

**Pathway of Maturity: How we change – Part 2**  
Ephesians 4:25-30

*...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness...*

**Introduction:** *Can people really change? If they can, how do they?* These may seem like simple questions, but the implications are immense. If we are simply a group of people predisposed to certain realities (addiction, gender dysphoria or sexual attraction), then life is about finding my true self and discovering happiness only when that is achieved. This idea is being pedaled and believed in our culture today and it is taking many unsuspecting but well meaning people captive. *"If I have these urges, desires, and attractions, then to deny self of these things leaves me unhappy, so the best thing to do is by my authentic self and act out on these things."* These statements or ones like them characterize the type of advice people receive from therapists and counselors who try to map out a pathway to happiness. This pathway is always focused on SELF, on individual thought, and places personal fulfillment over anything else, including responsibility, commitment, and sacrifice. The problem is that a self driven life CANNOT produce long term happiness, because anytime we rebel against God and His plan, we are at odds with Him, under His judgment and wrath, spiraling down a path of being given over to our sin leading to pervasive depravity and eventual insanity (see Romans 1:28-32).

The fact that people can change is at the very core of the gospel and is one of the most glorious realities of the universe! The gospel brings about **transformation**, a change at the core of our nature, and replaces rebellion with friendship, despair with hope, meaninglessness with purpose, lust with love, and a pursuit of tepid temporal happiness that can never truly satisfy with living water that satisfies into eternity. We are given new **desires, direction, and object of worship that accompanies a new heart and mind**. The gospel ultimately does what no medication or therapy can offer: *changes us from the inside out*.

Look no further than the life of Paul, the author of the letter of Ephesians that we've been studying, for a dazzling example of transformation. Paul was not only a persecutor of God's church, but he was entrenched in a lifestyle that was as far away from Christ as one could get. Some rebellion against God glories in self-indulgence (i.e. sexual immorality, drunkenness, etc.), some shows itself in self-righteousness, setting up self above God. Paul believed he was **right and righteous, better than others intellectually, and more moral than everyone** (see Philippians 3:3-6). He was confident, self-justified, and happy to kill those opposed to his religious convictions. He was moving AWAY from Christ when Jesus saved him, and Paul was not changed in small degrees while leaving nagging desires. He was **transformed completely, moving from persecutor to missionary, from enemy to champion, from counting his own righteousness to counting it all as rubbish compared to knowing Christ** (Phil. 3:8). There was no category of salvation that Paul would understand and teach that said one can be saved but stay... "I'm saved, but stay in my sin, lifestyle, or addiction". This doesn't mean there will not be struggle. In fact, it means there WILL be a struggle! Transformation in the gospel means we enter into a battle against our flesh and our pursuit of Christ

Last week we ended by looking at a **three step process** in our constant pursuit of God in Christ, becoming more and more like Him in holiness and true righteousness. We put off the **old self**, including actions, habits and desires, **renew our mind in the truth**, and put on **the new self**, which has been transformed in the gospel, with a new heart. This is a process for EVERY believer, is at the heart of discipleship in Christ, and applies to us daily. Our old self is DEAD, but still strapped to our body, so we must not let it rule in our lives. This morning we are going to look at some **practical ways this process**

**plays out**, We will note 3 main patterns that are visible in each example: **1)** Each is a visible illustration of what **true repentance** looks like: identifying the sinful reality, putting it off, thinking rightly, and replacing it with the opposite action. **2)** Each of these practices is **RELATIONAL** at their core, and affect both God and others in their actions. A quick overview shows areas like lying/truth, anger, stealing, caustic talk, bitterness, forgiveness, love, and sexual immorality. Each has an implication to both sides of the relationship. **3)** These each have implications to unity in the church, and thus in the home. We will see how dealing with each area allows us to keep short accounts, to build up, and walk in love. We will start with the first 4 today and cover the rest at the end of the summer (that's called a tease).

