

Over the last couple of weeks we've been talking about the spiritual exercise of putting off the old man, or old nature, and putting on the new as we seek Christ and walk in His ways by faith. And as noted before this putting off is a realization that we have a lot of baggage we bring from the world as well as the desires of the sinful nature we were born into this world with.

And so, as a believer, there's a constant battle of wanting to do what pleases Christ but also wanting to do what the old nature desires in terms of pleasing self to the exclusion of Christ.

Paul is not so naive as to think that Christians may not find themselves giving in to the old nature. But, instead of condemning them he strongly encourages them to consider what path they're following and then to make a conscious choice to follow after the Lord instead of seeking a path which dishonors Him.

In our text this morning we're going to see how Paul expects these Christians to make those choices and not walk after the ways of this sinful world from which we've been delivered.

EPH 4:25-32 "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin" (Psalm 4:4): Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

At first glance we might conclude that the entire church in Ephesus is struggling with sinful behavior, and the kind of sinful behavior that not even the world would want to embrace. What business would want its employees to be lying to each other, to be angry with each other, to be stealing from each other and the company, to

be speaking with disrespect toward each other, or expressing bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice?

What employer in his right mind would put up with that sort of behavior? And that's sort of the point here. It's not as though this type of behavior is running rampant with Paul's readers, but rather the attitude toward this type of behavior should not be accepted in the Body of Christ any more than it would be accepted in the world where people have to deal with each other in a corporate sense.

Does this mean that none of this fleshly or carnal behavior was going on in Ephesus? I'm sure there were people who were involved in some of this behavior, just as there is this type of behavior in churches all over the world today.

And this is precisely why this type of command must be given from God. We may be saved by faith through the shed blood of Christ, and given a new nature and the power to live in it, but just as Paul has been writing, we must then contend with the desires of the old nature battling with the new.

And we must put off those practices by the grace which only God can supply as we put on those things which are from above: the fruit of the Spirit which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (GAL 5:22-23)

If a church was only demonstrating the characteristics Paul describes in our text, we might wonder if that was a true church or not. And yet we know that this church in Ephesus was not only a true church, but a church which was in fact being characterized by the fruit of the Spirit to a great degree.

This is why Paul could write in EPH 1:15-16 "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."

Was he just baiting them for the left hook to the body he's about to deliver here in Eph.4:25-31? No, he really meant what he said in the first chapter, but he knows how all of these desires still persist which is why we must be vigilant to not only know they exist but to take an active role in turning from them when we're tempted to follow after them.

I like the way R.C. Sproul puts it. "As Christians we are to mortify the flesh by destroying the old nature. 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 occasions for sin."

It's pretty hard to start a fire if you're not playing with matches. And it is difficult to fall into sin, unless we've placed ourselves in a position of being tempted or we entertain the idea of sinning if that temptation comes to us when we least expect it.

Like Joseph in the O.T., when tempted by Potifar's wife, we must flee from sin, knowing that none of us are above pursuing sin if left unchecked. Joseph was a man like any other man. He was fleeing for at least a couple of reasons. He didn't want to be further tempted, but he also knew that if he stuck around he might very well succumb to the flesh. And it's the flesh Paul addresses here in our text.

EPH 4:25 "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

There's nothing more frustrating than to have someone lie to you. Most parents experience this with their children. The kids get into something they shouldn't and when confronted they have a tendency to lose their memory, kind of like some politicians.

You know they're not being straight forward with you, and so you push the issue until they come around to admitting what they've done is wrong. With children, especially little children, not being entirely truthful might be expected at times, and yet it should never be tolerated or encouraged by not dealing with it.

And I suspect, on occasion, it might even seem cute. It's like finding your child in the kitchen corner with his face stuffed full of cookies as you confront him with the question, 'did you get into the cookie jar?', and he answers, no, as cookie crumbs are flying out of his mouth.

You're tempted to laugh, but you dare not as that might send the wrong message. But, there's nothing cute with adults lying to each other, or trying to bend the truth. And often times it's best to bring this up long before it ever happens. This is one reason so much effort is spent trying to teach kids the dangers of drugs, for example, long before they reach the age of getting involved in such activities.

And this is part of what Paul is doing. Again, this doesn't mean that some of this activity may not have actually been occurring, but it seems more likely that Paul is trying a preemptive approach to sin.

The dangers of speaking falsehood are brought out in the latter part of verse 25. We are members of one another in the body of Christ. To hurt one member of the body effects the entire body, just as cutting your finger effects your ability to perform certain tasks. And to cut your finger deliberately would be nutty. So too, in the realm of relationships in the body.

Speaking falsehood, which is a deliberate act, is not the way to win friends and influence people, nor promote peace and unity in the church. And by the way, Paul is not the only one to address this problem. Peter also understood that even Christians are tempted to allow the old nature to have its way as we do nothing to combat it. It takes an active approach to putting off and putting on.

