

The Christian Walk

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[0 : 00] Well, let's just look at that closing section of chapter 4. And we're looking at page 1177, Ephesians chapter 4, following on from where we left off two weeks ago.

That's verse 25 down to the end of the chapter, where Paul is now turning his attention to some of the practicalities in living the Christian life.

And I'll read some of the passage. Therefore, having put away falsehood, verse 25, 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.

[1 : 08] 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.

I think it's important to say at the very outset that this is not the ABC of how to be a Christian. We can't make ourselves Christians, and we cannot, by keeping certain rules and regulations, make ourselves right in God's eyes.

It's very important for us tonight to get this perspective right, that this passage is not about, if you do this passage, if you live by this passage, then you will make yourself right with God.

That's not the way it works at all. A person has to be made right with God, by the power of God, by the new life, in the new life that God works within a person when he is converted.

Please don't get it wrong. It's very important that we get the order right. Only the person who is converted can live this passage, because his heart has been changed by the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 20] He's come to faith in Jesus. He's come to see his own bankruptcy and lostness and darkness, and he's come to see that there's only one way to be saved, and that is by trusting in Jesus Christ as his Savior, and he has experienced and entered into the new life that God has given him.

Then he's able, then he wants to, with all his heart, he wants to live for Jesus, because Jesus is at the center. He's on the throne. He's the object of his life.

And that's, I hope, the way things are for all of us this evening who have put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what this passage is speaking about.

That does not mean that this passage doesn't have anything to say to someone who's not a Christian. I believe that every part of God's word can be used by the Holy Spirit to convict us.

And when we're going to be talking tonight about falsehood, and anger, and stealing, and corrupting talk, and all of these things, and we're going to be reminded once again about the standard that God has expected us to live to.

[3 : 27] And when it's as we're reminded of that, that we become convicted about our need to be saved. And as we're convicted to be saved, we realize that there's only one way to be saved.

There's only one way to live the life that God wants us to live, and that is the change that Jesus can bring in our hearts.

And so I would ask you once again tonight to come to Jesus. Don't think you can do it by yourself. You can't. Even although you can convince yourself, I'm good enough, you're not. You've got to come to Jesus.

You've got to ask that he will do this great miracle in your life in which a person is born again, and which a person comes to see that he's a sinner and that he trusts in the Savior.

So let's get the context right. So let's go into some of these, the practicalities of living the Christian life. The first thing that impresses me about this, I was reminded when I was looking at this passage that we've all become accustomed in our modern world to live with CCTV cameras.

Some people, of course, object to them, especially in the cities, because they seem to follow you.

It's possible for CCTV cameras to follow you if you want to go from one end of a city to another.

[4 : 44] It's possible for someone in a control room to follow your every movement, which shop you go into, which street you walk down in, where your car is going, and all the rest of it. Some people claim that it's an intrusion into your privacy.

I'm not going to go into whether they're right or to what extent they're right or wrong. It's not my place for the moment, but all I know is that there is that complaint. And sometimes, it strikes me that this passage is like a CCTV camera or several of them in that your every movement is being monitored.

We know that already, of course. Anybody who knows the Bible will know that God sees and knows everything that we do. But this is slightly different in that we, as God's people, are to watch ourselves every movement, every place we go, everything we do, every thought, every word.

We are to monitor our whole lives. All of our lives. There are no no-go areas in the Christian life.

You can't divide your Christian life into my private life, in which I can do what I want, and God's time, in which I'll do whatever he wants.

You can't do that. All of our time, all of our lives, belongs to God. And if nothing else, this passage, it reminds us that our whole lives are a commitment, they're a consecration to the Lord.

[6 : 09] I think we need to remember that at the very outset, that there's no, that what we do here belongs to God, but also what we do on a Monday morning belongs to God. And what we do on a Thursday evening belongs to God.

The whole of our lives is a consecration. It's an offering. As Paul says, offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God, for this is your spiritual service.

And our lives have got to be a spiritual service. Now here, Paul, he starts speaking about the areas of life that need to change and that need to be curbed and need to be controlled continuously as we prayerfully live these lives in obedience to Jesus.

And the first area he talks about is in verse 25 where he says, therefore, having put away falsehood, let us, each of you, speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

So if we're looking for a word that describes this verse, it is truth and falsehood. And what he's really saying is that falsehood has no part in the life of a Christian.

[7 : 19] On the contrary, truth has every part. It dominates. It is the rule of life as to how a person lives for the Lord.

Now these people, remember, the Ephesian Christians, remember, of course, that they had come from being pagans. They had lived all their lives up until the time they were converted. When they heard the gospel, they had lived their lives under false religion.

