



Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin.” Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. 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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (Ephesians 4:25–5:4).

Last week, Mark did a great job reminding us of our new set of clothes. For those of us that have put our faith and trust in Christ, our old self, our former way of life has been taken off and replaced by the new self, which is our new life in Christ. When a prisoner is released from custody, they become free people again. They put off one role and assume another. Christians are told to put off the prison clothes, the old self, and put on the new life of Christ which is created to be like God in righteousness and holiness.

The reality for many of us is that we don’t live like free people. Many of us live feeling imprisoned by our old way of life, by sin, and by bad choices. We feel stuck, discouraged and maybe even apathetic. Why is it that loving God and living free is so difficult? Paul tells us in these verses exactly what we must remember and do to live in the full measure of the freedom Christ has given us. Real freedom isn’t a license to do what you want, but the power to do what you ought. In this text, Paul gives us six concrete examples of the filthy clothes that we need to take off and what

specifically we are to put on. These six examples are really steps that lead to freedom in Christ.

Six Steps that Lead to Freedom.

Before we jump into these six examples, we need to notice three important features they all have in common. First, each step concerns our relationships with each other. You can’t be holy all by yourself. We live in the real world with people everyday. Paul is assuming that we are in relationship with others in a local church. His concern is with unity in the Body of Christ. All six examples of evil are destroyers of that unity. Second, Paul tells us what not to do and what to do. He says, “Don’t do this, but do this.” Paul understood the best way to stop a bad habit is to replace it with a good one. Third, each example is given a theological reason why we should act and behave a certain way. The reason is either stated or implied. Paul tells us not to do something, then what to do, and why we are to do it. The 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. Let’s look at the first step to freedom in verse 25 and you’ll see exactly what I mean.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Put off lying and speak truthfully

Paul tells us to put off falsehood and lies and instead speak truthfully. It’s not enough to avoid lies, Paul says to pursue truth. We have already been told in Ephesians to speak the truth in love and now to speak truthfully to our neighbor. Later we will learn to put on the belt of truth. Why should we put off lying? What’s the theological reason? He gives two. The first is implied, because God is truth and God never lies (Tit. 1:2). The second reason is because we are all members of one body. We are again brought back to the importance of unity in the church, the body of Christ. Fellowship is built on trust, and trust is built on truth. Lies destroy the church but truth strengthens her. Because you have already been made new in Christ, put off lying and speak truthfully. Paul next moves from lying to anger.

“In your anger do not sin.” Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold (verses 26–27).

Don't lose your temper, but rather make sure your anger is righteous

Does it surprise you that anger is not a sin? Anger is a huge issue with many of the men that I meet with and counsel. Even in my own life, I am not immune to the devastating effects of anger. There is such a thing as Christian anger. Paul is describing the fine line between righteous and unrighteous anger. Jesus appropriately got angry when he drove out the money changers and merchants in the Temple (Mark 3:5). That was righteous anger.

Paul gives us three reasons why unrighteous anger is a part of the old self. First, anger quickly leads to sin, *"In your anger do not sin."* Anger that is free from wounded pride, malice, animosity and revenge is truly a rare thing.

Second, the longer anger festers, the harder it is to control, *"do not let the sun go down on your anger."* Sometimes that is not possible. What about people who live in Alaska? They get more time! Paul has in mind Psalm 4:4 that says, "Don't sin by letting anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent." The principle here is to deal quickly with your anger. Do you need to apologize? Do it. Do you need to be reconciled to someone? Don't waste time; do it. Being angry is human. Staying angry is foolish. If you are married, memorize this verse and never go to bed angry at your spouse. Can I get an amen married people?!

Third, anger can give the devil a foothold. The word for "foothold" is *topos*, which means a place, position, or opportunity. Anger can easily give the devil a place on the map in your life to strike. Be careful, Paul says.

