

Ephesians 4:25-32¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

2. Description of the new regenerated person ([4:20-32](#)) (*cont. from last week – Eph 4:17-24*)

²⁰But that isn't what you learned about Christ. ²¹Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²²throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

²⁵So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. ²⁶And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

²⁸If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. ²⁹Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

³⁰And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Notes

[4:25](#)

stop telling lies.—The construction in the Greek text is an aorist middle participle and not an imperative and thus could be rendered "so having put away falsehood." Because the believer has put away the old person and his or her lifestyle, it can be assumed that falsehood has been put away.

[4:26](#)

And "don't sin by letting anger control you."—The Greek text has the positive followed by a negative, namely, "Be angry and do not sin."

[4:28](#)

give generously to others in need.—In other words, share the material goods that have been gained by hard labor.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 97-99.

4:29

Don't use foul or abusive language.—"Foul or abusive" is an expansion of a single Greek word, *sapros* [^{TG}<G4550>, ^{ZG}4911] (rotten, putrid). In context, the word includes the use of unwholesome or unhelpful words that fail to build up one another. This is supported by the contrast in the next clause, let everything you say be good and helpful. Unwholesome words destroy, whereas beneficial words build up.

so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear.—The NLT's rendering "encouragement" is a translation of *charis* [^{TG}<G5485>, ^{ZG}5921] (grace), which refers to the bestowal of unmerited favor and/or enablement.

4:30

do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live.—The expression "bring sorrow" (*lupeite* [^{TG}<G3076>, ^{ZG}3382]) occurs 63 times in the LXX, where, for example, Joseph told his brothers not to be distressed or grieved for what they had done to him ([Gen 45:5](#)). It is used 26 times in the NT, 15 times by Paul, and only here in Ephesians. It is used when the disciples were distressed or grieved over Jesus' announcement of his death ([Matt 17:23](#)) and when the rich young ruler went from Jesus grieving because he was not willing to sell all his goods ([Matt 19:22](#)). In the present context Paul enjoins the believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, it must follow that he is a person. An inanimate object cannot grieve. In the present context then, unwholesome words are forbidden for two reasons: First, they impede spiritual growth of fellow believers; second, they grieve the Holy Spirit.

by the way you live.—In the context it might be better to render it "by the way you speak."

Remember, he has identified you as his own.—This is a reference to the sealing of the Spirit, which identifies believers as God's own and gives them the security of belonging to him (cf. [1:13](#); [2 Cor 1:22](#)).

guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.—The sealing of the Holy Spirit will continue until he redeems us or sets us free from sin. Redemption has two phases: The first phase frees believers from sin and its obligation; the second phase, alluded to in this verse, sets believers free from the presence of sin in the eschatological future when Christ returns.

4:31

as well as all types of evil behavior.—The words "as well as" are translated from the preposition *sun* [^{TG}<G4862>, ^{ZG}5250] (with), which connotes an inclusive idea. Hence, believers are enjoined to put away the five vices (listed immediately preceding) along with malice.

4:32

forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.—The verbs "forgiving and forgiven" are the verb forms of "grace"; they are to be gracious to one another, just as God in Christ is gracious to them.

Commentary

Having instructed the Ephesians to refrain from living as the Gentiles, who have lost all moral sensitivity and given themselves over to impurity (4:17-19), and having taught them that they had thrown off the old person and put on the new person (4:22-24), Paul now gives practical applications as to how the new person in Christ lives day by day (4:25-32). There are five specific exhortations for believers. All but one of these exhortations has three parts: (1) a negative command, (2) a positive command, and (3) the reason for the positive command. In the second exhortation the first two parts are reversed.

The first exhortation warns against participation in falsehood and urges the speaking of truth (4:25). The participial construction in Greek (“having put away falsehood”) assumes that falsehood has been put away. Thus, he exhorts them to speak the truth with their neighbors. This should be the natural consequence of the new person’s conduct, which is based on righteousness and holiness, and these, in turn, are based on truth (4:24). The present active imperative indicates that, having laid aside falsehood, they are to make a habit of speaking the truth to their neighbor. “Neighbor” refers primarily to fellow believers for two reasons. First, it is a quotation from [Zechariah 8:16](#), where the neighbor refers to someone within the community of the remnant. Second, the next clause in the present context speaks of being members of one another. Now that they are members of this new community, they are to speak the truth to one another. Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that believers are to speak the truth at all times, even in their contacts with unbelievers. Since believers base their lifestyle on reality, there is no need to bring falsehood into any relationship, within or without the church.