1PE 2:1-3 "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Though Peter does not mention putting off and putting on, this is exactly what he's doing by identifying what needs to be put off and then how we must put on as we substitute the things of the flesh with the word of God, which instructs us in the ways of righteousness. This is why if we're not in the word of God on a regular basis we will become very susceptible to choosing the flesh, because we're not availing ourselves to the voice of God.

And so, what Paul is doing in our text is to shed light on this problem before this sort of thing ever happens, as he warns against it. And one of the best ways to avoid falsehood is to continually speak truth.

I know the temptation to want to give half-truths or speak what we know today as "white-lies" to each other, but we need to see this in light of the way God sees this.

ZEC 8:16-17 "These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD."

The more we see this from God's perspective, the less prone we are to want to pursue that which displeases Him.

EPH 4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin" (Psalm 4:4): Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold."

This is an interesting statement. It's actually taken from Psa.4:4 which reads, "Tremble, (either with anger or fear) and do not sin."

Some have taken this to mean that anger is an acceptable practice as long as you deal with it by the end of the day. Some have also used this as a proof text for a righteous anger. And yet, this verse isn't dealing with either. The point of this verse is to identify the fact that anger may exist and yet we don't let it turn to further sin by either allowing it to turn to hatred or something worse.

Anger is an expression of the heart. And though sin may cause it, it doesn't have to be sinful in and of itself any more than joy, which is an expression of the heart, has to be sinful in and of itself. And by the way, joy could be sinful if it's being joyful in sinful behavior and delighting in something which would dishonor God.

Anger can turn volatile very quickly, and so Paul is saying to deal with it as soon as possible before it becomes even more sinful. He's not suggesting that you wait until turning in at bedtime to finally come to grips with it. This is an expression that people of his day would use to teach the importance of not sleeping on a problem, get rid of it as soon as possible. Put it off as you put on God's perspective on anger.

Let me just quickly say that there may be a place for righteous anger. But, I would also caution all of us that there was only one person who could know exactly where that line was at all times. And that was the Lord Jesus Christ, who was perfect God and man.

The other issue with anger, or any sin which effects our emotions, is that it will most certainly give the devil an opportunity. Other types of sin, like the ones mentioned: stealing, lying, and so on, may not involve the emotions in the same way as anger. When emotional extremes come into play we are less likely to be in proper control of our actions and this will certainly give the devil an edge in trying to cause us to fall.

For example, for someone to place themselves in the arms of another person they have no business embracing is not the time to try to logically consider what God says about fornication or

adultery. The emotions are running at a very high rate and we are much more likely to succumb to that temptation in that situation.

The time to deal with that temptation is long before we're ever in that situation. And the best way to deal with that situation is not to place ourselves anywhere near it. But, like with anger, which might be triggered immediately through a situation beyond our control, having thought about how to deal with anger prior to it actually happening can certainly help us to deal with it according to God's word as long as we've been in the word of God.

What I've found also is that as we grow in Christ and we desire to draw close to Him and follow Him by faith and obedience, anger can be one of those areas where our Lord actually enables us to overcome it when it comes up. I know lots of people who have had to deal with anger in their lives and yet over the years they are able to not let anger get the upper hand and give the devil an opportunity.

And the reason they're able to do this is because they've made the choice to put off the temptation to fly off the handle as they put on the grace which God supplies each of us to flee from sin and live in the new nature we have in Christ.

I know there are people who may mistakenly think that it's part of their makeup. My ethnic background predisposes me to be a hot head. No, what predisposes anyone to be a hot head is sin. There is no excuse as a believer when we know that we belong to the Prince of Peace who empowers us to walk in His ways.

But choosing to submit and let Christ be in control is essential in our ability to flee from sins which may involve the extremes of our emotional lives. Again, Paul touches on this in the letter he wrote to the church in Thessalonica.

1TH 5:5-6 "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but ***let us be alert and self-controlled.***"

He also says in 2TI 4:5 "But you, ***keep your head in all situations***, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

Here Paul is saying that the reason we must keep our heads or have self-control is also for the purpose of service. If our emotions are directing our lives then the devil is going to keep us busy following

those emotions and we will never be able to serve Christ effectively.

***"...Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."***

And of course the verse which is usually associated with this problem of not being in control, which then opens the door for us following after temptations and the old man, is found in the first letter Peter wrote.

1PE 5:8-11 "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Resisting the enemy must be done as we are in self-control and able to think clearly and biblically. If we have our minds cluttered with confusing thoughts and unbiblical ideas we will always put ourselves in jeopardy of being deceived into practicing ungodly things or pursuing self-motivated desires instead of God's will according to His word.

Don't give the devil an opportunity in any area of your life. There's enough going on in our lives and the world around us without giving him a free ticket to pounce and cause havoc as he tries to devour us with his tactics of deceit and lies.

