

IX. Lesson 9 From Rags to Riches – Ephesians 4:17-32

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Stuart chapter 9

Aim: To contrast the lifestyle of the unconverted with the lifestyle of Christians.

Paul now shifts from the theology of the unity and diversity of the mystical body of Christ to spell out behavioral patterns that he expects to see in the church and in the lives of the saints. In the passage before us, the apostle tells us how believers live in the world. He is reiterating his entreaty in 4:1 that his readers walk ‘in a manner worthy of [their] calling.’ Christians cannot live the same way as other people do. Why is this? Paul’s teaching can be summarized in a single sentence: You cannot be the same as other people because you are not the same as other people! It is as simple as that. The Bible does not say to us, ‘Become something different!’ Rather, it says, ‘You *are* different. Be in practice what you are in fact.’

The Ephesians were Gentiles and had lived as other Gentiles did in the past. But now things had become completely different. Therefore he admonishes them not to walk as Gentiles. Paul means to contrast the old way with the new: they should not do what the pagans do. Rather, they had been called to discipleship and holiness by Christ. Christians are to live holy lives, not just because morality is good in itself (though it is), or because it promotes happiness or success or anything else (though it does), but because of what God has done. Because of what we believe about God’s actions toward us through Jesus Christ we should live as God wants and requires us to live.

A. The Gentile Walk (Eph. 4:17-19)

The word translated ‘testify’ (*martyromai*) can just as well be rendered ‘insist.’

Before Paul talks positively about how we should live the Christian life, he first reminds the Ephesians of some very important truths—in this case the true nature of the world system from which they have been delivered and the reasons it got to be that way.

The true nature of the old way of life is described now in a series of devastating phrases. Paul develops precisely the same line of thought here in Ephesians as he did in writing the first chapter of Romans, beginning with 1:18. There, Paul explains how the wrath of God is revealed against ungodly people, not because they are innocently ignorant of Him, but because they have willfully closed their eyes to the revelation that God has given to the world.

1. Futility and Darkness (4:17-18a)

- *What do you suppose Paul meant by “Gentiles walking in the futility of their minds” (4:17)? See Romans 1:21-23.*

There was a mental, spiritual, and moral decadence in the Greek and Roman culture of that society. The initial description of the world system is its emphasis on the intellectual in non-Christians’ lives. The chief characteristic of the Gentiles is that they have futile minds. Their minds are set on things of no real value. Without the knowledge of God, ultimately all is ‘futility’ or ‘vanity’ (*mataiotēs*). The knowledge they pridefully claim is nothing more than folly, for they fool themselves into thinking they are wise (Rom 1:2).

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Their understanding is darkened (*eskotoōmenoi*) by sin. They cannot see what is staring them in the face—for example, that creation declares the existence and power of the invisible God. Thus they have become alienated (*apēllotriōmenoi*) or estranged from the life-giving knowledge of God. They are far, far away from Him, and deprived of spiritual blessings and privileges.

Gentiles are ignorant of the things of God and don't have God in their thinking. Their thinking is not informed by divine revelation and they don't have the perspective of eternity that is given to Christians in the word of God. The pagan mind is never theocentric; the Christian mind must be theocentric.

People act as they think, and the reason they are constantly messing up is that they are vain in their thinking and darkened in their understanding as a consequence of being separated from God. In other words, our problems go back to the mind. It is here and not elsewhere that the unsaved person has his chief flaw. He does not know God; so he cannot think properly. Everything is out of place, and his disordered, sinful conduct reflects his disordered, sinful mind.

2. Ignorance and Blindness (4:18b)

They are this way because of the ignorance (*agnoia*) which is *in* them. They have been like this since birth. They are like this by nature. And they cannot change themselves, for they have hearts of stone. This is a very profound analysis of the unconverted heart.