The second exhortation acknowledges that believers may, at times, be legitimately angry, yet they are admonished not to sin (4:26-27). Instead of the usual pattern, Paul here begins with the positive and then states the negative, namely, “be angry and do not sin.” Since there are references in the Bible to God’s anger, it cannot be said that there is anything intrinsically evil about anger. Paul was quoting [Psalm 4:4](#), which had probably become a proverbial statement. Anger is not to be acted out in a sinful manner, such as when it develops into a prolonged irritation, allowing the devil to gain an inroad into the life of the believer. No one should make a practice of harboring anger overnight. It is essential to keep short accounts of anger. Prolonged anger gives opportunity to the devil to twist and distort truth, causing anger to mount and possibly resulting in dissension and revenge. Again, anger is not intrinsically sinful, for God expresses anger. However, when God is angry, he is always in control of his anger. Unlike God, however, people have a tendency to allow anger to control them. Thus, the second command “do not sin” is necessary. Hence, if someone in the body of believers has been wronged, it is correct for one to be angry but not to be consumed by that anger.

The third exhortation tells the believer to refrain from stealing. Instead, they should work so that they can give to the needy (4:28). Whereas a thief takes from others for his own benefit, a believer is to work with his own hands for the purpose of sharing. Stealing is a characteristic of the old person, who has been put off; working for those in need must characterize the new person. Honest gain is not for self-indulgence but for doing something beneficial for others within the believing community. A believer is to work diligently to gain what is good for the purpose of sharing with those who have need.

The fourth exhortation concerns the use of language (4:29-30). Again the negative command is given first, exhorting believers not to use any unwholesome (*sapros* [^{TG}<G4550>, ^{ZG}4911], “rotten, putrid”) words but instead to speak that which is good so as to edify others. The preceding verse dealt with the physical needs of believers; this verse speaks of spiritual needs. Unwholesome words destroy; good and wholesome words build up, thereby accomplishing the purpose of giving “encouragement to those who hear.” This encouragement enables them to fill the lack or need among them. Clearly, believers need to watch their language to make sure their words build up and do not tear down. Paul then said that unwholesome, destructive language grieves the Holy Spirit by whom believers are sealed until the day

of redemption (see discussion of this at 1:13-14). The seal of the Holy Spirit identifies believers as God's possession, and it will remain until the time when Christ brings them to himself. In light of this, the use of worthless words not only hurts the body of Christ but also grieves the Holy Spirit, who seals them.

The fifth exhortation warns believers against maliciousness and enjoins them to edify one another ([4:31-32](#)). Again, the negative exhortation is first stated ([4:31](#)), followed by a positive exhortation ([4:32](#)). Paul now exhorts believers to put away five vices ([4:31](#)) on the basis of having thrown away the old person ([4:22](#)): bitterness (*pikria* [^{TG}<[G4088](#)>, ^{ZG}4394], “bitterness, resentment”), rage (*thumos* [^{TG}<[G2372](#)>, ^{ZG}2596], “outburst of anger”), anger (*orgē* [^{TG}<[G3709](#)>, ^{ZG}3973], “settled state of anger”), shouting (*kraugē* [^{TG}<[G2906](#)>, ^{ZG}3199], “shouting, screaming”), and slander (*blasphēmia* [^{TG}<[G988](#)>, ^{ZG}1060], “defamation, abusive speech”). The first word, “bitterness,” deals with attitude, the next two words, “rage” and “anger,” deal with disposition, and the last two, “shouting” and “slander,” refer to manner of speech. Following the recitation of these five vices, Paul concludes with the inclusive phrase, “with all malice” or as in the NLT, “as well as all types of evil behavior.” The word “malice” denotes “badness, vice, evil,” which is the opposite of “moral excellence, virtue.” In this respect, it is an all-inclusive word for ill will or maliciousness; it casts a pall on any action with which it is connected. This word enhances the meaning of the five vices listed earlier.

Following this there are three positive injunctions ([4:32](#)). The first promotes kindness. The word “kindness” has the idea of that which is fitting, pleasant, and good. Its noun form is used in [2:7](#), where it states that God is going to demonstrate in the heavenly realms his kindness in giving salvation. In [4:32](#) the adjective has the same connotation where believers are instructed to exhibit kindness toward each other. Such an attitude does not come naturally. According to [Galatians 5:22](#), it is the fruit of the Spirit. Reliance on the Holy Spirit enables one to exhibit kindness. The second positive quality is to be “tenderhearted” or “compassionate.” This compound noun (*eusplanchnos* [^{TG}<[G2155](#)>, ^{ZG}2359]), used in the New Testament only here and [1 Peter 3:8](#), is based on the noun *splanchnon* [^{TG}<[G4698](#)>, ^{ZG}5073], which refers to the inner emotions of affection—hence, compassion (cf. [2 Cor 6:12](#); [7:15](#); [Phil 1:8](#); [2:1](#); [Col 3:12](#); [Phlm 1:7, 12, 20](#); [1 John 3:17](#)). It is the opposite of harshness or maliciousness. The final positive quality is stated as “forgiving one another.” As mentioned in the notes above, “forgiving” and “forgiven” are verb forms of “grace.” Paul enjoins the believers to be gracious, be kind, and show favor. It is very fitting to the context because graciousness is the antithesis of bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, and slander. Graciousness is broader than forgiveness but includes forgiveness. We are to be gracious to one another just as God in Christ was gracious to us. God directed his graciousness toward us by sending his Son to die on the cross for us. This gracious act serves as an illustration and example for believers in their relationship to each other.

