

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Conduct of the New Man Ephesians 4:25-28

Intro: Here at the end of ch⁴, Paul's now beginning to deal directly and specifically with Christian conduct, which, as we'll see, is merely the practical application of the great doctrinal teachings that were declared in ch¹⁻³. But the apostle has led into this discussion indirectly. 1st, he reminds the Ephesians of what they were before God saved them. They were hardened against God, darkened and futile in their thinking, separated from God's life, and insensitive to holiness so that they indulged in every kind of sensual vice. 2nd, he reminds them that in spite of this dark background they still had been saved by God and had come to know Jesus Christ, who leads His followers to walk in an entirely different way (21). The new man is created according to the image of Jesus Christ and is instinctively righteous and holy. This is in direct contrast with the old man who inherited from Adam and instinctively rebels against God. But what is this new way that is in Christ? And how are we to walk in it?

In today's text, Paul's going to list 5 specific examples of this new way in which believers are to walk but he prefaces this with an illustration of what it means to walk in this new way rather than the old. Paul talks about changing to a new way of life in terms of taking off 1 set of clothes and putting on another (22-24). 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. Like Lazarus, we've been brought out of death into life by Christ. As part of that spiritual miracle our old graveclothes, which were appropriate for a corpse but not for a living body, have been taken off, and we have been re-clothed in wedding garments in preparation for that great wedding supper of the Lamb. From this point on we should now begin to act like members of the wedding party.

25 – In his introduction to this section (17-24), Paul has presented the truth in a kind of theological before and after analysis: what we were before Christ vs. what we are after Christ (17-21); putting off the old man vs. putting on the new man (22-24). This “before and after” pattern carries on into the list of instructions as several of them contain a negative statement of past behavior followed by a positive replacement. This new for old style of

instruction perfectly reflects the before and after shift that has occurred with respect to the believer's new standing with God and the putting off of the old self and putting on the new. The believer's past behavior was derived from the old self; their substituted behavior arises from the new self which has replaced the old.

therefore – Paul's use of this word at the very beginning of his list points us to the reality that this list is much more than just a list of do's and don't. The very first thing Paul says a believer is to put away is lying – well, even an unsaved Jew would understand that lying is wrong as it would break the 9th Commandment. Paul's not providing a simple list of "good things to do now that you're a Christian". But, by use of the word therefore, we're to understand that everything that follows is derived specifically from what has already been said concerning the believer's new reality in Christ. Thus, everything that follows is not subjected in any way to our agreement with it or whether we like it or not. Paul is describing what it looks like to be a Christian and why it must look this way. Our agreement with his analysis is not required, only our compliance.

lying – While the act of lying is an acceptable translation and directly parallels the act of speaking the truth, the Greek term is better understood as falsehood. The idea of putting away better suits the abstract sense of falsehood as a general characteristic of the old nature. It not only includes the verbal act of lying but also encompasses the human habit of constructing a story so that the teller always appears as the victim or the hero, never the antagonist. It also includes the idea of living a lie, presenting yourself as being something you actually are not. The whole sense of falsehood – which can pervade a person's character and disposition – has been put away! Our predisposition for falsehood has been displaced so now believers are to be characterized by speaking, presenting and living the truth.

The Greek word translated lying is *pseudos* ("the lie"). This is the word John uses in reference to the spirit of antichrist (1 Jn 2:20-23). Here, Paul may have in mind the Christian's repudiation of this basic lie as a basis for urging truthful speech. In becoming Christians the believers at Ephesus had repudiated the lie and had embraced the truth. That is, they had turned from false gods, idols, or Satan to Jesus, who is, in fact, the truth (Jn 14:6). So, since they are already new creatures in respect to this basic truth and

falsehood, they should now forego lying entirely and speak truth always.

Paul's been speaking of truth again and again in this passage. Gentiles don't know the truth; they are darkened in their understanding. Christians do know truth; they have learned it from and in Christ. Also, it's by being renewed in the spirit [attitude] of [our] minds that we are to make progress in our spiritual walk. This means that if we're to grow as Christians, one of the necessary ingredients is cultivating truthfulness. We can lie quite deliberately. A slander is a lie. A statement deliberately intended to mislead another person is a lie, particularly when the misleading is for our own advantage. But we also lie unintentionally just because we're not in the habit of rigorously cultivating truth.

