

Sermon Notes, September 10, 2017

The Christian Lifestyle: Get Rid Of... Ephesians 4:25-32

Ephesians 4 is an amazingly wonderful, diverse and manifold passage on what the Christian lifestyle really is. The purpose of this passage is to show how we can put off the old self and put on the new. All of the commands we're looking at in vv. 25-32 are specific examples of *how* we are and *where* we are to put on the new self. Notice how often this "put off, put on" principle is mirrored in the specific injunctions.

Most of the things here, you're told to do in other religions as well. The difference is Paul, and therefore Christianity, is never interested in moral behavior simply as moral behavior. That is religion. Paul is saying, to put on the new self means remember your identity. Remind yourself of who you are now that you're a committed follower of Christ, growing up into Christ. That is the source. That is the principle, and that makes the Christian religion very different than all other ethical systems. Paul has told us to think about what Jesus has done for you. Think of who that makes you. Think of who that makes him to you. He says in v. 30, "... do not grieve the ... Holy Spirit of God ...". Look at who lives inside of me.

Of course, you do actually have to put forth your effort, and discipline yourself. You engage with the Holy Spirit to crucify the flesh (Gal. 5:24).

We are returning to the topic of anger, because it has such importance and such relevance to us personally, and culturally. First of all, let's look at what Paul actually says. It's a command.

1. "Be angry" must mean that venting or suppression or denial of anger is wrong

People think there are only two approaches to anger: One is you can just vent it, and the other is you can control it like a civilized person. That's not at all what the Bible says. The Bible is nowhere near as simplistic as that. The Bible says if that is your understanding of anger, you're in for a lot of trouble. The book of Hebrews says beware lest a root of bitterness remain and springing up defile many. It's telling us that you should always be extremely aware of *whether* and *how* much anger you have.

2. "Be angry" must also mean is anger is sometimes required. Paul actually says, "Be angry ..."

This is a command. Anger sometimes is required. Go further than that, or put another way, it means sometimes if you're not angry, you are wrong. See, anger is something that is true of God, and therefore, it can't always be a sin. Jesus gets angry and God gets angry.

In Mark 5 Jesus gets angry. Anger is energy aroused in defense of something good and released against something evil. That's the reason why it would be wrong, in many situations, not to be angry. Anger is energy aroused in defense of something. You want to defend something. If you see something that's threatened that's wonderful and good, and you don't get angry, you are not acting correctly.

3. "Be angry and do not sin ..."

Anger isn't sinful in itself, but Paul says, "... and do not sin," which means it's very possible to sin in many ways. So, look, there are three kinds of sinful anger.

- 1) You can actually see it in v. 31. It says, "Get rid of all bitterness ..."
- 2) it says, "... rage and anger,
- 3) brawling and slander ..."

Look. Rage and anger are *internal* conditions. Brawling and slander are *external* actions.

The word *rage* is *thumos*, which means white heat. Rage is the act of giving into our feelings of anger and blowing up, and it can be manifested verbally or physically. It is explosive.

The second word, *anger*, in *this list*, in the Greek is *orge*. It is more of a settled condition, it is a long-lasting attitude, in which you just go sour, and you look at the whole world through anger. You're seeing everything through anger, so you're finding fault with everybody, and you're finding irritation with everything. You see injustice everywhere. There is a correct way of dealing with anger. You have to direct your anger toward problems, not people. Therefore, anger is to be used in a correct way, not to be stuffed, and not to be vented. It's to be used appropriately and for the right reasons. You have to attack the error. This is *not* easy.

One more thing. You have to remember this takes time. It's a gradual thing. It doesn't happen overnight, and it really will only happen as you are growing in grace in general. This is why the Christian approach is so different. Where did we say it begins? Vv. 20-24. All this comes from being in Christ! Christianity says you have to be continually in worship and in prayer and in study of the Word. Through the sacraments and through a personal encounter with God through Jesus Christ you have to be constantly meeting him so you're changing and growing, and as Christ's character begins to grow in you, it comes out and pushes off the old leaves. It pushes off the anger. It's not something that happens overnight. It comes gradually. It comes bit by bit. And it does involve you. Look what it says. "Get rid of..."