

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

Christians are supposed to be the nicest people in the world: the most honest, best team players, emotionally stable, most generous, least offensive, most encouraging, not abusive or vindictive, and the most forgiving. This means they should be the best in all walks of life: best employees, bosses, friends, children, parents, husbands, wives, politicians, entrepreneurs, etc., etc. Why are they supposed to be all this and more?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Being a Christian has far-reaching implications. It's supposed to change the way you do everything, how you handle the truth, anger, someone else's property, your paycheck, your speech, your emotions, forgiveness, and more. How can Christians be this awesome?

Chapter 4

4:25, there's a general pattern that Paul uses with all these commands; the pattern is this: a negative command, followed by a positive command, and then a reason for obeying. However, the pattern is not present in all the commands. Most Bibles (except Darby and the ESV) translate the first command in 4:25 as if the pattern is present, but it's not. Due to the Greek grammar and more importantly the context, the "putting away" already happened, i.e., they've already put away the lie (this is the same verb as in 4:22 where they've already put away/taken off the old man). So God's not giving them the command, "Stop lying." Instead, He's reminding them of the lie that they've already taken off.

What's the lie they've removed and the truth they've put on? The lie they're no longer wearing is the sinful old man who's guided by Satan, 2:2. The truth they're now wearing is the *true* righteous and holy new man, their new position and identity in Christ, 1:13; 2:5-6, 15-16; 4:15, 21-24. Since they've taken this lie off, they must speak truth to each other (the truth of their new identity which will lead to honesty in general). This is a quote from Zechariah 8:16 which shows that God will one day rule Israel and the world from the City of Truth as the God of truth (8:3, 8). Therefore, God's people must love honesty instead of falsehood (8:16-17). So it must be with us today, i.e., since God is and loves truth, we must be identified with truth. And why should we obey this first command concerning truth and honesty? Because we're interconnected, we're one Body in Christ, 4:3-6. We mustn't let dishonesty divide us.

4:26-27, the next item God addresses is anger. The command is "Be angry and do not sin" which is a quote from Psalm 4:4 where David pleads his case to the Lord regarding his enemies. He tells himself to be angry but not to sin because the Lord in whom he trusts will deliver him and grant him joy and a peaceful night's rest (Psalm 4:3, 7-8). Anger is not a sin; it's one of many normal human emotions, the question is what will you do with that anger? If you hold on to your anger, if you let the "sun go down on your wrath," then you will give Satan a foothold to destroy you and the church and that's the reason why we should obey this command.

4:28, stealing, an honest day's work, and what to do with your paycheck is next: if there are any thieves or former thieves in the audience, they must put that former life behind them. Instead, they're supposed to get a job and work hard. God then gives the reason for obedience: these former thieves must earn their own money so that they can provide not only for themselves but others in need. That is, instead of stealing another's possessions, they're to be generous with theirs.

4:29, next is how they should speak. The negative command: they must not let any "corrupt" word come out of their mouths. The original word means something rotten. The positive command: instead of speaking words that are rotten, that have no value whatsoever, they're to speak words that edify, words that build up instead of words that tear down. Reason for obedience: so that it will "impart grace to the hearers," i.e., so that it will bless instead of curse the hearer.

4:30, this one has a negative command, but is missing the positive command, although the positive is implied. Negative command: we must not grieve the Holy Spirit. Why? Because He "sealed [us] for the day of our redemption." That is, God the Holy Spirit put a seal on us which signifies security and protection. It means that we belong to God and nothing or no one can ever change that. It is so secure that this seal will last until the Lord returns to redeem us, His purchased possession, 1:14. The seal also signifies identity, i.e., we now have a new identity in Christ which means that we're no longer a lost, sinful creature enslaved to Satan's bidding, 2:2.

