

PM Ephesians 4:25-32 Righteous Living in a Fallen World

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2020

Preacher: Rev Trevor Kane

[0 : 00] Go then please to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. We're going to read from verse 17 down to the end of the chapter. We're going to consider tonight verse 25 down to the end of the chapter but to get the flow.

Seeing we haven't been in Ephesians for a few weeks. We'll read from Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 17. Ephesians chapter 4 beginning to read at verse 17.

This is the word of God. Now, this I say and testify in the Lord. That you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do.

In the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding. Alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart.

They have become callous. And given themselves up to sensuality. Greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learn Christ.

[1 : 07] Assuming that you have heard about him. And were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus. To put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life. And is corrupt through deceitful desires.

And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. And to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood.

Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor. For we are members of one of another. Be angry. And do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

And give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal. But rather let him labor. Doing honest work with his own hands. So that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths. But only such as is good for building up. As fits the occasion. That it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

[2 : 12] By whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath. And anger and clamor and slander be put away from you. Along with all malice.

Be kind to one another. Tender hearted. Forgiving one another. As God in Christ. Forgave you. Amen.

This is the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. And we trust that God will. Let's turn in the Old Testament then to Psalm 7. Psalm 7. As we read Ephesians 4.

One of the things that Paul tells the Ephesian believers. Is that they're to be angry. But not to sin. It's one of the things that we often find so difficult. But as we read the scriptures.

We're often reminded that God is angry. God is angry with his people. God is angry with those who refuse to worship him. So as we come to it.

[3 : 07] Anger itself is not the problem. But we have to make sure that we are exercising righteous anger. And one of the examples as we see it here is in Psalm 7. So we'll read Psalm 7 together.

And we'll read the whole of the Psalm. Psalm 7. And beginning to read at verse 1. O Lord my God.

In you do I take refuge. Save me from all my pursuers. And deliver me. Lest like a lion they tear my soul apart. Rending it in pieces with none to deliver.

O Lord my God. If I have done this. If there is wrong in my hands. If I have repaid my friend with evil. Or plundered my enemy without cause. Let the enemy pursue my soul.

And overtake it. And let him trample my life to the ground. And lay my glory in the dust. Arise. O Lord in your anger.

[4 : 07] Lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies. Awake for me. You have appointed a judgment. Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you.

Over it return on high. The Lord judges the peoples. Judge me O Lord according to my righteousness. And according to the integrity that is in me.

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end. And may you establish the righteous. You who test the minds and hearts. O righteous God. My shield is with God.

Who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge. And a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent.

God will wet his sword. He has bent and readied his bow. He has prepared for him his deadly weapons. Making his arrows fiery shafts.

[5 : 05] Behold. The wicked man conceives evil. And is pregnant with mischief. And gives birth to lies. He makes a pit. Digging it out. And falls into the hole that he has made.

His mischief returns upon his own head. And on his own skull. His violence descends. I will give thanks to the Lord. The thanks due to his righteousness.

And I will sing praise. To the name of the Lord. Most. Aye. Amen. This is a reading of God's. Inspired.

And inerrant word. Let's turn in our Bibles then please friends. To Ephesians 5. Ephesians 4. Sorry. Ephesians 4. Sorry. And verses 25.

Through 32. The very end. The very last section here. In Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4. 25. Through 32. One of the events that has always fascinated me.

[6 : 05] Has been the world's strongest man. You know it's kind of on. Every year between Christmas. And New Year. Every day it will be on. I used to think it was a bit like wrestling.

I used to think that all the people who were kind of on the inside of it. Knew that it was all fake. I used to think that those giant boulders that they lifted were kind of made out of polystyrene. And they were really acting. Pretending to lift these giant boulders.

Or that the cars were somehow made out of cardboard. So that it didn't actually look like it was. That was until I saw a documentary about one of the competitors.

And I realized it was all real. It took you through his life. It took you through the weights that he had to lift in the gym. It took you through the reinforced beds that he had to buy. It took you through the food that he had to eat.

Everything that he had to do in order to be a strong man. Everything in his life revolved around this one goal. Everything in his life revolved around the reality that he was a strong man.

[7 : 04] It was at the very center of his being. At the very center of who he was. He didn't just say that he was a strong man. He lived the life of a strong man.

He lifted the weights. He ate the food. What he did proved the truth of what he said. The way he lived his life showed the reality that he was the world's strongest man.