So they had come to live. Every religion has its own lifestyle. And if you don't believe in a God that sees into your heart and that knows everything that you do, then you believe that there are certain things you'll get away with.

You'll also believe that telling lies is not a big deal because God doesn't see you and you're not really accountable to him as the all-seeing and all-knowing God.

And that's the way that these people had grown up and they had lived lives that were full of lies and deceit and corruption. And it was part of, it's maybe perhaps hard for some of us to understand, those of us who have been brought up in a Christian context.

[8 : 27] We've all been taught that lying is wrong. It's hard for us to appreciate that some of these people had grown up in paganism and for them, lying wasn't a great, it wasn't a big deal if you got away with it and if you managed to get what you wanted.

But now that they had become Christian, they had come to know the Lord Jesus who said, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. And in having their hearts open to Jesus as the truth, they came to discover the value of truth as a lifestyle for them.

It must have been a fantastic change for them. No longer could they get away with telling lies to one another. Every time they were tempted to answer a question wrongly and to have to stop themselves, they ought to say, I can't do this anymore.

I can't deceive someone anymore. I cannot say something that is less than the truth. I've got to tell the truth even if it gets me into trouble or even if it disadvantages me in some way.

And that's where many of them, they suffered for being Christians because they were prepared to put God first. They weren't prepared to put their own interests first. That's the way they used to live.

[9 : 45] But now, they put God first. And they had to, some of them, had to suffer the consequences of doing that. Now, I know that there are questions that passages like this raise as to whether it is ever, ever right for a person to tell lies.

There are instances, for example, in the Old Testament where people told lies. You remember the midwives in Egypt in Exodus chapter 2 where Pharaoh was killing the babies, the Hebrew babies, and the Hebrew midwives came and they told lies, told something that was less than the truth in order to save the Hebrew babies.

And of course, there was Rahab in Jericho. Remember how the king had sent men to look for the spies and she had told them that they had gone one way when in actual fact they were hiding.

Was she right? Was she wrong? How can you justify what she said in order to save the men because clearly they were saved from the king and from his soldiers and so on.

I don't want to go into that this evening because these questions, I suppose, they're very interesting and they are very real. I'm not saying that they're at every instance and every example is the same but on the most vast majority of times, in fact, I'm not even sure if we'll ever, ever experience an occasion when it is right to tell a lie or when it can be justified.

[11 : 17] And you cannot go back into the Bible and say, ah, because they did it then it's okay for me sometimes to do it. No. Our lives must be dominated by the truth at all times because truth is what, after all, the Lord we serve is the God of truth.

He's the one who has told us the truth about himself. The Bible is all about the truth. It's about ourselves, what we really are, what we really need, the salvation that we really need in Jesus Christ.

God has told us the truth about ourselves. Now, he's already said this in verse 4 as a characteristic, as a mark of the church.

In verse 15, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ. In other words, in terms of our relationships with one another in the church, it has to be characterized by truth and honesty and openness.

And as Christians, we must be, what you see is what you get. Without pulling the wool over, anybody's trying to deceive in any way whatsoever, either by telling people what you think they want to hear, or in some other way.

[12 : 36] We have to be characterized as men and women who are open with the truth and are not afraid to tell the truth, and yet that truth must never be told in any other spirit apart from a spirit of love.

Speaking the truth in love. That's what determines our relationships with one another. Speaking the truth in love. And again, as we've seen before, it was one of these examples in which people were able to look in from the outside and say, these people are different.

They're not trying to get everything for themselves by deceiving other people, but they're open and honest and loving towards one another. They have an open relationship with one another.

Therefore, they are different. There's something unique about these people. So, here we are reminded of one other feature of the church that has to stand. And in a world today in which God has been forgotten, then don't let there be any mistake that truth is going to go out the window.

You see, when you lose sight of God to whom we're accountable, why tell the truth if you can get away with it? I remember hearing this on a radio program some years ago, in one of these BBC radio chat programs.

[13 : 50] I was listening to it in the morning and they were having this big discussion about is it ever right to tell the truth? And somebody said, why not? If you can get away, is it ever, sorry, is it ever right to tell a lie?

And somebody made the point, well, well, if you're going to get something out of it and if you're not going to be caught, then what's the problem? And that's the way a lot of people live. But that's never

the way that a Christian lives because truth is a guiding principle because we serve and we know the God of truth.

So that's the first thing that the apostle talks about, truth and falsehood. But then he turns to something else. He turns to our emotions in verse 26 and he says this, be angry and do not sin. Then he says, do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. That's the first thing. That's the next thing he says, the second area of life. He's talking about our emotions.

