

How We Treat Each Other

Good morning. My name is Kent and I'm our **teaching pastor** here. I realize if you're newer around here, that might be a little confusing, because for most of the summer the person up here preaching has been *not me* just as often as it *has been* me. We've been filling in a lot of our Sundays lately hearing from other guys in our church family, as well as people from outside churches. And the goal with all that was to let you guys here from some outside voices, but also to give me some time to pray and prep for the upcoming season here at City Church—which has been really good personally. We've got some things coming up teaching-wise that I'm excited about: we're gonna be teaching through a series on sex and sexuality starting in September, gonna teach on the idea of mission and what it means to be on mission this fall, and then we've got an whole-church initiative leading up to Christmas that we're all gonna get involved in that I'm particularly looking forward to, even though currently I can't tell you a thing about it—and yes I do realize how incredibly cruel that was. So all that to say, I enjoyed some time off of preaching this summer, but from here on out you're gonna be seeing a good bit more of me up here. Which might be seem like great news or horrible news, but it's gonna happen either way.

Anyway, if you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to Ephesians 4. So last week our friend **Tim Olson** was here with us, and he walked us through what I would call the “basic rhythm of the Christian life.” That **following Jesus looks like putting off our old identity, and putting on our new identity given to us through Jesus**. That right there, I would say, is the ebb and flow of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Following Jesus looks like daily putting off aspects of our character that are destructive, and putting on aspects of character that are helpful—that's the big idea.

And what Paul is going to do for us this week and next is give us a **variety of specific things** he thinks we are to “put off” and “put on.” This week, what he gets into is what we are to “put off” and “put on” in regards to *how we treat each other*. Now, before we go any further, I think it's worth noting that **when Paul starts giving examples of how we are to live as followers of Jesus, he talks first about relationships with other followers of Jesus**. That seems significant. The *first thing* Paul feels like the Ephesian church needs to understand about living as followers of Jesus is how to go about *relationships with one another*.

I point that out because I think there's a popular sentiment floating around out there that you don't really need to have meaningful relationships with other Christians, to be a Christian. That following Jesus is mainly just about you and Jesus—and you don't need anything other than that, and maybe the occasional church service, to follow him. But **that notion would be very foreign to Paul, and to the bible, and to Jesus himself**. Jesus spends the *majority* of the sermon on the mount—his most famous teaching in Matthew—talking about *how we interact with other people*. And Paul starts off talking about how to live as a follower of Jesus talking about how we treat each other. Relationships evidently matter in following Jesus—they matter *a lot*. And **today's passage is largely going to talk about how we are to treat one another as followers of Jesus**.

So by way of outline, **Paul is going to walk us through five shifts that we make as followers of Jesus in how we treat each other—five things we are to “put off,” the things we should “put on” in their place, and then the motivation for each one**. Let's take a look at what they are. First up...

#1: From lying to truth-telling (v. 25)

[25] *Therefore—having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

Now, this word “falsehood” is way **more than** just telling deliberate lies. **The word Paul uses just refers to anytime we are different different than what we claim to be.** And whether or not we would call it *lying*, I bet we’ve all done that. I bet we’ve all pretended to be somebody we’re not. I bet we’ve all tried to make people think we’re doing better than we are. I bet a lot of us have had someone in our LifeGroup who cares about us ask us how our marriage is and said “fine,” knowing full-well that it is anything but fine. We’ve probably all done what I call *half-confessing*, where we will talk to people about our sins and shortcomings that are more socially acceptable and common, while withholding things that would make us look bad. While we may not think of any of that as “lying,” it’s *absolutely* included in what Paul is warning against doing here.

Paul says we should put off the tendency towards that, and **instead**, “speak the truth” with one another. Tell people that care about us the *entire* truth about ourselves, and not just *partial* truths. If we’re not doing well, here’s a novel idea: *say we’re not doing well*. If we’re struggling right now, *let people in on how we’re struggling*. Doesn’t have to be with everyone in the world, but with the people who truly care about us and want to help.