I would argue that there is a great need in the world today for more Christian anger. We should get angry over blatant evil and sin. We should be angry at injustice and wickedness. Did you know that one billion people worldwide live in chronic hunger? That's equivalent to the populations of North America and Europe combined. Does that get you angry? It should. Did you know that a child is 45 times more likely to die before age 5 in Nigeria than in France? Does that get you angry? It should. Because you have already been made new in Christ, put off unrighteous anger.

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need (v. 28).

Put off stealing and work for a living so that you can give generously

The word used for stealing is a general word which includes cheating and concealing. Like the eighth commandment of Moses' law, it had and still has wide application which includes not only stealing others' money or possessions, but things like tax evasion, employers who oppress their workers, and employees who goof off on Facebook during working hours!

It's not enough for a thief to stop stealing. Paul says she must work hard so that she can give to those in need. Stealing hurts fellowship and unity, but work in the service of others replaces it. Every Sunday at the North Campus we shuttle in a group of people from the Safe Harbor Homeless Shelter in South City. We have been so blessed by their presence over the years and several of them have served in ministry with us as well. The truth of this Scripture is that when God gets you back on your feet with a job and a place to live, he wants you to turn around and help others in need. That is the mark of someone truly walking with Christ. Because you have already been made new in Christ, put off stealing and give. Paul turns from the use of our hands to the use of our mouths in verse 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.

Don't use your mouth for evil, use it for good

The word *unwholesome* literally means something that is rotten and decaying. Rotten talk is anything that is dishonest, unkind, vulgar, or any type of words that hurt the hearer. Instead, we are encouraged to use our conversations for edifying and building others up. When we do that it "benefits" those who listen. That word for "benefit" means to give grace to those who listen. Do your words give grace to others or do they tear down? Proverbs 12:18 reminds us that, *"The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."* Jesus talked a lot about the significance of speech because our words often reveal what is in our hearts.

What would your day be like if you looked to give grace and build up every person you talked with? Can you imagine how people would respond if they left your presence being inspired and encouraged? Because you have already been made new in Christ, don't use your mouth for evil but for good. Paul continues with a long list of evil attitudes in verses 31–32.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Put off bitterness, rage and malice and instead be kind, compassionate and forgiving.

There are six different unpleasant attitudes Paul deals with here and I just don't have time to unpack each one and explain their significance. The picture here is of someone who has let their heart become hardened and their mind darkened. Anger has festered and grown into something that is totally out of control. Paul reminds the Ephesians that behavior like that has no place among those who have been made new in Christ. Instead, we are to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. What's the theological reason that motivates this behavior? In Christ God forgave you.

The root word for forgiving is the word *grace*. Put on grace in how you treat others because God was gracious to you. Because you have already been made new in Christ, put off bitterness, rage and malice. Finally, Paul moves on to talk about how Christians should think and talk about sex.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (5:3–4).

Don't joke about sex, but give thanks for it

The word for sexual immorality is *porneia*. It's where we get the word "pornography" from. It refers to any and all forms of sexual sin that are outside of the God-ordained context of a loving marriage. Even in Paul's day this was a high standard to demand. Sexual immorality was rampant in Ephesus. Remember, the Greek goddess Artemis, Diana of the Ephesians, was a fertility goddess and sexual orgies were regularly associated with her worship. Our day is no different. You don't need to travel to Las Vegas to come across what Paul is talking about here. All you need to do is turn on the TV or log onto the internet.

Paul is not only concerned with our sexual behavior but with how we talk about sex. Any talk that is obscene, shameful, foolish, coarse, risqué and vulgar are inappropriate for God's people. Instead, we are told to give thanks for the gift of sex, not joke about it. The world thinks that we limit sex and constrain people with the Bible. But, the Bible talks a lot about sex. Just read Song of Solomon. God created the best sex to be in the context of a committed marriage relationship. Christians actually have a high and holy view of God's gift of intimacy. In fact studies show that committed Christians in monogamous relationships have the best sex! God is good and so are his ways! Because you have already been made new in Christ, anything that cheapens and abuses God's gift of sex must be put off.