The second important truth Paul holds before his readers in this paragraph is the reason the Gentile world system has become as it has. It is because of the 'hardening of [people's] hearts.' The word sometimes translated as 'blindness' is *pōrōsis*. It comes from the noun *pōros*, which means 'stone.' The word was also used medically. *Pōrion* was a 'callus.' The verb *pōroō* meant to 'petrify,' 'harden,' or 'cause a callus to form,' so figuratively it means 'to become hard' or 'insensitive.' Applied to the eyes, it meant blindness. This is how it is translated in the KJV (and NKJV). And, of course, it is not wrong. A 'blind heart' cannot see God. Still, the trouble with 'blindness' is that it suggests an inescapable and therefore a morally blameless inability, and this is not the idea. What Paul is saying is that the unsaved world is actually very much to blame. People have willfully hardened themselves against God, and as a result they have become warped in their spiritual understanding.

3. Calloused, Lewd, Unclean, Greedy (4:19)

Notice that since they do not have God in their minds, then they do not have God in their actions. What is inside shows itself outside. Having hearts of stone, they have no spiritual sensitivity. 'Being past feeling' (*apēlgēkotes*) can also be translated 'having become callous.' They have ceased to have any appreciation of the truth of God or any feeling of shame in the face of evil. After their minds become 'empty' to the truth of God, they become 'callous' and insensitive to God's way of life. Nothing holds them back from doing whatever appeals to their physical appetites. They have deadened their conscience and do not feel its stings. Immorality of life has inevitably followed.

It is a life of *aselgeia*, a word that means 'lewdness,' 'licentiousness,' or 'wanton violence,' outrageous conduct of any kind, a life without any care for personal standards or social sanctions. They do whatever they want, even if it is unclean (*akatharsias*). They live to satisfy and to please themselves, however impure it may be. Although they were created and intended to live a life of moral order and example, in their callousness they can no longer differentiate between right and wrong. Instead they rationalize everything in their minds, to appease their

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own immoral appetites. The last word in the sentence, *pleonexia*, essentially means ‘greedy,’ the desire for more than is one’s due, and the passion to possess it without regard for what is right of for the persons of others. The use of this word in the New Testament is closely linked with the sins of the flesh.

B. The Christian Walk (Eph. 4:20-24)

There are no imperatives in these verses. Paul gives no commands and makes no suggestions. The apostle is not telling us what *should* happen, but what *has* happened! Conversion is a moral transformation. The proof that you are converted is that your life has been changed. And it is precisely because it has changed that you can no longer live like those who remain unconverted.

Paul is saying: ‘The truth of God and of His purpose has come to dominate your minds, and this truth has ethical implications. Your lives are no longer dark, your minds no longer vain. You are no longer alienated but walking step by step in the full light of the Lord, and in fellowship with Him. So you must finish with all immorality, and the passion for what is impure, and for what outrages the souls and bodies of others.’

Paul’s introduction to the Christian life begins with a reference to Christ Himself and not to anything that might be supposed to come out of the depraved hearts or futile efforts of mere human beings. The only transforming power that has ever come into the world is that of the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, and the only true and lasting changes that ever take place in an individual life take place through believing and learning from Him.

1. Learning Christ (4:20-21)

Being a Christian isn’t just a matter of learning propositions but of learning *Christ*, the very embodiment of truth. As Paul begins to explain this he uses three verbs, all having to do with education, and he follows them with a reference to ‘the truth that is in Jesus.’

The first verb is *emathete*, in ‘you learned Christ.’ The idea of learning a person, rather than a mere fact or doctrine, is found nowhere else in the Greek Bible. What does it mean? It means that Christians are Christians because they have entered into a personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

The second verb is *ēkousate*, in ‘you heard Him.’ The point is not that we have heard *of* Christ, but rather that we have heard Him speak. How so? We have heard Him in Scripture, particularly as it has been expounded to us by preachers of the gospel. As Paul preached Jesus, the Ephesians heard Jesus Himself through Paul’s exposition.

The third verb is *edidachthēte*. It is a heightened form of the common Greek word for instruction and occurs in the phrase ‘you were taught by Him.’ Literally, the Greek says that you were taught ‘in Him’ rather than ‘by Him,’ and probably means that Jesus is the atmosphere within which the teaching takes place. We might say that Jesus is the school as well as the teacher and the subject of instruction. Christ is not only the subject but the ‘sphere of the instruction.’