And here’s why he says we should do that: “because we are *members of one another*.” So his reasoning is not just “because lying is bad.” His rationale for speaking the truth to one another is because **when we lie, we actually prohibit the church from being able to function like it should.** The word “members” in this passage is actually a biological term—can be translated “limbs” or “bodily organs.” So Paul uses the metaphor of a human body. He points out that a body can’t function if the different parts of it aren’t communicating accurately with one another. *If your brain tells your hand that something isn’t hot, and it is hot, you have a problem on your hands (literally :)).* Paul says that’s exactly what it’s like when the we don’t speak truthfully with *one another*—it’s self-destructive, self-defeating. **It actually prohibits us from being able to function the way we should.** *When people in your LifeGroup ask you how you’re doing and you say “fine,” but you’re not really fine—you actually prevent them from being able to rally around you like they are supposed to. When you’re actually really frustrated with someone in our church and you say you aren’t or pretend that you aren’t—you actually prohibit unity from happening.* And so in light of all that, Paul says, let’s tell the truth with one another. Next shift...

#2: From sinful anger to dealing with anger (v. 26-27)

[26] *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil.*

So Paul has **chosen his words very carefully** here—look at what he says. “Be angry—and do not sin.” So the first *implication* is that **anger in and of itself is not necessarily sinful. At its core, anger is just what we feel when we witness things around us that aren’t as they should be.** And because we live

in a broken, imperfect world, there are no shortage of things that aren't as they should be. So some of those things *should* make us angry.

But onto that, he adds a warning: that **while anger is not inherently sinful, it is dangerous**. So while anger isn't necessarily sinful on its own—at the same time, when we get angry, we are more *prone* to do sinful things. Things we probably wouldn't have done otherwise. Often, *stupid* things. Can I get an experienced-based amen? In our first year of marriage, this happened to me. Ana and I had just had an argument about something, and I was getting incredibly frustrated. So, having a flair for the dramatic, and being incredibly angry, here's what I decided to do. I yelled a combination of words that I won't repeat from stage so that you guys won't fire me, and then I wound up in preparation to angrily knock over a tower fan we had in our bedroom. I figured knocking over a fan seemed like a mature, sane, rational thing to do. But as my hand moved towards it, I did have the awareness to go "well I don't want to hit it really hard and scare Ana." So I slowed the velocity of my hand down to the point that when I hit the fan, there wasn't enough force to knock it over. So it just sort of wobbled back and forth, like one of those penguin toys kids have. And it was so incredibly anti-climactic that we both just bursted into laughter. Now only something like anger would cause a person to think that knocking over a fan—or I should say, *attempting* to knock over a fan—is a good idea.

We have a tendency to **do stupid things** when we're angry, do we not? So maybe you've done really stupid things in your anger like that, that are just foolish and laughable. Or, maybe it's way worse than that. Maybe you've destroyed a relationship with your anger. Maybe you've ruined a marriage with your anger. Maybe you've said things that you can't take back in your anger. **The reality is that anger can cloud our judgment, make us hyper-emotional, and make us do or say things we might not otherwise do.** So Paul, very wisely, says "okay, be angry, but do not sin in your anger." Meaning "*when you are angry*, even if it's righteous anger, see to it that that anger doesn't lead you to do destructive things to other people."

Instead, we should deal with our anger so it doesn't turn sinful. And he tells us that by giving us us one very practical bit of advice: "do not let the sun go down on your anger." Now, this is probably more figurative than it is literal. He's probably isn't saying you literally shouldn't go to sleep at night if you're angry about something, as much as he's just saying, **the longer you leave anger undealt with, the more sinful it's likely to become.** So instead of letting anger fester, instead of letting it go undealt with for long periods of time, deal with it. If you're angry with someone, go and talk with whoever it is about it. So that anger doesn't transform itself into sin.

And here's **why** he says to do this: so that we don't give Satan an opportunity. That word "opportunity" is more vivid in the original language—it's the word **"stronghold."** **It's war imagery—the picture is of an invading army finding a city they can easily compromise and take over in order to launch strikes on the region around it.** And if you pay attention, this is exactly how Satan often works. Frequently, if one person lets their anger sour into bitterness, or passive-aggressiveness, or gossip—what happens is that Satan uses that person to start and destroy other relationships *through* that person. He uses that person to generate drama and conflict and bitterness in *other* people. And Paul says Satan uses that person as a stronghold, and before you know it, Satan is just setting up shop and wreaking havoc on entire communities through them. **Paul says that by refusing to deal with your own anger in helpful ways, you are helping Satan destroy the community around you.** That's serious. And so Paul says let's learn to deal with our anger. Moving on...

