

Ephesians 4:25-32 - Witness Protection Christianity, Part 2

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: 28 June 2015

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. What a beautiful song and a great reminder of how God meets us and shows Himself to us. One of the ways God does that day by day, moment by moment, week after week, is through His Word that He's given to us, where He's revealed Himself to us, spoken into our lives.

So let's look to it with eagerness this morning for Him to speak to us. We're in the last verses of Ephesians chapter 4 this morning. Before we jump into this passage, I want us to remember just a little bit of where we were last week.

The passage we looked at last Sunday is the theological background for what we're talking about in the passage this week. It tells us the basis for what we're talking about.

It talks about the reality in the Christian life that victory over sin has been secured for us by Jesus, right? And a new life begun that He's given to us.

[1 : 11] And at the same time, there's an ongoing war being waged against that new life by the remnants of sin that are in us that are battling against us. And God's calling us to live in a way that's fitting with our new life.

By warring against sin, putting sin to death, not making a truce with an enemy Jesus died to defeat. Is the way we talked about it last week. And at the same time, seeing God produce in us true righteousness and holiness.

We said God has not only made us new, given us a new identity, but He's also remaking us into His image to be what He created us to be in the first place. The analogy we have been using for that is witness protection.

Where a witness may come to turn people in and to testify against very dangerous people and may need protection in that sense. They may need to be sent away to a new location with a new identity and set up there for their good with a completely new life.

It wouldn't be safe, would it? For them to stay where they were. It's the only safe way forward is to say, you've got to embrace this new life that's been given to you.

[2 : 25] There's danger in the old life. There's freedom in the new life. And so we come to our passage this morning where Paul will begin, moving from that to start with therefore.

Therefore, in light of the fact that God has given you new life and that He's working in us by His Spirit, what's that new life going to look like? What are some specific things that must characterize us in light of this?

Ephesians chapter 4. We'll start reading at verse 25. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members 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 by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

[3 : 37] 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Let's pray. God, we do believe that your word is living and active. That it's sharper than a double-edged sword.

That it will cut and divide our joints from our marrow. That it will expose the inner portions of our heart, cut to places we're not even aware of or conscious, are in our hearts.

And so, we ask this morning that as painful as that can be, that you would make us eager to hear your word. That you would make us desire it to operate on us like that.

That you, by your Spirit, would perform that surgery for our good. We so much rather would do things our own way. We so much rather would have our opinions that we can bring to the table and judge your word.

[4 : 46] Father, would you subdue that in our hearts? Would we sit under your word? Would it undo us and would you change us by your Spirit? Do that as we look to your word now, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. One of the realities that we certainly can appreciate about witness protection is that for the witness to flourish in his new identity, two things are going to have to happen.

There's going to be both a disconnecting from the old life and a full embrace of the new life. Both of those are required. Just to leave behind the old life and go sit in the safe house sullenly and quietly for the rest of your days is not the new life and new identity you've been given, is it?

At the same time, to embrace with gusto the new life and say, yes, I'm going to go live here, but I'm also going to dabble around with my old friends every once in a while.

I don't want to lose them. That's not going to be safe either, is it? That's not the new life that you've been given. Pastor Sinclair Ferguson talks about this reality in terms of a garden.

[5 : 55] He talks about flowers and weeds. He says, if you're going to have a beautiful garden come, there's going to be weeds that need to be pulled up and flowers that need to be planted to see new life thrive.

One or the other on its own is not going to work, is it? And this is Paul's pattern in this passage as he paints a beautiful picture of the new life. He tells us five specific areas we're going to walk through this morning.

And in each one of those, he tells us three things. He tells us what belongs to the old way of life, how we're not to live anymore, what belongs to the new life, how we should live.

And then thirdly, he tells us why. Why should it be different? But we're going to talk about those things, and then we're going to talk about how that happens, and what the full picture it is that Paul paints, not just these five individual things.

We'll do that at the end, but first let's walk through these five specific commands for Christian living and make sure we understand what we're talking about. We're going to note that pattern that we just mentioned for all five of them.

[7 : 01] So first, verse 25. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

The old man telling lies and have truths, things that would lead people away from the truth, that would be misleading statements.

That's what we're not to do anymore. Instead, we're to speak truth. And this seems pretty easy, right? All right, he's starting us off with one that we can handle.

Just don't lie and tell the truth, right? I mean, that's pretty straightforward. I can do that. I always do it that way. Do you never color or spin the truth just to promote yourself or protect your reputation? Have you never told a story or shared a prayer request at small group or a post on social media that was embellished for effect so you'd sound interesting or spiritual?

