

**SOME FIRST STEPS IN THE WAY OF HOLINESS**

Ephesians 4:25-28

**Intro:** I have entitled my message this morning, “Some First Steps in the Way of Holiness.” I have done this because it seems to me that we might call Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus *a primer on the Christian life*, or better still, *a primer on how to live a holy life*. A primer is defined in the dictionary as “a book in teaching children to read or to spell.” Originally the word “primer” was a prayer book, which was used to teach Christians how to pray. It was used to get them started in living a Christian life, but if a person were an adult when they were saved, it would have been used for that person regardless of age, whether a child, or a young person, or an adult.

When I speak of *some first steps in the way of holiness*, I would remind you that we begin the Christian life as babes in Christ whatever our age in this life might be. Any parent will tell you that one thing that most parents remember, especially mothers, is the age her children were when they took their first steps. That is an exciting time in the life of any child. They don’t know when they start walking that they are going to have to keep it up for a long time.

While Paul was not limiting himself just to those who had recently received Christ, it did include those who had recently been saved. But we all need to be reminded daily how those of us who claim to know the Lord are expected to live each day of our lives. All through the Bible we learn what we are to be and what we are not to be, what we are to do and what we are not to do. But Paul in Ephesians emphasized to the believers in the church at Ephesus the importance of right doctrine, or teaching. He did this actually in chapters 1, 2, and 3. Then by his two prayers, one in chapter one, and another in chapter two, he taught the believers in Ephesus the great importance of prayer. But when we get to chapter 4 he began to speak about our walk, our conduct, the way we live from day to day. And the object of a life that is pleasing to the Lord is that, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we become a holy people, meaning that we put off the old man, as we leaned last Sunday, and put on the new man. This comes through obedience to the Word of God.

When you see a Christian taking his first steps as a Christian, that is a very exciting time for all others who are Christians. In fact, this is one of the first things that we look for as evidence that a person has truly been

born again, or born from above, or born of God.

The Bible word for our conduct as Christians is “walk.” And our “walk” is made up of steps, one step after another. That is the way we walk, one step at a time. The Apostle Peter in a passage I want to read to you, said the Christ is our Example as to how we are to live, especially when the world, and sometimes other Christians, make it hard for us to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. This is what Peter said, and you will these words in 1 Peter 2:21-23:

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:  
22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:  
23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

You will find in our text for today, as we do in these verses from 1 Peter, that one part of our body that often gives us the most trouble is our mouths, our tongues. Before we look in detail at verses 25 through 28, let me remind you of the five ways the Apostle Paul used the word “walk” here in Ephesians so we will all have a better idea of how we are the people of God, are to live.

1) In Eph. 4:1-2:

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,  
2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

2) In Eph. 4:17:

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

3) In Eph. 5:1-2:

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;  
2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

4) In Eph. 5:8:

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

5) In Eph. 5:15-16:

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,  
16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

The Apostle Paul contrasted in this epistle the way we walked before we

were saved, and the way we are to walk now. Many times, although he may not use the word *walk*, it is clear that it is the way we live that he was so very concerned about.

Now before we consider what I have called *some of the first steps that we are to take as Christians in our daily lives*, let me point out what they are, and then we will consider each one. He contrasted the ways that used to characterize our lives, and then tells how we should live now.

In these four verses he mentioned how we used to live, and contrasted each one with the way we must live now. The first in verse 25 is lying. The second in verse 26 is anger. The third in verse 27 is giving place to the Devil. The fourth in verse 28 is stealing.

Have those of you who were in Sunday School this morning noticed how much like Colossians 3 is like our text in Ephesians. In Colossians 3:9 Paul wrote:

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds,

10 And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

Concerning anger he mentioned it in Colossians 3:8 as the first of several things that we need to “put off.” In Colossians 3 Paul did not mention the Devil, but the Devil is behind all of the sins that he did mention. But he did mention “anger” and “wrath” in verse 8 as he did in Ephesians 4:26. So the fact that we are doing double duty in denouncing these sins on the same day in SS and in our morning service, the Lord must want all of us to pay close attention to these words of the Apostle Paul.

But now let us go back to Ephesians 4:25. And the first of the four sins we have mentioned, which is lying.

### **I. “PUTTING AWAY LYING” (Eph . 4:25).**

Beginning with verse 17 and going down through verse 22 Paul was very negative. Then in verses 23 and 24 he was positive in what he had to say. But now from verse 25 to the end of the chapter he is both negative and positive, because it is in doing the positive that we are able to correct the negative. If you don’t understand what I mean by negative and positive, by negative I mean what we are *not* to do, and by positive I mean what Paul told us *to do!*

Have you ever noticed how prevalent and how strong lying is in human nature. Adam and Eve did everything that they could to cover their sin once they had done what God told them not to do. In Psalm 58:3 King David said this:

3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

Up until the time I was ten years old I went to a church with my folks where the Pastor preached the Gospel, but he spoke in such a way that he was frequently invited to speak at the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, and other civic clubs. On one occasion that he mentioned in a sermon, he was at one of these clubs where there were a lot of men present. And as he began he made the statement, "If there is any man here today who has never told a lie, I want him to stand up." And then without stopping he went on to say, "I want all of you to see the biggest liar in this crowd." Well, after he made the first statement, a man stood up. But when he went on to make the second statement, that man sat down so quickly that it was surprising that he didn't go on through the floor. *There never has been a single person who has ever lived on earth who has not lied and lied and lied – one exception: our Lord Jesus Christ.* Men are put under oath, and they still lie. We lie because we are proud. You see one sin contributes to another. Nobody ever had to be taught to lie. It goes right along with human nature. We as Christians have all struggled with this problem. When David spoke about "the wicked," he was speaking about people who do not know the Lord. The only real cure for lying is the new birth. But since our old nature is still with us, we still can lie. But this needs to be "put off." If we are being "renewed in the spirit of our minds" by our intake of the Word of God, we are going to change. We ought always to be able to trust the word of a Christian.

