# Ephesians 4:17-32

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0:00] Let us pray as we stand. Father, we're very grateful that you have awakened us to praise you for your goodness and to ask for your grace this morning. So we pray that you would fill our hearts and minds with the goodness and graciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That you would teach us how to pray and live in line with what you're doing in the world. And that you would make us happy and satisfied in you.
And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So I was away at St. John's Newfoundland this last week.
Man, what a beautiful place that is. There's a rugged beauty. And the people are really hospitable. It's amazing. We were at a cafe one morning.
Aaron and Jacob and Ryan and Chris and myself. And we're all in our collars. And there were three filmmakers sitting at a table. And Aaron struck up a conversation with them.
[1:08] And they said, who are you guys and what are you doing here? And so I started chatting with them. And when they found out there were ministers at a conference, their question was, so what's God saying these days? I thought that's a pretty good question.

And they were serious. So would you join me in Ephesians chapter 4? Page 978. Brief reminder, Paul is writing to Christians in Ephesus, the third largest city in the ancient world.
And he is writing from a jail cell in Rome. And from that jail cell, he is reminding them of their new identity in Christ. And he is urging them to live a life worthy of their calling.
In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul has made the stunning claim that the church is God's new humanity in the world. People from every race and age and circumstance and occupation have been raised from spiritual death to life.
Those who are far away from God have been brought near. Those who are divided have been united. And those who are without God in the world have become the very temple and dwelling place of God on earth. See, it's far from sitting on the sidelines of history.
[2:25] Paul is saying you is the church of Jesus Christ. No matter how small or weak or feeble or persecuted, you are right at the heart of what God is doing in the world. And your life together, your life individually and your life together is meant to give the world a preview and a picture of what it's going to look like when Christ returns.

And everything in heaven and earth comes under his gracious lordship. And so the great question that Paul is seeking to answer in chapters 4 through 6 is, What does it look like for us to live as God's new humanity in the world?
What does it look like? And Paul's answer in the second half of Ephesians 4, which we're looking at this morning, is twofold. Number one, you will look very different than the culture around you.
And number two, every area of your life will be touched and transformed by the grace of Jesus.
You're going to look really different and you're going to be transformed. So those are the two points of the sermon, a community of contrast and a community of change.
So let's begin with contrast. In verses 17 to 24, Paul makes the contrast really clear between those who follow Christ and those who follow the culture.
[3:38] And he basically says, those who follow Christ should look really different from those who follow the culture. Verse 17. Now, now this I say and testify in the Lord, says Paul, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do.

There he's just talking about those who haven't come to believe in Christ. And then he describes how the Gentiles live. We'll get to that in a moment. And he goes on in verse 20 to make this contrast. And he says, but that is not the way you learned Christ.

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Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him and the truth is in Jesus Christ. Did you notice that language? Learned, heard, taught, truth.
It's all the language of a school. All right. Paul is essentially saying every day that you walk out into the world, you are attending two schools simultaneously.
One is the school of the culture, which is trying to teach you one way of being human. And the other is the school of Christ and his church, which is trying to teach you a different way of being human.
[4:45] Two schools simultaneously. So let's take a look at this. How does the culture school work? I think in our day and age, it works a little bit like this. First, you have to look inside to find out who you are.

Nobody can tell you who you are. You have to look inside and say, what do my desires internally tell me about who I am? It's a journey of self-discovery.
The second step is you need to tell the world what you've discovered about who you are from the inside. So you need to post it on social media or tell your friends or find a way of letting others know and celebrating it.
And then the third step is normally dissociating from all those who tell you differently in some way, shape, or form. And often that's not only just a move of self-advocacy.
That's a move of self-protection as well. Because who we see ourselves as is very precious to us. And one of the problems here that Paul identifies for us is that that doesn't really work.
[5:48] Because if our desires are the source of all that we, of our identity and our way of living, well, we're going to be misled. Because in verse 22, Paul says that our desires are deceitful.

