

## Sunday Sermon January 10

### *Changing Clothes*

### **Ephesians 4:25-32**

All of us can remember mom's stern words, "You can't wear that. You will have to change your clothes." Now we boys were proud of our grass-stained, mud-caked clothes. Why, they were a badge of our masculinity, a proof of our toughness. There was little that we needed to change, and especially not our clothes. Well once again we are being told to change our clothes. But this time, it is *God who is telling us to put away, to strip off, to discard the filthy rags of our old sinful life and to put on the new spotless robes of our new life in Christ.* And so that we will get a clear idea of what Paul means, he gives us *five concrete examples.* Paul reaches into the nitty-gritty of our everyday lives to teach us how to obey the command to be holy as God is holy. Now as we study these examples, we will note three features that are common to all of them. Paul will tell us to stop doing something, to start doing something, and then give us the reason why.

#### **I. Put away falsehood and put on the truth.**

<sup>25</sup> *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

##### **1. Stop telling lies!**

We live in a society where lying has become commonplace. We see it every day in politics, in the news media, and often in our relationships at school, at work and even in our homes. Now when Paul refers to lying he is referring to more than simply telling direct falsehoods. You lie when you exaggerate or add to the truth. Cheating in school or on your income tax returns is a form of lying. Making a foolish promise that you know is impossible to keep is a form of lying. Betraying confidence when you promised that you would tell no one, flattery, and often the excuses we make are all forms of lying. A Christian should have no part in dishonesty or deceit of any kind. Now our reluctance to do this is often demonstrated in the fact that when somebody tells you to stop lying we come up with all sorts of situations in which it looks like lying

would be a good thing. For example, what you do when your wife asks you if you like her new sweater or dress?

### **2. Tell the truth!**

We are to be honest in every area of our life. We should never withhold information in order to deceive or mislead someone. But telling the truth does not require telling everything we know. It does not mean that we cannot keep a confidence. It does not mean that we blurt out all our ill feelings, express all our doubts or hatreds with those we dislike.

Sometimes we need to keep quiet about our wrong feelings and ask God to remove them. Bottom line, we are to speak the truth to everyone and in every situation and especially to other believers (They are the neighbors he is talking about.).

### **3. Why: for the unity and the harmony of the church!**

We know that our physical bodies cannot function properly or safely if each member does not correctly communicate to the others. If our brain suddenly starts giving false signals to our feet, we will begin to stumble. If it falsely reports being cold we could freeze to death. If the optic nerve sends false signals to the brain, a dangerous curve in the highway might appear straight and safe, and we would crash. So it is with the body of Christ. If its members are deceitful, they cannot effectively minister to each other or with each other. We must “speak the truth in love” so that we can trust each other and live in harmony with each other.

## **II. Put away unrighteous anger and put on righteous anger.**

<sup>26</sup> *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

<sup>27</sup> *and give no opportunity to the devil.*

### **1. Be angry at the right thing and for the right reason.**

There is such a thing as righteous indignation. Indeed we need to have more of it! We often tolerate or compromise with sin in a way in which God never would. It would do us well, to be intolerant of evil - to hate sin just as God hates it. We should hate the atrocities going on in our world – the beheading of children, the sex slave industry, etc. We should deplore the legalization of numerous ungodly behaviors. BUT, at the same time we must be on our guard and act as sensors of our own anger.

### **2. Don't nurse your anger!**

Never go to bed angry is a good rule. Why? Because our anger can quickly degenerate into resentment, bitterness or accelerate into rage.

**3. Why: the devil will exploit the situation to bring division and disharmony into the church.**

There is nothing the devil loves more than a malcontent, an angry person disturbing the church. He loves to lurk around an angry person hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage (at the board meeting, the outreach event, the meetings in the parking lot, etc.).

**III. Put away stealing and start doing honest work.**

<sup>28</sup> *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.*

**1. Stop stealing!**

The prohibition of stealing has a wide application. You steal from your employer when you only work hard for six hours and fool around for the other two. Shoplifting, padding expense accounts, failing to report income to the IRS, taking some of your dad's money off the dresser, reneging on a debt, not paying fair wages, or pocketing what a clerk overpays in change are all stealing. I will never forget finding a \$100 bill on the produce counter at Walmart beside the cabbage. Upon finding it, my mind began to think of all of the ways that I could put it to good use at home. Then I thought maybe I should take it to the information desk. But perhaps I should give it to the Salvation Army when I went through the door. I knew that the right thing would be to return it to the store and so I did. To have kept it would have been a form of stealing. By the way, you should have seen the astonishment on their faces.

