



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4:25- 5:2

Winter 2023-24

"Faith in Practice"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Ephesians. We're going to finish chapter 4 and actually begin chapter 5. Our text is chapter 4, verse 25 through chapter 5, verse 2. He has told them that they have 'put off the old man'; and, 'put on the new man'. They're 'new creatures in Christ', as was just read. So he gives us a "Therefore", 'Here's the consequence of that, here's the result of that, here's how that ought to be applied to one's life.' He says,

²⁵Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry, and *yet* do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸He 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. ²⁹Let 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. ³⁰Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and 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.

Ephesians 4:25- 5:2

May God make us that to those around us, here and in the world, “a fragrant aroma.” Let's go to the LORD in prayer, and ask Him to bless our time of study together, and look to Him for that.

Father, we do come to You with that request, that You bless us in this hour. It's a great time; a time of fellowship, a time of being with Your people and doing this very important act of study and worship—opening the Scriptures, reading them, and then considering the meaning of the text. This is how we're fed spiritually—this is how we grow. And this hour is very important for all of us, as is the Sunday School hour, and as is our time daily as we read the Scriptures and contemplate Your revelation—and the revelation that You give of Yourself in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So bless us, LORD, as we do that this morning as we consider the *ethics* of the Christian life, the *morality* of the Christian life, and the behavior that should naturally follow from those who have become ‘new creatures’—‘a new creation in Christ.’ May we live as we should; for we have the ability with the fact that You've given us a new heart, a new mind, a new nature, and planted us in Your Son. And we have His life through the Holy Spirit who guides us and empowers us; so Father, may we act upon that and live a life that honors You. So bless us, LORD, with understanding that will galvanize correct behavior.

And we pray for those that are grieving, and for those that are sick, and for those who need Your mercy. And we pray for the Vacation Bible School that will come up in the summer, as they are already beginning to plan it. I pray that You would bless that, and bless all who will participate—it's a great ministry, and we pray Your blessing upon it.

Bless us now, LORD, as we sing our next hymn. Prepare our hearts for a time of worship and a time of study. It's a great passage we look at, for it reminds us of what we should be doing. So LORD, remind us of that but also give us the energy, the desire, and the effort to live to Your glory, and to the benefit of those around us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Dietrich Bonhoeffer became known as a modern Christian martyr when he was executed by his captors at the end of the Second World War. He also gained fame from his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he coined the phrase "cheap grace" —explained as, 'grace without discipleship and without Christ, without commitment.'

Some who profess faith do live like that. But grace, which is *free grace*, is not 'cheap grace'. It calls for commitment which is done in basic deeds; like speaking truth, and showing kindness. That's Paul's subject in our text this morning of Ephesians 4; it's about Christian ethics, the 'dos and don'ts' of the Christian life. It's about, 'faith in practice.' This is where, 'the rubber meets the road', so to speak—where the reality of faith is seen in personal commitment because sometimes the practice of simple virtues is done at personal cost.

Paul has reminded the Ephesians that they had changed; when they first believed they had 'put off the old self and they had put on the new'. They were now 'a new creation', and they were to behave like it. And Paul told them how; and significantly, he began with "*truth*". Grammatically, we could translate verse 25, "Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, speak truth."

Falsehood, or lying, is really the way of the world, which is built on the lie and false promises. Leon Morris called lying, "An accepted weapon of the world." It is, and it works. Politicians and businessmen have advanced their careers by falsifying resumes or creating fictitious biographies; claiming to have worked for companies on Wall Street, or served with distinction in the military. That's 'the way of the world'.

But believers, Christians, have 'put off the old self and put on the new self.' We are 'new creatures', and have joined ourselves to Christ, who is *the truth*. In fact, Paul stated in the previous verse that as *new people*, we have, "...been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." (vs24). So we are to be people of the truth—and speak truth, not lies.

A large part of Paul's instruction here has to do with the *tongue*, has to do with speech, which shows the importance of communication. We are to "speak truth" to our "neighbor", Paul says. (vs25). We're to be honest and true with everyone—but here, "*neighbor*", is a reference to *fellow Christians*; members of the church, the body of Christ; because Paul adds, "...we are members of one another." (vs25b)

Earlier in verse 16, Paul described the church as a body, "...being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies..." If we are not *supplying truth* to one another, we cannot function as a body.