Judas Iscariot lived a lie. He tried, and was successful, in getting even the other disciples to believe that he was devoted to the Lord, but it was all a lie. Ananias and Sapphira lied about what they had supposedly given to the Lord. And for them it was a sin unto death. "Deceit" is mentioned among the sins which are charged against the human race in Romans 1 when they refuse to submit themselves to God. So that the more a nation turns against the Lord, the greater becomes the problem of lying and deceit.

How is lying overcome? By a God-given desire to speak the truth whatever the cost might be. Christians need to be those who once and for all time have renounced lying and are determined to speak the truth. For

Peter to deny three times in the strongest possible way that he even knew the Lord, shows that it is only by the grace of God that we can be delivered from lying. His bitter tears show how costly it is to lie. Some of the greatest lies are made by men who distort the truth of the Word of God, and preach as the truth that which is the worst kind of error. Often, as with Peter, lying is produced by fear, by the fear of man. The correction can be made when we fear the Lord more than we fear men. As Paul said, the man who will speak the truth with his neighbor, one who is the closest to him, is the man who will usually speak the truth to a stranger.

Here, and with all sin, Paul's words to the believers at Rome, help us if we have a problem with lying (or any other sin): "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

We are all guilty; only the Lord can deliver us.

Let us go on to verse 26.

**ii. "BE YE ANGRY, AND SIN NOT" (Eph. 4:26).**

This exhortation on the part of the Apostle Paul, may take us by surprise. The Bible does not teach that all anger is sinful. There are times when it is sinful not to be angry. When people commit crimes, and cause suffering and often death to others, it would be wrong not to be angry. Every day I pray for my great grandchildren that no wicked predator will ever be able to lay a wicked hand on any of them, and I pray that for all children. My blood boils when I hear of these sex maniacs who prey on beautiful young girls, and often kill them. It ought to anger us that there are people in our country, who have been raised here and enjoyed all of the benefits of this country of ours, but now are terrorists at heart and pose a new danger for us in our country. It ought to anger us at all of the injustices that we hear about every day. The list can go on and on. There are times when it is sinful not to be angry.

But anger can completely overwhelm us and lead us to sin. I am completely against abortion, but I am not going to spend one minute at an abortion clinic to try to keep women from going in. That doesn't solve anything. What people need to know is that any human life is a gift from God. Again, the Gospel is the answer to the sins of our country. We need to beware of letting our anger provoke us to sin. Instead, "let not the sun go down upon your wrath." And the best way to deal with our anger

before the day ends, is to commit it all to the Lord in prayer. There is very much going on in our country today that is sinful in God's sight. But we are told in Scripture that God has said, again in Romans 12, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19, quoted from Deut. 32:35). Even in our fellowship with each other we can express our anger at all of the sin that is sweeping over our country, but we must not lie awake at night, troubled by it. God is sovereign. God is in control. And we need to keep our eyes on Him, and trust Him to work out His purposes and to judge when and where He sees fit.

But I must hurry on. Our next verse tell us:

### **III. NOT TO GIVE PLACE TO THE DEVIL (Eph. 4:27).**

Whenever we depart from the Word, either by disobedience, or by carrying things too far, we give the Devil the opportunity to take advantage of a situation. Again we can cite Adam and Eve as in violation here. When Eve even engaged in conversation with the Devil, she was given him the opportunity to lead her into sin. And when Adam obeyed his wife rather than obeying the Lord, he was giving place to the Devil. Any failure on our part to abide by the Word of God, is giving the Devil the opportunity to get the victory over us. And it is so easy for one sin to lead to another. The Devil like a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Our greatest safeguard against the wiles of the Devil, and we will learn from Ephesians 6, is to be clothed with the whole armor of God. And you will see that every part of the armor has something to do with the Word of God. Don't try to argue against sin. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Don't give him any opportunity to draw you into sin. He can't touch us unless we give him the opportunity. More could be said, but I must move on.

The last verse has to do with stealing, especially directed to those who have had a problem with it.

### **IV. "LET HIM THAT STOLE, STEAL NO MORE" (Eph. 4:28).**

We all have besetting sins, sins that are a special problem to us. Some people make a living by stealing from other people. A former thief is going to have a struggle getting away from what has been to him a way of life. But he needs to "put off" stealing. He must be determined by the grace of God that he is not going to do this anymore. Now such convic-

tion can only come by the power of the Holy Spirit. The cure for stealing is WORK. Human nature is more concerned about *taking* than it is about *giving*. Selfishness is at the basis of stealing. A thief is not concerned about meeting the needs of others; he is primarily looking out for himself. The Lord said, according to Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Give to others, even to those in our own families, brings more blessing, gives us more joy, than all that we can possibly take from others for ourselves. Stealing does not produce happiness, and neither does any other sin. Only a Christian is prepared to receive this truth.

**Concl:** These are some of the first steps to a life pleasing to God, a life of holiness. And just as it is a blessing to see our children take their first steps, and to do other things that show that they are learning and growing, so when we see a Christian paying attention to what the Word tells him about how he should live if he is to please God, that also brings great joy to our hearts. It is not by delaying our obedience to the Word, or by raising questions about the Word, but it is by doing what the Lord tells us to do, or not to do, that we experience the blessing of the Lord, and can be instruments of blessing from God to others, but by having our minds renewed by the Word, so that our lives can and will be changed