Notice, in giving the positive behavioral substitute, Paul is actually quoting from [Zech 8:16](#). In this prophetic chapter, Jerusalem will be known as the City of Truth ([3](#)), which will enjoy the Lord's blessings in various ways. He will also save the faithful remnant of Israel ([13](#)). As a consequence of this salvation and blessing, the people are to treat one another with justice and truth ([16](#)). They are not to plot evil against their neighbors or love perjury, which the Lord hates ([17](#)). Paul's use of this OT prophecy serves a similar function in our text: speaking truth to one another is expected within the community that has experienced God's salvation and blessing.

But Paul doesn't stop with just being neighborly; he goes on to remind us that we're not just neighbors in the same community but that we are actually members of one another, members of the same body! This strengthens the concept of community beyond that of "neighbor" because those in Christ are joined together in a more profound relationship. Neighbors share in the same community but members of the body of Christ belong to each other in an organic way. A body can only function properly if it tells itself the truth. If your hand touches something hot but your brain tells your hand that it's actually cool, your hand will be severely burned. Earlier in the chapter, Paul spoke of the unity and health of the body being established by its members speaking the truth in love ([15](#)). Thus, the body of Christ is a new community that has experienced God's salvation and blessing and as such, it is to live by the standard of truth, having put away the old lifestyle of falsehood.

26-27 – Paul's second example doesn't have an expressed positive side. In fact, this command has long puzzled interpreters. This instruction not only

permits believers to express anger, but commands it! What? We're probably meant to understand this as being a controlled or righteous anger as opposed to an uncontrolled, selfish, or sinful anger. This is because anger itself is not sin. Scores of OT passages speak of the just anger of God against the wicked and even against His own people when they persist in disobedience. Jesus was angry on several occasions ([Mt 21:12-13](#); [Mk 3:5](#)). It is not simply appropriate to respond to certain situations with anger, but, clearly, it's required of a person who is committed to speaking the truth.

Righteous anger differs from the kind of anger prohibited in [31](#) and other places, even though the same Greek word is used in both places. It's purely context that determines the nature of the anger prohibited in [31](#), as it is listed along with bitterness, wrath, clamor and evil speaking. Even we can experience righteous anger. That's why Paul introduces this subject by a quotation from [Ps 4:4](#). The righteous nature of the anger instructed in [26](#) is emphasized by the caveat and do not sin. This statement confirms that a righteous anger is in view while also acknowledging the human temptation to allow righteous anger to devolve into a sinful version. It is as wrong not to be angry in a situation demanding anger, such as a gross injustice, as it is to be angry at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons. But we must admit that we are most often angry in precisely that way—at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons. And it is because our own personal feelings, pride, and self-image are wrapped up in our reactions.

So, anger must be handled with care. Righteous causes can easily provoke unrighteous responses. How do we deal with this? If we look to Paul's OT reference, we may find a clue ([Ps 4:3-5](#)). In [4:3b](#) the psalmist affirms the Lord's attentiveness when called upon by those who are godly. He then exhorts the reader to reflect on the situation in the heart in silent stillness ([4b](#)). They are then to offer sacrifices in righteousness and trust in the Lord ([4:5](#)). All of this helps to interpret the anger instruction. Whatever injustice or unrighteousness we encounter, we must remember that the Lord hears our call. We are to reflect on our own hearts without sinning through ungodly speech or actions, remaining righteous in spite of our anger.

Paul's next statement can be equally confusing and misinterpreted. This phrase is sometimes understood literally to mean that anger must be dispersed before the day is over and is commonly applied to married couples. This is unlikely Paul's intended meaning for 2 reasons. 1st, this

would imply that such anger is bad and should be dispersed in a timely manner. But, we've already determined that righteous anger is good. 2nd, the word used here is not the same word for anger used at the beginning of 26 or in 31. The word for wrath actually refers to the cause of anger, rather than the experience of anger itself. Paul's saying that the cause of anger (injustice or unrighteousness) should be addressed. It's not enough to simply experience righteous anger in the face of injustice or unrighteousness – something must be done about it! Obviously, we should pray about it and seek the Lord and then act according to His leading. The believer is to act promptly to address the cause of righteous anger, whatever it may be.