[8 : 05] Have you never compromised the truth with your spouse so she'd be more happy with you? So you could avoid being blamed? Me either. Good. We hate getting blamed, don't we?

We'll do anything to avoid that. Just don't let it come back on me. Maybe I'll just steer it over here. Twist things just a little bit. Truth is vital and valuable.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Do people hear you and trust you? The people who know you, do they assume when they hear you say something they're hearing the truth? Are you a man or woman of your word, of integrity?

This is so important, Paul says, because we're a part of the same body on the same team. Imagine the pain for a physical body if one part of the body didn't tell truth to the other.

If, for instance, you were walking and your eye did not tell your foot, that's a nail that you're about to step on. If it didn't speak that truth to your foot and you walked on anyway, the pain that would cause.

[9 : 12] Or the pain that would come if your nose smelled smoke and didn't tell your legs to run out of the building. Right? Now those may seem like silly examples, but in the body of Christ, think of the pain that's caused when truth is not told by one part to the other.

Think of what that looks like, because truth-telling produces a culture of trust. Vital for the body to work well together, for the team to be headed in the same direction.

But lying produces a culture of distrust that brings division in the church and thus hinders the work of the gospel. Paul says, we're on the same team. Share honest, truthful information so we can work together, not against each other.

So that we're not constantly working our way around the circle of friends to find the real story. Suspecting that those that we ought to be able to trust are constantly misleading us.

Next, verse 26 and 27. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. You'll notice that when Paul's talking about the old man, he talks about sinful and uncontrolled anger.

[10 : 26] He chooses his words carefully to say that there's actually a thing such as righteous anger, right? It is possible to be angry and not sin. But that's not usually what we do.

That's not the way anger often affects us. We need now in the new man to have controlled thoughts and emotions where we recognize our anger and no matter what it is that's caused the anger, we don't just let it simmer, but we bring it in submission to Christ and His priorities.

That's the only way it's going to be righteous anger. Don't just stew on it and let it eat away at you where your anger begins to control you. That happens very quickly.

And some of us in this room are what I would call rationally driven fixers. I am. All of the engineers in the room are. And then half of the rest of you are wired the same way too, okay?

What that means is when we see a problem, we just want to fix it and be done with it. And we love this verse, don't we? Why do we love these verses? Ah, because it's saying in the Bible the way we've always wanted to function.

[11 : 36] Get things done. Resolve that problem and move on. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Except that Paul doesn't actually say that every situation should be resolved completely and very quickly.

He's talking here about our anger not being out of control. I used to operate this way in my marriage that if something was wrong, we had to fix it, right?

And the Bible said so and everything was going to be done before we went to bed. And what you end up learning is that these words don't exactly say that. There may actually be more things that need to be processed later.

Sometimes sleep even helps a little bit. But, but, what we are cautioned against, what we shouldn't go to bed with is unbridled anger and rage that's out of control, that's beginning to control us, letting our hate and our hurt control our hearts for prolonged seasons.

That's what's being warned against. Even if a conversation is still to be had on the subject, even if there's more that needs to be processed, the rage should be replaced by love, for example.

[12 : 51] The enmity that's thereby a desire for reconciliation or peace or mercy, even if that can't fully be accomplished in the five minutes that I'd like to have it tied up in.

Those desires that eat away at our hearts, the anger that stews and that begins to control us is so dangerous because why? Satan loves to get in there.

It's a foothold for Satan, isn't it? Satan loves to use our unbridled anger to sow discord in the body. He loves to take your simmering anger and work his way into the relationship from that foothold, doesn't he?

As anger eats away and controls you, you become easy prey for believing the lies of Satan about the one who's hurt you, don't you? It's really easy to believe bad things about them while you're angry with them, while your rage is flaring up.

And so you begin easily to work against them rather than with them and Satan would love that.

Notice one more thing before we move on. When do we usually quote this verse?

[13 : 55] It's usually in a marriage class, right? Some of you were in a marriage Sunday school class this morning. This is a great verse for marriages. Are we in the marriage section of Ephesians

yet? We're not there yet.

One more chapter. We're going to get there. Paul's going to talk about marriage. What is Paul talking about right now? All your relationships. Every single relationship in the body of Christ that we're to follow this.

I know, right? That is hard. And you thought if you loved your husband, you could harbor unbridled anger against her all night and be doing pretty well. And Paul says, all of your relationships. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Example 3, verse 28. 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.

Perhaps we don't often think of ourselves as thieves, but how easy can it be in an attempt to protect or provide for ourselves? To steal taxes from the government?