In other words, they will not tell us the truth about who I am. And in fact, they'll often lead me astray. And I think we see this finding working its way in our lives so often is that if we look internally to follow our desires, we think it will promise freedom and fulfillment.
But actually, it doesn't give us the freedom and fulfillment that we long for. We actually end up just becoming slave to the very desires that we're trying to fulfill. And so if you look at verse 19, it says, They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality and are greedy to practice every kind of impurity.
In other words, Paul describes this sense of trying to be true to yourself and your desires that leads to actually being trapped but enslaved to the very desires that you're trying to be true to. There's a voracious appetite for impurity and to the point where you become hardened to what will really truly live, lead to your happiness and your freedom.
And the saddest of all is verse 18. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart.
[7:13] So Paul is saying that the school of the culture promises freedom. It promises fulfillment. It promises the liberation and the fulfillment of your desires. And it actually does the exact opposite.

It leads to this place where your life is bound by the very desires that were supposed to set you free. And you are without the life of God in the world. And you start to become hardened to the life that he wants you to experience.
It's a pretty sobering picture. And contrasted with that, then in verse 20 and following, Paul says the school of Christ works in a very different way. First, instead of looking inside yourself to find out who you are, you look to Christ and Christ alone to find out who you are.
And Christ is full of grace and truth and mercy. And it's interesting here, the language describes Christ as the curriculum. Notice verse 20. That's not the way you learned Christ.
It describes Christ as the one who does the teaching. Verse 21, you were taught in him. Literally, it could be you were taught by him. And then it describes Christ as the classroom itself.
[8:19] The truth is in Jesus. So there's this sense in which Christ is the curriculum, he is the teacher, and he is the classroom. You have to look to Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus if you want to discover who you truly are.

And once you discover who you truly are in Jesus, Paul says the second step is to be who you truly are in Jesus. To live it out fully. And Paul says that's going to involve a change of clothes.
This is a metaphor for a transformed life. He says on the one hand, you're going to have to put off all those old ways of living and thinking and relating and acting and feeling that are not determined by the school of Christ.
You're going to have to put it all off like a dirty old clothes that don't fit. And then you're going to have to put on a new set of clothes, which is a new way of living and relating and seeing others and

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relating to God that is fitting to who you've become in the Lord Jesus Christ.
And so Paul has this thing where there's two schools that we are constantly attending every day. The school of the culture and the school of Christ. And he's saying, I want you to exchange one for the other.
[9:29] And daily walk in ongoing renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit and become who you truly are in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says, if you do this, beware, this is going to change every facet of your life.

Like nothing about you is going to remain untouched. And that's what he goes on to do in verses 25 to 32 is he just gives a litany of like, hey, that's what this means here. Hey, that's what this means here.
Hey, that's what it means here. And all these sorts of things. And maybe a helpful way of getting at it is seeing that Paul touches on three areas of our lives. He touches on what we do with our hands, what we say with our mouths, and what we feel in our hearts.
Our hands, our mouths, and our hearts. Look at verse 28. Let's start there with the hands. He says, let the thief no longer steal.
Now, stealing in the Old Testament wasn't just taking people's money and possessions, although that's true. It could also be tax evasion. It could also be charging a client too much money or selling something for more than it's worth.
[10:39] It could also be employers not paying their workers proper wages. It could also be workers working less hours than they're supposed to or cutting corners and doing subpar work.

It was this holistic vision of having integrity in life and not cheating anyone else. And instead of stealing, Paul commends honest work with one's hands.
He says, 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.
Isn't this fascinating? Paul's basically saying when you experience the grace of the Lord Jesus in your life, it's going to transform you from a person who takes in order to meet your own needs into a person who works in order to be able to meet the needs of others.
You see, the Bible has a profoundly positive view of work. We are not saved by our good works, but we are saved for good works. And God cares not only about the integrity of the work that we do, but also how we steward the money that we make from our work.
[11:48] So there's both these things. He wants us to be honest in our work and in the way we make money. And he also cares about the generosity that's enabled by our work, how we use the money that we make.