#3: From stealing to giving (v. 28)

[28] Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Now, this one might be the one thing in this passage where most of us go “**phew**,” at least I’m not doing this one.” Hopefully, the bulk of us are not out there robbing banks or convenience stores. If so, you should probably stop that. But most of us probably aren’t in that place. Now, there are more *subtle* forms of stealing—rounding way up on the hours you invoice for, wasting enormous amounts of time on the clock when there’s work to be done—things like that.

But even if you don’t struggle with that side of things at all, I do want you to notice here **the contrast** that Paul makes. So he doesn’t just say that we should go from stealing to earning faithfully. There’s actually another phrase in there—do you see it? He says the opposite of stealing is “doing honest work, *so that you may have something to share with anyone in need.*” **The opposite of stealing isn’t just earning faithfully—it’s giving generously.** So I know the bulk of us in this room—I know that most of us have jobs where we’re earning money and providing for ourselves so we don’t have to go out and rob people—and that’s great, keep that up. But my guess is that very few of us show up to work in the morning thinking “I’m so glad I have this job so that I can be generous to other people.” And my guess is that if some of us took an honest look at how we spend our money—our budgets wouldn’t reflect that we think that way either. But Paul is making the point here that **God isn’t just interested in making you fiscally responsible. According to the bible, you can be incredibly smart and responsible with your money, and still be completely ignoring God with your money. Think about the man in the gospels who tore down his barns to build bigger ones. He builds bigger storage units so he can store all the extra crops he has saved up. This dude is as fiscally responsible as they come. If he was alive today, he’d have a maxed out 401K, fully-funded retirement, and a rainy day fund. And Jesus calls him a fool. He says to him “you don’t understand the purpose of your money and possessions.” We’re not just called to be fiscally responsible, but radically generous.**

So some of us, in light of this verse in Ephesians, need to **take the first step**. We need to move towards *fiscal responsibility*. We need to move from having *no* budget to *making* a budget. From spending more money than we make to living within our means. That might be where you’re at. For others of us, maybe we’re doing decent on that, but we need to actually **complete the circle**. We need to go from being fiscally responsible to radically generous. Alright, next up:

#4: From corrupting talk to talk that builds up (v. 29)

[29] Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

The word for “corrupt” here literally means **“spoiled.”** It’s the word used for when fruit or meat of any sort had gone bad. So Paul is talking about any type of talk that has a “spoiling” effect. And because of the context of this passage, it seems like Paul probably has in mind how we talk to, with and *about* each other.

One major category of corrupting talk is gossip. We've probably all been in situations where the conversation is going great—until someone says something that is just the *slightest* bit negative about a person who isn't there—and then watched as the conversation is permanently derailed. Permanently “spoiled.” Corrupting talk spoils the conversation *itself*, spoils people's *perception* of the person you're talking *about*, and Jesus actually tells us in the gospels about another thing it spoils: the person speaking it. Matthew 15:18 says “...*what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.*” So it not only spoils the conversation, not only spoils the *reputation* people being talked *about*—it also spoils the one saying it. You see, **Jesus cares about our words because he cares about what's in our hearts.** *Augustine*, the early Christian theologian, back in the day had a sign hanging over his dining room table that said “*Whoever speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table.*” I love that—what if we had that as the unspoken rule at our tables as a church family?