Notice that although Paul is speaking of the knowledge of Christ and His ways in the deepest, most personal, and most profound sense, it is nevertheless in terms of *knowing* or *learning of* Christ that he speaks. Why is this? It is because in the previous verse he has described the condition of the secular or Gentile world as due chiefly to ignorance. He was pointing out that

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the depravity of the Gentile world was due to its willful ignorance of God. It follows then, that when Paul speaks of the difference Jesus makes he does so in exactly parallel terms. The world is ignorant of God, but Christians must come to know Him.

2. The Old Man and the New Man (4:22-24)

- *How can we renew the spirits of our minds (4:23)? See Romans 12:2. Specific answers may be found in 4:25; 4:26; 4:28; 4:29.*

As past sins are dealt with by the grace of forgiveness, and as repentance determines to abandon them completely, all that belongs to the old way of life, the way of the heathen that has been described in verses 17-19, is to be set aside decisively. (The Greek aorist tense signifies a single act.) We are to feed the new man with all the means of grace that God has appointed and at the same time starve the old man by denying him the occasion to sin.

We seem to be moral schizoids. It is a struggle between what the Bible calls the ‘old man’ (*palaios anthropos*) and the ‘new man.’ Because I have been made alive to God and quickened by His regenerating grace, there is now a radical discontinuity between my new self and my old self. The old man has been dealt a death blow; his destination is certain, but he is not yet dead. As Christians we are to mortify the flesh by destroying the old nature. It is ‘corrupt’ (*phtheirō*), a word which means ‘perishing,’ ‘rotten,’ or ‘polluted.’

Greek has two adjectives for ‘new’: *kainos*, which means new in the sense of fresh and distinctive, and *neos*, which means new in the sense of young. Both have corresponding verbs that are used in the New Testament concerning life in Christ. In verse 23, we have the verb from *neos* (‘be renewed’ *ananeousthai*), which thus implies putting off the decrepitude of the old nature and the regaining of ‘undying youth.’ The present tense emphasizes further that what is required, and made possible in Christ, is continuous renewal.

In verse 24, *kainos*, the second word for new, is used. For in the place of the old nature, characterized by selfishness and sin, and bound by evil and its consequences, there is ‘the new nature’ which is God’s creation. Here, moreover, the aorist verb again implies a decisive act, putting on this God-created, God-given life, as it has already implied the decisive putting off of the old. Above all, the image of God is shown in character ‘in true righteousness and holiness.’ If these qualities are not seen, at least in some measure, there is no evidence that there has been God’s work of re-creation at all. ‘Righteousness’ (*dikaïosunē*) is used of the fulfillment of one’s duty to other people, and ‘holiness’ (*hosiotēs*) of observing one’s duty to God.

God commands each believer to emulate Christ by clothing himself in righteousness and setting himself apart for the work Christ would have him do. Believers should not conform to the world’s standards, but rather empty themselves of the garbage the world heaps upon them. It is important to understand that truth is absolutely vital and essential to new life. It is truth that changes our behavior; a sober, clear understanding of God’s truth is what changes lives.

C. Putting Off and Putting On (Eph. 4:25-32)

The use of ‘therefore’ in verse 25 indicates that the application of putting off the old man and putting on the new man is found here, and not earlier. Believers are to follow certain Christian standards precisely because God has already made them new creatures in Christ by putting away the old nature and putting on the new. The apostle is not merely urging a new and higher

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standard of morality on people. That is an utterly futile thing. We cannot be genuinely better by mere moral suasion. That is not it at all. Rather, Paul is demanding a high form of behavior precisely because something decisive has already taken place. We have already been made new in Christ. That is why we should and must act like it.

In the verses that follow, there are two ways to look at Paul's organization of material. One way is to see five specific examples of what the new, higher standard of Christian conduct should be in 4:25-32. Most of them are given both negatively and positively, corresponding to the illustration of putting off one type of conduct and putting on another. There is a pattern of negative prohibition, positive command and motivation in these verses. In appealing for proper Christian conduct Paul says that Christians are to put off the conduct associated with their former life apart from Christ and put on a new pattern of behavior, just as they might put on a new dress or suit. This is generally how commentators approach the passage.

