

Evidence of the New Life Eph. 4:25-32

Intro. Some years ago a Christian film depicting the arrest of believers during the Tribulation sent a question through the Christian community. Like the WWJD bracelets...which ask, "What would Jesus do?"...the film prompted this question: *"If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"* That's a legitimate question in light of Christ's teachings.

In **Matt. 12:33** Jesus said, "**Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.**" Jesus was talking here about a person's life and how visible behavior relates to who they are whether good or bad. If we were in the crowd that heard this lesson, we would have wondered how it was possible for a tree to change from bad to good? But even more perplexing...**How can human nature change from bad to good?**

The teaching and the miracles of Jesus were provocative, but they were also preparatory. They prepared sinners to embrace the miracle of the new birth. His teaching prepared them to understand their need to be made new. His miracles, like turning water to wine, proved He has power to do it. Despite his religious devotion, Jesus told Nicodemus, "**You must be born again.**" - **Jn. 3:7** In grace and love, God devised a way to make bad people good...a way to give every sinner a new heart and a fresh start. By His death on the cross, Jesus paid our sin debt once and for all. He saved us from the punishment we deserved. This is justification...its God declaring us righteous in the highest court of the Universe. A snowfall like we had last Thursday night, should remind us of justification. The Lord said in **Isa. 1:18**, "**Come now, let us reason together...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**

Having settled our sin debt, the Holy Spirit enters our lives and makes us new people. This is the miracle of regeneration. **II Cor. 5:17** says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** Regeneration is the way God makes bad people good. He affects a miraculous transformation inside of us. The NT says believers are given a new mind / a new will / a new heart / a new inheritance / a new relationship / new power / new knowledge / new wisdom / new perception / new understanding / new righteousness / new love / new desire / new citizenship / and many other new things. The outworking of this newness is stated in **Rom. 6:4** which says, **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** God did all this so **we may live a new life.** The new birth equips us to live in a way that glorifies God and demon-strates the power of the Gospel and the reality of His presence in our lives.

In **Eph. 4:17-24**, Paul reminded his readers that they had been made new in Christ. At the moment of conversion, they **put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires** and **put on the new self, created to be like God in true**

righteousness and holiness. (vs. 22, 24) The aorist tense of the verbs **put off** and **put on** signifies completed action in the past time period. That means the transaction was accomplished once and for all. The indicative voice of these verbs show this isn't a command, but a statement of fact. This is what God did for us when we were born again. He put off the old and put on the new. He clothed us with His righteousness.

The verb is different in **v. 23**, however. **...to be made new in the attitude of your minds** is a present infinitive which indicates an ongoing process. As we feed on God's Word, His Spirit changes our mind about things. Dr. Laura says, *"I've got new attitude."* That's what we need. Before we can live right, God must change our minds. So from the moment of salvation, God enrolls us in His SOS...His *School of Sanctification*. And as we found last time in **vs. 20 and 21**, Jesus is the school / the teacher / and the main subject. Sanctification is becoming Christlike in thought / motives / word / and deed. It's a life-long study that will occupy us until Jesus comes to take us home. But we can be good students in God's school or we can be flunkies. I hate to be so blunt, but it's true. We can **apply our hearts to wisdom**, or we can fill our minds and waste our time with foolishness. The choice is ours to make. We can accept the challenge of **II Tim. 2:15** which says, **Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth...** or we can drift along with the Christian crowd and never make any real progress in growing to be more like Christ. We know this is possible because of **I Cor. 3:1** where Paul wrote, **Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ.** It's OK to be childish when you're a child, but it's not OK to remain that way. Another example of stunted growth is implied in **Heb. 5:12** - **...by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!** Ouch!

When we studied God's plan in **Eph. 4:11, 12**, I challenged you to consider how you fit into that plan.

Let me read those verses again, **It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.** Are you are a serious student? Are you engaged in preparation for works of service so Christ's body might be built up?

This challenge runs counter to the trends that are so prevalent in the Church today. Many attend worship the way they attend a movie or a sporting event...except the movie and sporting lasts 3 hours not just one. Others plug in to church hoping for a trickle charge that will carry them through the week until next Sunday. Most haven't learned to study or feed themselves. If you think I'm being cranky and over-stating the case, the numbers don't lie. Just a little more than half of a Sunday morning crowd attend Sunday School and less than that attend the teaching hour on Sunday evening. Teachers express disappointment when lesson books are forgotten / bookwork isn't done / memory verses go unlearned / and attendance is sporadic. I think we all need to ask ourselves if we're really serious about becoming the disciple God wants us to be.