And so we see here that making money and using it to bless others in need becomes a form of Christian ministry. Under the grace and the lordship of Jesus Christ and all the accountants and bankers said, amen.
It's a way in which the gospel is lived out by our hands. It's a tangible way in which we show the riches of God's grace and kindness towards us. You see, Paul said elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, for you know the grace of the lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become spiritually rich.
And Paul's saying this is an aspect of living as God's new humanity in the world. We know the riches of his grace so profoundly that we seek to work and use whatever we make in our work in order to share those riches with others and therefore we'll affect the gospel in the way we live.
So it's honest hands. And the second thing is it's truthful mouths. If you look at verse 25, Paul pays attention to what comes out of our mouths.
[13:10] He says, therefore, having put away falsehood, literally having put away the lie, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

And skip down to verse 29. He says, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths. It's the image of rotten apples or of rusty metal. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only as such is good for building people up, as fits the occasion.
In other words, you don't have to say everything all the time. Just the right word at the right moment is what we're looking for. Why? That it may give grace to those who hear it.
The purpose of speaking to one another isn't just so we share all our opinions and, you know, this is what I think about everything. The purpose of our speech is what does this person need to hear to be encouraged in the Lord Jesus?

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What do they need right now? And then verse 30, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. It's so interesting that this comes directly after all the talk about speech.
[14:19] It's as if dishonest and unsavory words are a source of sorrow for the Holy Spirit. Because the day that we heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, Paul says we were filled and sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption.

And ever since we heard that word of truth, the Holy Spirit has been opening our eyes to the riches of God's kindness and grace and power and love toward us. Strengthening us when we're weak and filling us when we're empty.
And the Spirit is very sensitive to all the ways in which our lives do not yet reflect the redemption that he's sealed us for. And no more more so than our speech, because the Spirit knows the immense power of the tongue for good and for evil.
Sticks and stones break my bones, but words will never hurt me. So goes the nursery rhyme. You guys know that one? It's not true. We all know how deep a single word can cut.
And how vast its devastation can be. James, the brother of Jesus, said the tongue can be like a fire that sets a whole forest ablaze. The tongue can be like the fangs of a snake full of deadly poison.
[15:39] And yet the tongue can also be like a fresh spring that refreshes those who hear. The key point for Paul is a profoundly relational one.

He said in verse 25 that we are neighbors in the city of God, that we are members of one another in the body of Christ. And everything that we speak, all the truth that we speak to one another is meant to build up the fellowship and not corrupt it or erode it.
Eugene Peterson once said, Our job is to speak the name of Jesus to one another and to speak it personally at the right time in the right way.
So more broadly, Paul is saying, Christians, you need to be honest, reliable people whose words communicate truth and words offer grace. And this is what's going to help build up the fellowship. This is what's going to help make you look more and more like the new humanity that God wants you to be. This is what's going to shine God's light into the world when you do these things. So first, he says, have honest hands.
[16:46] Second, he says, have truthful mouths. And third, he says, you need tender hearts. Of all the emotions of the human heart, anger might be the most complex and unwieldy of them all.

And so Paul goes straight for anger. And he says two things. He says, deal with your anger quickly and deal with all forms and expressions of your anger.
Verse 16. Sorry, that's not true. Verse 26. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.
And give no opportunity to the devil. In other words, deal with your anger quickly. I don't think Paul, the whole sun thing here, I don't think Paul is saying, like, never go to bed angry. There will be a lot of people who wouldn't sleep very often.
I think what Paul is saying is don't let your anger fester. When it festers, Satan can get a foothold. If you don't deal with it quickly, you're giving the devil an opportunity.
[17:55] And often that opportunity that you're giving the devil is either to tempt you towards some sin or to harden your heart towards the person that you're angry toward.