And **in its place**, what if we put on talk that “builds up.” Builds up the conversation, builds up the person we're talking *to*, builds up the person we're talking *about*. What if every one of us, when we showed up to hang out with our LifeGroup, showed up ready to say one thing that would “give grace” to somebody there. What if on our way to lunch or coffee with someone in our church we just spent five minutes in the car asking “how can I speak the grace of Jesus into this person's life while we're hanging out today?” What if every time we hung out with another follower of Jesus we showed ready to encourage that person with just one way we've seen the Holy Spirit at work in them lately? Can you imagine how encouraging and life-giving that would be for all of us? Can you imagine how grace-saturated our time together would be? That's what Paul wants us to aim for as followers of Jesus: talk that *builds up*. Okay, one last shift:

#5: From resentment to compassion (v. 30-32)

*[30] And do not **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all **bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.** [32] Be **kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***

So our son **Whit** is now two and a half years old. And one of his favorite things to eat is a **peanut butter and jelly sandwich**. But after he eats one, he almost always has this wonderful mixture of peanut butter and jelly all over his fingers. And so he'll always start off by trying to wipe his hands on his shirt. And I'll tell him to use a napkin. And then he'll try to wipe it on a cabinet. And I'll tell him to use a napkin. And then he'll try to wipe it on me. And I'll say “son you better use that napkin right NOW!” And eventually I'll say something like, “no Whit. Don't wipe it on your shirt or the cabinet or me or the floor or the TV or your own hair—don't wipe it on anything other than a napkin.” I tell you that because I think that's similar to what Paul does at the end of this passage. I think our temptation as we read through a passage like this is to go “okay, we shouldn't lie, but what about...?” “Okay, we shouldn't be angry, but what about...?” “Okay, we shouldn't gossip, but what about...?” Sometimes we just have this uncanny tendency to take good instructions in the bible and trying to figure out all the exceptions to them. So I think what Paul does here is go, “just so we're clear with all this—I want you to put away all “bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice...and *anything else that resembles these things*. Put them all away.

Bitterness is carries the imagery of a smoldering fire. It looks like it's out, but every time someone brings up that person or that situation or that thing that happened, it bursts right back into flames in your soul. **Wrath** is any passionate outburst of anger towards someone, even if it's expressed to a third party. **Anger** is actually a different word than the one Paul used earlier in the passage. This one isn't a thoughtful anger—it's being hot-headed, quick-tempered, irritable—being the type of person that everyone else constantly has to walk on eggshells around. *That* type of anger, Paul says, should be put away. **Clamor** is when it becomes *childish*—when we feel like we have to make it loudly known to others anytime someone wrongs us in even the slightest ways. **Slander** is anytime we utter false destructive things about another person, in order to tarnish their reputation or retaliate against them. And "**all malice**" is probably just meant as a catch-all—to reiterate that we are to put away *anything* that resembles *any* of this.

So do you see what Paul is doing here? There's a lot of overlap between these terms. So it's not so much that Paul is trying to list out a bunch of different things, as much as he's trying to be **comprehensive** in describing the things we are to put away. He's trying to say "just in case you were confused about what to put away, I want you to put away anything that remotely resembles any of this. Put it *all* away."

And he says the **reason** we should put it all away is because it all "**grieves the Spirit of God**." Now to a follower of Jesus, the Spirit isn't an *it*, but a *he*. The Spirit is a person. Not a human being, but a living being that you live in relationship with. Which means he experiences emotions like we do. And this passage says that when we don't put away all these types of things in our relationships with one another, it *grieves* the Holy Spirit. Remember that already in this letter, Paul has said that the Holy Spirit is who makes unity among followers of Jesus *possible*. **So when we give into these things that destroy unity, it causes the Spirit deep, emotional, visceral pain.** So let's put things like that away.

And in its place, v. 32 says we should put on "kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness." Now, I think most of us would agree that those are good things to shoot for. Don't know of many people that would try and argue that kindness and tenderheartedness and forgiveness towards other people are *bad* things. But I think sometimes we don't realize what they might need to look like in practice. **Probably four or five years ago, there was a guy in the church I pastored who was confessing to his wife that he had been secretly looking at porn for the past several years. So he sat her down, he told her exactly what was going on, and as he expected, she starts to cry. And as she does, he says "I'm really sorry that I hurt you, I want you to know that I'll never do it again and I..."—and his wife just stops him. And she says, through her tears "no, that's not it. I hate that you did this and it does hurt, but that's not why I'm crying. I'm crying because I can't imagine how isolated you must've felt. I'm crying because I hate that you felt like had to keep that hidden and bottled up for so long. I'm crying because of how difficult that had to have been for you, how much distance that had to create between you and God."**