Are we really serious about being **prepared for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up?**

I may sound negative, but I believe God has brought MBC to an exciting place. He has given us an awesome facility and a leadership team that is eager to serve God and His people. But God is challenging us all to consider what being His disciple and what being a disciple-maker means. Refusing to let us drift...we sense the Lord calling us back to basics. And one such basic is a commitment to be more serious and intentional about discipleship. We may be on the threshold of the Lord's return and it's time to resist the trends and be at our best.

So let's get back to our text in **Eph. 4**. When Jesus said, **a tree is recognized by its fruit**, He meant that each person's life will exhibit evidence that identifies them as saved or unsaved. Only God knows our hearts, but what shows up outwardly tells our story one way or the other. So based on the new life Christ has given, Paul's challenge proceeds from general to specific. **vs. 25-32** contain five exhortations and each one has three parts. Each exhortation has a negative side / a positive side / and a reason for the positive.

1. Truthful speech - vs. 25 - Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

The conjunction **Therefore** in **v.25**, establishes continuity with the previous section. **Falsehood** or lying is epidemic in our society. Lying routinely happens everywhere; in politics / in business / in the media / in religion...in world affairs as well as home life and interpersonal relationships. Falsehood exists in many forms such as cheating / exaggeration / flattery / deception / withholding needed information / and giving false information.

The origin of lying is found in the first book of the Bible where Satan deceived Eve. As the Father of lies, he continues to promote lying and to deceive the human race.

Paul began this section with the importance of truth-telling because of the direct link between our heart and our tongue. Just a few verses earlier he cited **the truth that is in Jesus - v.21**. Truth must characterize everything we do because **God's Word is true** / Jesus is Himself is **the truth** / and God's Spirit is the **Spirit of Truth**. To be a follower of Christ is to speak and live in truth like Jesus did so every form of falsehood must be put off.

Notice that **v. 25** says, **each of you must...speak truthfully to his neighbor**. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. **(Mt. 9:19)** No one likes to be lied to. No one likes to be deceived. To love our neighbor as we love ourselves is to tell them the truth. Whatever we say should be reliable, honest, and sincere. How can we expect to have credibility when we speak about Christ if we lie to them about the sprinkler head our lawn mower crunched? Speaking the truth doesn't mean we tell everyone everything they want to know. There are times we should exercise strict confidence or discernment...times when we should only say what is relevant or

appropriate. But when we speak, our words must be true and they must be spoken in love.

Notice the reason Paul gives for speaking truthfully...**for we are all members of one body**. This letter is written to believers in Christ...believers united by the Spirit in one body. If your eye didn't tell the truth to your foot, you might step on broken glass. That's how the body works. In the same way, strong relationships in the Body of Christ are founded on trust which is built on truth. So the first evidence of the new life is truthful speech.

2. Controlled anger - vs. 26, 27 - "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.

Paul was thinking of **Ps. 4:4** when he gave this exhortation. **In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent**. These verses admit that anger is an appropriate response in certain situations. It's right and godly to be angry at sin and evil. We should be angered by the corruption, violence, and godless immorality that is destroying our nation. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness and disobedience, **II Kings 17:18** says, **So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence**. In fact, **Psa. 7:11** says, **God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath everyday**. In the NT, Jesus was angered by the Pharisees who tried to prevent Him from healing a man on the Sabbath. On another occasion He was angry with the money-changers who desecrated His Father's House. So righteous anger on behalf of a believer is a legitimate response when God is defied or people we love are injured by the sinful acts of others.

But the trouble is...justifiable anger can quickly become unrighteous. So Paul wrote, **In your anger do not sin**. There are several helpful instructions here for keeping anger under control. *First*, we should ask, "*What is the source of my anger? Is it wounded pride or real wrong? Is it bad feelings or true injustice?*" If the anger isn't legitimate, it must be judged and gotten rid of as Paul wrote in **v.31**. *Second*, as **v.26** says, **Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry**...In other words, anger must be dealt with quickly...before the sun sets. We must not nurse anger or give it a chance to grow. Anger is like parking tickets stuffed in a glove box...it matures. Our anger isn't helped when we tell others about our grievance and solicit their support. It only intensifies when we do research to strengthen our case. It's better to let the fire burn down than stir up the coals and add more fuel.