As Peter say's, ... "the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Let's move on to the next set of problems Paul brings up in our text.

EPH 4:28 "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."

The context here has more to do with people not working to earn a living than it has to do with stealing in general. It really addresses laziness and sinful behavior as a result of that laziness. Obviously,

stealing for any reason is wrong and God addresses this in the 10 commandments with the eighth commandment being, "Thou shalt not steal."

In Paul's day slavery was legal and a booming commodity in cheap labor. There certainly would have been the temptation to supplement one's income by taking from someone who was seen as a tyrant. But, the reason Paul gives for not stealing goes much deeper than simply taking what doesn't belong to you.

He says, that one "must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."

God places personal responsibility on each individual to contribute to his own needs as well as his family. But, it goes beyond just supplying personal needs. Paul wants individuals in the body of Christ to help in supplying the needs of those less fortunate. He's not talking about welfare here. He's saying we must help others so that they too can begin working with their own hands and supplying their own needs, who then in turn can help with the needs of others.

We can actually get in the way of people meeting their own needs if we keep them dependent on someone else. This is the major flaw with our welfare system in this country, which has recently come under attack for this very reason. People have no incentive to get a job because of the way the system works.

Paul is saying, we must encourage all believers to not only be self-controlled, but also self-sufficient. And this doesn't mean that we are self-sufficient to the exclusion of God. He alone is our sufficiency. All things come from Him, but He also provides the means in meeting our needs, part of which is working with our own hands and not depending on others all our lives.

EPH 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

This has to do with speech and communication. And though this could certainly include foul language, the thrust here has more to do with how we encourage or don't encourage the body of Christ with the things we convey in our speech.

The word unwholesome is literally translated rotten. If you take rotten fruit and put it with healthy fruit there will be only one

result. Everything turns rotten. In the same way if our speech is being used for gossip or backbiting or spreading envy and division then it's only a matter of time before the entire body is effected.

This kind of speech is not helpful and it tears down instead of building up. And when we're busy using our mouths for this kind of communication we will never be able to effectively know what the needs of others are because we're too busy concerned with self.

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees He addressed the things they were teaching and promoting with their mouths.

MAT 12:34-35 "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."

Our Lord's point here is that when the heart is dark and deceived it speaks its natural language which is sinful and consumed with self. On a little different level this is also true of believers who are not putting off that old man and who are submitting to its pursuit of self.

If we're not putting such things off then the only things we will effectively convey are those things which come out of a heart bent on serving self. The good man, in this case the man whose heart is set upon the Lord, brings out the good stored up in him, and the evil man, or the old man and the flesh, will bring things out of the evil it produces.

EPH 4:30-32 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Here Paul adds a perspective that should not be lost in this entire matter of putting off and putting on. And it's the matter of how our sinful pursuits hurt our God and Savior who died so that we might be delivered from sin and its effects.

The Holy Spirit of God is a person in the Godhead who also loves us with an everlasting love. He has sealed us for the day of redemption which means that we cannot be lost. He has a firm eternal grip on us. But, He has sealed us also that we might live to the honor and glory of Christ.

And when we go off in our own direction, not putting off sin and self, it grieves Him as it would grieve any parent who loves his children. I don't think if any Christian seriously thought about how God is grieved over our sin that we would actively pursue such ungodly behavior. But, I guess that's part of the problem. We have a tendency to push God to the side and not consider Him when we do such things.

When our relationship with Him is healthy and vibrant as we're loving Him with all our hearts, souls and minds then there will not be a reason for Him to be grieved over our behavior because we're busy putting on those things that please Him. And when we're busy pleasing Him we will find that we won't have time for things like we see in verse 31: "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Paul says, get rid of this stuff, put it off as you put on the things of God.

He wants our relationship to each other in the body of Christ to be healthy so that we can promote not only peace and unity, but also promote the work God has for us of edifying each other and reaching out to a lost world with the truth of God's word and His gospel.

In contrast, Paul says in verse 32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

We may sin against God and one another, but in our compassion and love for one another we must consider how much God has forgiven us, so that in turn we may do the same with each other. This is all about relationships. A relationship with God and with the people of God in the body of Christ, specifically the local body in which he has placed believers.

Jesus gives us a sample of the type of prayer we should pray concerning relationships we have with each other in MAT 6:12 "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

As long as we're considering each other as more important than ourselves we will always be in an attitude of putting others first. And that attitude will come as we place Christ first and foremost in our lives. Let us put off the old man which puts ourselves first and put on the new man which desires to please God and others to the glory of God.

As the world sees this kind of attitude, they will then begin to see Jesus at work in us in a way where they may desire the same thing. And even if they don't at least we will be able to say we are not spending our time grieving the Holy Spirit, we're spending our time building up treasures for eternity and heaven.

Be an ambassador for Christ in everything you do and let His love shine as you put on the mind and Spirit of Christ and the love He has given us which is to be given away to a dying world.