And as we come to these verses in Ephesians 4. In this very last section of 25 through 32. Paul challenges us with something similar. He challenges us to live the life of the Christian faith.

He doesn't want us to be just hearers of the word. But he wants us to be doers of the word. He challenges us to put the Christian faith at the center of everything we do as believers.

He wants us to use the modern parlance. He wants us to walk the walk. As well as talk the talk. Not only to say that we are Christians. But to live the reality of that in our lives.

[8 : 14] We see three ways. I think that this passage challenges us. Three ways that this passage speaks to us. Firstly we want to think about this idea of righteous anger.

How our anger will show the reality of Jesus Christ in our life. Notice that Paul doesn't say that we are not to be angry. But rather we are to be righteously angry. Secondly then we want to think about a righteous behavior.

We come to verse 28. There is this imperative. Let the thief no longer steal. The reality of a redeemed life. That being a thief was incompatible with being in Christ. So if you were in Christ you were no longer to steal.

This righteous behavior. This righteous way of living. And then thirdly and finally a righteous life. As we see these verses 29 through 32. Paul shows different things to the Ephesians.

That will show the reality of their faith in Christ. So firstly then we want to think about the righteous anger. The righteous anger. And we see that in verses 25 through 27.

[9 : 19] Verses 25 through 27. Righteous anger. In the previous section of Ephesians that we thought about. This previous section in Ephesians chapter 4.

Paul had reminded the Ephesian believers of the reality of their new life in Christ. His final instruction we saw to them last week. Was to put off the old self. To put off that old way of living.

To put off that old man. Which was outside of Christ. And instead put on this new life. This new way of living. This new way of doing things in Christ. Christ.

And as we come to verse 25 tonight then. It's almost a continuation of that isn't it? We see again Paul starts verse 25 with this word. Therefore. Because of everything I've said.

Because of the reality that you're to put off the old self. Because of the reality that you're to put on the new self. Because the former way of life was incompatible with being in Christ. Therefore. This is what it looks like.

[10 : 18] This is the practical implication of what I've just said. This is the practical application of the theology I've just given you. This is the instruction that flows out of my teaching.

If you like. And we see what that instruction is. Don't we? We're called. Verse 25. The Ephesian believers are called. Therefore.

Having put away falsehood. Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor. For we are members one of another.

The Greek culture was one where. I need to be careful what I say. But it was one certainly in which lying wasn't looked down upon.

It was one certainly in which lying could be said to be a sense of value. I remember working with international students in Belfast. And it was a nightmare if you were running events.

[11 : 19] You know you'd go to a group of students and you'd say to them. You know are you going to come to my event? And they'd say yeah yeah yeah of course we'll be there. So you'd have all this catering in for loads of students. And none of them would turn up.

And you sort of took a while to adjust to the fact that. For them to lie to you wasn't a big deal. But for them to say that you weren't going to your event that you were putting on. Was seen as somehow shameful to you.

And shameful to them. They'd rather say they were coming and not turn up. Than tell you that they weren't coming at all. And it's a similar idea with the Greek culture. That lying was something that was just kind of accepted.

It was a way of life. And so one of the ways Paul tells the Ephesians. To mark themselves out as different. Is to put away falsehood. To put away lies. Lies.

And of course the devil is the father of lies. Isn't he? So if we're putting off lies. Then we're putting off one of the ways that the devil is known. One of the things that will mark the Ephesian believers out.

[12 : 17] Is radically different from the culture around them. Is that they've put away falsehood. That they don't lie. But of course our culture is no different really is it?

In fact our culture is probably one of the ones that is worse. In modern history. You think of social media.

It's a place where lies are spread rapidly. We see people sharing things that they know to be false. In order to get their message out there. In order so that they can control the narrative.

And shape the narrative as they say. But as Christians we're called to be speakers of truth. As those who have put off falsehood.

And it certainly affects how we interact with one another. And it affects how we interact with the world around us. Do we think about what we're sharing on Facebook or Twitter? Do we think or care whether it's true or not?

[13 : 19] Or do we share it because it suits our narrative? It suits the way that we like to think about the world. Falsehood isn't just lying here. Putting off a falsehood isn't just lying.

Per se. But it can be deliberately misinterpreting someone's position to their detriment. Deliberately taking the worst slant on someone's position. So that we can put them down.