And both are devastating. And Paul recognizes, I mean, he recognizes that anger is not always bad. There are good times when you should be angry about evil in the world and injustice and sin in your life.
Those are good things. But Paul also knows that most often our anger is laced with unrighteousness and unholiness and pride and selfishness. And so we need to deal with it.
And in verse 31, Paul gives kind of a list of the different expressions and manifestations that need to be dealt with. He says in verse 31, Now, the Greeks understood the power of anger.
So they had four different words to describe four different varieties of anger. And it's interesting that Paul uses three of the four words here. The first word is wrath.
[19:04] And it's used to describe a sudden outburst or flare up, like a flame flaring up or water boiling over. It's that unpredictable outrage.

Happens in the moment. The second word is anger. It describes a settled disposition of displeasure and dislike towards somebody. And then the third word is malice.

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And it describes anger that has been allowed to go on for so long that it becomes an attitude of resentment and cynicism and ill will towards somebody. So notice here how Paul's logic has a discernible progression from sudden outburst to settled disposition to lasting resentment.
See, anger can be toxic. And Paul knows it. It can erode our relationships and break down trust. And we can use it to control and manipulate those around us. Anger can destroy in a minute what took years to build.
And anger can dig a hole, a deficit that would take years to fill. I learned this in the early years of marriage. It became pretty clear right away.
[20:18] I thought I was a pretty peaceable person. That I had anger in my heart that I had to deal with. And there's no way our relationship was going to flourish and go forward unless that got dealt with right in the early days.

So that was the growth curve. And when anger is deeply settled in our hearts, it is most often expressed in some form of words. Because words reveal what are really in our hearts.
And this is why Paul in this list points out two sins of speech that flow from the sins of anger. The first one is clamor. That's raising your voice.
That's arguing or shouting or screaming. In other words, it's saying, I don't want to hear you. In my anger, I want you to hear me. And I want to overpower you with my speech.
It's a way of trying to control or manipulate or silence the other person. It's clamor. And the other word Paul uses is slander. Slander. Speech that demeans, belittles, puts down undercuts.
[21:22] And this is something that often doesn't happen to somebody's face. It happens behind their back. It's a way of making others feel less than and looking less than in the eyes of others.

It's a way of dehumanizing others. And we don't have to spend much time on social media to see how often this happens. And how easy it is for us to say something over email or post something online that we would never say to somebody's face.
You see, Paul says all these things, you need to put them away. Because they don't belong in the school of Christ. This isn't the way you learned Jesus Christ.
If you want to be like Jesus Christ, look at verse 32. You need to be kind to one another. You need to be tenderhearted. Forgiving one another. Isn't that lovely?
Paul's not assuming that we're always going to get it right with one another. Forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. So brothers and sisters, Paul says you are a community of contrast because you've been saved by grace.
[22:26] Not anything you have done. But if you are saved by grace, then you will live a transformed and changed life as the Holy Spirit does a work of renewal in your life every day of the rest of your life.

And what is that renewal going to look like? It's going to look like honest hands. It's going to look like truthful speech. And it's going to look like tender hearts. And the wonderful thing about this is in part how ordinary it is and normal it is.
Like Paul's not asking us to be superhuman. He's asking us to just be kind and have integrity. To be truthful and to be tender. To bless others instead of taking from them.
To build up instead of tearing down. All these simple little things in our day-to-day, week-to-week interaction as the Holy Spirit renews us. These become the things that are a portal to the world of the eternal realities to come.
They become the lights that shine in the world and show the truth of Jesus Christ. They become the salt that people experience when they come into our community and see this is a community under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[23:31] It is as we live into this new humanity that God is creating. That we discover who we truly are. And we discover that it's the truth of Jesus alone that has the power to strengthen our hands, to sanctify our mouths, and to soften our hearts.

For our great good. And for God's great glory. Amen.

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