Paul gives us another reason to put off these evils. I purposely skipped verse 30 until now because all six areas Paul has addressed grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, brawling, slander, malice and sexual immorality all grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and he can be grieved. He is hurt and saddened by anything that is unholy because he is holy. You have been sealed; you have been redeemed; live like it, Paul says.

How Do We Love God and Live Free?

The temptation is to read over this list of six areas and think, I really need to try harder and do better at taking these things

off. I need to white-knuckle it and do better at the Christian life. That is **not** at all what Paul is teaching us here. The secret to Christianity is what Paul has talked about all along in Ephesians. We have been chosen, redeemed, and adopted. We have been given an inheritance, we are saints, and we are new in Christ. All of these things point to our new identity in Christ. That is the key. God comes to live inside us, impart his life to us, and give us his power to live. Only when we sit and walk with that understanding can we go on to love, serve, pray, fight, and live. How do we love God and live free? Paul explains further in 5:1–2.

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the only place in the Bible that we are asked to "follow God's example." Literally, we are to "be imitators of God." William Barclay calls this "the highest standard in the world." Paul could have listed dozens of other sinful traits to take off but instead he summons us to imitate God. How in the world is it possible to imitate the One who is infinitely above us and who is the sovereign God of the universe? We do this in three ways. First we imitate God "as dearly loved children." Just as a son should imitate a good father or a daughter should imitate a good mother, the children of God imitate God. As children of God, the same voice that Jesus heard after his baptism is calling out to us, "this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." God is already well pleased with you. You cannot earn any more of his favor. Trying your best to live up to these six standards won't change how he views you either. You are his child!

Second, we imitate God by walking in the way of love. This is not just any kind of love we are to walk in. This love is to be forgiving. God the Father forgave us through the work of Christ and we are to forgive one another. When we truly know and believe that we are forgiven, we are set free to forgive others lovingly. This love is also giving. Christ gave himself up for us at the cross and has given us all things, every spiritual blessing. Walking in love is a daily choice we make, one that is fueled by the Holy Spirit. Child of God, walk in love!

How else do we imitate God? By putting off everything Paul has outlined in these verses. Put off lying and speak truthfully. Don't lose your temper, but rather make sure your anger is righteous. Put off stealing and work for a living so that you can give. Don't use your mouth for evil; use it for good. Put off bitterness, rage and malice and instead be kind, compassionate and forgiving. Don't joke about sex, but give thanks for it. Why? Because this is who God is! We must let him undress our filthy rags and clothe us with his life, although the process is costly and often painful.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C. S. Lewis tells of how a young boy named Eustace becomes a dragon—a very unhappy dragon at that. Eustace steals a gold armband and puts it on, only to

find that his greed turns him into a dragon. And the armband is excruciatingly tight on his dragon foot.

One night, in the midst of his pain and frustration, Eustace encounters a huge lion who tells the boy to follow it to a high mountain well. Eustace longs to bathe his aching foot in the cool water, but the lion tells him he must undress first. It seems silly to Eustace because dragons don't wear clothes, but then he remembers that dragons, like snakes, shed their skins.

So Eustace scratches his skin, and the scales begin falling off, and soon his whole skin peels away. But when he puts his foot in the water, he sees that it is just as rough and scaly as before. He continues scratching at the second dragon skin and realizes there is yet another underneath.

Finally the lion says, "You will have to let me undress you."

Eustace is afraid of the lion's claws but desperate to get in the water. The first tear is painfully deep as the lion begins to peel away the skin. Surely death will follow, Eustace believes. With the gnarled mess of dragon skin now cut away, the lion holds Eustace and throws him into the water. Initially, the water stings, but soon it is perfectly delicious. Eustace swims without pain, for he's a boy again.

You can change because God has already changed you. He has ripped off your old self and given you a new life in Christ that is righteous and holy. Because we have already been made new in Christ, we should and must act like it. You are no longer a dragon!

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where this is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.