Maybe you're here tonight and social media isn't your thing. So how does this apply to you? Well, are you sure that the things you're saying about someone are true? Are you sure that the latest bit of information that came your way is definitely true?

Are you speaking it in the best light? Are you going to speak in falsehoods? As Christians call, Paul calls the Ephesians and calls us, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to put off falsehood.

To put off lies. And notice the motivation that he gives the Ephesian believers at the end of the verse. Having put away all falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.

[14 : 33] Why? For we are members one of another. Why should we stop speaking falsehood? Why should we put off falsehood? Why should we speak the truth?

Because we're all members of one another. When we lie, we actively destroy the body of Christ. When we lie, we're denying that fundamental unity that is ours in Jesus Christ.

We're familiar, of course, aren't we, with the story of the boy who cried wolf. The boy who's sent to look after the sheep, to look after the flock, and as young boys do, he gets bored and so decides to have a little bit of mischief.

So what does he do? He cries wolf. All the villagers come running out to protect the flock, to protect the young boy who's been left in charge of them, only to discover that there's no wolf there. This goes on a few times until eventually his lies have so corroded the trust that when actually a wolf does come, there's no one to help him.

And that's what lies do. That's what falsehood does, even in the body of Christ. It corrodes trust. It corrodes confidence in one another.

[15 : 50] And then eventually all trust is gone. We're to put off falsehood. We're to put off lies. We're united together by love and by faith in Christ.

We're to be those who speak the truth to one another in love. Not to be those who say one thing to a person's faith and another thing behind their back.

So that's the first thing Paul says. That's the first way they're going to mark themselves out as different, that they'll speak the truth rather than falsehood. And then we notice, verse 26, that Paul continues with his ethical instructions, if you like.

He tells the believers in Ephesus, what does he say in verse 26? Be angry and do not sin. Now this is where we need to be careful. Because some people read verse 26, and they take it as an imperative.

They take this as Paul's instruction for life. What's Paul's instruction for life? How does Paul want the church in Ephesus to live? He wants them to be angry. But of course that's completely misreading what Paul says, isn't it?

[16 : 57] That Paul's telling the believers here in Ephesus to be angry as their basic state in life. That's not what Paul's saying at all, is it? What Paul's saying is, in your anger, do not sin.

He doesn't say that you should never be angry, but rather to make sure that the anger that you have is a righteous anger, is a justified anger. We can think of some examples in Scripture where people are righteously angry.

Think of the example of Jesus Christ himself. When he saw those money changers in the temple, he didn't simply tut and say, Dear, dear, dear, somebody should really do something about this. No. He drove them out.

He was righteously angry. The psalmist, as we read in Psalm 7, speaks about the righteous anger of God. So it's clear that in and of itself, anger isn't the issue.

Anger isn't the problem. There is a righteous anger. But anger becomes sin when we're angry that we've been marginalized. Anger becomes sinful when we're angry because of the slight that's been given to us.

[18 : 09] Because things haven't gone our way. Because we feel that we haven't been listened to. Because we feel that we haven't been appreciated. But this is where we need to be so careful, friends.

And this is where we need to remind ourselves that the human heart is deceitful above all things. Because it's so easy, so, so easy to convince yourself that your anger is a righteous anger.

It's so easy to convince yourself that your anger is justified because the other person is wrong and needs to be told. Because the other person is foolish and needs to be told.

And yet, how often is that truly the case? How often, if we're honest, if we look at our own hearts, how honest are we, how often, sir, are we angry because the holiness, righteousness, justice of God has been impinged?

Has been impugned? And how often are we angry because we don't get our own way? How often are we angry because our reputation has been impugned?

[19 : 23] Maybe some of you are here tonight and you struggle with anger. If that's you tonight, then this verse doesn't give you carte blanche to be angry any time you want.

But it's a call to make sure that in your anger, you do not sin. Paul gives some practical advice to the Ephesians how they might go about that. What does he say? Verse 26, Be angry, do not sin.

How does that work out practically well? Verse 26, Do not let the sun go down in your anger. Give no opportunity to the devil. Deal with the problem as it arises. Deal with the issue as it's there.

Don't let it fester. Don't let it get a hold. Rather, deal with it. We live in an angry world, a world of litigation, a world where our rights are paramount.

And we're angry when our rights aren't upheld. What will show the watching world around us that we are different?

