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Conduct of the New Man II

Ephesians 4:29-32

Intro: Paul has now begun to deal directly with Christian conduct but he has led into this discussion indirectly. 1st, he reminds the Ephesians of what they were before God saved them and then he informs them of what they are now that God has saved them through faith in Jesus Christ. It's this new standing before God that warrants a new walk in the believer. Those who follow Jesus must walk in an entirely different way; they must walk as He walked.

In the last few verses of ch⁴, Paul lists 5 specific examples of this new walk that should characterize the true Christian's life. Throughout this entire section, Paul's been emphasizing the need to substitute the new behavior that believers have received from Christ for the old (lost) behavior that we inherited from Adam. The old nature was rotten when we got it but we were able to perfect corruption through our sin in spite of it, or because of it. Either way, what was of the old nature and old life is to be taken off and cast aside so that the new nature of Christ can be put on and lived out within the church and before the world. Christlike living is critical in both situations.

Last time we went into some detail of the first few examples Paul gave of what Christians should no longer do and what they should begin to do. Far from this being merely a list of dos and don'ts, Paul is actually laying out for believers what it means to be a Christian within the community of the Body of Christ. These are not just suggestions for good behavior but instructions of Christlike characteristics that should be present in the life of every believer. As such, they're not only tangible evidence of the salvation of the individual but also directly contribute to the spiritual health and well-being of the church as a whole. Thus, it is imperative that Christians accurately understand both the text and the context of these 5 examples provided by Paul. They're the life-blood of our experience within the church.

Last week we discussed the first few examples presented by Paul in v²⁵⁻²⁸. The first instruction was to put away **lying**. This, of course, means more than just to stop lying. This command not only includes putting away the false gods and idols that were worshipped before but also the complete removal

off falsehood that characterized the old life. Instead, believers are to cultivate a mentality of truthfulness by being renewed in the spirit of their minds but also, more importantly, in their relationships with fellow believers as they are members of the same body.

Next, Paul commands the use of righteous anger in the face of injustice or unrighteousness as it may appear within the community of the church; taking special precaution to ensure that our righteous anger doesn't dissolve into the sinful version of anger. He goes on to add that any failure to address the cause of the injustice or unrighteousness could, by default, give the devil a foothold in the church. The devil's goal is to bring accusation and division into the life of the church and when we fail to address obvious sin, we do the devil's work for him.

The 3rd example dealt with thievery; where the old nature was characterized by robbing others of the fruits of their labor; a believer with a new nature now labors with their hands; not only to provide for their own needs but, more importantly; so that they will have something to give to those who are truly in need. Instead of taking from others, the Christian is to labor so that they can minister to others. The purpose for getting becomes giving – not hoarding.

There are 2 more examples (commands) left. Let's see what Paul has to say about our tongues and our attitudes.

29 – In keeping with the theme of substituting the new, Christ-like actions for the old, sinful action, Paul now focuses on the tongue. Believers are to avoid speech that is “harmful, bad, evil or unwholesome” and instead only speak in a way that blesses others. Clearly, this harmful speech would include foul language but the scope of the word used here is not limited to that narrow definition. The word translated as corrupt is also used to describe fruit that is rotting. Paul is saying that this is what some talk does; it corrupts things; it rots them away. In contrast to this, Christians should use words to build up other people.

Paul's not just prohibiting swearing but any kind of speech that might be described as harmful. His point is to address how speech affects others and the role it plays within the community of the church. Just as the positive counterpart in the 2nd half of the verse focuses on how speech blesses

others, so the negative part focuses on how our speech might adversely affect others. This would include harsh criticism, gossip, slander, name-calling, lying, boasting and, of course, swearing. Also, the your in “your mouth” is plural, indicating that this instruction is to be upheld by the entire congregation, not just by individuals alone.

Harmful speech is to give way to whatever is good for necessary edification – for building others up according to their needs (NIV). This relates to spiritual strengthening as the whole body of Christ is to edify itself in love (16). The fact that this edification is necessary shows that it is to be targeted at specific needs rather than just general or random. The purpose of this targeted edification is to impart grace to the hearers. Ultimately, our speech should be a gift to others rather than do them harm. Now, it really doesn't matter if I think my speech is a gift to others, the proof of the pudding is in the tasting – does it do them good or do them harm? This grace is more than just God's grace found in Christ. It's used in a wider sense to refer to any good thing that blesses others as a practical extension of goodwill.