Unity is necessary for the church's vitality. When we're divided, we fail; and deceit divides—and of course, a person who will lie to believers, will certainly lie to unbelievers, and in doing that, destroy a Christian witness. So Paul begins this 'code of conduct', this 'code of ethics' by stating, "...speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor..." (vs25). We are grounded on truth; it is essential. So Paul's concern about the use of the tongue occupies a large part of his instruction in this passage.

But first, in verses 26 and 27, he deals with the *temper*—he deals with *anger*, he deals with *self-control*. "Be angry", he said, "and yet do not sin..." Now at first glance, that might seem more than strange—like a contradiction. 'Be angry, do not sin'. Well, isn't anger sin?—Not necessarily. In fact, Paul is quoting David in Psalm 4, verse 4, where David commands anger. —So there is '*good*' anger.

There are times when anything other than anger would be improper. When we see the innocent or the weak mistreated or cheated, we're right to be angry. We call it '*righteous indignation*.' It's what Christ showed when He cleansed the temple and cast

out the moneychangers for turning the temple into a robbers' den. Men were using the house of God and using the truth of God for personal gain. They were taking advantage of people under the protection of God's temple and it caused Christ to burn with anger.

Sin and unbelief provoke anger in God—and should provoke it in His people. Indifference, or tolerance toward what is wrong, is wrong; it is sin. In fact, it's evidence of a kind of arrested development, spiritually, when we're not exercised over wrongdoing and sin. Righteous indignation toward hypocrisy, injustice, sin of any kind, is right. And that kind of anger can provoke a person to 'righteous action'.

The Reformation was set off when Martin Luther learned that the church of Rome was selling indulgences to Germans, many of them poor peasants, to finance the building of St. Peter's Basilica. An *indulgence* was a document that could be bought with money and promised the buyer forgiveness of sins and a shorter time of punishment in purgatory.

Luther objected to that, and he acted upon it. He posted his 95 theses on the chapel door of Wittenberg Castle. It began a debate that spread across Europe and ignited the Reformation. His anger didn't lead to sin, but blessing.

William Wilberforce became angry over slavery. His anger moved him to take up a long fight against that practice in England. Anger, if righteous, is good.

But, as the warning indicates, it can lead to sin. Anger can become personal; it can simmer and boil over into bitterness, hatred, and vengeance. So Paul warns them to be cautious and keep it in check. He said, "...do not let the sun go down on your anger..." (vs26b). And the point is, 'Deal with it quickly.'

J. B. Philips paraphrased this, "Never go to bed angry." That's good advice, and a good rule for husbands and wives. That can't always be done, but, 'Deal with it quickly before it festers'—that's the point that Paul is making. We never grow spiritually when there is bitterness in our heart—'it gives opportunity to Satan.' That's what Paul says. (vs27).

In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 15, there's the warning against, 'a root of bitterness springing up and causing trouble, and defiling many.' It can divide a church. So, 'Beware', Paul was saying, '...the devil is always looking for a place in our thoughts to tempt and influence God's saints.'

But there was more that concerned Paul, so in verse 28 he moves from dishonesty and anger to theft; 'Let him who steals, steal no longer.' Now that's a little disturbing because it seems to suggest that the action was going on and needed to stop—that the Christians were stealing.

We need to remember, all saints are sinners. We were all saved out of a life of sinful habits—and habits are not easily broken. We are forgiven; we are justified; we are declared righteous before God. Our guilt has been removed; we are innocent in His sight—but we're still sinners. And so the reformers spoke of us as, "righteous sinners" ... and so we are. And that means we still need to be sanctified, we still need to be transformed. We are 'a work in progress' and we will be as long as we're on this earth. —And that's the work of the Holy Spirit on our soul, our mind, and our will.

Now, He works through instruction, and He works through warnings and admonitions, like this one, 'Let him who steals, steal no longer.' That has an effect on the believer. The Spirit of God uses it to bring conviction to our heart, and in so doing, a response—a good response. And not just a negative one like, 'quit stealing', but also the positive, 'start working'.

That, too, is Paul's instruction, "...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." (vs28b). In other words, 'Save so that you can help people.' I don't think he means, 'Don't save for your future needs.' You do need to do that. But his concern here is that we become a useful saint in order to help those who have needs, (and there are lots of needs that need to be addressed).

Well, the instruction here is general. It's not clear if Paul is giving instruction to lazy people who found it easier to steal than to work, or if these are laborers who were unemployed. There was no safety net in those days, or welfare system to help the unemployed. So stealing was an easy solution to feed oneself, or one's family. 'But it was not a solution!', Paul said.