Now let's, let's stop for a few moments and talk about anger and for the most part when we experience anger it is sinful anger.

[15:00] Don't think anybody here tonight would deny that. You have to admit it to yourself that when you get angry and when I get angry and believe, believe me, what I'm saying to you I'm saying to myself.

It's sinful anger, isn't it? But anger in itself is not wrong. God, we read on several occasions in the Bible that God, the wrath of God or the anger of God was kindled.

So God, if God gets angry, under certain circumstances, then you can't say that anger in itself is sinful. It isn't.

However, when we get angry, more often than not, we get angry, A, at the wrong things and B, our anger or our expression of anger is a sinful expression.

And that is what the apostle is aiming at in these verses. He's saying, if the circumstances warrant you getting angry, then by all means get angry.

[16:05] But make sure that in your anger you do not sin. There were times when the Lord Jesus got angry. Remember, of course, the occasion when he entered the temple and we saw the people buying and selling and the temple, which was a place of prayer, a place of worship, had been turned into a marketplace where people were just trying to make a profit at the expense of other people, where they were taking advantage of other people.

And Jesus got angry. He was right to get angry because they had transformed the house of God into a marketplace and no longer was the glory of God evident in the place.

It was just a place to make a profit. And he overturned the tables and he drove out the animals that were being bought and sold. So, if he was able to get angry, then there is such a thing as righteous anger.

So, the first thing we need to note from this verse is make sure if we are going to get angry that we get angry at the right things and there are things which God, we believe, is angry at.

We believe that God is angry at cruelty in the world, at murder in the world, when his law is fragrantly broken in the world.

[17:25] We get angry when we see injustice in the world, when we see oppression and abuse, where people suffer at the hands of others, cruel people who persecute others.

these are areas which we believe that the Lord is angry at and that's only a small example and so it's not surprising when we look at these things and when that feeling of outrage is aroused within us.

But the second thing is this, that when we do get angry, we have to manage it carefully because anger, if it is not managed carefully and if it lasts for any longer than a short time and that's why he's saying do not let the sun go down on your anger, it can destroy you.

I remember I had a friend once when I used to be in industry and he had this just after he married, he bought this car and he was driving down to Wales where he came from and his wife was driving the car and the car engine seized halfway down to Wales.

I remember him telling us what had happened was that she had been driving the car and he had been asleep and she hadn't looked at the temperature gauge and the temperature gauge had risen to the red and she hadn't noticed it and the car had driven on and on and on.

[18:55] It wasn't that the temperature gauge had gone into the red, it was that the car had stayed there and of course with the inevitable catastrophic result that eventually the engine seized up and it was ruined.

It had to be replaced. The car, the engine was destroyed because they had left the temperature gauge in the red and that's the way it works with anger as well.

If you leave it unchecked, it is something that can destroy you and do a great deal of damage to you as a person. It can consume you and what happens is you actually become a slave to whatever or

whoever you're angry at and you're actually giving yourself in, you're giving yourself over to whoever you think you're in control but in actual fact you're not in control at all.

You've lost that sense of self-control that has to take place within the life of a believer. A believer must control himself in every area and again, I'm talking to myself and I know my own vulnerability. I would never say anything to you without speaking to myself in the first instance. These times, and you can think I'm sure of times in your own life where under certain circumstances, however way you manifest your anger and there are various ways of manifesting anger.

[20 : 21] Some people are like a pan that's on a cooker and the hot plate is heating the pan and the pan is getting hotter and hotter and hotter. The water's getting hotter and hotter and hotter and if you look at it you don't even notice it's getting hotter and it's coming to the boil very slowly and then eventually it starts boiling.

Some people are like that where it's almost indecipherable, where it's almost unnoticeable where the pan comes to the boil. Other people are like, if you like, a tube of toothpaste where if you squeeze the tube of toothpaste and you go beyond a certain limit everything just explodes. Everyone has different ways of expressing their emotions. But what Paul is telling us here is this, is that make sure that it is managed.

Make sure that what we get angry at is the right thing and make sure that in your anger you do not sin. And all too often as I said before our anger is sinful anger which requires us to stop right away as soon as we detect.

I mentioned before about a thermometer which measures the heat of something. But there's another device called a thermostat. You've got them on your radiator.

[21 : 43] And the thermostat actually controls the radiator in your house so that when it senses that the temperature is going up it actually does something to turn the radiator down.

That's what we have to be like. We have to be in control of ourselves and we have to learn prayerfully to figure out when our emotions are building up and what kind of conditions and what kind of circumstances are likely to arouse these emotions.

