

Ephesians 4:25-29

Four examples of Christian Behaviour

Introduction

There was once a preacher, ministering with great eloquence. At one point he said something very striking, and the congregation spontaneously applauded, clapping their hands warmly. The preacher pulled them up with, “The truth is not to be applauded. It is to be applied.”

This is very much the Bible emphasis. Paul, having laid down the great principles of Christian conduct, now applies these in detail. Christians are new men, they have left the old way of life, and so must behave like new men. This affects tongues, emotions, and use of hands. They must not lie, can only be angry if it is righteous anger, must not steal, and must be careful about what they say.

It may surprise us that Paul finds it necessary to tell these Christians that lying and stealing are wrong, it is obvious to us. But we have been brought up under influences which are Christian in origin, in society where, for centuries, people have known these things are wrong. In the case of the original readers, they were brought up in society where lying, stealing, violence, coarseness were the everyday experience. They had been brought up in this atmosphere from childhood, and never gave it a second thought. Therefore Paul has to spell out to them that when they are new people in Christ, this is what is required. Very much as missionaries have to teach converts in Africa and Asia today – nothing can be taken for granted.

In the four examples given here, the same pattern occurs – negative prohibition, positive instruction, and then the reason is given.

Do not lie

Put off falsehood, and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians 4:25). Lying is a despicable and universal practice. Even in the highest circles, there is lying with kid gloves. Down the social scale, we find lying with rough hands. Done in different ways, but it is done everywhere. It is a sin which multiplies itself, it snowballs, one lie has to be followed by another to cover the first, and life becomes a complex tissue of lies. They are the cause of much suffering, unhappiness, misery, lack of trust, suspicion. It is a characteristic of the world – superficial friendliness, people whose life is mere pretence, play acting, a sham. However, in private you find out what they are really like.

The very first sin was the result of a lie (Genesis 3:1,4). Liar and father of all lies in the form of a serpent said to Eve “Did God say....? ... You will surely not die.” A lie about God and His command.

We can lie by certain words we say, we can lie by saying nothing and failing to correct a false statement, we can lie by a look, or by exaggeration to show how

important we are before others. Speech is one of the ways men are distinguished from the animals. We express our personality through speech. And self and self-centredness and self-importance uses speech to draw attention to self, to gain advantage, to impress and to further one's own ends.

But the new man in Christ is concerned with the truth. **He is the rock, his works are perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he** (Deuteronomy 32:4). **God who does not lie** (Titus 1:2). His Son said, **I am the way and the truth** (John 14:6). The all seeing and all knowing God requires truth **Surely you desire truth in the inner parts** (Psalm 51:6). Truth is not just on the surface, to make a good impression, but within also. Nothing bent, twisted or deceitful in character. **God wants all men to come to a knowledge of the truth** (1 Timothy 2:4). Cannot have fellowship with the God of truth unless we live and speak the truth. The reason is not because a Christian is a gentleman and cannot be a cad, but because the Christian must be a man of his word.

Here is the Christian's reason for his honesty. We are members one of another. Lying spoils fellowship, destroys openness and truth, creates suspicion. Loving our neighbour is even more true when applied to fellow Christians. Lying is a blow against the Body of Christ. A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ. The first sin to spoil the early church was the lie of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3,4). They did it because Satan had filled their hearts. His lying led to the punishment of being struck dead. So the early church realized, and all Christian people in all places to the end of time realize the terrible character of this particular sin.

People of God are to be genuine, truthful, reliable, dependable, honest. What a witness to a crooked dishonest world. In dishonest societies, Christians are sought out for help because, unlike everyone else, they are honest.

Do not lose your temper

In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:26-27). Do not lose your temper. Ensure your anger is righteous. Don't give opportunity to the Devil.

It is frequently believed that people should never be angry, according to the Bible. But this overlooks that there are occasions when we should be angry, when it is wrong not to be angry, and other occasions when anger is wrong. God is an angry God. **God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient** (Ephesians 5:6). The whole concept of judgement in Old and New Testaments is bound up with God's wrath. An important aspect of the Cross is "propitiation" – God's wrath is directed at us, but in grace He bore it in Christ. Jesus looked on His enemies with anger because they did not want Him to heal on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:5). Jesus displayed anger with the money-changers in the Temple (John 2:15). Revelation speaks of the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16).

The anger that God demonstrates is anger at sin. The trouble is we are no longer angry and indignant about sin. We shrug our shoulders and explain it away. Perversions and

injustices and suffering to other people, we take as normal, inevitable, and we are no longer upset.

Anger is a natural instinct, but although it is right, it can easily become misused. We are on a knife-edge. The point is that we should not be bad-tempered, not out of control, not filled with hatred or vengeance, not vindictive, or angry because of pride or spite. There should always be willingness to forgive and be reconciled. Hate sin, but not the sinner. Remember Christ hated sin, but He loved us.