Third, we must not let righteous anger develop into resentment. This is what the word translated **angry** at the end of **v.26** means. The Greek word **parorgismos**. The Greek word almost sounds like the turbulence of passionate feelings. It describes the anger that fomented in the heart of Christopher Dorner, the former Los Angeles policeman on a murderous rampage. Just like the anger that grew in this man, **parorgismos** is an emotion that can quickly escalate to murder. In **Matt. 5:21, 22** - Jesus said this sort of anger is actually as evil as murder itself. **"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be**

subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Sinful anger is self-serving / vindictive / and undisciplined. At this level, anger is never righteous and must be dealt with and put away. If you can't get rid of it on your own, you should seek help, but every child of God must get rid of it.

The reason anger must be controlled is stated in the end of **v.27 - and do not give the devil a foothold.** Satan delights to fan our anger into flame. One of his names is the destroyer. His ambition is to destroy human life and relationships. When anger becomes sinful, Satan gains a foothold...a beach head from which to lead us into further sin. This is illustrated by the conflict between Cain and Abel. Cain was **very angry** because God accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected the sacrifice he offered. His anger affected even his demeanor. When the Lord saw Cain's rage He spoke to him and said, **"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."** The Lord told Cain that a right response in this situation would be met with His acceptance. But if he didn't respond to his anger righteously, sin was crouching at his door like a lion ready to pounce on him. **1 Pet. 5:8** echoes **this** warning. **Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** Like a lion ready to pounce, sin desires to have us, but we must master it...we must control it. But as you know, Cain didn't listen to God. Controlled by jealousy, he murdered his brother, Abel. Those who question the depravity of the human heart need to think about this...in the case of earth's first brothers, one killed the other! The second evidence of the new life is **controlled anger.** If we earnestly desire this in our life, we will need to face the fact that a diet of on-screen revenge and violence runs completely counter to the new life Christ has given us. We are feeding from the lunch counter!

3. Honest labor - v. 28 - 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.

Many of the believers in the early church were slaves for whom stealing was a way of life. Others were land owners or business men who routinely cut corners / padded accounts / and cheated their workers. Stealing was just as common as it is today. I've heard it said that the goods we routinely purchase cost about a third more than they're worth to compensate for theft at every level from production to sales. Stealing turns us inside out. It proves we love money and things more than God. But as Paul wrote in **v. 20, You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.** Then in **v.28 - He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands...**

Living at the expense of others is a form of stealing. To fail to pay a worker a fair wage is theft. And for workers not to give their employer a full day's labor is yet another form of stealing. You laughed with me when I described the dirt piles my brothers and I were supposed to level. But there's more to that story. I'm thankful for a father who worked hard and taught his children the value of honest labor. While in Bible College, I often hired fellow students to work with me. Now roofing is hard work! But watching some of

them, I seriously wondered how they would survive in ministry, because the work of the ministry is much harder. Paul's personal work ethic was an example to others and proof of his love for them. His credibility as an apostle was established in part by his work ethic. In **1 Thess. 2:9** - he wrote, **Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.**

So the negative side of this command prohibits stealing among those who received a new life in Christ. The positive side encourages us to engage in useful work with our own hands. But notice how Paul elevates work to a higher level. Instead of merely working to provide for ourselves and our families, the verse ends...**that he may have something to share with those in need.** Instead of work motivated by a desire to have more for ourselves...we're challenged to work to have something to give **those in need.** This is what makes the new life stand out in a world where working is (or used to be) a way of life. Our work should be motivated by a desire to have some extra to share with others. So the third evidence of the new life is honest labor. I see this happening many ways in our church and it's a wonderful reflection of our giving Savior. I see it in our deacons who set aside some of their income to provide our pastors with gas cards for ministry travel.

4. Wholesome conversation - vs. 29 - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

From the use of hands, Paul turns to the use of the mouth. The word translated **unwholesome** is the Greek word *saphros* which the ancients used to describe spoiled fruit or meat. Corrupt communication includes dirty jokes and suggestive language / gossip / profanity / vulgarity / innuendo / and anything else that doesn't reflect the character of God or build up the church. The 4-letter filth commonly spoken in the average workplace can have a desensitizing effect on believers. Some can't speak a sentence without profanity. This is a terrible blight in our society. Along with filthy words, conversations are quick to turn negative / fault finding / and critical. If you work in that sort of environment, you need to ask God to cleanse your mind continuously or you'll pick up words and attitudes that are displeasing to the Lord. In **Psa. 141:3** the psalmist prayed, **Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.** We need a continuous guard over our mouths. In **Matt. 12:36** Jesus said, **But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.** If this was believed, people would run to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation!