27 – This instruction is associated with the 3 instructions regarding anger in 26. The place mentioned here is not just an opportunity but literally a place, a foothold in the believer's life. Believers should not give the devil space to operate. All through the Book, the devil is presented as a threat to believers who schemes against them can be effectively resisted by donning the full armor of God (6:11). The devil enjoys influence and power over all those who remain spiritually dead but he has lost power over those made alive in Christ. Though Christ is triumphant over all other competing authorities (1:22-23) the devil still remains a threat to believers if they do not avail themselves of the protection God's armor affords.

But, exactly how does one give place to the devil? If we accept that the last phrase of v26 refers to taking prompt and proper action against the cause of righteous anger then by not taking swift, decisive action to address the offense, the devil is given space to operate in that situation. This "space" doesn't necessarily relate to the one who is experiencing the righteous anger but rather to the unrighteous act that prompted the righteous anger. In other words, injustice or unrighteousness needs to be remedied so that the devil is restrained. This view of 27 is more community minded. It's not simply concerned with blocking the devil from your private life by dispersing personal anger before nightfall. It's about addressing the injustices that provoke righteous anger so that the devil is blocked from harming the community of believers within the church. The devil's work is to accuse and divide the family of God and to sow discord among them. When we fail to address injustice and unrighteousness, we do the devil's work for him.

28 – In keeping with the theme of community well-being, this instruction

concerning thieves is to turn them from harming others to serving them. This instruction refers explicitly to the 8th: You shall not steal (Ex 20:15). This is also an excellent example of the new-for-old replacement theme of the text. Instead of requiring thieves to simply stop doing evil, they are to replace their bad behavior with loving service; doing their own work so that they may share with those in need. Paul's use of the 3rd-person "him" establishes this as an expectation within the community – the church is to see to it that this instruction is carried out. This reform requires community participation.

There are many different ways that we can steal, of course. We steal from God when we fail to worship Him as we should or when we set our own interests before His legitimate interests. We steal from Him when we fail to honor Him by our lives or fail to tell others of His love. We steal from an employer when we don't give the best work we're capable of or when we waste time or consistently leave early. If we're in business, we can steal by overcharging for what we make or for the service we render. We steal if we sell an inferior product, pretending it's better than it is. We steal by borrowing and not repaying. We steal by damaging another's reputation. We steal from ourselves when we waste the time, talents, or resources God has entrusted to us.

But, what Paul has chiefly in mind here is taking things or money that does not belong to us, or doing nothing so that others have to take care of us when we are capable of caring for ourselves. Paul's contrast to such a dishonest or indolent attitude is work—"doing something useful" with our own hands. In place of stealing, the former thief is to labor – which is the opposite of thievery. The very nature of stealing is to take the fruit of another's labor – reaping without having sown. So it's appropriate that the reformed thief now becomes a laborer himself, working hard and toiling to reap his own reward. His is to replace doing evil by literally working the good.

What's the motivation for such personal industry? The world might say, "Work hard, because that will build self-esteem" or ". . . because then you'll be able to buy what you want and enjoy the good life." That's not the motivation Paul presents here. Instead, he says, "because then you will have something to share with those in need." The reformed thief is not to labor for his own sake (although becoming self-sufficient is implied) but for the sake of others.

There are people who have nothing because they will not work for it; they don't deserve handouts. But there are others who, through no fault of their own, genuinely have needs. The former thief is no longer to be selfishly concerned with just himself but to work for the benefit of others. Instead of depleting the resources of others for his own sake, he will use his own resources to supplement their lack of resources. Those genuinely in need are to be helped by Christians who work hard precisely so they will have something to give to those in need. The purpose for getting becomes giving; cheerful, gracious giving. 😊