



APPLICATIONS FOR A NEW WALK

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 Ephesians 4:25-5:2
 Sixth Message
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Everyone appreciates a “rags to riches” story. We love to hear accounts of people who were down and out having their dreams realized. This is the story of *Les Miserables*, *Rocky*, *National Velvet*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. We could go on and on. We are captivated by the saga of human transformation.

As Christians we must understand that transformation is our story too. Once we were down and out, we were “dead in [our] trespasses and sins...but God, being rich in mercy...made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:1-5). Once we were “in Adam,” now we are “in Christ.” And, as a result of being endowed with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies,” we are learning to live differently, to “walk in a manner worthy of our calling.” This is the theme of our recent studies in the book of Ephesians.

Two weeks ago we contrasted the unworthy walk with the worthy walk. We read Paul’s words exhorting the Ephesians to “not walk like the Gentiles,” i.e., like those who do not know God. That kind of walk is a journey into moral and spiritual darkness. Their lives are devoid of purpose and meaning. The “Gentiles” seek to satisfy the yearnings of their hearts with the things of the world. But these don’t satisfy. The more they try to fill themselves, the more hungry and thirsty they become. They end up with hard hearts, greedy souls, and empty lives.

The worthy walk of the Christian, in contrast, is the truth as it is in Jesus. The principle that Paul espouses is taking off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man. Here is how the apostle puts it in chapter 4:

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph 4:20-24, NASB)

Because the memory of the old man still resides in our flesh, we must take off those filthy clothes, change our thinking and put on the robes of righteousness. This does not come naturally to us. We must learn how to do it by going to school and studying. I took a golf lesson a few weeks ago and was encouraged to change certain things about my swing. Having swung the golf club the

same way for forty years, I discovered it’s not easy to change something so deeply engrained. It is the same with the old man.

The way of the old man is our natural response to life: it is how we learned to cope with pain, discomfort, inadequacy and stress. The old man is already dead, but we have a hard time leaving him in the grave. We have already looked at the principle of taking off, renewing, and putting on. Today we will apply that principle in six practical ways as we continue our studies in chapter 4 of this letter.

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Eph. 4:25)

First, Paul says we must “lay aside falsehood.” The verb “lay aside” is the same one that Paul used in verse 22, where he says we are to lay aside the old self. Falsehood means lying. We get our word “pseudo,” meaning sham, illusion, or counterfeit, from this word. Paul’s message is simple: we must stop lying to one another.

We lie to make ourselves look good. We lie to protect ourselves. We lie to avoid taking blame, because blame causes us to feel guilt and shame. We lie to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of speaking the truth. We lie to create a false self, an illusion, because the truth is painful. We lie to avoid hurting someone we care about.

Rather than lying, we must speak truth with our neighbor, says Paul, quoting the prophet Zechariah. God hates lies. He detests it when we devise evil in our hearts. He hates perjury. A “neighbor” is a “near one,” one with whom we live in community and proximity. Truth is the opposite of falsehood. It is a commitment to reality, no matter how painful that might be.

The reason we are to speak truth is that we are members of one another in the body of Christ. This is how we renew our minds to think differently and be motivated properly. As Christians our lives are connected and joined into one body. What someone else does affects us. What we do affects others. We are not growing separately or independently. We are growing together into maturity. As Paul said in 4:15-16, the whole body causes the growth of the body. That is the goal. And one of the elements that enhance growth is speaking the truth in love.

Lies never repay with any long-term benefit. They destroy relationships. They divide and separate the body, stifling growth, and work against the goals of the

church. Speaking truth is always beneficial. Relationships deepen and intimacy grows when we are truthful and honest with each other. We must value truth over self-protection.

The second application that Paul gives involves anger:

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. (Eph 4:26-27)

The phrase, "be angry, and yet do not sin," is a quote from Psalm 4. David calls out to God in distress and says,

Tremble [be angry], and do not sin;
Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust in the LORD. (Ps 4:4-5)

Rather than taking matters into his own hands, David lies still on his bed and trusts in God. He is more aware of his own capacity to sin in response to injustice than he is in being consumed with those who sinned against him. David wants to be righteous no matter what the circumstances.