But an alternate view, and perhaps a richer view, is to see how Paul talks about a new obedience that is supposed to replace our old rebellion against the law. Having said that we should live in holiness and righteousness, Paul now turns to the Ten Commandments as the standard for holy and righteous conduct. The passage that follows (spilling over into chapter 5) is thus a new exposition of the Ten Commandments, particularly the Sixth through Tenth, although not in order. In this exposition, particular emphasis is given to re-interpret the Commandments within the Christian context by focusing on sins of the tongue. Therefore, in the notes that follow, both outlines are employed.

1. The Ninth Commandment (4:25-27)

These statements against falsehood and anger have primarily to do with sins of speech that bear false witness against our neighbor. Zechariah 8:16 is quoted by Paul. After the phrase quoted, Zech. 8:16-17 goes on: 'give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath (perjury)'. So the context is in the courtroom setting, in the realm of bearing false witness against a neighbor. Paul does not quote this to encourage you to run off at the mouth and blab everything possible that is truthful to your neighbor. Sometimes it is better to keep silent rather than hurting others. Instead, the context is the law court where you do not allow others to come to harm by saying things that are untrue or withholding the truth.

In verse 26, we might be tempted to think that the prohibition against anger is Paul shifting to the Sixth Commandment. However, this is a quotation of Psalm 4:4, and again it is talking about the use of the tongue, building up or tearing down others, offering true witness or false witness. The context of Psalm 4 is that David has been slandered and maligned by others, and he must resolve how to deal with this. The gist of the Psalm is that when people abuse David, reproach him, and slander him, he doesn't say anything back to them. Instead he communes with his own heart and talks to the Lord about it. That is what Paul is alluding to – if you have a problem with someone's tongue, be angry and do not sin, that is, keep your mouth shut. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, but commune with your heart and talk to the Lord about it, and get it taken care of that way.

Don't talk to others about it; don't give the devil an opportunity. If we talk to others about it, we give the devil opportunity to ruin friendships, which is his main desire. Paul has been talking about the unity of the church, but then someone gets angry and they talk too much. If you need to talk about it, calm yourself down first by talking to the Lord, and then you don't run the risk of

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bearing false witness against your neighbor. Use your tongue to build up one another. Don't become angry and fall into the trap of talking to the wrong people.

a) Put off Lying, Put on the Truth (4:25)

The Greek word translated 'falsehood' is actually *to pseudos* ('the lie'). Lying is speaking untruthfully, with the intention of misleading or deceiving, and it has many forms. Paul has been speaking of truth again and again in this passage. Gentiles do not know the truth; they are darkened in their understanding. Christians know truth; they have learned it from and in Christ.

'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.' These words are a quotation of the Septuagint of Zechariah 8:16, but with a significant little change. The preposition 'to' becomes 'with,' thus indicating the inter-personal relationships that are to be emphasized in the clause that follows. Paul is referring here to peace abounding within the community of believers. 'We are members of one another.' Paul does not simply appeal to the moral law that his readers knew well. Rather he insists that Christians break the bonds of love and fellowship by which they have come to be bound when they try to deceive one another.

Christians have been remade after the image of the God of truth. Their speech is to be taken up with what is true, genuine, actual and factual. Every time we are untruthful, we destroy not only the person we are speaking to, but ourselves, too, 'for we are members of one another.'

b) Put off Sinful Anger, Put on Righteous Indignation (4:26-27)

Paul's second example does not have an expressed positive side, but we are probably to understand it as being a controlled or righteous anger as opposed to an uncontrolled, selfish, or sinful anger. This is because anger in and of itself is not sinful. Notice that the apostle does not say, 'Never be angry.' In fact, the imperative form is in the positive: 'In your anger do not sin.' This quotation from Psalm 4:4 makes a distinction between sinful and sinless wrath.

We have a tendency to think that anger, in and of itself, is a sin. Anger is an emotion, and we are created with emotions. Therefore, in and of themselves, emotions are good. However, when these emotions are misused, perverted, or abused, they become sinful.