**2. Start working!**

All Christians who are capable of working are required to do so. In another of Paul's letters he writes that "if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all." God asks that all of us earn an honest living. Instead of sponging on the community, as thieves do, we should contribute to it.

**3. Why: so that you can share in meeting the needs of the church.**

It is interesting that Paul gives the reason of sharing with those in need in the community or church. In other words, from the fruits of your labor, you can contribute to those who cannot work or are in desperate need in the fellowship of God's people as well as in the world around you. Bottom line, we work to provide for the needs (not necessarily the greed) of our household and then to share – to give our money away.

#### **IV. Put away corrupt speech and put on wholesome speech.**

<sup>29</sup> *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.* <sup>30</sup> *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

##### **1. Stop your “potty mouth!”**

Corrupt or foul language should be as repulsive to us as a rotten apple or a spoiled piece of meat. Off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, vulgarity, double entendre should never cross our lips.

##### **2. Start using your mouth for good.**

We should replace harmful and inappropriate speech with wholesome talk that is uplifting, helpful, constructive, encouraging, instructing, and always is fitting for the particular situation we are in - so that it constructively contributes to everyone. Further, our speech should be gracious and kind. Raw truth is seldom appropriate and is often destructive. How often have you heard someone say after making a very offensive or degrading remark, “but it’s the truth!” Stop that, we are told! By the way, I have often heard people say that we shouldn’t complement someone or we will give them a big head. It is time to stop worrying about the size of other people’s heads. It is our job to complement and encourage. We need not worry whether they become prideful about it.

##### **3. Why: it grieves the Holy Spirit!**

Wrongful speech brings sorrow or pain to the Holy Spirit. Since he is holy, he is grieved by impure communication. Since the Holy Spirit is all about unifying the body, he is grieved by the disunity that our tongues can bring to it. Because he is a Spirit of truth, he is upset by all our misuse of speech including teaching that which is untrue.

#### **V. Put away unpleasant attitudes for pleasant attitudes.**

. <sup>31</sup> *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* <sup>32</sup> *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

### **1. Stop “with the attitude!”**

Paul lists a number of wrongful attitudes or dispositions. Bitterness is a smoldering resentment, a brooding grudge. Wrath refers to full-blown anger – to be in a rage. By anger he means a deep, bottled up and internalized intense feeling. By clamor he means shouting or a public outburst. Slander refers to words that hurt another person and defame their character. Malice is congealed hatred, ill will, and even wishing or plotting evil against people. These attitudes must be repented of.

### **2. Start with the gratitude.**

In the place of these unpleasant attitudes we should have a sweet and gentle disposition. There should be a compassionate tender feeling in the very core of our being toward others. And above all, we should have an attitude of unconditional forgiveness.

### **3. Why: God has forgiven you.**

When we begin to grasp the depth and extravagance of God’s grace, it will be easy for us to forgive others. After all, what if you listed all of the things that you have done against God this year. Wouldn’t you find it amazing that he has forgiven you of each and every one of them? Christ has forgiven us of every sin past, present and future. And we certainly didn’t deserve it! So it should be easy to forgive others also.

### **Conclusion:**

This morning all of us need to change our clothes in some way. In our standing before God, we are all as believers absolutely holy. Christ has forgiven each and every sin that we will ever commit. That is judicial forgiveness. But in our day to day living we need parental forgiveness because our fellowship with God is sometimes broken by daily sins. As you look at the “dirty rags” that you are to discard, perhaps you need to spend some time alone with God today and confess that sin. Indeed, take the time each week to review the list of things that we are to put off as you come to God in prayer. You also have the joy of looking at the things that we need to put on, the “robes of royalty,” and the joy of receiving God’s help in doing so. A careful attention to this passage will

dramatically change your life forever. And it will do so in ways that will bring you stronger relationships, deeper joy, and a serene peace that will amaze your mind. It is time to change our clothes.