What does it mean to grieve God's Spirit? The original word means to cause severe mental or emotional distress. This is an interesting word choice for God. We normally don't think of God as suffering distress of any kind. Yet, this is the word He chose. Why? So that we would understand what we do to Him when we disobey; we cause Him pain. We hurt the one who loved us, the one who saved us. What grieves the Holy Spirit and why? What would grieve Him is if we did everything He told us not to do and if we refused to do everything He told us to do (in 4:25-32 and all of Scripture). Why does our sin grieve Him? Because to sin is to revert to our old sinful selves: instead of living out the new life and identity in Christ He's given us, we go back to being slaves of Satan, 2:2. Instead of living up to our new identity—which is why He keeps telling us over and over again, "walk worthy of your calling," 1:18; 2:1-10, 11-22; 3:16-19; 4:1-6, 14-15, 17, 20-24—we revert to our former blind and sinful life, 4:17-19.

4:31-32, finally, God wants all of us to remove far from us any and every reaction that would be malicious in nature, that would damage another person. He doesn't want bitterness (hostility, resentment, antagonism), wrath (intense displeasure), anger (strong displeasure), clamor (shouting, screaming), evil speaking (slander, harming someone's reputation), "with all malice," i.e., or anything else that would harm another, to be part of our character. The positive command: instead of reacting in a malicious manner when someone insults or hurts us, we must be kind, compassionate and forgive the wrongs done to us as one forgives a debt that is owed. Why should we obey? Because that's how God treated us when we wronged Him, when we offended and injured Him. The injuries we inflicted on God were (and are) more than any one person will ever inflict on us. He forgave us a lifetime of sin, 1:7, not just 10 or 10,000.

God expects all Christians to be this nice all the time! God expects all Christians to be honest, control their temper, be generous, not use foul language, to be encouraging, forgiving and so on. But Christianity is not unique in this is it? All religions or religious philosophies have a moral code. They all tell you to be honest, control your temper, be generous, etc. So what's different about Christianity? It's different in two ways:

- (1) In Christianity you're not being good in order to get to heaven; heaven is already yours, it was yours the moment you believed in Jesus (Luke 23:39-43). In all other religions you have a moral code you must follow in order to avoid "hell" and get to "heaven," i.e., Paradise, Enlightenment, Nirvana, or however they define the afterlife.
- (2) In all other religions, you're on your own: **you** have to not steal, not lose your temper, etc. No one's going to help you. There are priests, rabbis, imams, swamis, gurus, monks, yogis, or other spiritual leaders and fellow devotees who will help you. But in the end **you're the one** who has to not lie, not steal, not get mad. Not so in Christianity, in Christianity you're far from being on your own. In Christianity God is always with you (Ephesians 3:16-19 cf. Galatians 4:6) and He's the one doing the heavy lifting.

How does God help Christians fulfill His moral code, how does He do the heavy lifting? Why does God expect us to be so nice, to be what anyone would consider a "good person"? Who were we before He rescued us? We were dead, following every impulse that Satan gave us, 2:2. Who are we now? That dead self is NO MORE! We're now alive; we're brand new in Christ. God has stripped us of our old position in Satan's world and given us a new life in Christ. He's in us and we're in Him, 2:5-6, 15, 18; 3:16-19; 4:22-24, 25. This is why He expects so much of us. So in Christianity, God's not up in the sky shouting down commands, "Don't lie!" "Don't steal!" Instead, God doesn't just give us rules to follow; He gives us the ability and power to obey them because His ultimate goal is for us to hand over our lives to Him, 3:19. He wants us to hand over everything, our emotions, our reactions to annoying people, our response to our miserable job, our hatred towards those who hurt us, our labor, our money, our heartache and pain that keeps us from forgiving, He wants all of it.

Does God really enable us to be this good? I once had a boss that I hated with a passion. It was miserable going to work. Every day I'd be fuming at work and I'd take the anger home with me. And I was a Christian! If God's in us and we're in Him, why do we fail so miserably? We fail because we forget to live our new identity; we revert to our old selves, our old way of handling things. Eventually, I realized that I was failing to live by God's Spirit, that I failed to turn this difficult problem over to Him. That's when the problem went away. He opened my eyes and showed me how to see it clearly, how to let go of it and trust Him to fix it because I couldn't. From that moment on, I had peace even though I still had the same boss. Now eventually He removed me from the situation. But sometimes God doesn't remove the problem. Instead, He wants you to see it the way He does. And when you do, like Job you will say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," (Job 1:21).

III. Conclusion

Therefore, having put away the lie, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.....Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.