[15:08] Time from our employers? To rob tithes from God, as he tells his people in Malachi? And what Paul's getting at is the self-serving heart that drives these sorts of actions.

It's highlighted by what Paul commends as characteristic of the new life. What does he say? It's not just quit stealing, stop being thieves, but rather work.

And I expected that part, but it's not just work. That made sense to me. Stop stealing, instead work, work so you can buy the thing you were going to steal, right? That makes sense.

He goes further. What does he say? Not just stop stealing and work so that you can get what you want. Work so that you can do what? Have something to share with anyone in need.

He's going to our hearts. He's saying, don't just be good and work hard and provide for your family.

He's saying, I want you to be looking at others as more significant than yourselves.

[16:12] I want you to be more anxious even to provide for them and get what they need than what you want. How quick most of us are to find ways to get money and resources for ourselves.

How slow most of us are to find ways to give to others. But Paul says, not just you shouldn't be lazy or you shouldn't be greedy no matter how much you work, but rather be generous.

Why? Why is it important in this passage? Because God has designed His people to care for each other. The follower of Christ is to look for opportunities to be a giver rather than a taker.

To be one who is rich to others. Not merely rich Himself. What do you dream about? You dream about getting more for yourself?

About how you can bless others who need it? What is it that energizes your heart? That makes you excited? That animates your checkbook? That gets you going? Is it something you've been wanting?

[17:20] Or somebody else needs? This passage doesn't say it's wrong to be needy. It says it's wrong to overlook the needy.

I'll be honest with you. At about this point in studying for the sermon this week, I was ready to tap out and be done. Enough! Ouch!

Enough! Enough of cutting to my heart and showing me my need. It's hard, isn't it? To go point by point and one thing after another to the heart.

A couple more. Paul's going to turn back to the tongue. Verse 29. 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.

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, if all of man's sins were divided into two bundles, half of them would be sins of the tongue. One whole bundle out of the two would be things we do with our tongues.

[18:25] There's so much damage we do, isn't there? I suspect you were told growing up as I was, if you don't have something nice to say, yeah, yeah, everybody learned that, right?

Good. If you didn't, I'm sorry. Now you'll know. Don't say anything at all. It's actually pretty good advice, isn't it? When Paul says corrupting talk, that word he's using for corrupting is the word that's used of rotting fruit or putrid fish that's gone bad and spoiled.

That your talk would do that to someone else. It would begin to eat away at them. To destroy them. To damage others. To tear them down.

Perhaps even building yourself up as you destroy them. With our tongues, we praise God and with the same tongues, we curse men who were made in His image.

And James says, this should not be. Instead, Paul says, don't just sit silently all the time. I mean, that might be the way we could avoid corrupting talk.

[19 : 32] Just don't talk at all. Then you'll be safe. But Paul says it's more than that. He says the new life has speech that builds up and gives life. Reminds me in this verse of Proverbs 25, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

A word spoken in the right way at the right time. It's precious. It's valuable as gracious critique, as life-giving affirmation to someone.

Aren't you thankful for the encouragers God has put in your life? Whom could you encourage today? Think of anyone who needs a word to be built up rather than torn down?

Don't words have that power to build us up? Haven't you felt that? That's why Paul says the speech is so important to build up the body, to give grace to those who hear, right?

To bless or benefit the body. Especially with telephones and internet, very little tears at the fabric of the church more quickly than words that tear down.

[20 : 39] Talk that corrupts. Thankfully, the reverse is true. Very little builds community more quickly than gracious, encouraging talk.

What kind of speech do you use? What kind of speech do you condone and enjoy or tolerate in your brothers and sisters? Our tongues are dangerous.

And they often lead us to or are a part of even this last example Paul gives. Verses 31 and 32. 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. We're going to come back to verse 30 and grieving the Holy Spirit next week.

There's lots to unpack there and how it fits into this. But in many ways, this final category combines some of the previous ones we've been talking about. Perhaps what happens is that someone hurts you.

[21 : 39] There's an offense. You're frustrated. You're hurt. And instead of handling your anger the way God would direct you to, rather than handling it appropriately, you let it fester, right?

It starts to eat away inside you. You become bitter. You resent them. And you begin to desire that person's harm. Actually have malicious intent toward their reputation or their welfare.

Slandorous words. Actions intended to hurt someone. These are the outcomes of harboring bitterness in our hearts. Paul says that's no longer to characterize us.

Rather, we should be what? What's the contrast here? Instead, we should be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving. In other words, we should seek the good of others rather than their harm.