So what exactly are we to put off and put on? The scholars differ in their interpretations here. I will offer two possibilities. First, we are to put off anger, specifically unrighteous anger. Anger is an old-man response to hurt, pain, shame, inadequacy and injustice. It is a fleshly response to stress, a destructive and hurtful means by which we seek to control others and get our way.

We must take off anger and put on self-control and trust in God. Let us be still and mediate on our beds. "The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (Jas 1:20). Further, let us not allow the sun to go down on our anger. Let us keep short accounts and deal with anger before we retire for the night. If we don't, it will build up within us and give the devil an opportunity to damage us spiritually.

The second possibility is that we are to put off complacency towards sin, replacing it with righteous anger. If we do this we will not fall into sin by taking matters into our own hands instead of trusting God. Our natural responses to stress, trials and difficulties always involve sin. Paul is saying we must have the same attitude towards sin and evil as God does. If we don't, we will become passive and allow the old man to take control.

Paul qualifies this question of anger with three phrases: "do not sin," i.e., don't let anger become personal or prideful by letting it become unrighteous; "do not let the sun go down on your anger," i.e., never have a friendly attitude toward sin; and, "do not give the devil an opportunity," i.e., never give the devil an inch; do not let your guard down.

While both of these interpretations are valid, I favor the second, because of the context of Psalm 4, and also

because Paul will mention putting off anger later in this section. But we must be careful. We should never use righteous anger to defend ourselves or justify an ungodly attitude. Jesus never defended himself with the sword, even when he threw the moneychangers out of his Father's house.

There will not be many occasions in life when we are called to respond with righteous anger. But there may be a few. When I was employed as an engineer years ago, a project was in trouble because of poor management. The solution they came up with was to have everyone work nights and weekends to make up for their mismanagement. I spoke up and asked how could the bosses make the workers suffer for their poor judgment. To my surprise they changed their minds and went in another direction. Now that circumstance is rare, but we are always to have an aggressive stance toward sin and injustice wherever we find it.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Eph 4:28)

The third application of the apostle's principle involves stealing. The eighth commandment prohibits stealing another's possessions or property. This also applies to holding back what is due to another in any form whatever. Temptation is everywhere. Every time I go to the gym I am tempted to steal the towel! Gym towels are perfect for odd jobs around the house. People are tempted to steal things from hotel rooms, withhold income taxes, and borrow money and not pay it back. Why do people steal, anyway? It's because the old man gets a sense of elation when he gets something for free. We get a kick out of feeling that we didn't have to work for it. And it doesn't matter how much we have already. Even famous people get caught shoplifting.

So we are to put off stealing and put on working. We must get a job and toil with our own hands. That might be easier said than done in this economy, but I don't think Paul would be particularly choosy here. After all, he was tentmaker. The work we are offered may not be what we would like, but it keeps our hands busy and helps us not be an imposition on society. We should not refuse work. Over the years we are approached by many people asking for money and food, and we help out when it is appropriate. But when some of them are asked if they are trying to get a job, the answers they give at times are rather amazing.

The reason why it is good to work is that work not only provides for us, but also for others who may be in need. The renewed thinking is that we not takers but givers. Stealing betrays a chip-on-the-shoulder mentality. It is how people get revenge on society and the world, because they think the world owes them something. Working and giving to those in need utterly changes the way we live in society and relate to people. When we use our resources to help others we become more like God.

The fourth application also deals with speech:

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph 4:29)

We must put off “unwholesome” words. The term refers to decaying fish or rotting grapes. It describes garbage, trashy words that have no value. What we must put on instead is speech that is good for edification, words that build up others.

