

25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

In the first part of chapter 4, Paul emphasizes the unity of the body of Messiah, the *ekklesia*. Being in union with Yeshua in His death and resurrection, all within the local assembly of believers have an essential unity with each other. According to v. 16, within this unity we are enabled to mature in our faith and our walk with the Lord through that which “every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part” which therefore brings about “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (v. 16).

In the next section of our chapter (vv. 17–24), the Apostle admonishes us with the utter necessity of subduing the sinful nature (“the old self”) and living in accordance with “the new self,” through the power of the Spirit Who has opened our hearts to know the truth and to put it into practice as modeled and taught by Yeshua Himself (vv. 20–21). While a life ruled by sin is characterized by “being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (v. 22), the believer, having been renewed in the spirit of his mind, is to live out the “new self... which has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (v. 24)

Verse 25 begins with “Therefore” (Διὸ, *dio*) which signals that he has come to a concluding exhortation in light of what he has established in the previous verses. In doing so, he speaks specifically about those kinds of sins which destroy unity and therefore undermine the ability of the believing assembly to serve each other as God intends, which therefore gravely diminishes the very purpose of the gathered body, that the head of the body, Yeshua, should be honored and glorified so that a watching world will see His greatness.

Paul gives a list of admonitions, combining a negative coupled with a positive, and likewise adding reasons as the basis for the admonition.

...*laying aside falsehood* – The first sin he lists is that of the tongue, and thus is foundational. “Laying aside falsehood” (ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος) could just as correctly be translated “putting away lying,” that is, not to allow lying to be part of your thought process which will inevitably result in speaking falsehood. If the unbelieving life is characterized by “deceit” (4:22), then lying was a common occurrence. We see Paul using the same terminology (τὸ ψεῦδος, *to pseudos*, “deceit, lying”) in Rom 1:25 to describe the essential aspect of idolatry:

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie (τῷ ψεύδει), and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 1:25)

As far as Paul is concerned, speaking falsehood is at the heart of all forms of deceit and hypocrisy, and that which fundamentally undermines true community in the body of Messiah. We see then that the unity of the body is founded upon truth, that is, the truth as given to us in the inspired word of God, the Scriptures.

The word translated “laying aside” (ἀποτίθημι, *apotithēmi*) is an aorist participle but in this context may well function as an imperative.¹ The point is that a life characterized by lying is contrary to the renewed life in Yeshua.

...SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR – Here Paul quotes from the Lxx of Zech 8:16.

Zech 8:16 MT	Zech 8:16 Lxx	Eph 4:25
דְּבַרְוּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ	λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν ἕκαστος πρὸς τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ	λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν ἕκαστος μετὰ τοῦ πλησίον αὐτοῦ

The Lxx is an accurate translation of the Hebrew text, and the only difference between Paul’s citation and that of the Lxx is the exchange of the preposition μετὰ (*meta*, “with”) for the Lxx’s πρὸς (*pros*, “to”). But “to speak with his neighbor” or “to speak to his neighbor” gives essentially the same meaning. It may be that Paul used the preposition “with” to emphasize association, that is, the bond that exists between believers since they find their essential union in the Messiah, Yeshua. Even as Zechariah prophesies the restoration of Israel to worship God in truth, so Paul uses this idyllic scene of restored Jerusalem and the shalom that prevails as a fitting picture of what should characterize the *ekklesia* of Yeshua now.

...for we are members of one another. The context makes it clear that speaking the truth to each other is an essential characteristic of a believer’s life and should therefore be that to which every child of God strives. The obvious reason is that those who are “in Messiah” have been reborn to a new life in Messiah and have thereby been joined together

1 So Merkle, *Ephesians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (B&H Pub., 2016), p. 147; Klein, *Ephesians*, p. 130. Cf. the parallel in Col 3:9.

eternally. This is Paul’s emphasis when he states the primary reason for speaking the truth to each other, and it is “for (ὅτι, *hoti*, “because”) we are members of one another.” That is, we have a vital connection with and responsibility to our fellow believers within the believing community in which we fellowship. As Calvin comments regarding the union between believers in the believing assembly:

He [Paul] demands that every kind of communication between them shall be sincere; and enforces it by this consideration, for we are members one of another. That members should not agree among themselves, —that they should act in a deceitful manner towards each other, is prodigious wickedness.¹

26–27 BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Once again Paul references a line from the Tanach, Ps. 4:4

Ps 4:4[5] MT	Ps 4:4[5] Lxx	Eph 4:26
רָגַזוּ וְאַל-תִּתְּאוּ	ὀργίξεσθε καὶ μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε·	ὀργίξεσθε καὶ μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε·

The Lxx is an accurate translation of the Hebrew text, and Paul quotes the Lxx word-for-word.