We imagine that there is something intrinsically wrong about getting angry. If this was the case, it would reflect badly on the character of God, for the Bible speaks frequently about the wrath of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ was angry on a number of occasions during His public ministry (*cp.* Mt. 21:12-13; Mk. 3:5; Jn. 2:13-17), but His anger never led to sin, because His emotions were kept under perfect control. There is such a thing as justifiable or 'righteous indignation.' But we may only be angry at the things with which God is angry, and only ever for the same reason – that holiness has been outraged and God's universe spoiled even further.

Perhaps Paul had the rest of Psalm 4:4 on his mind when as he went on in verse 26: 'commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.' We are not to go to bed and brood. Righteous anger, like the manna from heaven, breeds worms if it is kept overnight. Passionate feelings against people or their actions are not to be kept long, lest they break down the love that seeks to bring good out of evil. To have the sun go down while you are still angry means that you take it to bed with you and the situation is not resolved. The anger is kept inside and it begins to boil and seethe, perhaps turning into bitterness. Unresolved anger is destructive.

Although anger in and of itself, is not evil, anger can very easily become an occasion for evil, an open door to Satanic enticements and temptation. Anger can give way to violence, violence to brutality, brutality to war. Anger can also become malicious and can change into resentment or

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the holding of a grudge. When we nurse our wrath or bitterness against others, we invite the great adversary to exploit our indignation.

2. The Eighth Commandment (4:28-30)

Structurally, this passage ends the same way as the previous one (don't give place to the devil; don't grieve the Holy Spirit). These thoughts are conceptually the same; if you grieve the Holy Spirit, you give the devil an opportunity.

Paul starts out by talking about literal stealing, and then he moves on to talk about using your tongue to steal from others, to "rot out" their homes instead of building up their households.

The way to cure the tendency to steal is to work hard. The man who works hard is less inclined to fall into a pattern of thievery. But there is more to it than that. He is to work hard so he can share with others. So the cure for stealing is sharing. This principle is contained in the gleaning laws – leaving some in the fields for the poor. Paul is applying the same principle here. So the new walk, the re-orientation of the old man, is to replace stealing with hard work and sharing.

He goes on to make an application. I can tear down your 'house,' your possessions, your family, your person, by using 'rotten' words. Or I can build up your house, your family, your person by speaking words that edify or build up and give grace to those who hear. Our tendency in the old way of life is to cut other people down. Rather, re-orient yourself to build up other people's name and property. This is also reflected in the OT law, which encourages each person to look out for the other's estate and ways to help them prosper. Again, the sin of the tongue here is an application of the basic principle of stealing.

Tearing down another's estate is to grieve the Holy Spirit. In 1:13-14, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is the down payment on our inheritance. If you want the inheritance, don't grieve the Holy Spirit. If you tear down other people's estate and inheritance, then the Holy Spirit will tear down your inheritance. In 2:22 we are being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. But if we tear down the dwelling place of others by our words and actions, then the Holy Spirit will tear us out of His dwelling place in heaven. In 3:16 we receive riches through the Spirit. If we grieve the Spirit by tearing down other people's riches, we lose out on riches. So, don't grieve the Spirit. That's why the Spirit is mentioned here. If we destroy the unity of the church, if we tear down what other people have, then our estates will be torn down.

a) Put off Stealing, Put on Hard Work (4:28)

Paul invokes the eighth commandment against stealing. He chiefly has in mind taking things or money that do not belong to us, or doing nothing so that others have to take care of us when we are capable of taking care of ourselves. There is no room for theft in the kingdom of God.

Paul's contrast to such a dishonest or indolent attitude is work: 'Get to work, and meet your needs by honest toil. Stop looking for an easy life.' The word for honest toil is *kopiaō*, signifying the strenuous work that produces fatigue. It is used in 1 Timothy 4:10 and 5:17 for earnest Christian service, but used for Paul's own manual labor in 1 Cor. 4:12. This command teaches the sanctity of labor. The Christian is never to be ashamed or afraid of hard work; it is the duty of all (1 Th. 4:11; 2 Th. 3:10-12).

The Christian motive for earning is not merely to have enough for oneself and one's own, and then perhaps for comforts and luxuries, but to have in order to give to the needy. God expects you not only to meet your own needs, but also to use your earnings to help those in want.