Now, **could she have** responded with a lot more anger than that? *Yep*. And to be honest with you, I don't even know that she would've been *wrong* to express more anger than that. But in that moment, when she had the option to respond with anger and spite and lashing out—here's what she chose to *put on instead*: she chose to put on kindness, tenderness, forgiveness. In that moment her heart was filled with compassion, not rage. **Because she had a relationship with Jesus, because she had the Holy Spirit alive within her, she knew that she had access to the type of love that "covers over a multitude of sins." She knew that in Jesus, she had been forgiven of far more than she would ever have to**

forgive. She knew that her sin had been forgiven in Jesus and because of that she could put on kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness towards her husband.

And **that's what Paul says.** He says the *way in which* we should forgive one another is “*as God in Christ forgave us.*” Can you imagine if Jesus kept a record of wrongs against him like so many of us do? Can you imagine if he were as quick to hold grudges, to lash out or be passive-aggressive, as many of us are? **But that's not Jesus' M.O. at all—not towards those of us who are in Christ. His M.O. is to extend forgiveness to his enemies. It's to forgive those who spit in his face, who nailed him to a cross. And to hold out forgiveness to even those who mock it and refuse to admit they need it.** That's how Jesus operates. And Paul calls us, as followers of Jesus, to follow that lead—“forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave us.”

And so, **in that vein,** Paul gives us our **marching orders** as it relates to this whole passage. Take a look at chapter 5, v. 1-2:

[1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“Be imitators of God.” **God**—who never lies. Who never sells himself or presents himself as something other than he is. Imitate him. **God**—who *does* get angry but never sins in his anger. Who instead of letting his anger sour into bitterness, comes on a rescue mission to die for those he's angry with. Imitate him. **God**—who doesn't take from anybody but graciously gives *himself*, and everything else needed, to all who will receive it. Imitate him. **God**—who speaks grace into the lives of anyone who will listen. Imitate him. And **God**—who forgives those who have wronged him the most by sending his own son to the cross. *Imitate him.*

You see, today's passage is **very practical** in nature. Not much complex theological truth that needs explaining. Mostly just *instructions*—what we need to put off, and what we need to put on in its place. Very straightforward, very “don't do this, and instead do this, and here's why.” That's what today has been. Which I'm hoping in its own way is incredibly helpful. But listen—**if we're not reading passages like this one carefully, they can end up confirming what a lot of people already think about Christianity: that following Jesus is just one long list of do's and don'ts.** But Christianity is so much more than that.

And so because of that, I want us all to **pay really careful attention** to these two last verses in ch. 5. Here's what Paul says: *be imitators of God, as his children.* Paul does not say, “okay, good luck following these rules.” He says “You're already God's kids,” Paul says. “So just like kids do, become like your Father.” **One thing all parents can tell you is that their kids naturally learn how to imitate them—in all the good and bad ways. And one thing that many of us have learned as we've gotten older is that we don't have to try very hard to become like our parents—in all the best and worst ways. All of that happens fairly naturally. Children become like their parents. So Paul says, in light of that, “you have a Father in heaven who is perfect—who is worth imitating with everything you've got. So do what kids do and imitate your dad.”**

But here's the thing—you have to have a relationship with the Father in order to know what to imitate, you have to be around him, you have to know what he's like. And the only way that's

possible is through Jesus, who *gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. **You can be a great person who treats other people wonderfully and still be alienated from God. And you can be a follower of Jesus who feels like they are constantly trying and failing to treat people this way, and still be called God's kid.** The question at the core is simply, *have you met Jesus?*

So here's the **invitation** on offer—if you're in the room and you **don't have a relationship** with God the Father, begin a relationship with the God of the universe through Jesus. Start there. None of this will feel very possible—or even *desirable*—without him. Get to know the God who dies for his enemies. Get to know the God who offers forgiveness to those who don't think they need it. And if you're here and **do have a relationship** with the God of the universe, become *imitators of God the Father*. In your relationships with other people, ask the question *how do I best put on display the love that God has shown me?* That's how we are to treat each other.