And we're to stop and to control ourselves and we're to say I'm not going to give in to this. I am not. Even if I'm right and someone else is wrong if you're in a dispute with someone you have to do what Christ did.

There was nobody as abused in the whole history of mankind as the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He was abused. He was treated with unimaginable cruelty.

And if ever someone suffered unjustly it was Jesus. And yet when he suffered he did not retaliate. That's the way we are to be.

[22 : 56] We are to be Christ-like beings. We are to have the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. And that's no easy thing.

And he also tells us not to make to make sure that the sun doesn't go down on our anger. In other words make sure it doesn't last more than a day.

And that's a tremendously practical piece of biblical principle isn't it? There's no one here tonight that doesn't understand that if you're angry for any reason tonight make sure the sun doesn't go down on it.

Make sure it doesn't last until tomorrow morning. Whether it's you being angry with your wife or your husband or your brother or your sister or your son or your daughter or someone who's in the house. and we're talking all too often about personal relationships here and the way that these relationships all too often break down.

And when we become threatened our pride gets aroused and it becomes an unstoppable force and we refuse to see another way.

[24 : 05] And how often we fall into the trap of allowing ourselves to go through a prolonged period of bitterness and resentment and retaliation in order to prove our point and to get our own back on those who are our opponents.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Leave it to the Lord. Remember the Lord is ruling. Remember he sees and he knows.

And if you're suffering something if you think that you're hard done by you remember he's in control. You don't need to fight all your battles for yourself.

He can do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think. And isn't it true that all too often we react to difficult things by arousing our own emotions and by letting rip instead of leaving it to the

Lord and prayerfully bringing all our cares to the Lord and asking him to intervene and to do in us more than we can ask or even think.

That's his promise to each one of us. Now if you fast forward to verse 31 and to take in the words in verse 31 because they're appropriate.

[25 : 30] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Now these are all the words that are associated with verse 26.

Bitterness is where you harbor a resentment against particularly someone or something and it becomes obsessive to you. You can't think of anything else apart from whatever issue it is. Remember Saul in the Old Testament. He became jealous of David and he wouldn't let it go. And every day was what am I going to do about David.

And all his resources were focused on what he was going to do about David. David became his number one public enemy. In actual fact he wasn't an enemy at all. David wanted to support him. He wanted to serve Saul. And if he had acted correctly and if he had exercised self-control he could have used David tremendously. And instead of that he turned against him and he became bitter.

[26 : 30] And it's possible for us to become bitter about practically anything. It grows arms and legs and goes out of all proportion. And wrath and anger and clamor.

Now these are all words that describe various stages of this emotion. Wrath is where we pour out, where it becomes evident to all and sundering, where it becomes obvious.

And anger is where it simmers like the pan on the stove. Clamor is where sometimes other people get involved. And slander is where in order to justify ourselves, we start speaking about other people in a way which is untruthful, in a way which is going to damage them and bring them down. All of these things of course are when our emotions become out of control. Then the next area he talks about is verse 28. And of course I should have said in verse 27 to give no opportunity to the devil.

Well of course that goes along with what we've been saying about anger. That when we give in to our emotions we're allowing the devil to get a foothold in our lives and in the way in which we act and conduct ourselves.

[27 : 48] And that is a foothold he will use to destroy our witness and to damage our relationship with the Lord and to cause all kinds of grief and problem.

Now verse 28 is a different area altogether where he says this 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 everyone in need with anyone in need.

Now once again it's perhaps difficult for most of us to imagine growing up in a world where stealing is commonplace because we have all been taught from when we were very young that stealing is wrong and it's not difficult to see how wrong stealing is and how society cannot a stable and a civilized society simply cannot be founded on people who are out for themselves and who want to steal what belongs to their neighbor or their friend or whoever.

And so we know that they're set. But you imagine a society a world in which stealing is commonplace. it starts I guess when you're young starts by falling into temptation and by being tempted to take something because nobody's looking and you discover how easy it is to just take something that belongs to someone else and nobody knows anything about it.

They don't know you've done it and you've got whatever you were looking for and that's it. But one thing leads to another. As soon as you begin to go down that road is a very dangerous one because you're opening the door to a lifestyle of secrecy and darkness and dishonesty and guilt.

[29 : 30] And whilst I said before that for the most part we all recognize how wrong stealing is, I wonder if I'm talking to someone this evening.

nobody knows about it. Nobody's ever found out that you've got a secret. If you have then stop now and come to the Lord.

God is the answer to your secret. Because trying to satisfy your own greed by taking what doesn't belong to you is never going to work.