#### Dealing with Lying Lips (v. 25)

*Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another*

**Process** – The first area that Paul addressed was the issue of **lying or speaking falsehood**. On a scale of severity, this one would not typically ping at the top of the chart, but that has more to do with our culture than the implications of lying itself. God is a God of light, and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), so lying is the antithesis of God's character and will. Satan is the father of lies, so lying follows his pathway. *"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. **When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies**"* (John 8:44). In fact, whenever someone is given over to their sin, it's a result of "exchanging the truth about God for a lie and worshiping the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). Lying comes out of trying to deceive others (1 John 1:6 – "I'm saved but walk in darkness"), deceiving ourselves (1 John 1:8 – "I don't sin") or call God a liar (1 John 1:10 – "I have not sinned, making Him a liar)

Putting away falsehood and lying, then, has more to do than just telling a lie, although it certainly means that as well. Falsehood includes any kind of deception, "half-truth", exaggeration, and sometimes not speaking at all. When Adam was confronted by God in the Garden as to his present condition ("Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?"), instead of simply coming clean, he pushed his wife to the forefront and blamed her. Since then, lying and deception have become so commonplace that we almost accept the reality without much question. When statistics are used, testimony given, or advertisements in general, we know that what is being pedaled is not all genuine or real, but is close enough to be passable. **Because lying and falsehood are so prevalent, speaking the truth is so distinctive.**

Now, notice two prominent realities of dealing with falsehood and lying. **1) Lying and falsehood stops when the truth is spoken, not when you stop talking!** (This is big) – Out of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34; 15:18), which means that our words reveal and betray our heart. To truly turn from lying and falsehood means we desire to be truthful in all ways and areas, primarily in our words. Truthfulness comes out of a redeemed heart that recognizes that God knows all things and we cannot deceive Him, although we think He's puny sometimes, thinking we can pull one over on Him! **2) Truthfulness is essential to healthy relationships, primarily with fellow believers** – One of the easiest ways to break a relationship is to break trust. As parents we tell our kids that we can deal with anything that they've done or are dealing with, but lying makes everything exponentially more difficult. We should be truthful with all, but being "members one of another" points to relationships within the church. So the goal of a transformed life is to be truthful from our heart outward, willing to speak what is real, not giving half-truths, and not concealing what is really going on.

**Implications** – The sin of falsehood is pervasive, but we typically don't think of it in these terms, since we keep it in the category of "outright lying". But we can easily manipulate people with giving partial information, by giving the silent treatment, or puffing ourselves up through exaggeration. Speaking the truth with our neighbor means that in our marriages and discipleship friendships we are willing to answer hard questions, seek to explain what is going on in our minds/hearts, and open up those areas of life that we lock away, hoping people won't know about. I talked with a couple of pastor friends a few weeks ago and they were commenting on how many things in the church and marriage are left unsaid, which creates disunity, lack of intimacy, and distrust. So speaking the truth, in love, with our neighbor, means we seek to be truthful in all things with each other, putting off falsehood regularly.

### **Dealing with Angry Hearts (26-27)**

*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity for the devil.*

**Process** – This next issue of dealing with anger is framed a little differently than the pattern of the others, and has a few more questions attached to it, but is equally important to understand. **Anger** is a sin that is called out often in Scripture (Col. 3:8, 2 Cor. 12:20) because it is always directed toward God in some form of dissatisfaction. As far back as **Genesis 4** anger ruled in mankind's hearts, as Cain allowed anger to rule over him. God had regard for Abel's sacrifice, which filled Cain with jealousy and anger, which overflowed into murder. Anger never stays alone, but is a result of unchecked emotions (bitterness, frustration, jealousy) that boil over to other sins (slander, murder, hatred). Anger is volcanic, as it can rumble below the surface for considerable time, only to erupt in a fury when the pressure reaches a fever pitch. In fact, some of the most angry people I've ever known were the most soft spoken, temperate, and seemingly self-controlled. But anger was under the surface and found the cracks to come out when least expected.