The renewed mind sees the impact of edifying speech to grace the lives of others. Our words are very powerful either to build up or to tear down. They have the power of life and death. A thoughtless word spoken to a young child can cause years of painful remembrances. The old man uses words that criticize, demean, dishonor and cut down. The new man uses words that grace another’s life. “Mark Twain once remarked, ‘I can live for two months on a good compliment.’...‘Good words,’ said English poet George Herbert, ‘are worth much and cost little.’”¹

Do we use words to grace other people? At times I find myself thinking things about people that would give great encouragement to them, but I don’t follow through and tell them. The new man graces people’s lives with words. This is how we are learning to walk. James Bryan Smith says, “Our souls are our emotions and passions, and providing soul care for one another is done through listening, encouraging, and affirming.”²

Another application involves the Holy Spirit:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

It’s hard to understand how this verse fits in the text. It may be another reason for the prior verse, a summary statement, or perhaps a transition into the next section. Perhaps it is saying that walking in the old man “grieves” the Holy Spirit. We were sealed with the Spirit when we became Christians, and that sealing stays in effect until the day of redemption. No matter what we do, the Holy Spirit continues to live inside of us. He will never leave us, and God will never leave us.

Paul is saying that it brings sadness to the Holy Spirit when we steal, when we lie, when we are controlled by anger, and when we use unwholesome words. If you feel sad about acting out of the old man, that is the Holy Spirit at work. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He is grieved when we walk in the old man. And the corollary is certainly true. When we walk in the new man, that gives the Holy Spirit great joy.

Finally, Paul gives a list of things to put off and put on:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has for-

given you. (Eph 4:31-32)

These things are general in nature, but they all have to do with how we treat people. We are to put off bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (wailing or lamenting), blasphemy, and all malice (evil). And we are to put on kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

We grow together as a body of believers by forgiving one another unreservedly. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the gospel. If we don’t forgive others, we’ll be consumed with all these negative things that Paul says we are to put off. Is there someone you are refusing to forgive? That’s the old man at work.

How do we renew our minds in order to treat people differently? We consider how God treats us. If God forgives us in Christ, we can forgive others. If God treats us with such kindness, we can treat others with kindness. If God is compassionate and affectionate towards us, then we can be compassionate towards others.

Paul wraps up everything he is saying about our new walk with a model for us to follow.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Eph 5:1-2)

The apostle gives two examples of how we are to live – God the Father, and God the Son.

First, Paul encourages us to imitate the Father as beloved children. Children always want to look and act like their parents. They do what they see their parents doing, whether good or bad. Since we tend to become what we see, let us look at the Heavenly Father and imitate him as our parent.

The second model to follow is Jesus. The encouragement is to walk in love. Christ walked in love by giving himself up for us and dying for us. Paul draws on the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, saying that when Jesus was crucified, his death ushered up to heaven an aroma that was pleasing to the Father: “The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Exod 29:41).

When we walk in love as Christ did, we die to ourselves, and that results in our life being a fragrant aroma to God. The Gentile gives his life over to sensuality; the Christian gives his life up for the sake of others. Once again we see a reference to the Trinity in this letter: we are to copy God, learn Christ, and not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Mimicking comes naturally to us. Growing up I tried to mimic everything the famous baseball player Mickey Mantle did. I held the bat like he did. I swung it like he did. I wanted to be a switch hitter like him. Tiger Woods is our model for golf. For basketball it’s Michael Jordan. For football it’s Johnny Unitas. Our models dic-

tate what we want to look like. To help us walk in the new man we must look at the Father and the Son and imitate them.

As we close, it's vital to remember that no list of rules or regulations will help us produce a worthy walk. No amount of effort will clean up the old man and make him presentable. No regimen of training will make the old man act in the way that God wants us to live. We cannot improve the old man. We have died to him. Let us not leave here with the idea of merely trying harder. That's a recipe for failure.

Ours is a story of transformation. As new creations, new men and women in Jesus Christ, the only way we can walk worthy is by the power, the grace, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. God has blessed us abundantly. The Father has chosen us, the Son has redeemed us, the Spirit has sealed us. As we walk in that blessing, as we walk in love and in the new man, our lives becomes a sweet-smelling fragrance to God. This is the very essence of putting off the old and putting on the new.

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1. James Bryan Smith, *Embracing the Love of God* (HarperSanFrancisco), 157-158.
2. Smith, *Embracing the Love of God*, 156.