. We figure, 'They over-charge for everything, anyway!'"

As believers, we are to lay aside every form of dishonesty, including colouring the truth, exaggerating, making promises that we do not intend to keep, or betraying confidences. There is no such thing as a "little white lie" for those who are positionally holy and blameless "in Christ." A believer's word should be totally trustworthy. Their yes should mean yes and their no should mean no. The **New English Translation** renders our Lord's words in **Matthew 5:33-37** in the following way:

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not break an oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.'

34 But I say to you, do not take oaths at all—not by heaven, because it is the throne of God,

35 not by earth, because it is his footstool, and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King.

36 Do not take an oath by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black.

37 Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no.' More than this is from the evil one.

In view of the fact that believers have put off the old man and have put on the new man, Paul exhorts them to “*speak every man truth with his neighbour.*”

Paul is not **suggesting** that we speak truth; he is **commanding** that we do so. The Greek word translated “*speak,*” is in the present imperative which calls for this speaking of the truth to be the believer’s habitual way of operating. It is to be an attitude and an action which characterizes his or her life. It is an attitude and an action that can only be carried out by relying wholly on the Holy Spirit who gives us both the desire and the power, according to **Philippians 2:13**.

We must speak “*the truth.*” The Greek word translated truth is **alétheia**: (**al-ay’-thi-a**), which refers to “the unconcealed reality lying at the basis of an appearance and agreeing with that appearance; the manifested essence of a matter.” It is truth as an accurate representation of the facts. It is the property of being in accord with or conformity to fact or reality. It is exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be.

Truth then is the correspondence between a reality and a declaration which professes to set it forth. To say it another way, words are true when they correspond with objective reality. Persons and things are true when they correspond with their profession. Hence a truth is a declaration which has corresponding reality, or a reality which is correctly set forth. Since God is Himself the great reality, that which correctly sets forth His nature is pre-eminently the Truth. Truth is the property of being in accord with fact or reality as defined by God.

Whatever God says is Truth. The Lord Christ Jesus is the embodiment of truth.

In this context let us consider **Galatians 2:11-14**:

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he had clearly done wrong.

12 Until certain people came from James, he had been eating with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he stopped doing this and separated himself because he was afraid of those who were pro-circumcision.

13 And the rest of the Jews also joined with him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray with them by their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "If you, although you are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you try to force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

(New English Translation)

Believers are to speak the whole truth, without distortion, diminution, or exaggeration. No promise is to be falsified and no mutual understanding is to be violated. We must embody truth in a similar manner as our Lord.

In his Commentary on the book of **Ephesians**, **John Phillips** makes the following remarks in respect of verse **25**:

"It seems incredible that Paul should have to tell Christians not to lie. Yet we are all surprised sometimes at 'the hidden things of darkness' that lurk in our souls (**1 Corinthians 4:5**). How easy it is in an unguarded moment when someone asks an awkward question to take refuge in a lie. But a lie on the lips of a Christian instantly grieves the Holy Spirit, who describes Himself as 'the Spirit of truth' (**John 15:26**)....

God is truth, unchanged and unchanging. The lie is the idiom of Satan's language. Lies are the evil one's common currency of speech. He, above all else, is 'the father of lies' (John 8:44)."

In **John 8:43-44**, our Lord said the following to the Jewish religious leaders:

43 Why don't you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot accept my teaching.

44 You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.

(New English Translation)

Brothers and sisters, the devil lies because he is a liar by nature. In fact he is "the father of lies." We too were liars by nature but, we have **put off** the **old man** with his deceitful lusts and have **put on** the **new man** who is created in righteousness and true holiness. Therefore, when we speak or act in a dishonest manner, we are acting out of character and are grieving the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We are not certain why Paul commenced this list of specific sins that must be put away with lying. It may be because all dishonesty **protects** the flesh rather than **confesses** the flesh. In **John 3:19-21** our Lord said,

19 Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.

21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.

(New English Translation)

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, Paul wrote,

1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, just as God has shown us mercy, we do not become discouraged.

2 But we have rejected shameful hidden deeds, not behaving with deceptiveness or distorting the word of God, but by open proclamation of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience before God.

(New English Translation)

The flesh is filled up with lustful deceit and doesn't want to be exposed. So when we come and bow down before Christ and begin to put that brand new garment on, it won't let us lie. If we do, immediately we know that we have grieved the Holy Spirit.

The reason for this exhortation to put away lying, and to speak every man truth with his neighbour is that believers are members of one another. Paul writes, "*for we are members one of another.*" The ground of the exhortation does not rest on merely on ethical considerations of our obligations to society, but on the deeper truth that in being members of one another, we are members of the Body of Christ who is the truth! Paul bases his exhortation on the profound Christian idea of union one with another through union with Christ. In verses **15** and **16** he had written,

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Every believer belongs to every other believer in Christ. As members one of another we affect each other, and we cannot build each other up except with truth. Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to open warfare in a church. It is instructive that the first sin that was publicly judged in the early church was the sin of lying! (**Acts 5:1-11**)

In **Acts 5:3** we read the following: *“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”*

Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill his heart and control him, Ananias allowed Satan to fill his heart and control him. When the Holy Spirit controls our hearts, we will speak the truth.

The **New English Translation** translates **Colossians 3:9-10** in the following way:

9 Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices

10 and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.

Brothers and sisters, if we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, lying is inconsistent with what God expects us to be. Indeed, it is inconsistent with who we are!

The word “*lie*” in **Colossians 3:9**, is in the present imperative tense in the Greek, indicating that Paul is forbidding the continuance of an action already going on. He is literally saying to the believers, “Stop lying to one another.” These Colossian saints had carried over into the new life, the sin of lying. Paul urges them to stop lying because they had **put off** the **old man** with his practices and had put on the **new man**. Dishonesty characterized the former life which was crucified and buried with Christ, but now honest speech and conduct are to characterize believers.

He says that the **new man** is constantly being renewed with respect to a complete and perfect knowledge which is according to the image of the One who created him. The word “*renewed*” is the translation of a Greek word which is in the present tense, indicating that believers are constantly being renewed to a new quality of life. This is a process that will continue for the rest of our earthly lives and is essentially synonymous with sanctification, growth in holiness, or gradually being conformed to the image of God’s Son, or growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The **new man** has a new nature similar to that of a growing plant. This growth is the result of being constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit. In a sense, the **new man** is not the end but the beginning of a life-long process. Brothers and sisters, the question for each of us to ask ourselves is “Am I growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?”

The **new man** is said to be “*renewed in knowledge,*” because **an ignorant mind cannot be a profitable mind!** In fact, there is nothing more dangerous than a religious person who is both zealous and ignorant. The **New English Translation** renders **Proverbs 19:2** as follows: “*It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily makes poor choices.*”

When we are saved, we still have the same body with the same brain. All the patterns of the past are etched in our mind. But as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, a renewing process takes place. Those old patterns are gradually erased and the newness of life in Christ fills our mind. The marvel and glory of sanctification is that the Lord would work His grace in us, reproducing in us the image of Jesus Christ.

This renewing process affects the way we think and what we understand about the Lord, His will, and His working in our life. The knowledge that Paul is talking about is an intense, life-changing knowledge that shapes the way we live according to the pattern found in Christ.

Just like a baby is born complete but immature, the new man is complete, but he has the capacity to grow. Sanctification is a continual growth in Christ-likeness which is not accidental, but is associated intimately with our intake of and obedience to the Word of Truth. **God's way to sanctify His saints is not to take us out of the world, but to progressively take the world out of us! His primary objective is not to get us into heaven, but to get heaven into us!** This is a continuous process; the new man has not yet matured and is ever in the state of development. Christians are not sinless, although they should sin less and less!

As we engage with God's Word, hearing it, reading it, thinking upon it, meditating on it, digesting it and applying it, then the gradual work of sanctification occurs. Certainly the Lord uses other things in the sanctification process, but **His primary tool in conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ is His Word.** That is why the renewing that takes place is based on knowledge "*according to the image of the one who created it.*"

If we are genuinely born again, a sure evidence of it is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our life, and we have the assurance that the One who began his work within us will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns (**Philippians 1:6**).