Instead of rotten words which are good for nothing, **v.29** urges beneficial words...**but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

What a fantastic rule to live by! If what I'm about to say doesn't benefit or build somebody up, I shouldn't say it! That would make for some serious quietness wouldn't it? Our words are to be true and pure. They should always minister grace to the listeners. **Building others up according to their needs...**means *words suitable to the*

occasion. It echoes **Prov.15:23** which says, **A man finds joy in giving an apt reply-- and how good is a timely word!** One reason for knowing our Bibles is to have verses at hand that are appropriate to where a friend is and what he's going through.

So **v.29** has a negative command, a positive command and a reason for the positive command.

Wholesome conversation gives evidence of the new life Christ has given us. Gracious words caused Jesus to stand out and be noticed. **Luke 4:22 - All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.** The new life He gave us makes it possible for us to be like Him in the words we speak and the way we say them.

5. Compassionate Relating - vs. 30-32 - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The final evidence of the new life is the new way believers relate to each other. **Notice v.30 - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

In **v.25** Paul reminds his readers that **we are all members of one body**. Few things grieve God's Spirit more than when believers sin against each other and do damage to the unity He created. So in these verses Paul exhorts us to exchange six sins for three ways of relating to each other that are patterned after the way God relates to us.

The negative command urges us to get rid of six sinful ways of the old life.

- **bitterness** is a nursing a grudge. It's resentment that grows and refuses to be reconciled.
- **rage and anger** are closely related. **Rage** is the Greek word *thumos* from which we get words having to do with temperature or heat, like thermos and thermostat. **Thumos** has the idea of heat or hostility that flares up. **Anger** is the Greek word *orge* which refers to a settled disposition...a long term hostility that could erupt like a volcano at any moment.
- **brawling** - refers to the loud rants of an angry man who wants everyone to hear his grievance. It's an argument that has escalated into a shouting match or worse.
- **slander** - is the Greek word *blasphemia*. It's what the Bible calls evil-speaking. It's running down or defaming the character of another.
- **along with every form of malice** - **malice** is the malevolence or bad feeling that underlies evil schemes. Malice seeks to get even. It's wishing or actually plotting evil against another.

These sins grieve the Holy Spirit and we must get rid of them all. They quench His power in us. They are sins against the family. They are violations of the unity of the Spirit so essential to the testimony of our new life in Christ.

With her own brand of wit and insight, Erma Bombeck has written about the problem of relationships within families. In one of her columns she observed that one problem in families is the way members cease answering each other. Like a Senate hearing, every time a question is asked, someone responds with another question. Here's a scenario that would be funny if it wasn't so true to life.

A 16 year old yells down from upstairs, "Has anyone seen my new sweater?" Father yells back, "You mean the one that cost \$40?" Her sister replies, "You mean the one you won't let me wear?" Then her brother responds, "You mean the stupid one that makes you look fat?" Grandma can't leave it alone so she chimes in, "You mean the one with the low neckline?" And finally, her mother answers, "You mean the one that has to be washed by hand in cold water?" Everybody was talking about the same sweater but no one answered the 16 year olds question!

Did you pick up on some less-than-perfect attitudes in that exchange? These are the underlying sins we must get rid of. They're the little foxes that spoil the vines. In exchange for bad attitudes, **v.32** says, **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** The previous six sins must be put off and replaced by three qualities that are rare in our world.

- to be **kind** is to have a generous and gracious disposition like that of God who showed amazing kindness by loving us and saving us. **Titus 3:4, 5 - But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. Kindness** reveals what is true about me regardless of who the other person is or what they've done to offend me.
- **to be compassionate** is to be tenderhearted toward others. It's thinking and wanting the best for them. It's loving them the way we hope they will love us. Once again, true compassion isn't conditioned by goodness sin others. It's a quality only God can produce in us.
- to be **forgiving** is to treat other persons favorably and graciously. Forgiveness releases our right to retaliate in any way. Like kindness and compassion, to be forgiving is to be like God who freely forgave us when we could not pay the enormous sin debt we had accumulated.

So let me ask... "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" These behaviors provide visible evidence of the new life. To have a credible witness that glorifies God, the old ways must be put off and the new ways must be put on. And we must accept the fact that these changes from old to new don't happen automatically. They require effort and discipline. They are the very qualities a true disciple of Jesus will exhibit. One of the most intriguing verses in the NT is **Acts 4:13. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.** This is what it boils down to. Have you been with Jesus? Have you been to His school where He is the teacher and the main subject of

study? Have you spent time with Him and are you engaged in learning to be like Him? Do others take note that you have been with Jesus?

Just a few verses later we read that Peter and John were in fact arrested. The words they spoke and the manner of their life supplied sufficient evidence that they were Christians, followers of Christ. What about you? Do you blend in with the crowd or stand out? *"If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"*