

MORE STEPS FOR HOLY LIVING

Ephesians 4:29-32

Intro: I hesitate to talk about anything in the Christian life as a secret, such as *the secret of blessing*. There are many things in our lives that we do not understand, and there always will be. But how to live a life where we can enjoy the blessing of the Lord, is not a secret to anyone who will take the time to read the Bible. How to have the blessing of God would be a secret if we did not have the Bible, but since we have God's Word, it is not a secret, and it never has been. God has not made known in His Word all that we might like to know, but He has revealed everything that He wants us to know, and it is wrong for us to speculate on what God has not revealed in His Word.

Toward the end of Moses' life he was directed by the Holy Spirit to give the children of Israel a statement in the fifth and final book of The Law, about what has been revealed as compared with that which has not been revealed. And the Lord has preserved it for us so that we can learn from it even these hundreds and even thousands of years later. I am referring to the words we find in Deuteronomy 29:29. I am sure that most of you are familiar with what the Lord said to the children of Israel through Moses in this verse. And they are words that are still true today. Listen as I read to you what the Lord told Moses:

29 The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deut. 29:29).

At the end of Moses' life all of Scripture that they had was what we find in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Even in those days there were evidently people who were asking about things which Moses could not tell them because God had not revealed everything that they wanted to know.

Thomas Brooks, a Puritan, wrote a very wonderful book on prayer on prayer which he called, *The Secret Key to Heaven*. I am sure that he called it a secret key because too few of the Lord's people have really spent enough time in the Word to understand the meaning of prayer, the blessings of prayer as well as the obstacles that keep us from enjoying the blessings and the fruitfulness of prayer. But he spoke back in the 1600's of the deadly effect that curiosity about things not revealed, or which are so profound that our finite minds cannot fathom the depths of some truths even when fragments of them are revealed.

Dr. Charles Feinberg, who was my Hebrew teacher in Seminary, was being quizzed by our class one day about things which either have not been revealed, or which have not been revealed at all. And it wasn't very long in that discussion when Dr. Feinberg said to us, "Men, you are just going to have to be content to let God know some things that He hasn't told you." In that one statement was some of the best advice I ever got about the study of the Word.

This was one comment from Thomas Brooks in his book on prayer:

Oh, that men were once learn to be contentedly ignorant, where God would not have them knowing! Oh, that men were once so humble, as to account it no disparagement to them, to acknowledge some depths in God, and in the blessed Scripture, which their shallow reason cannot fathom (p. 250).

But now all of this raises the question: What am I doing, and what are you doing, with what God has revealed to us, and which we can understand with the help of the Holy Spirit? And let me add another question to that: Is there one particular thing about revealed truth that God appears to be most concerned?

Well, a hint is given to us in Deuteronomy 29:29. Let me read that verse to you again. Notice carefully what this verse tells us:

29 The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deut. 29:29).

We know that they could not be saved by keeping the Law. It was not given for that purpose. But God through Moses made it perfectly clear that God wanted His people, and their children, generation after generation, to live in obedience to His Word.

The Lord Jesus Himself said that the greatest commandment in the Law, and we can say in all of Scripture, was that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. But how do we show that we love Him, just by saying that we do. I believe that we ought to tell the Lord that we love Him, tell Him that every day and many times a day. But how do we *show* that we love Him? In John 14:21 the Lord said this:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:21)

When the Lord had given His disciples a lesson in humility by washing their feet, He said to them, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

When James was exhorting the people of God in his epistle as to how they should live, he wrote these familiar words, "But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving you own selves" (James 1:22). It is good to hear the Word. It is good to read the Word. But our hearing and reading only benefit us when we obey the Word.

When Saul returned from battle having defeated the Amalekites, but he had spared King Agag's life, and the people had taken the sheep and oxen and other animals which had belonged to the Amalekites. Saul told Samuel that he had done what the Lord told him to do. Then Samuel said this:

19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?

20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.

22 And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:19-22).

F. B. Meyer, a godly English Pastor who was a contemporary of Spurgeon, wrote a book on Deuteronomy, and do you know the title he gave his commentary. He called it, *The School of Obedience*. We are all in that school, and we will be there until the Lord takes us to heaven.

As we turn to our text let me give you one more passage to keep in mind. It is in 1 Peter 1, that chapter which Professor Paul Felix expounded to us with such great blessing. I want to read to you verses 14 through 16:

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Did you notice the word “conversation”? Do you remember what it means in the KJV? It means *conduct*. It means our “walk,” the way we live. And how were they living? “As obedient children.” The Lord has saved us to make us holy. But remember this: *Only by obedience to the Word of God can we be holy. There is no holiness except through obedience. Remember that.*

Now to Ephesians 4, verse 29.

Last week we read what Paul said about lying in verse 25. Have you thought about that this week? Then we read what Paul said about anger, that there are times when it is sinful not to get angry, but we must be careful not to let our anger run away with us. This is in verse 26. In verse 27 Paul warned us that not obeying the Word gives the Devil the opportunity he is always looking for to take advantage of us, which he will when we lie, or when we stay angry. And then he told us in verse 28 not to steal, but to work for what we get. Working prevents us from stealing. And notice that Paul’s emphasis here seems to be the way we lie to each other, or the way we get angry with each other, or the way we let our guard down with the Devil in our relationships with each other. And finally stealing from each other.

I. GODLY SPEECH (Eph. 4:29).

In verse 9 Paul was thinking about how we are to minister to each other in what we talk about. We need to be careful about “corrupt communication.” The word that is translated here as communication is the Greek word **λόγος** which is usually translated as *word*. So it would mean a corrupt word as well as the thought behind it, leading to not only unprofitable thoughts and talk, but that which would defile a person in any way. That which is not good is usually bad in some way, or many ways. Instead our talk with each other should be spiritually beneficial, that which edifies or strengthens spiritually the person we are talking to.