[20 : 26] What will show the reality of the difference that Jesus Christ makes to us? It'll be that our anger is a righteous anger. It'll be that our anger isn't focused on getting our needs, desires, and wants met.

But our anger is focused because the glory of God has been brought low. So that's the first thing Paul reminds them of is this righteous anger.

Secondly then, he reminds them of righteous behavior. And we see that in verse 28. Verse 28, we see the righteous behavior. Paul continues to the Ephesian believers and he tells them that the thief should no longer steal.

Don't you just love that? Because let's try and work that out logically. Verse 28, what's Paul in effect saying by including this in the letter to the Ephesians?

He's in effect telling them that there will be those who used to steal in their congregation. That there would be thieves in the church and that these thieves would need discipling.

[21 : 35] There's a certain question about what's meant here. If you read the commentary, some people read this and say, well, as Paul's given this instruction here, what he's talking about are those who have hired themselves out for the day.

Maybe they haven't had work for a day or two and therefore then they've had to go and steal in order to sustain them and their families. Others say what Paul means here are those who are perhaps seasonal workers.

You know, those people who might hire themselves out for a month at a time harvesting grapes, harvesting grain, harvesting whatever it was. At other times of the year, obviously then, it would be fairly lean and they would have to steal to get by.

It doesn't really matter, does it? The instruction is that the thief is to no longer steal. It's a pretty clear instruction.

Rather, this person is to labour hard with their hands. This person is to do honest work. And that way, they will have something to share with those in need. It's a wonderful picture.

[22 : 41] It's a wonderful show of how the gospel impacts people's lives. They used to be those who took things. They used to be those who were thieves. They used to be those who stole.

And now Paul says, well actually no, now that you're in Christ, now that you've been redeemed by Christ, this is how you live. You work hard with your own hands. More than that, you might have enough so that you'll stop someone else from stealing.

So that you can give to those in need so that they themselves won't have to go out and steal. You might be sitting here tonight and thinking, well what has this got to do with me?

I'm not a thief. But what about those tea breaks at work that stretch an extra 5, 10, 15 minutes? Stealing from your employer, however much you might like to dress it up.

What about those expense forms that are slightly padded with things that haven't actually been done? That box of pens that you took from work that nobody would miss anyway, it's all stealing. What about those earnings that never quite make it into the tax book?

[23 : 51] Is that not stealing? The world around might simply say, well these are perks to the job. If the company paid me properly then I wouldn't mind working properly.

You can justify it by saying, well there's thousands of pens in the storeroom, what difference will a few pens that I've taken make? You might say, well sure look at Starbucks, look at Amazon, look at the tax that they avoid paying.

Why should I pay my fair share whenever they don't? We may not put a balaclava on and go out and rob a bank, unless I've misread the room of course.

But we steal in ways that we don't even recognize as stealing. And Paul tells us that one of the things that will mark us out as different, one of the things that will show people the reality that we belong to Christ.

One of the ways for the Ephesian church to mark itself out as different was to no longer steal, but rather work hard with their hands, was to provide for those who couldn't provide for themselves, was to provide for those who couldn't quite make ends meet.

[25 : 07] Their behavior, even when their master's eye wasn't on them, was to be righteous, to be above reproach. Thirdly, finally then, tonight, we see how Paul calls the Ephesian Christians to live righteous lives, righteous lives, and we see that in verses 29 through 32.

We see what he says in verse 29, don't we? Let no corrupting talk, verse 29, come out of your mouths. The idea here is putrefying talk.

The idea here is talk that causes decomposition. It's not talk that builds up, it's not talk that's good and positive, but it's talk that actively undermines, it's talk that actively corrupts the body of Christ.

Don't be like this, Paul says, don't let your speech be like this, Ephesian believers, don't let your speech corrupt and decay, but rather make sure that your speech is that which builds up, which encourages.

Let your speech give grace to those who hear. there's a politician in Northern Ireland called Gavin Robinson, he's the MP for East Belfast, it's one of the constituencies that I used to live in, so I was fairly interested in this.

[26 : 31] The 2015 general election was a straight battle between Gavin Robinson and Naomi Long of the Alliance Party who held a seat. Gavin Robinson won in the end by a few thousand votes, but his victory speech was horrifying.

It's gone down in Northern Irish political history as one of the most graceless speeches ever made. If you want, you should go home and look it up on YouTube, it is horrific. And that's putrefying talk, that's not talk that builds up, that's not talk that encourages.