Even those who've harmed us, right? That's actually what forgiveness means. Forgiveness says not that I merely overlook the offense that's been committed against me and say, you know what?

[22 : 42] It really was no big deal. There was no harm there. No one really harmed me. That's not what forgiveness means. Forgiveness means, rather, that I really was harmed, but that I bear the cost of that for your good.

That's forgiveness. And isn't that how God treated us? Did God turn a blind eye to our sin and say, no harm done? No big deal?

No. No, He didn't. But instead, He bore the cost of it Himself. And if our offenses against Him have been forgiven, if all of us in the body have had God decide He's working for our good, who are we to want harm of someone for whom God says, I'm working for His good?

We should seek the good of each other as well. Do you love extending forgiveness? Is it one of your favorite things to do? Or do you secretly revel in keeping a superiority, having things to hold over others in relationships?

Is that where your heart really goes? Would you rather see someone who hurts you suffer hurt as well? Or do you love to see them receive what they don't deserve? Do you harden your heart in bitterness?

[23 : 54] Or do you soften your heart in kindness toward them? Okay, that's the list. Whew! Made it through the list. It can be exhausting.

It can be discouraging, can't it? As we begin to see the pain of our sin as God does surgery on our hearts, considering all these things at once, let me just encourage you, don't ignore where the Holy Spirit has been pricking your heart in the last few minutes.

Ask yourself honestly, where has there been a catch? Where did you feel Him saying, here, I want you to consider this. Which area right now would you be seeking to ignore that He'd be prodding you to address?

Selfishness? Selfishness? Dishonesty? Careless words? Anger and unforgiveness? I found this week as I meditated on these verses that what happened to me over and over was God would show me weeds that needed to be pulled up right where I felt like the garden was looking pretty good.

In the areas where I felt like, okay, this one, whew, take a deep breath, I don't really have to worry about this. And at the same time, God showed me flowers to plant, opportunities to bless others that I hadn't considered before.

[25 : 12] Ask Him to do that in your heart. But even as you consider that for yourself, one thing you can't miss when you look at this passage is that God's not just talking to you.

He's talking to all of us. It's a community project, isn't it? All five of the reasons behind why our lives should be different have to do with some aspect of the body of Christ.

Some aspect of the health of the body. That's what God's after. He's after not just new people, but a new community, right? What would it look like if we all embraced these new ways of living?

What kind of community is God seeking to create among those who know and trust Him? What would it look like here? Just a few ideas. It's certainly a community that should be encouraging and uplifting.

Where others are looking out for your good and can't wait to serve you. I think in particular, it's a community where it's safe to fail or struggle.

[26 : 12] Don't you want to be part of that kind of community? A community where it is safe to fail or struggle? Why would it be safe in the communities that God is creating here? Because when you fail or when you struggle, you encounter what?

forgiveness, encouragement, not uncontrolled anger and slander. So all of a sudden, you're safe when you fail.

It's that picture, again, from a few weeks ago of truthing in love. Where truth and love remain connected in our relationships with each other. It would be a community where the materially poor were attracted to it because they were treated like guests of honor.

They didn't feel like burdens. It would be a community where conflict was handled regularly and respectfully because we loved to forgive. One more thought.

I think it would be a place where the longer you're there, the more you begin to feel that it's not just some sappy southern smiles on Sunday mornings but you go home wondering what people really think about you.

[27 : 21] You won't know that at first in a community. There's no way, is there, when you come in to say, I don't know, are they just friendly but really, really, what are they thinking about me? I think the longer you stayed in this kind of community, the more you would realize they're not faking and they're not stabbing me in the back when I walk out of the room.

People are genuinely for me. They really want what's best for me. They really love me. Wouldn't you want to be part of a community like that? Wouldn't you love to be in that community?

You would because that's what God's designed you and created you for. To long for honest, encouraging, merciful, forgiving community. That's the way He's designed us and it's what's created by the new life that He's working in us and among us.

So just one last question this morning. How? How in the world do we get there? How does it happen? Do we all just go do it?

Everybody go be like that and it works great. If you're convicted of sin this morning, how do you change? How do we corporately start to look like the new life and the new community that God intends for us?

[28 : 35] On either side of the passage we've looked at this morning, the verse that comes right before it and the verse that comes right after it, Paul tells us, be like God.

Look at Ephesians 4.24. Put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Then the passage we talked about, Ephesians 5.1, therefore, be imitators of God. Be like God. That's a great summary of the passage we just looked at, isn't it? It's the essence of what these specific commands are. Be like God.

What's He like? He's the God of all truth who does not harbor His anger forever, who always gives to us, always speaks grace to us, always forgives even though we don't deserve those things.