In conclusion, the first part of this chapter concerns the believers living in unity ([4:1-16](#)); the second part concerns their living in holiness ([4:17-32](#)). In his discussion of the life of holiness, Paul first described the nature and practice of the old person ([4:17-20](#)), whom the believers had put off. Then, he followed this with a discussion about the new person each had become ([4:20-32](#)). In [4:25-32](#), he gives specific exhortations regarding the lifestyle of the new person. Since believers have already put off the old person ([4:22](#)) and put on the new person ([4:24](#)), they are not to continue in the destructive lifestyle of the unbelievers, but rather they are to be characterized by a new lifestyle that honors God and builds up the body of Christ.

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Ephesians 4:25-32²

4:25. The fruit that comes from a person's life—his actions—proves whether the person is yielding to the sinful nature or to the Holy Spirit. To illustrate his point Paul used four representative examples of problems that were very important in his day and still are today. [Verse 25](#) deals with lying, an obvious manifestation of the fallen nature. By way of contrast, Paul encouraged Christians to "speak every man truth with his neighbor," because they are members of the same Body.

4:26. In the second example there is also a negative and a positive. This admonition relates to the improper use of anger which results from yielding to the Adamic nature, and the proper use of anger which results from yielding to the Holy Spirit. "Be ye angry, and sin not" comes from the imperative verbs "be angry" and "do not sin" and is a quotation of [Psalm 4:4](#).

The same word for anger (*orgē*) is used of God ([Matthew 3:7](#); [Mark 3:5](#); [Romans 1:18](#); [12:19](#)), so anger in itself is not sinful. Jesus certainly was angry when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem ([John 2:13-16](#)). There are times when righteous anger should be manifested against injustice and other forms of sin.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" also comes from a present imperative prohibition so it could be rendered, "Stop letting the sun go down on your wrath." Anger easily can lead to resentment or bitterness, the meaning of the second word (*parorgismos*) which is translated "wrath" in this verse. If a person becomes angry for some legitimate reason, whatever triggered the anger should be settled before the day is past, a way of saying it should be taken care of immediately.

4:27. The devil will use anything he can to hinder God's people, and the improper use of anger is one of his greatest tools. Never give Satan an opportunity to take advantage of them.

4:28. Stealing is another manifestation of yielding to the Adamic nature. Pilfering was a way of life for many of the Ephesian Christians before their conversion. Apparently some of them continued to practice it even after becoming Christians because Paul literally told them to "stop stealing." Working is the best practical antidote to stealing. Furthermore, the person who works hard will have something to share with others who are in need.

4:29. The fourth issue, "corrupt communication," really deals with "putrid, rotten, corrupt, filthy, rancid" speech. When Christians constantly work and live with other people who are not believers, they are often subjected to such ungodly language. However, they must not use that fact as an excuse for succumbing to that which is a normal way of life for the unsaved people around them.

4:30. In addition to the four specific items mentioned, Paul warned the Ephesians literally to "stop grieving the Holy Spirit." His presence in a person's life is one of the most important proofs that he belongs to God. Because of this serious matter believers must be careful not to do anything that would grieve Him.

Sins of attitude are referred to in the closing verses of the chapter. Apparently these grieve the Holy Spirit as much as the four sins the apostle warned against. Among other things, this verse portrays the Holy Spirit as a Person with the ability to be grieved.

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 145-147.

4:31. Therefore, we need to "put away" all "bitterness" (*pikria*, resentment), "wrath" (*thumos*, a violent outburst of anger), "anger" (*orgē*, a settled feeling of anger), "clamor" (*kraugē*, shouting), "evil speaking" (*blasphēmia*, blasphemy), and "malice" (*kakia*, ill feeling).

4:32. This verse begins in the Greek language with an appeal to "keep on becoming kind to one another." The idea expressed is that of abandoning one attitude completely and replacing it with another attitude. Forgiving other people is not always easy, but Christians have the greatest of all incentives for doing so, the fact that Christ forgave them.

This total passage, along with many others, shows that the apostle Paul certainly did not believe the fallen, sinful nature was removed completely at salvation. Instead, at conversion the power of the Adamic nature is broken so a person is no longer a slave to it. At the same time God places within the person His Holy Spirit, so in a real sense he then has two natures. This results in a struggle that continues throughout this earthly life. But the more the Christian yields to the Holy Spirit, the easier it becomes. Also, the more a person resists the cravings of the Adamic nature, the easier it will be for his spiritual nature to dominate his way of life.