It is hard to read this verse without thinking of the point James makes of the problem of the tongue in his epistle. The point he makes is that speech is a powerful tool either for good or for evil. It's like a bit in the mouth of a horse. It can turn that large animal one way or another. Or, it is like a rudder on a ship or a fire (Jam 3:5b-6). That's a powerful statement, but it's no exaggeration. Hitler's corrupting speech plunged the entire world into war and caused massive suffering and anguish. By contrast, the speech of Jesus Christ has done more to bless more people than any other single thing in all history. For all of its secularism and materialism, America is still known as a giving country. This is due largely to the influence Christianity has had on the American psyche and culture.

We should learn what good and evil our speech can cause, and we should seek God's help in controlling our evil tongue. How? By allowing God to control our minds. Tongue control will never be achieved unless there is first of all heart and mind control.

30 – Some commentators question why Paul speaks about grieving the Holy Spirit at this point. This statement might have been inserted anywhere in this section. Why here? In truth, it looks like an interruption. Why is it made at all? It most likely occurs right here because the Holy Spirit is

primarily the Spirit of revelation, first giving God's Word in written form and then blessing the teaching of that Word by faithful individuals 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 down others who are part of that body. This verse is directly related to the previous instruction in v29. But what is Paul saying?

The context of this instruction is found in [Isa 63](#). This passage ([7-10a](#)) speaks of the Lord's faithful love toward Israel ([7](#)) and His redemption of them brought about by His love and compassion for them ([9](#)). Israel's rebellion against their Savior and Redeemer is how they grieved the Holy Spirit. Thus, grieving the Holy Spirit of God is not simply a matter of displeasing God or making the Spirit sad. It refers specifically to the rejection of the love and compassion of God as it's expressed through His redemption. It's direct rebellion against His work of calling together and creating a people for Himself. Paul transfers this imagery to the church and this is confirmed in the 2nd part of the verse that says believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the sign of God's redemption, the sign of a people belonging to God.

How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? The context points to grieving Him through use of corrupt (rotten) speech that can destroy the community of the church rather than speech that edifies and build up the church. But, it is also possible to grieve the Holy Spirit when we neglect holiness in our lives. We can grieve the Holy Spirit when as believers who have miraculously been made spiritually alive in Christ consistently think in purely materialistic terms or when we display a greater love for the things of this world than for Him. One function of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Jesus Christ and we can grieve Him when we fail to do the same in our speech and actions.

Now, we must understand that the Holy Spirit is not grieved by us because He has a petty, over-sensitive nature. As the 3rd member of the God-head, the Holy Spirit is God, which means He possesses all the divine attributes of God. One of those attributes is omniscience – all-knowing – which means He has always known what you were going to do, how you were going to grieve Him. Clearly, the Spirit is not surprised by our failures so why is He grieved? We must realize that the Spirit is grieved primarily for our sakes

because He knows exactly the extent of the misery our sin will cost us. He reads and senses our sorrows in our sins. He grieves over us because He sees how much chastisement we will incur – and how much communion we will lose.

When Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, he wasn't weeping because Lazarus was dead – He was about to raise him up to life again, revealing His own divine nature. No, Jesus wept because of the scene around the tomb – the heartache and loss of Mary and Martha, the unbelief of most of those who surrounded the tomb. Jesus saw the destructive tool of sin and wept because He knew it wasn't supposed to be this way. In the midst of our regenerated life, when we make it a habit to focus on the things of this world more than the riches that we have been given in Christ, the Holy Spirit grieves over our sin because He knows how much it is going to cost us in the end.

The language of redemption Paul uses refers to the buying back of a slave or a captive; making someone free by payment of a ransom. The Holy Spirit is God's mark on redeemed believers that indicates His possession and protection of them. The day of redemption refers to a future day when God will finally and conclusively claim those who belong to Him. He has already bought them through the redemption that comes by the gospel, and now believers are graciously kept secure by God, for a glorious future with God.

We must also remember that, although grieving the Holy Spirit involves serious rebellion against God's love and compassion, Paul never implies that the Spirit will be removed from the believer's presence. Since we are sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption, He will not be shaken off by lapses in our judgment that are inconsistent with our new status and standing before God. Having said all that; we should also remember that any such lapses are serious and deeply inconsistent with the presence of the Spirit in our hearts and lives. He's personally affected by them.