The only solution for the saint was to labor with one's own hands—do hard work to provide for self. And further, 'Save money', as I said, that we may be useful and helpful to others who are in financial need. That's virtuous; and it's *miraculous*—that's the result of the new birth. In his lesson on this, Dr. Johnson said, "This is the power of the Gospel: It can turn a thief into a philanthropist." I like that; that's true. There is no sin from which the Gospel cannot deliver and in its place supply virtue, righteousness.

Now all of this seems straightforward enough: 'Don't steal.' But what about when things become really desperate, when there's no work? 'Desperate times call for desperate measures', and hunger can lead to that.

In the 1950's, in communist China, due to the catastrophic policy called *The Great Leap Forward*, the country suffered what some have called, 'Mao's Great Famine.' Millions of people died of hunger. It's estimated that the number was over 50 million. One survivor said, "Those who stole food survived. Those who didn't, died." When I read that I wondered; I wondered if many of those who died were Christians who refused to steal.

Paul didn't make exceptions here: "Steal no longer". Sometimes the choice is, 'Sin or die.' That's hard; that takes commitment. That's the difference between 'free grace' and 'cheap grace'. *Free grace* produces new life, and new loves, and obedience. We pray we are never in such desperate times, but if we are, we pray for the grace to be strong and faithful. Paul was telling the Ephesians to, 'Be faithful. Live as the new self, not the old self.'

In verse 29, Paul returns to the subject he began in verse 25. Here he says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." Speech is a gift of God. The God of the Bible, the Triune God, is the God who speaks. It's one of the things, one of the accusations, that the psalmists make against the idolaters: Their idols don't speak. The gods of the ancient world didn't speak.

God spoke. He spoke the universe into existence. That's Psalm 33, verse 6, "By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made...". Jesus Christ is *the Logos*; He is, "the Word". (Jn 1:1). God has spoken to His people throughout history, "In many ways", the writer of Hebrews said, "I"...in the prophets", and finally. "in His Son", 'God speaks'. (Heb 1:1-2). God reveals truth, and the way to life, and the way of a wise life. —He's revealed it all. And God has given man this great privilege of speech. We're not to abuse it, or treat it lightly.

Paul warns against speaking an "unwholesome word", which means something like, 'rotten speech'. This word is used in the Gospels of rotten trees that produce bad fruit. Now we naturally think of off color language or jokes, (and I'm sure that's included), but Paul probably has something more in mind than that: He's thinking of language that 'tears down' —like gossip.

Augustin recognized that. After he became a Christian, he returned to North Africa, and he established a monastery where he, "stressed good books, learned conversation, and edifying speech." On the table at which he and his friends would share a meal and have free conversation, he engraved the words, "Whoever thinks that he is able to nibble at the life of absent friends, must know that he is unworthy of this table." —And those who ignored the rule were severely reprimanded.

'The tongue', James said, 'is a fire, the very world of iniquity, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.' (Jas 3:6). Those are strong words about the danger of the tongue, and what it can do, and who is behind it. A child's confidence can be crushed by cruel words. Husbands and wives say things in the heat of anger that they regret for years. Lives are destroyed by "unwholesome" conversation.

So Paul says, Don't let it, "...proceed from your mouth...". Instead, he said, Speak, "...only such *a word* as is good for edification..." (vs29b). The person who has such a word is a great blessing to others. In this walk we are on, in this pilgrimage, this journey we are on through this world, we need wisdom.

I often refer to *Pilgrim's Progress*. It's been called, '*the dangerous journey*', for all along the way there are dangers. It's almost as though the whole point of the story that Bunyan told is of all the ways to get off the path, (because they're always being led off the path). It's a dangerous journey we're on and we need wisdom, we need encouragement, we need what Paul describes here as, "a word"..."according to the need of the moment." (vs29c).

To be such a person who is so equipped with that kind of wisdom that he or she knows what is needed for that particular moment, and that particular situation that is troubling a person—well, that takes time; that takes study. That takes a deep knowledge of God's Word and it takes experience in the Christian walk, experience with Christ. —It takes maturity.

And that's the life that we must aspire to and strive for: To know truth, and know how to speak truth at the right time and in the right way, so that people are encouraged, (or warned), but always edified.

Well then he adds, in the middle of this, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." (vs30). The connection may not be readily apparent but it's very important. The Spirit is the agent who enables us to do all of this. It's an easy thing to say, 'Don't steal', when times are good, but hard to obey when it's a famine. Easy to say, "Speak truth!", but tough to do when it may cost you your job or cost you your life. But that's the cost of discipleship.

