

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 4:25-32

"...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3)

I offer the above passage simply as a reminder that everything following that passage (4:1-3) is an elaboration of that exhortation. From this point forward, Paul is essentially laying out what it looks like to live consistently with our God-given identity (which he described in Chapters 1-3). So, we want to keep this well in mind as we look at this week's passage (4:25-32)

Additionally, we want to keep the immediately preceding instructions clearly in mind also:

"...put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:22, 24)

Paul will now describe at least some of what this looks like:

- Put off falsehood...speak truthfully to your neighbor
- In your anger do not sin...
- Do not steal...instead work; doing something useful with your hands
- Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth...speak only what is helpful and edifying
- Do not grieve the Holy Spirit
- Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice
- Be kind and compassionate, forgiving one another.

Some things to keep in mind: This is a sample list (not an exhaustive list) of what it means to become like Jesus. Becoming like Jesus is the goal. The goal is attainable.

Some more things to keep in mind: We don't do these things (or not do these things) in order to get God to love us more, or in order to earn any favor, merit, or appeasement. Rather, we do them (or not do them) in order to live consistently into who we are...who God says we are (again, see Chapters 1-3). Look over the list again. Notice how the list describes what we would expect Jesus to be like...and we are called to be like Jesus.

Paul offers some detailed explanation of HOW these exhortations/instructions are in-line with our identity and calling:

- For we are all members of one body
- So as not to give the devil a foothold
- So that we have something to share with those in need
- That it may benefit those who listen

- Just as in Christ God forgave us

We are intimately connected with God and each other. That being the case, there are certain principles and practices that rule the day. Notice how all this fleshes out, and is in harmony with, verses 2-3. We can think of verses 25-32 as the rubber meeting the road of verses 2-3.

To not obey Paul's instructions in verses 25-32 is to not keep the unity of the Spirit (verse 3), which naturally grieves the Holy Spirit.

Practically speaking, why do people lie, hold onto anger, or steal? Typically, it's because their looking out for themselves, not trusting anyone but themselves, being fearful or greedy. None of that is in-line with who God says we are, or with what God has done for us, or with what He promises us. Rather, it's the old humanity doing what it naturally does...following its corrupted and deceitful desires. But in Christ, that is all changed. So, again, Paul is simply outlining what it looks like to live consistently with who we are in Christ.

From a simple moral/ethical viewpoint, Paul's instructions don't seem much different from other religions or philosophies or ideals of virtue. But the underlying motivation, the foundations which undergirds it, is completely different. It's loving God and others due to the love that was first shown to us. (It's not in order to earn or gain anything, but rather a response to what has already been given.) This is uniquely and distinctly Christian. It is relational, not pragmatic. It demonstrates intimacy and inter-connectedness, not independence and autonomy. It also speaks to a divine empowerment.

Under our own steam, utilizing only the resources we can muster within ourselves, and living in the world we do, the idea of getting rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice (verse 31) is pretty unrealistic. If you don't believe me, just check out the news. Likewise, to be consistently kind and compassionate and forgiving is pretty idealistic if left to our own devices. But thankfully we're not left to our own devices. We have the Holy Spirit to empower us; and we have the experience of being forgiven to fuel and motivate us to forgive others.

What does it look like when a person is indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live "in Christ", to put on this "new self"? It looks a lot like what Paul describes here in verses 25-32.

- Q. As we consider the "old self" vs the "new self" describe some changes you have noticed in yourself. How have you changed when it comes to lying vs honesty? What changes have you noticed in regards to anger? How is your speech/conversations different now compared to before? What other differences can you identify/recognize?**
- Q. I'm sure we can all nod in agreement that Paul's instructions of what to do (or not do)—this list of morals/ethics, if you prefer—are good and right. But for you personally, what is your motivation for doing (or not doing) them?**

- Q. When are you tempted to lie, or stretch the truth? How does everything we have and are in Christ speak to that temptation?**
- Q. Are you holding on to any anger (or bitterness or resentment) that you need to let go of? How does everything we have and are in Christ speak to that?**
- Q. Have you ever stolen anything? Care to share? (Just for fun, the Greek word “steal” is “klepto”)**
- Q. Have you even had anything stolen? How did it make you feel? What were the variety of thoughts and emotions you felt?**
- Q. Describe a time when someone showed you kindness, compassion, forgiveness.**
- Q. Describe a time when you wounded someone with your words. Describe a time when you were wounded by someone’s words.**
- Q. Describe a time when you were built up by someone’s words.**
- Q. Image-management (i.e. managing how others view us) can be a form of falsehood and not speaking truthfully with one another. Often times, sadly, within the Church we feel the need to make ourselves look better than we really are...to hide the fact that some of what Paul describes in this passage besets us. Do you feel safe enough in your Home Group to share your real struggles? Explain.**