



EIGHT JEWELS OF CHRISTIAN LIVING EPHESIANS 4:25-5:1

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MARCH 29, 2026

This may be an old, well-worn truth that many of you already know, and if so, feel free to check out for the first 10 minutes of my message. For everyone else, let me take you back to your High School English grammar class. I'm not even sure that there is much of an emphasis these days on grammar. Just listening to how people talk is a sure sign that even if such a class existed, they either slept through it or skipped class on a regular basis.

There are two words that all of us should by now understand, even if we didn't have a class devoted to correct grammar. These words are absolutely essential to understanding the Christian life. ***A failure to put them in proper relationship to each other is more dangerous than simply making a grammatical mistake. Our eternal destiny is dependent upon it.*** I realize that may sound a bit over the top, the sort of exaggeration that preachers use to drive home a point. But I assure you, it is no exaggeration. Let me explain.

The two words that I have in mind, the two words that you and I must understand if we are to live a life pleasing to the Lord, are ***indicative*** and ***imperative***. I'll make it as simple as I can. An indicative statement is just that, a statement of fact. It is designed to assert what is true. An imperative statement is a command, a call for action in the light of the indicative. Here is an example of what I mean.

Indicative: You have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Imperative: Because you have been justified, here is how you should live.

Now, that seems simple enough, but it is eternally dangerous if you conceive of them in reverse order. The teaching of Scripture is that it is because God has graciously justified and redeemed us through Jesus Christ (that's the indicative) that we are to walk worthy of our calling and obey the many ethical/moral commands in the NT (that's the imperative). Simply put, ***the indicative must always precede the imperative.***

Where Christians get in trouble is in thinking that they will obey the commands of Scripture in order to attain to salvation, or at least show themselves worthy of God's saving grace. Their thinking is something along these lines: "I will energetically obey the commands in Scripture (that's the imperative) so that God will love me (that's the indicative)." I hope you can see that this is far more than a simple lesson in grammar. Our eternal life depends on getting it right. We do not obey the commands and exhortations in the Bible so that God will declare us righteous. God has already declared us righteous. Therefore, we should obey his commands and seek to live according to his will. This is Christianity 101.

Often people never even know that they have reversed the order of these two. Perhaps they were raised and educated in a legalistic home, or in a local church that over-emphasized obedience and under-emphasized grace. As such, they live in constant fear and anxiety that they haven't done enough to please God and to lay hold of his saving mercy.

I've taken the time to drive home this point because it is foundational to understanding the structure and focus of the NT, especially in the writings of Paul. Those of you who are familiar with the book of Romans may recall that in Romans 1-11 we hear about the indicative of what God has done for us in Christ. In Romans 12-16 Paul turns to describe the imperative of what we are now to do in light of what God has already done. In fact, if you don't like the words indicative and imperative, replace them with the words "done" and "do".

You can readily see this in the way Paul opens Romans 12:1. After describing the saving mercy of God, he opens chapter 12 with these words: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Note well: it is because of and based on the "mercies of God" that he urges us to live in a particular way.

We see much the same thing here in Ephesians 4. As you may recall, after describing in Ephesians 1-3 the salvation that God has provided in Jesus Christ, he writes: "I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). God having "called" us is the basis for how we are to "walk" in a manner worthy of it. This is why Ephesians 1-3 can be described as the indicative or the "done" of Christianity, while Ephesians 4-6 is the imperative or the "do" of Christian living. ***Please, don't ever get them***

backwards. If you ever find yourself thinking, “Here is what I will do so that God will love me and save me,” you are well on the way to a miserable life and a Christless eternity.

So, following this short lesson in grammar and theology, let’s turn our attention to the imperative of Christian living or the “do” of the Christian life. Here in Ephesians 4:25-5:1 Paul mentions eight specific things we are to do or conversely, not do. We’ll look at each one turn.

The Eight Jewels of Christian Living

(1) *Speaking the truth* – 4:25

Note that the first step in speaking the truth is “putting away falsehood.” This must be more than simply saying you won’t lie anymore. I think it includes confession and repentance for whatever lies you may have already committed. Of course, not lying is of little help if there is not in its place an active pursuit of the truth. The reason for this exhortation is not simply because lying is sinful and thus an offense against God, but because “we are members one of another” (v. 25b). We are a spiritual family that is even more powerful and deeper than a biological family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, which makes lying to one another especially grievous and painful. Cf. Eph. 4:15; Ps. 5:6).

Speaking the truth to one another is no easy task. Lying, or perhaps just keeping silent, often appears to have greater rewards. The truth might be threatening to your reputation or your status in the community. I hardly need to remind all of you of how devastating it is for a person who is the object of a lie, especially when that lie is made public and there is no repentance forthcoming. I won’t mention names, but most of you know who I’m talking about.

(2) *Righteous anger* – 4:26-27

Here Paul draws on the OT for his point (see Ps. 4:4). There are generally two views of this exhortation.