What a great example for us, right? Be like God. Be like God. I thought about that this week. You know, there was an ad campaign when I was a young boy.

[29 : 48] Some of you probably heard of it. It was called Be Like Mike. And so I, along with millions of other young boys, decided that we were going to be like Michael Jordan.

We were going to start drinking Gatorade, wearing Nike tennis shoes, and dunking the ball, soaring through the air the way that he did, and it was so beautiful to watch.

And so we were going to be like Mike. I would practice all of the shots that he did. One of my favorite was the one where he floats across the top of the key, double pumps, and fires a jumper that beats the Jazz in the NBA Finals right at the buzzer.

It's one of his best shots. But the problem for me was in the middle of that double pump, I usually hit the ground somewhere on the first pump, and then the shot went off the side of the rim, so I would move to one of the other ones where he was closer to the basket, and I never could dunk without lowering the goal down first.

Anybody else? Yeah, some of y'all lived in that. Yeah. I'm still working on the dunking thing. Having a good example can be a good motivation for a while, can't it?

[30 : 57] You can be inspired to work hard and really be excited about being the best that you can be, and this actually came in the midst of a culture that we still largely live in where you were told what?

You can be whatever you want if you just put your mind to it and work hard enough. It was in many ways a just-do-it mindset, ironically enough.

But at some point for a young boy who wants to be like Mike, that actually begins to become not just inspiring but discouraging, doesn't it? Why? Because I wasn't very much like him.

No matter how much I watched him, no matter how hard I tried to do it just the way he did, I mean, maybe a little bit better if that was the goal, but be like the best player in the world?

No way. I don't think I've got what it takes. No matter how hard I try, I just can't seem to do it. The good news of the gospel is this, that the story of Scripture is not just be like God.

[32 : 04] Isn't that good news? If it was just be like God, that's even harder than be like Mike, right? That's pretty tough. In fact, it's not just be like God and he'll love you even when you aren't.

Although, isn't that beautiful? Can you say amen to that this morning? Praise the Lord. Be like God and he loves you when you aren't. Be imitators of God as beloved children.

You're already his. You already have his love. Don't follow dad to earn his love, but because you already have it. Isn't that such a different perspective on life?

But it's actually even more than that. The grand story of Scripture says it's even more beautiful. It says, be like God. That's what I've designed you for. And it says he'll love you even when you aren't like him.

And his love for you is what gives you the resources to live like him. It's his love that enables it. As many great shots as he made, as many of his shoes as I wore, Michael Jordan never gave me any resources for being like him.

[33 : 18] Go back to our witness protection analogy. Imagine that the witness comes and gives his testimony and then imagine releasing that witness penniless back into the same town where he just gave the testimony.

Hey, I hope you can do well. Hope it goes well for you. No new identity. No new occupation. No money to get to a new place. Hope you make it.

That's not witness protection, is it? No. Witness protection says I've got you a new identity, a new job, a new place, and we're staying with you to watch out for you.

We will keep providing these things for you. Listen, God says this. Southwood, my beloved children, how will you become a community like you've talked about this morning?

A community like me? I want to tell you. He says, I will never stop pouring my love into you. I will keep showering you with forgiveness.

[34 : 22] I will continue to be the generous one who gives and gives and gives rather than takes. I will never stop singing over you words of grace rather than judgment.

And that's not just a model for you. It's more than that. It's the only resource that can make it happen. You see, I'm pouring those gifts into you so you can pour them out on each other even when they don't deserve it because you didn't deserve it when I gave them to you in the first place. I've given you my spirit. I've given you a new identity. You're my beloved children and that won't change. I'm staying with you. So stay close to me.

Drink deeply of me. Experience my grace again. And I'll keep making you, as I always promised, a community where my character and kindness overflow to everyone who gets near you. Let's pray. Oh Father, would you do that here? On our best days, we want that. We want to be like that.

[35 : 37] We want to be a place where it's a refuge for the hurting and a safe home for those who fail and struggle. We want to be that because we feel our need for it.

We need a community like that. And Father, we know what it's like to try to make it happen on our own. We know we don't have it in us by ourselves.

Thank you, thank you that you haven't just saved us and left us. Thank you that you're with us, that we're always your children and you'll never take your spirit from us.

Would you continue to change us? Would you continue to give us the strength to be the people that you've created us to be, the church you've created us to be? And would many know of your love? Because it just spills over the edges. It just splashes out from us because you've been so, so kind to us. We ask that in Jesus' name.

[36 : 36] Amen. Amen.