31-32 – This final set of instructions continue the new-for-old approach to practical Christian living. The old set of attitudes and behaviors are presented in a vice-list in v**31** while the new ones are given in v**32**. The phrase put away literally means to take away, remove and correspond precisely with the idea of putting off the old man (**22**). The list of vices provided is more than just a list of characteristics that believers need to

avoid. It represents a former way of life that is no longer appropriate for those who have put on the new man (24). But the instruction itself assumes that believers may not have yet fully removed these characteristics from their lives.

Each vice listed in v31 could be analyzed in detail but that's not the point of the list. The purpose of a vice-list is to provide an impression of the types of attitudes and actions that are regarded as inappropriate. We get the general idea what Paul is prohibiting without needing to examine each sin in detail. This is even more apparent when we realize the list is not intended to be exhaustive – just representative. Still, it's helpful to focus on the first item on the list – bitterness. This sin represents the root cause of the resulting anger, shouting unwholesome speech. Bitterness only looks to the immediate present and fails to recall the past great gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ or the future resurrection and the glory to be shared with Christ.

These vices are primarily concerned with the heart while also paying attention to verbal conduct, which is nothing less than a tangible expression of the content of the heart. But all these vices find their ultimate significance within community living; they all concern dispositions of the heart with respect to other people – how we interact with them. This concern for the community of the body of Christ is clearly revealed in the following verse (32). If believers are to live peaceably with one another, the old attitude must be purged from the community. In short, the new man has control of his emotions. When such things do emerge, he is able to deal with them in a manner glorifying to God.

Instead of allowing bitterness, etc to remain a threat to the body of Christ, believers are to be kind... Kindness and compassion are dispositions of the heart that heal the brokenhearted, mend damaged relationships and build up the body of Christ. While it is impossible to manufacture these qualities, they may be cultivated in our lives by receiving God's kindness and compassion expressed through the love of Jesus Christ (5:2). While following God's example is key (5:1), this is only made possible by experiencing His example first. Genuine kindness and compassion for others are expressions of a heart that's been transformed by the love of God (1 Jn 3:17). The implication is that the experience of God's love within the believer will be so transformative that it can't help but produce

compassion for others in their heart.

The word translated forgiving can better be understood as graciousness, which commonly refers to giving freely as a favor, graciously. This definition also suits the immediate context better as graciousness is the direct antithesis of bitterness; bitterness is counteracted by graciousness. Paul's instruction here is that believers are to be gracious to one another. This graciousness certainly should include forgiveness, but it's not limited to it.

Being gracious toward one another is encouraged by following the example of God's graciousness which was ultimately revealed, extended and applied in Christ. Again, this isn't simply a matter of following God's example; a gracious heart is cultivated through experiencing the grace of God personally in your heart. To put it succinctly, the new man seeks to show the same kindness, tender-heartedness and graciousness to others that God has shown them. If we would, from this day forward, simply commit to treating others just as God has treated us, we will fulfill everything Paul has instructed us to do in this chapter.

At the same time, we must always remember that God's graciousness is offered to us on account of Christ. It was Jesus who suffered and died on that cross, purchasing our forgiveness by His own blood. On account of Christ's sacrifice, God is able to extend both graciousness and forgiveness to those who accept Christ's gift of salvation. In the same way, we're to be gracious toward others for the same reason – on account of what Christ has done for us. Freely, we have received His grace and forgiveness; freely we should give the same.

In closing, notice the way Paul brings in each person of the Trinity while laying down the Christian's moral obligations. In the very next verse (5:1) Paul's going to say, "be imitators of God..." So the first motivation for obeying these instructions is that they are expressions of the character of God. We are to be like this because God is like this. As an introduction to this section Paul has encouraged us to know Christ and to grow in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus (4:20-21). This is a second motivation—on the basis of what we know—and it is reinforced by the fact that Jesus has modeled the Christian graces for us. Third, he has spoken of the Holy Spirit, whose task is to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ and who is grieved if that is not happening. It's almost as if Paul is saying, "Act

like Christians, for God's sake. And you are to do this by God's power as well." 😊