When people think of us as Christians, when people think of us as those who follow Jesus Christ, that shouldn't be what comes into their minds. They shouldn't think, well, those people are graceless, those people are angry.

Rather, they should think, well, it does me good to be around them. It's an encouragement that they're there, they're a joy in such a dark, difficult world. There's no corrupting talk in their mouths, there's no deceitful talk in their mouths.

Then, verse 30, Paul instructs the Ephesian believers, what does he say? Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

[27 : 50] We thought a little bit in chapter 1 of Ephesians about this sealing with the Holy Spirit. But how might we grieve the Holy Spirit? Well, quite simply, by deliberately sinning, by deliberately continuing and living in a life of sin and rebellion.

But there's an important thing that we need to draw out here, an important point that we need to draw out for ourselves. Because verse 30 reminds us of the personal nature of the Holy Spirit, doesn't it? Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

For many of us, the Holy Spirit can feel like an impersonal force, something akin to the force in Star Wars. It's an impersonal energy in the universe that we can manipulate and use for our ends.

And yet, Paul here reminds us of the personal nature of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit is not an it. He is a he. The Holy Spirit can be grieved, can feel pain and discomfort when believers choose to deliberately sin.

The Holy Spirit, he is the third person in the Trinity. He is equal in power and glory with the Father and with the Son. He is equal in power and glory with the God.

[29 : 11] How many of us, I wonder, grieve the Holy Spirit without actually knowing it? How many of us, I wonder, grieve the Holy Spirit without actually thinking about the personal nature of the Holy Spirit who dwells inside of us?

us. We come back in verse 31 to an attitude of heart that Paul calls the Ephesians to. What does he say?

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. we live in days of bitterness and wrath, don't we?

We live in days of anger and slander. But as Christians, we're not to be engaged in that. As Christians, we're to rise above that.

We're to put all bitterness and wrath and anger away along with all malice. Rather, verse 32, rather, rather, rather be kind to one another.

[30 : 18] Don't be filled with wrath. Be filled with kindness, Paul says. Don't be filled with fury. Rather, forgive one another.

Don't hold on to grudges, Paul says to the Ephesians, but rather forgive one another. And there's a wonderful finish to this section, isn't there?

Because what reason does Paul give to the Ephesians? Does Paul say do this because it's the way to the best you? Does Paul say do this because it's the way to the best community?

No. Paul says to the Ephesians, you forgive one another as God and Christ forgive you. You've been forgiven.

You've been cleansed. You've been healed. You've been restored. The weight of your sin against God was far greater than any sin you could have against one another. Therefore, Ephesians, forgive one another.

[31 : 19] The world around you is full of envy, wrath, bitterness, jealousy, rage. The world around you is full of that. But rather, you know who you are in Christ.

So you don't need to be full of those things. Rather, be kind, be tender hearted, be forgiving, be quick to forgive, be quick to let go of pains and slights, be quick to let go of imagined pains and slights.

Is there a grudge that you're holding that you need to let go of this evening? Is there a brother or sister that you need to forgive tonight because remember that in Christ God has forgiven us?

Therefore, we should be quick to forgive one another. Is there a brother or sister that you need to go to this evening and apologize to for the way that you've acted towards them?

That you need to make restitution with tonight? Just as we've been forgiven in Christ, just as our sin was put away from us in Christ, so we're called to forgive one another, to love one another.

[32 : 49] We started tonight with the thought about proving that we are genuinely in Christ, what things it will be that mark us out as different, what things it will be that mark us out as unique.

It will be the fact that we don't lie, that we put away falsehood, that we don't put the positive spin on things that make us look good. It will be the fact that we're angry but righteously angry.

It will be the fact that we live redeemed lives, that the people we were before we were in Christ are different people than we are now in Christ, that the thief no longer steals, that the slanderer no longer slanders.

But most radically of all I think it will be the fact that we forgive one another. Forgiveness today is a foreign concept to many in our world.

You look on Twitter, you look on Facebook, you look on BBC News, you look everywhere. Even if someone apologizes now it's no longer enough. Even if someone says sorry now, it's no longer enough.

[34 : 04] Forgiveness is a foreign concept to the world around us. But yet as we forgive one another, as we love one another, it shows the reality that our sins have been forgiven in Christ.

It shows the reality that we redeemed people of God. Amen.