Now, that's really beyond us. The reality is, it is impossible in the flesh, in our natural ability. But we don't walk naturally, but supernaturally. That's why the Holy Spirit is essential; we do it by the power of the Spirit, so Paul says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..." The reason is that it will lead to spiritual frustration. (Well, the reason is,

'It's wrong, it's sin to do that. It's a sin against the Lord God.) But practically speaking it affects our abilities, and our walk, and our life.

Now that statement clearly shows, by the way, that the Holy Spirit is not, 'a *thing*', but a Person—not an *influence or power*, like the wind. Only a *person* can be grieved. We can resist an influence; you can't grieve the wind.

The Holy Spirit is a Person, the third Person of the Trinity, and revealed, referred to, throughout the Bible, (both Old and New Testaments), and presented as a Person. We see Him all through the Scriptures. We see Him from the beginning. He's there in Genesis chapter 1, verse 2, "...moving over the surface of the waters", involved in the creation of life. He is in Isaiah 48, verse 16, one of the great Trinitarian texts of the Old Testament.

But it's in the New Testament that the presence and personality of the Holy Spirit is revealed more clearly. In John 14, for example, the Lord promised to send Him to the disciples. He called the Spirit, "the Helper." 'He will teach them all things.' (Jn 14:26). Only a person helps. Only a person teaches.

The word "*spirit*", (*pneuma*), is neuter. It's not masculine, it's not feminine. And yet, when it's referred to in those verses, the Lord refers to it with the masculine pronoun, "He". Why? Because the Spirit is not an 'it'. It's a *He*; it's a person. "He" is a person.

In Acts chapter 5, verse 3 it's stated that, 'He can be lied to'. In Romans chapter 8, verse 14, Paul states that, 'the Spirit of God leads the sons of God'. All of that indicates personality: A *person* can be lied to. A *person* leads. The Holy Spirit is that; He teaches, and guides, and protects.

Paul said that we are, 'sealed by', (vs30), or, 'sealed with', (Eph 1:13), 'the Spirit' "for the day of redemption." (vs30). "Redemption" is *freedom*, often used of 'freeing captives'. It occurred at the cross when the Lord, by His death, paid for our sins—bought our freedom. It is past and it is finished. That's what the Lord declared from the cross, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30).

But here, “the day of redemption”, is future. It is the resurrection when we are freed from the presence of sin—when our freedom is complete. And we're sealed by the Spirit until that day. Why *sealed*? I know we covered this earlier in our studies in chapter 1, verse 13, but a seal on an ancient document showed ownership—and the Spirit shows His ownership of us, and keeps us safe, secure, to the very end, “for the day of redemption”!

That's divine activity. The Spirit, just as the Son, and the Father, is God. And the Holy Spirit loves us, just as God loves us, unconditionally—which makes grieving Him all the more grievous. We grieve Him when we violate these principles of conduct: When we speak an “unwholesome word”, when we gossip or do anything against the saints that would divide the church, or when we sin willfully.

That's not only grievous—it's dangerous. We are dependent on Him: He sanctifies us, He strengthens us, He enables us to have wisdom—to know the right way to live, and gives us progress in the faith. When we grieve the Holy Spirit it affects our relationship with Him, which hinders our power to live the Christian life. At such times we are not able to walk by the Spirit. Now, He never leaves us. In fact, according to Romans 8, verse 14, He never stops ‘leading us.’

And so, in those times, He deals with us: He convicts us and brings us to a sense of our sin to change us and bring us into a right relationship with Him and the Lord God, the Triune God, in the right way. But it's frustrating—it frustrates our life when we grieve Him.

The absolute necessity of the Spirit and His work in our lives is indicated further in what follows where Paul expanded the code of conduct. He wrote in verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

This is more instruction on abusive language, harmful conversation—but you'll notice, this is also a warning against harmful attitudes and actions; bitterness, and

wrath, and anger. Those are states of mind that lead to hostile acts like slander and malice. 'Let them all be put away from you!', Paul is saying.

But again, that's not so easy to do. Bitterness, for example, takes root and festers in the soul from a sense of being wronged, or suffering an injustice. And in such a case it's hard to put that away—especially when the world says, 'Get even!' , (and that's what we naturally think of doing).

But we're not, 'of the world'. We've been saved out of the world. And the first step to overcoming wrong attitudes and wrong actions is realizing that—remembering that we are a new creation and resolving to live like it, to live according to what we are.