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b) Put off Unwholesome Talk, Put on Edifying Talk (4:29-30)

Get rid of the idea that your mouth exists for your benefit. No! It exists for the betterment and benefit of others. The contrast between unwholesome talk and helpful talk is stronger and also more obvious in Greek than in English. This is because the word translated ‘unwholesome’ is *sapros*, which literally means ‘corrupt’ or ‘rotten,’ and thus has a derived sense of ‘worthless.’ It is used of fruit that is rotting, for example. This is what some talk does, Paul argues. It corrupts things; it rots them away. In contrast to this, Christians should use words to build up people. ‘Words suitable for the occasion’ contain the same thought as in Proverbs 15:23, ‘A word in season, how good it is!’

- *In 4:30 Paul says that the Holy Spirit has sealed us for the day of redemption. Yet in 1:7, he says that we have already been redeemed. Is this an inconsistency? If not, how do you explain the difference?*

The instructions about anger were followed by the warning against giving place to the devil (v. 26). These instructions now about the Christian’s conversation are followed by the warning ‘do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.’ Paul acknowledges the Holy Spirit as fully personal. We know this by the Greek word he uses for ‘grieve.’ *Lupeō* means to cause pain, sorrow, or distress, and only persons can feel such things. But how does one grieve the Holy Spirit? Since the Spirit is holy, pure, and righteous, He would be grieved by the practice of unrighteousness. Since He is also ‘one Spirit’ (4:4), He would be grieved by disunity among the body of believers. Each Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It follows that whenever he thinks, speaks or acts in an unholy way, he grieves that glorious person.

The statement about grieving the Holy Spirit might have been inserted anywhere. Why here? It looks like an interruption. Why is it made at all? It may occur here because the Holy Spirit is chiefly the Spirit of revelation, first giving the Word of God in written form, in our Bibles, and then blessing the teaching of that Word by faithful persons for the building up of the church. The Holy Spirit blesses human words to edification. So it must grieve Him particularly when the speech of Christians, rather than building up the church, as it should, is used to tear others down who are part of that body.

In chapter 1, we saw that a seal is a sign of ownership. Sealing is not something the Holy Spirit does. He is Himself the seal. God has put His sign of ownership on all believers without exception by giving to them His Spirit. We have already been sealed, but we now await the day when our bodies will be completely redeemed. ‘Sealing’ refers to the beginning of our Christian walk and ‘redemption’ looks toward its culmination at the second coming.

3. The Sixth Commandment (4:31-5:2)

Paul applies the sixth commandment (You shall not kill), by applying it to the heart – you shall not even hate your neighbor. Paul is really concerned, like James, with the sins of the tongue. Not only can the tongue steal, it can also commit murder.

Paul lists six things we need to get rid of. First is ‘all bitterness.’ Bitterness is implacability; if you are bitter, there is nothing to be done to soften you up. When a person becomes bitter, they are unforgiving. We get bitter against people who are close to us who we think have done us harm or have failed us. When you become bitter, you cannot be placated. How do you get rid of bitterness?

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Well first you have to get rid of wrath and anger. Wrath is the initial outburst. It is the tendency to hit back really fast, the first response. Anger is settled fury, when you stay mad. Then there is clamor. A clamorous person is one who is loud and tells everyone how they have been hurt and maligned. Clamor is spreading grievances out all over; it is a terrible tendency of the tongue. Slander is cutting people down. And then there's malice or evil feelings. These are all ways we can violate the sixth commandment and commit murder with the tongue.

What's the solution? Paul gives two solutions; the first is in verse 32. If we remember how we have been forgiven, then it is a whole lot easier to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving. This is the same rationale that is used throughout the OT law. "Be kind to the widow and the orphan, because you were once a slave in Egypt." Paul transforms this into NT language – remember how God in Christ has forgiven you.

But this is hard to do in itself, so Paul goes on in verses 1-2 of chapter 5. How do you overcome the tendency to kill other people? You kill yourself. The way Christ shows us is the way of sacrifice. The opposite of you shall not kill is to become a sacrifice. We are supposed to become sacrifices, living a sacrificial lifestyle, putting to death ourselves, we will not be filled with bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

Note that 5:3-6 continue this theme of exposition of the Ten Commandments, covering the Seventh and Tenth Commandments.

a) *Put off Malice, Put on Kindness (4:31-32)*

- *Is forgiving another hard to do (4:32)? How do you go about forgiving another? List steps if necessary.*

Paul names six things here which are decisively to 'be put away.' If a believer sets aside these vices, which cause disharmony, unity among the community of faith results. Yet, a believer should realize that he is in a spiritual battle, and his enemy who seeks to devour him will continue to exploit these annoyances to the detriment of the community.