In Psalm 4, David is affirming that “the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself” (v. 3[4]). Thus, in light of this clear and wonderful friendship and intimate family relationship with the God of Israel, the Psalmist gives himself the command “to be angry” but not to allow such righteous anger to give way to sinful thoughts or behavior. In the context of the Psalm, David is contemplating the fact that there are those over whom he rules as king who reproach him rather than giving him the honor due to a king. Likewise, those who despise his rule “love what is worthless and aim at deception.”

O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?
How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?
(Ps 4:2[3])

¹ Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 297.

This context may well have linked the Psalm in Paul’s mind to his own admonitions regarding those who are speaking falsehood and thus are causing disruption within the believing community.

There is much debate as to how Paul intends the two imperatives (commands) in our text to be understood. Some would interpret the first command, “Be angry,” as implying a conditionality or concessive idea: “Although you are angry...” or “If you are angry...”¹ and thus not an actual command “to be angry.”

Others have shown that both imperatives² are true commands so that the first command, “be angry” is describing true righteous indignation when as believers we act sinfully ourselves (in which case the anger is directed to oneself) or when we see others who profess to be believers are engaging in sinful behavior, and the anger results from seeing those who profess to believe acting in a way that degrades the character and holiness of the very One they confess to be their Lord and Savior.³ It seems quite clear that this view best fits the language as well as the context. Even as God Himself expresses anger and remains entirely righteous, so it is right for all who are born from above and have the indwelling Spirit of God to feel righteous anger when people blaspheme God, living in a way that dishonors Him, and who mock the very Son of God, Yeshua, Who gave Himself to redeem sinners. Yet the danger is that such anger, if not entirely submitted to God Himself and thus controlled by His Spirit, could morph into sinful hatred fanned into flames by the self centeredness of the flesh. Thus, in the next phrase, Paul gives wise teaching in setting controls in regard to “righteous indignation.”

...do not let the sun go down on your anger – Allowing anger to remain will likewise allow it to fester in that which is sinful, marked by hatred and despising others rather than resulting in sorrow and compassion. When confronted with the decadent ways of the world, we may rightly sense disgust and righteous anger, for the very glory of God is hidden by those who, created in His image, engage in that which the Creator

1 Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (B&H Pub., 2016), p. 148; Ernest Best. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians. International Critical Commentary* (T&T Clark, 1998), p. 449.

2 Both imperatives, ὀργίσεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε, are present imperatives.

3 For a thorough discussion on this issue, from a grammatical and syntax perspective, see Daniel Wallace, “Ὀργίσεσθε in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989), 353–72; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 619-21.

hates. But such righteous anger should quickly move to sorrow and even compassion, that by the mercies of God they too might come to know Him through the power of the Gospel.

There is no doubt a proper place for righteous indignation; but there is a subtle temptation to regard my anger as righteous indignation and other people's anger as sheer bad temper. Here it is suggested that anger can be prevented from degenerating into sin if a strict time limit is placed on it: "do not let the sun set on your anger."¹

Ultimately, righteous anger must be given over to God lest it become that which consumes one's heart and turns to self-serving anger and turns one's mind to contemplate methods of revenge. Paul speaks to this in Romans.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rom 12:19)

... and do not give the devil an opportunity. – The Greek could be more directly translated as: "and do not give a place to the devil" (*μηδὲ δίδοτε τόπον τῷ διαβόλῳ*), that is, "do not give any open door in your life by which the devil could enter." It is true that the Greek word here translated as "the devil" (*διάβολος, diabolos*) can also mean "the slanderer" or "one who engages in slander."² But in the Apostolic Scriptures, *diabolos* is found 37 times and the majority of these are clearly referencing Satan. Likewise, *diabolos* is found 20 times in the Lxx, 18 of which translate Hebrew *יָצָן, sāṭān*. It is clear that Paul is using the word to refer to the enemy, and this is confirmed by the concluding verses of our chapter in which he outlines the "armor of God" by which the enemy is defeated in the life of the child of God.

Anger that turns to bitterness can be a consuming factor, even in the life of believer. Paul warns us here not to allow bitterness to lodge in our hearts but rather to allow even righteous anger or indignation to be handed over to God, for He is the One Who is able to deal with those who may be acting as one's enemies. What is more, to allow bitterness and anger to lodge in one's heart and mind is to give an open door to the enemy who wants to disrupt and destroy. In the closing of this chapter Paul gives the antidote to allowing any opening to the enemy,

1 F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 360.

2 BDAG, "διάβολος," p. 226.

and that is to learn and practice the spiritual exercise of forgiveness. Not allowing even righteous anger to evolve into bitterness and hatred is to close the door to the enemy who seeks to enter.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. (1Pet 5:8–9)

28 – He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

In this next admonition, Paul follows the pattern of giving first a negative followed by a positive and then adding a motivating reason for this Messiah-honoring behavior. The one who was accustomed to thievery is now, as a believer, to put such sinful acts behind him and rather to work for honest wages, but not only to supply his own needs and the needs of his family if he has wife and children, but also that he can freely give to someone who is needy.