But also, remembering that we have a supernatural life: We have a new heart with a capacity for obedience, and importantly, we have the Holy Spirit, who seals us, and enables us, so that we can do it. We can not only put bad attitudes and behavior away, we can, (we must), replace them with virtue. That's Paul's instruction in verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Now again, "Be kind to one another", is directed to fellow believers. Paul is concerned here with unity in the church—but the application is broad. We're to be kind to all people, and forgiving, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

That can also be translated more broadly: "Being gracious to one another, just as also God in Christ was gracious to you." That fits the word well, and it covers more of what Paul speaks of here. Grace should characterize our lives—it is motivation for our new life.

The words, 'Being gracious to one another *just as*', can also be translated, *because*; "Being gracious to one another *because*". Either one is possible; both are correct. God's grace in Christ is our standard. But we, of all people, should be gracious, or forgiving, *because* we have been shown much grace and forgiveness.

Nevertheless, this is all the work of the Holy Spirit. It is, as I've been saying, supernatural. It's not self-produced. It is the fruit of the Spirit. Paul puts *kindness* in that list of nine virtues in Galatians 5:22.

But even that, something as basic as human kindness, can be costly. In June, 1940, after Hitler's army conquered France, Portugal's consul general in Bordeaux, Susa Mendes, saw the sidewalk at the consel crowded with Jewish men, women, and children. They wanted transit visas to freedom, which the Germans prohibited, (his prime minister in Portugal forbid issuing those visas).

Mr. Mendes knew doing it would end his career and his ability to support his family; but he knew it was the only way of escape for the refugees. So over a few days-time, he issued thousands of visas, saving thousands of Jewish lives. He lost his job, lost his property, and died penniless—but without regrets. He said he would rather stand with God against man, than stand with man against God.

Usually obedience is routine, but sometimes it costs much. For the believer in Christ, that is a test of our faith. And God tests us. Reward may not come in this life, but eternal reward will come in eternity.

Now if Paul's standard of Christian conduct isn't demanding enough, he raises it even higher in chapter 5, verse 1. He wrote, "Therefore..." that is, 'Since God is gracious to us', "...be imitators of God..."

A child who has been loved by his or her parents, who has experienced and felt their love and their care, will honor them in his or her life, and emulate them in his or her behavior. And we do that with the LORD as beloved children, spiritual children, as we understand the great blessings of grace that we have received from Him.

And so it's important to learn those great blessings—which is to say, 'Go back to chapters 1-3', the doctrinal section of the book, where the grace of God, and the power of God for the undeserving is so manifestly described. All that we've received is so clearly put forth in those chapters. It's doctrine. It's what we need as the basis for our ethics.

Well, how do we imitate God? Paul tells us in verse 2, "and walk in love...". Live out life with love. Love is a much abused word today. But Paul makes clear what Christian love is—it is self-sacrificing. Christ is our standard, "...just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God is a fragrant aroma. "

He put God's will first, our Lord did, and sacrificed Himself for us. That's love; it's never situational. Ethics are never situational. Love is obedient in all situations and never compromises God's will. These are hard things. Easy to preach, hard to live. But that's true discipleship, committed discipleship—not cheap grace.

Charles Spurgeon's last words from the pulpit were, "Those who have no master are slaves to themselves. Depend on it: You will either serve Satan or Christ—either self or the Savior."

That's true; God is merciful, especially when we fail. He knows we are dust. But believers in Christ strive for obedience. May God give us the grace, free grace, to deny self and serve Him.

If you're here without Christ, without having believe in Him as God and Savior, you are a slave. You're a slave to self and to all the desires and the sinful passions that are in your heart—and you are a slave to Satan. And that life is doomed.

Come to Christ; flee the wrath to come. The Lord is gracious and abounding in lovingkindness. He receives all who turn to Him. He forgives and makes every believer a son, an heir to glory. May God help you to do that.

And help all of us to strive to live according to the standard set forth here, recognizing you're a new creation in Christ and you can live differently—and must.

(Closing prayer) Father, that is great truth we have just sung about. Thank You that Your Son took on flesh in order to die in our place. And because of that, we have forgiveness because of the precious blood of Christ. He's atoned for us. We're in Your

hand, and nothing can pluck us from it. That's grace. That's the great truth of the Gospel, and it should resonate within our hearts as we think about that, and motivate us to live, in the little bit of time we have in this world, to Your glory. May we do that; enable us to do that, LORD. We thank You for all You've done for us.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. Shalom. We pray this in the name of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(End of Audio)