Never let anger be uncontrolled, or else things can be said in the heat of the moment which will leave permanent scars, even after forgiveness. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Do not nurse anger. Never go to bed angry. Live a day at a time, even with anger. Never go to sleep without settling your moral accounts. Anger is important, and when under control, it is a righteous thing. But beware lest the Devil takes advantage and we are pushed over the edge.

One woman explained her bad temper – “I explode, and then it is all over”. Yes, just like a shotgun – but look at the damage that is left behind.

Do not let the Devil exploit righteous anger and provoke us into hatred or breach of fellowship. We sin in our anger when the root is self, and not anger for Christ’s sake or righteousness’ sake.

Do not steal

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need (Ephesians 4:28). Here Paul reiterates the eighth commandment to the Ephesians. Stealing in their society was a matter of habit, custom and practice. They would have been steeped in it and never thought there was anything wrong with it. The only thing which was wrong was to be caught and found out.

The fact that stealing is wrong is news to an increasing number of people in our society – some regard it as justifiable redistribution of wealth. And many people who know stealing is wrong have very limited views about how far this commandment can be applied. Never occurs to many that it includes dishonest filling in of Income Tax forms, smuggling through customs, extended coffee or lunch breaks, using property and possessions of employers, paying low wages, employees giving poor quality workmanship, failing to return borrowed property. Even for a Christian to witness in his employer’s time is stealing. Likewise, a preacher preaching another man’s sermon without confessing it, or a preacher failing to be generous and systematic givers.

At the back of it all is self. Getting possessions the easy way without work, gaining some pleasure or pride in dishonesty, despising hard work and regarding people who work hard as fools, lacking respect for others and their possessions. The Bible stresses the dignity of work and the importance of honest toil. Nothing in common with modern philosophy which despises work as a nuisance, and makes pleasure and enjoyment the supreme aim. The popular idea of gaining the maximum in return for the minimum has no sympathy from the Bible. To work wholeheartedly and conscientiously is the Bible’s emphasis. **If a man will not work, he will not eat.**

Such people.. urge to settle down and earn the bread they eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). And one of the effects is that the person will have the ability and wherewithal to give to those in need. **Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus** (Philippians 2:4-5).

Paul exemplified this attitude to hard work. Every Jewish Rabbi was taught a trade like everyone else. “If you do not teach your son a trade, you teach him to be a thief”. Paul’s trade was tent making, which he practiced while he was establishing churches. And when the churches were established, although he knew he had the right to be supported by them, he did not insist on it if they were in difficulties (1 Thessalonians 2:9). **You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions... In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself ‘It is more blessed to give than receive’”** (Acts 20:34-35).

Consider the many biblical examples of God’s call to men who were busy at work – Moses, whilst he was being a shepherd, also David while a shepherd, Gideon while he was threshing wheat, four disciples while they were fishing, Christ Himself was a carpenter.

The use of speech

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29). Do not use your mouth for evil, but for good. Therefore our speech is used to minister grace to heaven. Paul returns to the use of the tongue again. The background of the Ephesian readers – at feasts, parties and social gatherings, foul conversation, phrases and catch phrases were just the norm. So similar to today’s society. People are ever bolder, more daring, more coarse in their speech. Evil talk that is dishonest, unkind, abusive, or vulgar has no place in the Christian’s mouth.

Speech is a wonderful gift. It distinguishes us from all other animal creation. Only men speak. But when off guard, we give ourselves away. The unbeliever displays lack of control, does not think about what he says, uses speech to express his own self-importance, to show off, to draw attention to self, to attract praise, to try to outdo others. He jokes about delicate matters and laughs at sin. His speech often has corrupting effect, as he raises and inflames the passions of others.

The Christian has to be careful, even if words are in the mind, not to let them out. Speech will reveal the state of the heart. **Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken** (Matthew 12:34,36). The new man in Christ will speak in a new way. **Make a tree good, and its fruit will be good** (Matthew 12:33). The Christian does not use conversation to draw attention to himself but to please God and to help others. He will not talk for the sake of it. He will not chatter and gossip for the sake of it. His speech will be good, clear, edifying, helpful, sensitive and suitable for the occasion. How tactless some Christians can be when they feel they must always be preaching sermons. **Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned**

with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6). Prophecy about the Lord in Isaiah **The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary** (Isaiah 50:4). Many are weary of sin, life, and the demands of life, and they bear heavy burdens, disappointments, anxieties, let downs. Forget selves, aim to speak a word in season, a word of encouragement and cheer and help.

Conclusion

Being a new man in Christ will affect speech, emotion, attitude to work and attitude to others. The difference should be visible. We have not arrived yet. Need to yield whole selves to God – tongue, emotions, talents and gifts.