The Greek verb translated “he who steals,” κλέπτω (*kleptō*), may generally carry the sense in our context of “stealing secretly” rather than violent robbery.¹ It may be that Paul has in mind

the working poor whose income would fluctuate with the seasons in the agrarian economy of Roman Asia and who may have supplemented their income in difficult times by secretly stealing from their employers and others.²

It is also obvious that Paul is not referring to slaves, since he describes the person as being paid for his labors and thus would have something to give to the one in need.

The wording “he who steals” (ὁ κλέπτων, *ho kleptōn*) implies that there were those in the communities Paul is addressing who were actively engage in petty larceny and, as a result, were in danger of falling back into their “former manner of life” (v. 22) and were not pursuing “putting on the new self” by which they would be known as true followers of Yeshua.

1 See Preisker, “κλέπτω” in *TDNT*, 3.754-56.

2 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 315.

Thus, it is the sin of selfishness, the root of all sin, that Paul ultimately is describing here, for stealing is to gain something for oneself without any thought of the consequences to the one from whom the things are stolen. Thus he admonishes the thief to no longer steal but rather to gain life's necessary needs through honest work, and even with the added motivation to have something from his labors to give to those in need. Rather than consumed with one's own needs, the attention of the believer in Yeshua is to be upon others who need help.

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul also teaches that honest work (for those able to work) should be a common characteristic of those who confess faith in Yeshua.

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Yeshua Messiah to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. (2Thess 3:10–12)

29 – Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

In the opening of this section (v. 25), Paul admonishes us “to speak the truth to one another,” that is, to encourage, admonish, and even lovingly confront each other with the goal of helping one another to rejoice in the goodness of God and to grow in being examples of His mercy and grace.

The word translated “unwholesome” is the Greek *σαπρὸς* (*sapros*) found only eight times in the Apostolic Scriptures. In the Gospels, the word is used to describe “rotten fruit” (Matt 7:17-18; 12:33[x2]; 13:48; Luke 6:43[2x]). In our verse, the word carries the same idea, i.e., that “rotten speech” is that which is pictured as bitterness in the mouth of the one who speaks it. It is that which does not bring good but fosters that which is bitter and hurtful.

Here again, Paul admonishes us with a negative, to not allow an unwholesome word to be included in our speech, followed by a positive, to speak in a way that edifies and meets the current need, and then a motivation, that what we say would give grace to those who hear. Surely, when we learn to pattern our speech according to these guidelines, we will often be those who are used of God to encourage and strength-

en others within our families, our close circle of friends, and our wider community in which we fellowship.

...but only such a word as is good for edification – This is now the fourth time that Paul has used the word “edification” (2:21; 4:12, 16). The word means “to build up” or “to strengthen” and is being used by Paul in Ephesians to describe what all those within the local assembly of believers should have as a primary focus, that is, to be a positive influence among one’s brothers and sisters in the Lord in order that together, we would grow up “to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah” (4:13), that is, to become more and more like Him.

This, then, becomes a litmus test for each person in the local assembly of believers: “How are my conversations with others in our community helping them become more and more like our Messiah?” Clearly if we have this in our hearts and minds, we will escape the temptation to engage in *lashon hara*, “evil speech” or “gossip.”

...according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. – Clearly, to commit ourselves to speaking in such a way that it results in the edification of others, requires not only a personal, ongoing growth in the word of God, in prayer, and in knowing the mind of our Messiah, but it also requires wisdom: when to speak, what to say, and how to say it. This is what Paul means by “according to the need of the moment.” We may have good intentions to help edify others, but if we speak at the wrong time or without choosing wisely when we say one thing or another, rather than edifying it may injure and make future conversations with that person far more difficult.

The motivation which Paul offers is this: that if we are being led by the Spirit and have committed ourselves to edifying speech and no “rotten words,” we may well be used of the Lord to encourage others by encouraging them in the very gift of God’s grace.

In Ephesians, the phrase to “give grace to” refers to a gift that enables the recipient to accomplish the task God has given them (3:2, 7, 8; 4:7).¹ As “each joint supplies” something necessary for the body of Messiah to function as He intends, Paul’s use of the phrase “will give grace to those who hear” may well mean that the encouraging words we share together actually enable one another to exercise their spiritual gifting within the community in the way that God intends. Instead of tearing down, the words of edification build each other up and enable all to serve the Lord as He intends, showing forth His greatness, love, and grace.

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 317.