There is a good verse in Isaiah which goes right along with this. It is Isaiah 50:4:

4 The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear

as the learned.

“The learned” is sometimes translated as *the learner*, or as *a disciple*. The idea here is that of the Lord ministering to us “morning by morning,” that is, on a regular, daily basis, and on the basis of what He says to me, I am enabled “to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” The idea is that you and I are to be meeting with the Lord “morning by morning,” reading the Word (because that is the way He speaks to us now), and what He gives me for myself, I may find is just exactly what I need, but what a brother or sister in Christ needs whom I may meet during the day. So it is important for us to be listening to the Lord and learning, not only for ourselves, but for that brother or sister I meet during the day who needs just what the Lord has given me that morning. God uses us to “minister grace,” spiritual strength and blessing, to a brother or sister in Christ whom we meet during the day who may not have taken time to be with the Lord that morning.

So we are to be careful not to talk about bad or worthless things, but that which will edify the person with whom we are speaking. We have the opportunity to put this in practice today after we are dismissed and have opportunities to speak to one another.

But let us move on to verse 30.

II. “GRIEVE NOT THE SPIRIT (Eph. 4:30).

Paul was speaking here about the Holy Spirit. He is God the Holy Spirit. He is a Person, just as much a Person as God the Father, and God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And as God, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent. He is able to hear what we talk about, what all of us are talking about. And we are either pleasing Him, or grieving Him.

The word “and” at the beginning of verse 30 ties it in with verse 29. One way we grieve the Holy Spirit is by worthless, sometimes even harmful, conversation. We all this morning, when we are dismissed, will just have observed the Lord’s Supper. How wonderful it will be if we talk to each other about the Lord’s Supper, or about what we have heard in the teaching of the Word in Sunday School or church, or possibly from what we have read this morning in our time with the Lord. Did you begin the day with the Lord today? It is most important that should be a part of our regular activity every day.

How do we grieve the Lord? We grieve Him by our disobedience. This does not mean that we can't inquire about each other's health, or talk about our problems, or give family news. But it does mean that we need to please the Holy Spirit by our fellowship with each other, and always keep in mind our responsibility to be a blessing to each other. And we need to look for ways in which others can be a blessing to us..

But what did Paul mean by the rest of the verse, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"? Here we need to look back at Paul's grand statement of salvation in chapter 1 of Ephesians, and especially verses 13 and 14. (Read.)

The sealing of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer is a mark of ownership, that we belong to the Lord, and secondly it is a guarantee of the security of our relationship with the Lord. It is because we are sealed by the Holy Spirit that Paul could write Philippians 1:6. We can grieve the Holy Spirit, but He will never depart from us; He will never give up on us. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is our assurance (among other truths) that our full participation in the day of redemption is absolutely secure. So our security is not an excuse for carelessness in our lives, but an encouragement for the highest degree of faithfulness. How thankful we all can be for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is not a truth that we feel, but a fact that we believe, and rejoice in the reality of this amazing truth.

Now in the light of all of this we have two verses in which Paul speaks of characteristics which are not to be characteristic of us (v. 31), but he follows it up with characteristics that are to be true of us.

III. HOW WE CAN KEEP FROM GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT (Eph. 4:31-32).

A. The negative side (v. 31).

These characteristics are to be put away:

- 1) "All bitterness" - This is a person who is harsh, who is unforgiving and bitter, whose influence on others is like acid on the skin. He is resentful and eager to get back at others whom he feels have wronged him. His initial reaction to people is negative.
- 2) "Wrath" and "anger" - what is the difference? These two words are

found together in Romans 2:8; Col. 3:8; and Rev. 19:15. “Wrath” can be described by the person who suddenly blows his top, but then he gets over it and calms down. “Anger” may be slower in rising up, but once it is present it continues on and on. Anger is what is referred to in verse 26.

3) “Clamor” - This is the person who always seems to be dissatisfied and unhappy, and is not hesitant about making his discontent known. He insists on having his own way.

4) “Evil speaking” - It is from this word that we get our English word blasphemy. It can mean taking the Lord’s Name in vain. Or if it addressed toward another human being, it can mean ridicule, or belittling, speaking evil of another person whether it seems justified or not. We are not to tear down the character of others.

5) “Malice” - Notice the word “all” is repeated here. This is an evil person, vicious, vengeful.

These words show how possible it is for a true child of God to act like a person who does not know the Lord. The possibility is there. People are beset with different sins. But the difference with a true child of God is that he may have times when these characteristics are seen in him, but if he is truly saved, he won’t live that way.

B. The positive side (v. 32).

1) The word “be” is the Greek word for becoming so it speaks of progress in the manifestation of kindness. “Good” would be a proper translation. “Helpful” is another word that describes a kind person.

2) “Tenderhearted” - This is how we are to be toward those who are in kind of distress. The Lord is the supreme Example of tenderheartedness. A human illustration would be the Good Samaritan.

3) “Forgiving” means letting wrongs done toward us go without demanding even an apology, and certainly not seeking retribution. The pattern: “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Concl: These two verses form a fitting conclusion with the way this chapter began, and a further exhortation of verse 17 that we are not to react like unsaved people often react. The Christian life is a life that calls for the exercise of the grace of God, and it is the difference that is to be seen in the behavior of a child of God that will often enable others to see and understand their need of Christ. As the Lord Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). But, as it was with Paul, so it is only by the grace of God that we can be what we are called to be. As we obey, our lives become more holy, more like our blessed Lord.