

# EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

Today's passage in Ephesians is challenging. We're about to discuss some things that are hard for most of us to handle: how we speak to one another, how we deal with our anger, bitterness, forgiveness, etc. Most of all, we'll discuss what these matters have to do with Paul's warning not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:25-32

## Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?
2. In verse 25, Paul encourages us to speak truthfully with one another. How does honesty help us shape healthy relationships within the church and our small groups? How does vulnerability fit into this conversation regarding honesty and falsehood?

It shouldn't surprise us to see Paul calling us to be truthful with one another. After all, lying to one another doesn't build trust, which doesn't build unity.

One of the ways we're most tempted to lie to one another is by hiding behind our false selves. The "false self" is the self you're most tempted to project. It's the "together" self that you want others to see. When we aim to keep our true self (with all of its insecurities, hurts, fears, and needs) hidden from our brothers and sisters in Christ, we prevent our relationships from deepening, and we keep ourselves from experiencing the freedom of being known and loved by our church family.

3. Throughout the first few chapters of Ephesians, we've seen Paul emphasize maintaining unity in the church. What role does forgiveness play in our efforts to maintain this unity? Why can forgiveness be such a challenge?

It should be a foregone conclusion that we'll hurt one another at one point or another. Like any family, the church is filled with people who are far from perfect. We shouldn't be naive to think that the church will get along perfectly all the time – hence Paul commending us to "make every effort" to maintain unity. To forge the kind of relationships we're called to have with one another in the church, we'll have to learn what it means to forgive the wounds of a friend. Holding on to unforgiveness is a self-made prison.

4. In verses 26-27, Paul gives us some instructions on dealing with anger. What does he tell us to do? What would it look like to apply these instructions (in our family, among church members, co-workers)? How does anger give a foothold to the devil? How have you seen this to be true firsthand?

Anger isn't neutral – the longer you carry it or allow it to linger – it grows, and when it grows, it destroys you from the inside out. In his Ephesian commentary, Tony Merida writes, “Paul is saying: Do not let it fester. Resolve it quickly. Even “good anger” can lead to problems like bitterness, so the time to be angry is short! The final qualification is, ‘Don’t go to bed with unresolved conflict, or else you will sleep with the Devil.’ Seek forgiveness and reconciliation quickly. Satan would love to use your anger as an opportunity to make you violent and divisive.”

5. In verse 28, Paul tells us to work honestly and show generosity to others. What is “honest” work? What is “dishonest” work? Why does Paul connect honest, hard work with generosity? What tendency could he have in mind?

Author Dorothy Sayers, while describing what the church should teach a carpenter about being a Christian, wrote, “What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use is all that if, in the very center of his life and occupation, he is insulting God with bad carpentry?”

Honest work certainly includes not stealing office supplies, but it goes a lot further than that. Honest work is done with integrity – it consists of the quality of our work, the impact of our work, and how we treat others in the workplace.

Paul connects honest hard work to generosity because our hearts tend to believe, “I’ve worked hard for this money – I’m going to use it for my good pleasure.” Let’s not forget what Jesus said in Luke 12:16-21, “ And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup> And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

6. If you followed Paul’s instruction in verse 29 to filter everything you say through the “good and helpful” filter, what percentage of your everyday language would change? How are we tempted to downplay or justify using “colorful” language (cynicism, sarcasm, innuendos, foul words)?

At every turn, we’re tempted to lower our standards when it comes to our speech. Whether it’s the latest comedy that’s off the charts funny but filled with foul language or sexual innuendos, or it’s jokes in the workplace or memes on social media. Perhaps you’ve seen someone wearing a tee shirt that says, “I’m Christian, but I cuss a little!” Sounds funny, right? But is it really? It’s certainly not biblical. Jesus clarified that we’d be held accountable for our speech (Matthew 12:36). After all, our words say

much more about us than we might think. We'd do well to remember what Jesus said in Matthew 15:11-20:

<sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" <sup>13</sup> He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." <sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." <sup>16</sup> And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

7. In verses 30-31, Paul warns against grieving the Holy Spirit and urges us to eliminate all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander. Why do we tend to adapt to the unhealthy emotional climate of the world around us? How do these unhealthy attitudes impact us spiritually? How can we become the kind of people who are characterized by the qualities of verse 32?

In his book, *Live No Lies*, John Mark Comer writes, "Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature.... To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other."

Comer also writes, "The goal of reading Scripture is not information but spiritual formation. To take on the 'mind of Christ.' To actually think like Jesus thinks. To fill your mind with the thoughts of God so regularly and deeply that it literally rewires your brain, and from there, your whole person."

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?