So you say well we're a bunch of free church people. Who is he talking to? I don't know. That's the whole point. I don't know who I'm talking to. But the Lord knows.

And he knows that we're all a bunch of sinners here tonight. And you're capable of anything at all. Just the same as I am capable of anything. There is nothing, believe me that I'm not capable of doing.

[30 : 49] I'm capable of lying. I'm capable of murder. I'm capable of all kinds of darkness and corruption and deceit. Anything at all. And we're all the same.

All I'm saying is that there could be someone here today who has given into it and it's become something of a habit and a lifestyle for you. Whatever it is, stop and come to the Lord.

Could it be this evening that God is opening up your heart to see the foolishness, not only the foolishness, but the futility and the emptiness of what you're doing.

It's never going to get you what you think it's going to get. Only the Lord can satisfy what you're really longing for in life. But in any case, there are people today just the same way as there were today for whom the lifestyle, their life, instead of going out to work in the morning, they're going out to see what they can get.

And for them, they had to stop. For them, the Christian life meant stopping what they were doing and putting their old life in the past. But that's what we all have to do, isn't it? Whether our old life was filled with dishonesty or deceit or impure thoughts or whatever it was, it has to go.

[32 : 04] Now, here's a point I want you to notice very, very carefully. Do you notice in this passage that when Paul is telling the people there that they must leave their old lifestyle, whether it's lying or whether it's anger or whether it's stealing or whatever it is, he doesn't just say leave it in the past, he says fill the void with something else.

So here, when he's talking about stealing, he's saying let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands. Have you ever wondered how can I successfully battle with temptation?

I'm not saying there's an easy answer to that, but here is one answer that I really believe you need to take note of just the same as I do. How can I, and everyone here from sometime, at some point in their lives, we battle with temptation, whatever that temptation is.

There are some times when temptation is particularly strong, other times when it's not so strong, but all of us here tonight, we know what it is to be tempted to do wrong things. Now, for a Christian, he's fighting as never before.

Before he was converted, he used to give in, that was his lifestyle, but now you're fighting as never before and you're asking yourself, if I'm a child of God, how come temptation has never been so strong?

[33 : 33] And I'm tempted to do stuff now as a Christian I was never tempted to do in the past. Maybe I'm not a Christian at all. That's not the case. As a Christian, your eyes have been opened to your full potential as a sinner.

And God is teaching you all through that to put away the things that he doesn't want to be part of your life and that must not characterize your life. And the way to do it is not just to put them away and then what?

It is to put them away and to fill the void with something else. So the person who stole, who would make a point of living his life seeing what he could get that belonged to someone else, must now turn and he must use his time and his energies and his opportunities for other things.

He must work. Now, if you take it a step back, what's behind stealing? What lies behind a life of theft? Well, it's this.

It is where you're aiming to get without working. It's where you have a life where you have a worldview that says, I'm going to get as much as I can out of life without doing anything from it.

[34 : 48] That's not God's way at all. God's way is to work for what we have in this life. but it's also to fill our lives with helping and encouraging and supporting and guiding and using our energies and our time and our talents for the good of other people, particularly by way of God's people in the church.

And so what the Lord is saying to us here, I believe, is whatever our lifestyle used to be, put it away, but fill your life with good things.

Fill your life with alternatives. Don't be idle. Don't have a void in your life. Make sure you ask yourself, now, how does God want me to fill my time?

How does he want me to use my time? Later on, we're going to see this in chapter 5. We're to redeem the time because the days are evil. Every hour is precious.

Every day is precious in the life of a Christian. temptation. And it's when, is it not the truth? That it's when we're idle that we're most vulnerable to temptation.

[36 : 01] That was the case with David, wasn't it? It was when he was idle. It was when he wasn't doing what he should have been doing, that he was having a rest in the palace and he looked down and he saw Bathsheba.

And one thing led to another, he called it up to his palace and there you know the answer, the rest is history. It was when he was idle. God prevent us and save us from idleness.

He wants us to be industrious. He wants us to be active, always about the master's business because when we are about the Lord's business, we won't have time for the kind of things that we can so easily slip into and the things that would so easily destroy us if they got the opportunity.

The time has gone. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray to be careful in all of these areas. We ask, Lord, that you will make us watchful and that you will make us prayerful because we cannot do any of these things and we cannot live the Christian life by ourselves.

We must be filled with the Holy Spirit and we must have a burning and a longing and an earnest love for you and a zeal for you in which we want to come away from everything that is dark and deceitful and sinful.

[37 : 25] We ask, Lord, that you will make us the kind of people that is described, that are described in your word. We ask that you will fill us with your spirit, forgive our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen.