

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 4:25-32

Message #21 (February 11, 2007)

THE WORTHY WALK (Part 2)

Introduction

1. You have probably heard the old story about the preacher and the farmer. The preacher asked the farmer, “If you had \$200, would you give \$100 to the Lord?” The farmer replied, “I would.” The preacher continued, “If you had two cows, would you give one of them to the Lord?” Again the farmer replied, “I would.” The preacher then asked, “If you had two pigs, would you give one to the Lord?” The farmer protested, “That’s not fair. You know I have two pigs!”
2. The point is quite simple. It is easy to see and understand and agree with truth, as long as it does not really affect or apply to us. However, when it intersects with where we live, it is a lot more difficult to swallow!
3. Paul has already made the point that as believers; we are in Christ; we are new creations. We have a wonderful position in Christ and Paul urges us to be what we are. So we must put off the old and put on the new. Last week we were introduced to the basic principle. Today we see how Paul specifically applies this to our daily lives. It is highly likely that we will consider something today that will collide head on with where we are. Then we will have to decide if we are willing to “give up the pig” so to speak! Typically when the truth starts to stomp on our toes, we get frustrated with the messenger, determining that he has gone from preaching to meddling! The problem is not the messenger but the message. What we do with the message will make all the difference in relation to the worthy walk we are urged to walk.
4. Paul gives **five basic applications** of putting off the old and putting on the new. If we really want to walk the worthy walk we should be able to pray something like this: “Lord, I am willing to listen to your Word as the Holy Spirit challenges my heart. I will yield to your Holy Spirit as He brings conviction into my heart and offers to help me walk the worthy walk.” Are we ready?

I. PUT OFF LYING – PUT ON TRUTHFULNESS (25)

A. How bad is lying?

1. Stern Biblical words – For the most part we believe that it is best to tell the truth, but many Christians will “stretch the truth” for the sake of convenience or to somehow “save face.” We have developed an intricate plan for what is a lie and what is “not really a lie, though not exactly the truth.” Consider these verses in the Scripture concerning lying. I offer them without comment: **Revelation 21:8** *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death;* **Revelation 22:15** *Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood;* **Proverbs 23:23** *Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.;* **Proverbs 6:16-19** *There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.*
2. Straight definitions – Basically a lie is a statement contrary to fact spoken with the intent to deceive. Lying may manifest itself in many forms: telling what is not true, exaggerating, cheating, making excuses, betraying confidences, not fulfilling promises, etc. Lying began with Satan (John 8:44). He lies about everything, (with the exception of telling the truth about our sinfulness). Lying is never right. Many would argue for “situation ethics” but it would be hard to build a Biblical defense for such. (It is in the Bible – Rahab – but it is not condoned). The problem is that lying is opposed to the very foundation of the Christian life and message – the truth. (It is interesting that the very first sin to be judged in the church was lying – Acts 5). (I was talking to a missionary who has been serving for many years in France. He told me that whatever the tax rate is in France, the government automatically charges 15% more because they assume that is the average amount that people will cheat their government! Their policies assume deceitfulness!)

B. How important is the truth?

1. Paul draws the conclusion of the truth's importance with the phrase, "for we are members one of another." Because we are together as the body of Christ, in order to maintain unity and function properly together, we must tell the truth.
2. Suppose that certain parts of our physical body began to lie to the rest of the body. If our brain should lie to our skin and told it what was cold was hot and what was hot was cold, we would either freeze or scald in the shower! If our brain tricked our eyes into not seeing certain things that were present, we could be brought into harms way. When we do something harmful to the body, normally we feel pain. The body says, "Stop doing that!" If we did not get that signal, we could do serious or even fatal damage to ourselves! That is the way it is with telling the truth to each other.
3. Our spiritual family relationships depend on truth-telling. When we lie, we cause disunity and strife and trouble for the entire body. Frankly, if a person is a continual liar there is very little reason to believe that this one is even a true Christian. Put off lying. Put on the truth.

II. PUT OFF ANGER – PUT ON SELF-CONTROL (26-27)

A. The commands

1. "Be angry..." Paul did not say, "Don't be angry." He commanded, "Be angry..." Have we found a command we have no trouble obeying? Jesus became angry (Mark 3:5). The Bible tells us that God gets angry (Deuteronomy 9:8, 20). While it is true that this is a command, we must not stop until we complete the sentence.
2. "Do not sin..." Sometimes we call this "righteous indignation." However, we need to be clear about the definition. More than likely, when I am angry, I believe it is righteous indignation. When you are angry, I am convinced that it is sin. When I get angry, it is justified. When you get angry, it is sin. Aristotle would not be someone I would normally quote, but on this point he got it right: "Anyone can get angry, but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, in the right way, this is not easy." Frankly, righteous indignation is essentially related not to us, but to God. That is, when God's holy name is violated we ought to be angry! Whatever label we might give it, most other anger is sin.

B. The caution

1. Concerning time ... “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” The word Paul uses for anger is the kind that is internal – kind of a slow burn. Phillips paraphrased it, “Never go to bed angry.” Even in righteous anger there seems to be a time limit. Because we are human, we have the tendency to allow personal vindictiveness to permeate our anger. We are quite able to overindulge even in righteous anger. We are cautioned not to harbor resentments beyond the day they started. (“But you don’t know how seriously offensive that act or statement was against me!” – It doesn’t matter. The consequences are too great if we harbor such anger). Psalm 4:4-5 *Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.*
2. Concerning consequence ... If we allow our anger to simmer, we provide a beachhead, a foothold for the devil. Uncurbed anger opens us up to irrational and evil suggestions. Remember that the devil is always on the prowl. We do not need to make his job any easier. Whenever we become angry, we are in effect becoming allied with Satan. Put off anger; put on self-control.

III. PUT OFF STEALING – PUT ON SHARING (28)

- A. The call to stop stealing (the Greek word is where we get our English word “kleptomania”) – Paul challenges his readers here in the present tense. The implication was that stealing remained a serious problem even with believers. Many who came to Christ were slaves. Pilfering was a way of life and sometimes considered essential for the survival of a slave family. Today Christians also justify stealing. “O they owe it to me.” “Everybody does it.” “Our company expects us to do this.” “It is not really stealing.” Someone defined stealing as “finding something before its lost.” Whether it is taking hotel towels or office supplies or falsifying reports or cheating on exams or failing to pay a fair wage for work completed, it is wrong and ought to have no part in the life of a believer. A significant percentage of the price of goods goes to offset the cost of shoplifting. Paul says, if you are doing this, stop doing this. Put off stealing. This takes us to the next idea; we do not steal to get. We work to give.
- B. The call to start working – Manual labor is in view here. Believers ought to be the hardest workers where they work. Note Paul’s words to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 3:10 *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*). He certainly practiced what he preached (Acts 20:33-34). If we fail to work and start to steal, we are imitating the devil who is a murderer and a liar who has come to “steal, kill and destroy.” The saying of rabbis was, “If you do not teach your son a trade, you teach him to be a thief.”
- C. The call to start sharing – Not only does a Christian work instead of stealing, but he also gives himself to sharing. He works not to satisfy his own selfishness, but he works to satisfy the needs of others. Work hard, not so you can have everything you want, but so you can share with those who are in need.

IV. PUT OFF CORRUPT SPEECH – PUT ON EDIFYING CONVERSATION (29-30)

- A. The negative
1. The issue of foul language – Paul’s word here can mean “useless, worthless, rotten or decayed.” Such language has no place in the Christian’s vocabulary. Remember that we are a new creation in Christ. Our mouth was also made new. It is time for some to put off the old. Jesus made it clear that the heart and the mouth were connected. That

which comes out the mouth originated in the heart. What we say may in fact be revealing too much about what is in our hearts.

2. The issue of useless language – It does not necessarily have to be dirty to be useless. (Paul continued speaking of this issue in chapter 5:4). It was good counsel indeed, when the Psalmist wrote, *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!* Psalm 141:3.

B. The positive – Rather than speaking worthless words, we are called upon to speak that which is good, that which builds up, that which fits the need. (*To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!* Proverbs 15:23)

C. The purpose – Paul tells us the purpose for such speech, that what we say ought to give (or minister) grace to those who hear. The person we are speaking to does not need to earn our kind words. After all, what is grace? It is time to put off corrupt speech and put on conversation that builds others up. Paul told the Colossians, *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person* (4:6). Verbal attacks and angry, bitter exchanges have no place in the context of Christians.

D. The problem – When we speak inappropriately (ill timed, unedifying speech), we grieve the Holy Spirit. I think Paul was suggesting that when we fail to put off the old man in any of these categories we grieve the Holy Spirit, but he makes his remarks specifically at this point in his letter. The Holy Spirit loves us. He indwells us. He is at work perfecting us. When we speak corrupt speech, we are going against His very nature. For He is holy! Such behavior grieves God. I am not entirely sure why Paul said, (speaking of the Holy Spirit), “by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” I offer this possibility. The Holy Spirit is God’s mark of ownership on us. We belong to God and He is at work to perfect what He has purchased. When we are tempted to speak corrupt speech, the thoughts that we have been redeemed and that the Spirit of God indwells us and that He is God’s mark that we belong to Him, should be good deterrents. Surely I do not wish to bring reproach on my heavenly Father!

V. PUT OFF BITTERNESS – PUT ON FORGIVENESS (31-32)

A. The character of bitterness

1. Wrath – The outward, passionate display of the fury of inner resentment is wrath. We must put this away. Bitterness also manifests itself in ...
2. Anger – This is probably the disposition or characteristics of such a person. “He is an angry man.” Again such behavior has no appropriate place in a believer’s life. No believer should be so described.
3. Clamor – These are loud outcries, violent arguments, yelling and screaming at one another. Again, this is hardly a testimony to the gracious work of God in us!
4. Slander – to slander is to speak evil of. Included would be insulting words, untrue statements, etc.
5. All malice – This would include all other forms of base conduct and evil inclinations of the mind in our relationships toward others. If the fellowship of believers looks like this, we are in serious need of a wardrobe change! Puff off the old and put on the new.

B. The character of forgiveness

1. Kindness – this word carries the idea of gentleness or graciousness. It is the very opposite of bitterness described in verse 31. (I once heard someone say, “If you are not very kind, you are not very spiritual.” Paul would agree with that).
2. Compassion – compassion would be the opposite of the hard-heartedness of verse 31.
3. Restoration – This comes in the form of forgiveness. When we fail to forgive we are acting like the enemy. When we extend forgiveness to others, we are acting like Jesus. Surely we want to emulate our Savior. When we fail to forgive, we become a living contradiction to the Christianity we claim to possess. If we understand at all the depth of God’s mercy, we cannot withhold forgiveness.

C. The closing incentive – We are called to forgive as God, in Christ, forgave us. I think that means this. I quote from John MacArthur, “Just as freely, generously, wholeheartedly, spontaneously and eagerly as God in Christ forgave us, so we are to forgive others.” Some of us are prone to think that we have a right to be angry and are under no obligation to extend forgiveness. (We are like Jonah, when God asked him if he had a right to be angry and he told Him yes!) We do not get angry at others because they deserve it. We get angry because we are sinful. When we fail to extend forgiveness to others, we grieve the Spirit who lives in us; we grieve the Son who died for our sins; we grieve the Father who extended forgiveness to us.

Conclusion

1. Consider this: “If we were a community of people who never lied, but always spoke the truth; who never got angry in a sinful way, but always acted in love; who never stole, but always shared; who never spoke with filthy communication, but always ministered grace to those listening; who never had bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor or evil speaking, but were always characterized by kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness...do you think the world would take note of our message?”
2. Could it be that at least one of the reasons the world dismisses the message of the Gospel is because of the lack of authenticity in the lives of those who clam to believe it? It is time for a change in wardrobe!