

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

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

26 ‘In your anger do not sin’: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

28 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.

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.**

**5:1 Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children
2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Living the life

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

The apostle Paul was quite an intellectual, a theologian who was the first christian to work out a systematic understanding of the whole gospel message, and the early part of Ephesians has a lot of his thinking on the subject. But in chapter 4 he suddenly starts talking about what it actually means to be a christian.

An imitator of Christ. This is where the rubber hits the road, because however much you talk about it, faith means actually putting your belief into action. You have to live the life. Hopefully you want to live the life. James the brother of Jesus says this, *2:14 What good is it .. if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose someone is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that... BUT we have to keep two opposites in mind at the same time. Paul in Ephesians 2 ...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*

So our good deeds must be a *response* to the goodness and mercy of God. Our faith is proved by our deeds. So what should our *response* be to God if we are serious about our faith? How should we behave? Paul here outlines 5 examples of bad behaviour we must reject.

Verse 25. Speak truth not lies. Lies and half truths seem to be in fashion at the moment, particularly in political circles, and this kind of role modelling transfers to the general public and the church. If you can lie and get away with it, then people will say, and do say, “why bother telling the truth? If the great and the good do it, it must be OK, look how successful they are”.

Each of you must put off falsehood. It’s our responsibility as individuals to reject lies. There’s a sort of group deception if we put our trust in lies, and in any case, ultimately truth and transparency means that there will also be justice and fairness, socially but also in our legal system and in civil affairs. And it’s not good enough to avoid lies. *We must speak and actively pursue truth.* Jesus claimed that he was the truth. Lies produce disunity and division. Paul says that as a church we must speak truthfully because we are one body, we are *members of one another*. And you can’t be good in a vacuum, only in relation to other people.

Verse 26-27 Anger. The key line here is in your anger do not sin. Anger in itself is not a sin and Paul is not saying it is, but that it’s how we deal with it. So when we allow it to fester it does not help us, or the person we are angry with, so we should not sleep on it! *Do not let the sun go down on your anger.* v26

Deal with it immediately. v27 *And give no opportunity to the devil*
This verse is saying that if you don’t exert self-control, anger will control you. This is certainly true with personal relationships, and separating the issue from the emotion is crucial. Jesus was quite clearly angry with the money changers in the temple, but his point was made and he moved on without letting the anger take control. In wider issues we can be more detached, so if we’re campaigning for justice issues for instance, or against poverty, anger can be a positive force if it’s channelled in the right way. There is an argument that Christians haven’t been assertive enough in public life, and people like Mary Whitehouse, who was ridiculed for her views on sex in the media, have been proved to be right whether or not we liked her style! In public life there are clearly things which need to be called out, but too often the church has lacked righteously angry prophetic voices. [Remember that Paul in this letter is dealing with unity in a very new church community and yet right in the middle of it he’s addressing anger. This is because real peace is not achieved through appeasement. John Stott quotes E.K. Simpson’s commentary where he points out that ‘*the truest peace-maker may have to assume the role of peace-breaker as a sacred obligation*’.] This is why the Old Testament prophets were never popular. As a church we should not always expect to be popular if we are speaking truth. The churches which are growing globally are most often those who are being persecuted.

Verse 28 Do not steal. Paul stretches this to more than just the 8th commandment. He links it specifically to work: *Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful.* So we must be positive. Stop stealing yes, but start doing something proactively good, work towards helping those who are in need. Use your hands (Remember that Paul worked as a tentmaker). But this can also apply to things like tax avoidance, to employers mistreating workers, or employees who give poor service. So if I'm sure I'm not a thief, I still might need to look a little closer at my attitude to work. I might need to think about contributing to the community as well as making a living from it.

Verse 29 Don't use your mouth for evil but for good.

I started by quoting James, and this was one of his favourite subjects. *3:8 no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* The Greek word Paul uses for evil here is *sapros*, which was usually used to mean rotten, as in rotten trees or rotten fruit.

We have a unique gift of speech and we're instructed to use it for good. To edify, to encourage, to build up, to be kind. Paul is talking to the church, but as I've said before God doesn't excuse anyone, human beings are all made in his image and so they shouldn't abuse the gift of speech. We all love a sharp wit, but it does not need to be unkindly used. Of course many people go further than being merely rude, and when you link it with our first subject of lying it causes massive damage.

We too often obsess over more media friendly sins like the sexual ones, and gloss over the verbal ones. James goes on to say *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.*

We're all able to make the choice which it's going to be. Blessing and encouragement or nastiness and gossip. Jesus said this:

Matthew 12:34 The mouth speaks what the heart is full of...by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned

Verse 31-2 Be kind and compassionate.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. These must be rejected. Don't do this, don't wish ill will on people. Be kind and compassionate to each other just as God is kind. Imitate God. The Greek word for *kind* here is *chrestos*. The early believers saw how its similarity to 'Christ' made it so appropriate. Be Christ to one another. Be kind!

In a world that has decided that it's going to lose its mind

Be more kind, my friends, try to be more kind. Frank Turner.

You will say but God will judge us. Yes, because whatever we do we cannot and will not ever be good enough. His righteous anger and judgement against us is more often than not our own sin and mistakes coming back to haunt us. And God always knew that this was the case. Christianity is God knowing we can't bridge the gap, and coming in the person of Jesus to bridge it for us. That's the good news of the gospel. We just have to believe and trust in Jesus. And then, because He has given us the gift of His Spirit to live in us, we can live life in the Spirit. Amen.