First, there is 'bitterness' (*pikria*), the resentful spirit which refuses reconciliation. It is a spirit gone sour, a spirit that refuses to reconcile. It is an acid that eats the container from inside out.

Then come 'wrath' (*thymos*) and 'anger' (*orgē*), which are closely associated. *Thymos* is distinguished as the outburst of passion rather than the settled feeling of anger. *Orgē* is used for the wrath of God (5:6), and the verb is used in verse 26 for righteous human anger. Here it is used for the anger that springs from personal animosity, the flaring up of passion and temper because of personal provocation.

Kraugē is translated as 'clamor,' the loud self-assertion of the angry man, who will make everyone hear his grievance.' Clamor describes people who lose control during arguments and raise their voices or scream obscenities. 'Slander' is *blasphēmia*, a word often used in the Bible for speaking against God, but also common for slanderous or abusive speaking against one's fellows. It is speaking evil against another and spreading lies to harm his reputation. Lastly, the apostle adds 'all malice' (*pas kakia*), which generally describes a vicious character. Malice is premeditated ill will toward another. It involves actually plotting to harm someone physically or ruin his reputation.

All of these vices have no place in the Christian community. The eradication of evil words and actions depends ultimately on the purification of the thought life. So speaking positively, the

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apostle says, ‘be kind to one another, tenderhearted ...’ These are the same qualities that Christ demonstrated. Kindness (*chrēstos*), used of God in 2:7, is urged here as a fundamental Christian virtue. It is love in practical action; it is the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbor’s affairs as it does of its own. In adding ‘tenderhearted’ (*eusplanchnoi*), the apostle makes sure that he cannot be understood as requiring acts of kindness without a heart of sympathy and love prompting them.

As Christians we are forgiven people through the atoning work of Christ. This in itself gives us incentive to forgive those who sin or trespass against us. We are likewise called to be forgiving people. ‘Forgiving’ (*charizomai*) can have the wider meaning of ‘dealing graciously’ with one another, but this includes forgiveness, which is probably the dominant thought here. The supreme example and motive for all Christian forgiveness is God’s own forgiveness. He has done this once and for all and completely. Therefore in love and gratitude to him men and women must forgive. How many times must we forgive? ‘Seventy times seven’ (Mt. 18:22)—in other words, an infinite number.

Charizomai has a richer meaning than *aphiēmi*, the most common verb used for offering forgiveness. *Aphiēmi* denotes ‘letting go’ or ‘letting off.’ Forgiveness in this sense means allowing a mistake or trespass against us and casting out of any bitterness within us. *Charizomai* goes a step further and primarily means ‘to bestow as a free gift.’ *Aphiēmi* might lead a believer to say, ‘Yes, I forgive him,’ without any corresponding action to demonstrate this forgiveness. *Charizomai* tells us that we must make a sincere effort to confront those who sin against us, to relay our heart-felt intent to forgive them, and to offer ourselves back into a relationship with them.

Christ has died, and the Christian’s ‘old self’ died with Him. Christ has risen, and with Him the Christian rose to newness of life. Union with Christ is what makes a Christian a Christian. It is also what makes it impossible for him to live as he used to.

D. Application Questions

- *I really have been trying to walk “in a manner worthy of my calling” since this study began. I do not want to become as nonbelievers who Scripture says walk “in the futility of their minds.” I want to become more involved in the body of Christ in order to think and act as a co-heir to the kingdom of God. How can I become more involved in the local church?*
- *Grieving the Holy Spirit would include fostering disunity among the body of Christ. Do I hold bitterness or a grudge against a brother or sister in Christ? How can I ask this person forgiveness and seek to build or rebuild the relationship?*

For next time: Read Ephesians 5:1-21 and Stuart chapter 10.