So it's a bit odd that Paul says to "be angry" and yet do not sin. What does he mean? It is true that God can be angry over sin and Jesus showed righteous anger (1 Kings 11:9; Ps. 79:5; Jer. 3:12), though He is slow to do so, this is dealing with anger stirred within relationships (anybody ever been angry with a loved one/spouse?). The answer is in the two different words Paul uses for "anger" here. The first is the anger that is stirred up by something that happens, and occurs in our mind and heart. Paul refers to Psalm 4:4 here, and the counsel in both is to not let the initial anger to ignite and overflow into an anger of action, whether violence, words, or exasperation. It's the recognition that the initial response is not sinful, but the acting out of it would be. That is why the process of dealing with anger is so important.

Timing is everything. Once anger is recognized, the need for reconciling and restoration is immediately needed. Anger broods and festers. So the counsel is to deal with it relentlessly and quickly – not letting the sun go down on anger, proverbially meaning to deal with it the same day (not just by sundown). This means having an honest, truthful, painful, forgiving, and restoring conversation with the one where the anger originates. **Why is this so imperative? Because unchecked, festering anger gives the devil a foothold in the relationship!** Satan cannot cause us to be angry, but he surely maximizes the time we are. This is a wedge that kills marriages. It's described as "drifting apart", not "feeling the way I used to feel", or "falling out of love", when there are truly unresolved anger issues. There are two main footholds that Satan uses to destroy marriages: unchecked anger and uncommitted and neglected sexual intimacy (1 Cor. 7:5). He pounces on these things to strengthen lies (they'll never change, you are justified, it's their fault, there is someone else out there who'll appreciate you) and pull apart covenant relationships.

**Implications** – Love demands action, and one of the most loving things to do in life is to confess anger toward another. Reconciling with a brother/sister/spouse is primary even before giving gifts to the Lord (Matt. 5:23-24). Anger will hurt others, but just like bitterness, it ultimately kills us (Heb. 12:15). This means that we need to make **convictional decisions to commit to the process**. Erin and I had this verse as a high value in our first year of marriage, and it cost us sleep as we would sit around the dinner table late into the night to work out the frustration between us, sometimes committing to shelve the conversation to the next day so we could be clear headed. But this helped set a pattern of dealing with conflict and potential anger produced. This has been far from a perfect process, as I will slip into silent treatment mode from time to time, but it culminates in honest conversation, mutual confession of sin and asking of forgiveness, and moving forward in wholeness and joy. So let me leave this section with a few questions: Are you keeping short accounts in relationships? Are you harboring anger toward another? Are you willing to deal with it before the Lord and that person? This is what putting off, renewal, and putting on looks like.

### Dealing with Thieving Hands (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.*

**Process** – Stealing something from someone else or taking something that is not yours is always seen and known as wrong. It was codified in the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, yet most cultures have found ways to justify the desire to steal. In certain countries we've traveled to as a church, if you leave a valuable item in the open and unattended even for a moment, the justification to take it is "you must not need it or care about it", thus I can take it. Poverty can be a great motivation to steal (Prov. 30:9), though it is not justified. Most times, however, stealing has to do with a heart attitude toward labor and earning for oneself, which comes down to a trust in the Lord to provide (Matt 6:30-33). In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, Paul addresses and confronts the sin of idleness in the church, where able bodied people were not working and earning a living and thus became a burden to the church, since others had to pick up the provision. They were busybodies, rather than busy at work, and the counsel was that if they were not willing to work, they should not eat either (3:10). Why? Because all things belong to the Lord, even our time, resources, and treasure, and they all must be stewarded. Today, stealing is experienced in work places every day, stealing time, taking payment for jobs left undone, and idleness posing as busyness. We've been plagued with stealing from the government in shorting taxes, or stealing from the Lord by a refusal to give. The heart behind stealing is selfish pride, which deems all resources to please ourselves and dictate the terms, rather than seeing all things belonging to God and helping others.

What is the antidote of "putting on"? This is not only clear but beautiful. **When is a thief no longer a thief? Not when he stops stealing, but WHEN he starts working hard to be able to give to those who are truly in need!** This is a picture of full repentance. The word "labor" here means to "work to the point of exhaustion, laboring honestly, "not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bond servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6). The heart of thievery is "what can I get away with" and "what is the path of least resistance". The heart that belongs to Christ seeks to work as an expression of faith and worship, and giving away as a greater joy than hoarding for oneself.

**Implications** – Paul set an example to follow in his life and ministry: he labored and toiled night and day, never took bread without paying for it (though he could have), to show the ethic and heart behind gospel work (2 Thess. 3:7-9). Because God is the ultimate provider, He will produce the outcome for us, taking care of our daily needs, above and beyond measure. But he calls us to work hard. It is an ethic that has waned in our culture, as often money comes from family or government, demotivating people

to actually work hard. Lack of hard work is stealing. We do not work hard simply to earn more money, but work hard to please the Lord, and as He cares for us, we seek to give away to those who do not have the opportunity to work. *Are you known as a hard worker in your home? In your job? Why or why not?*

### **Dealing with a Potty Mouth (29-30)**

*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.*

**Process** – Our words are powerful. In fact, James tells us that there is nothing more powerful or destructive than our tongue, since it is untamable and a restless evil (James 3:8). Our words can bring the most powerful and confident to their knees and encourage the most lowly to heights of action. The word for “corrupting” talk is something that is “rotten, foul, or putrid”. These are words that are not only unwholesome (“bad” words) but unprofitable. They are words that cause things to rot, like the rotten peach at the bottom of the box of fruit, and begins to fester and spoil the whole bunch. Our words become worthless when we are not attentive and proactive with watching what we say, since we default to things that are unprofitable. This is why David connected his mouth and heart in a prayer for both: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD my rock and my redeemer”* (Psalm. 19:14).

So to “put on” words proper words, we must be purposeful and intentional with what we say, particularly to those that we love in our home and church. We seek to build up, to encourage, to admonish, and exhort. We seek to use words that fit the occasion, meaning that we don’t encourage when exhortation is needed or admonish when someone simply needs lifting up. It also means that we are truthful in our encouragement, saying things that are true and not words intended to flatter or artificially inflate. We must see our words as a valuable commodity and resource, ones that when harnessed and focused can instill confidence in those we care about. We’re reminded that Proverbs 10:19 cautions, *“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent”* (Prov. 10:19). So a new heart in Jesus desires to build up and use our words economically. What is at stake? Not only the building up of those we love, but the pleasing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells each believer, guides in the truth, points us to Christ, and convicts of sin. When we tear down others who are also in dwelt believers, we **grieve or cause sadness** to Him. We are reminded that this does not take away our salvation, so it is not FEAR mongering that keeps us in line. On the contrary, because we are sealed, we can have confidence and assurance of our salvation, which frees us to please the Holy Spirit of God.

**Implications** - Our words matter. They can be used to build up, encourage, motivate and help. I’ve told Erin that there is no one else that can motivate me like she can when she says or writes something encouraging. It adds to a confidence that comes from the Lord but is tangible with someone else. But our words can absolutely tear down and cut deeper than any weapon. Even our unintended words or those that we hold back can have adverse effects on our spouse, kids, and friends. Paul was an encourager to the churches, even if he had to correct. Jesus told His disciples that He loved them and desired to be with them. John told the churches of areas they were doing well. No one needs false or artificial sunshine shone at them, but all of us need encouragement. *Do you actively use your words to build others up? Have you been intentional to be encouraging to those that you love? Where have you used your words or held back your words that have tore down others?*

### **Concluding Thoughts:**

The gospel transforms. None of these areas, from our words, to our anger, to our work can be changed truly without the gospel. Trying to make these changes without the work of Christ or faith in God is simply moralism and works based effort, which leaves us in futility. But because Christ has died in our place, given us His righteousness, and made us new, we are CHANGED, so we work through these changes throughout our life. This is our active pursuit, which not only pleases the Lord but produces greater joy and unity in our life and the life of our families and church. Our responsibility in light of transformation is to work, to put off, to be renewed, and put on consistently.