- One view is that Paul’s exhortation is conditional or concessive: “If (or, when) you get angry, don’t sin.” This is Lincoln’s view, who provides this paraphrase: “Anger is to be avoided at all costs, but if, for whatever reason, you do get angry, then refuse to indulge such anger so that you do not sin” (301). This view, however, is grammatically unlikely (see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 491).
- Another view, the one that I embrace, is that the command and prohibition which follows are both to be taken at face value. There are occasions in the life of the church when righteous indignation is called for. Of all people here today, I know this to be true. But we must be careful. Don’t let your anger simmer and seethe and lead you into other sins such as pride, spite, malice, or longing for revenge. But to be perfectly clear, *not* to feel anger when a sin or injustice is committed is itself a sin.

The exhortation not to let “the sun go down on your anger” (v. 26b) is not to be taken literally. If it were, “it would mean that those who lived in the Arctic or Antarctic would at certain times of the year have no temporal limitation on their anger!” (Best, 450). In the OT sunset was viewed as the time limit for a number of activities (see Deut. 24:13,15,23). Paul’s point is simply that we must be brief in our anger; we must not let it settle and harden before dealing with its cause. Thus, this is “a warning against brooding in anger or nursing it. It is to be dealt with promptly, with reconciliation being effected as quickly as possible” (O’Brien, 340).

I like the way John Stott summarizes this point: “In the face of blatant evil we should be indignant not tolerant, angry not apathetic” (186).

(3) *Resisting Satan’s effort to exploit our anger* – 4:27, or as Paul says, “Give no opportunity to the devil” (v. 27).

Here we see that the devil can exploit the relational strains and tension that develop in the Christian community. Sydney Page is correct to point out “that the devil is not credited with producing anger; that is, its source is apparently to be found within the person himself or herself. Nevertheless, anger [and unforgiveness] can provide the devil with an opportunity to wreak havoc in the life of the individual and the community” (188-89). It seems reasonable that Satan’s activity in this regard would extend to the other sins mentioned in the immediately subsequent context: stealing, unwholesome speech, bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, malice, unforgiveness (see vv. 28-32).

Clinton Arnold points to Paul's use of the term *topos*, translated "foothold" or "opportunity". He argues that this word is often used in the NT for "***inhabited space***" (cf. Luke. 2:7 where it refers to the fact that "there was no *place*" for them in the inn; see also 4:37; 14:9; twice in John 14:2-3 Jesus refers to the "place" he has gone to prepare for us). Even more to the point, says Arnold, are passages that illustrate the use of *topos* to refer to the inhabiting space of an evil spirit, such as Luke 11:24 and Rev. 12:7-8, where as a result of Michael's defeat of Satan and his demons "there was no longer any *place* for them in heaven." Thus he concludes that "the most natural way to interpret the use of *topos* in Ephesians 4:27 is the idea of inhabitable space. Paul is thus calling these believers to vigilance and moral purity so that they do not relinquish a base of operations to demonic spirits" (88).

In the ongoing debate about whether a born-again Christian can be demonized, which is to say, can a believer have an indwelling demonic spirit, this is probably the most explicit example of why the answer to that question is, Yes.

But let me be clear. I don't believe Paul is saying that anytime we sin by lying or due to uncontrolled and unjustified anger, we open the door to a demonic spirit. He has in view ***unrepentant*** lying, anger, and any sort of other sins. That is the point of his telling us to "not let the sun go down on your anger." In other words, confess, repent, and reconcile with your brother or sister.

This verse also tells us that contrary to what most people think, it isn't only egregious public sins like murder or adultery or kidnapping or child molestation that open the door to the entry of a demonic spirit. It may often be the sin of evil speech or instances of petty theft or any other similar, seemingly minor transgressions.

(4) ***Generosity, not theft or greed*** – 4:28

Prohibitions against theft are common in the Bible (see Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19; Lev. 19:11; Mark 10:19; Rom. 13:9; etc.). Here Paul says that stealing is to be replaced by hard work. The needy person is most likely someone within the church. Thus "the motive for work is not individual profit but rather communal well-being. . . The thief is to become a philanthropist" (Lincoln, 304). Thus, Paul is saying that thieves fail the community of faith, not so much because they steal from other Christians, but because they make no financial contribution to it.

(5) ***Controlling your speech*** – 4:29

The word translated "corrupting/unwholesome" (*sapros*) is found only here and in Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33; 13:48; Luke 6:43. In these latter texts it refers to rotten fruit, decaying food, putrid fish. Paul is speaking about ***spiritual halitosis!*** What kind of speech does he have in mind?

Lying (cf. v. 25), obscenity, abusive language, gossip, flattery that manipulates, cynical remarks, judgmentalism, slander, contemptuous talk, condescending speech (with a patronizing attitude), sarcasm that cuts and degrades, mockery, ridicule, etc.

Why must we guard our speech? Because (1) words are the test or revelation of our character (cf. Isa. 6:5-7), and (2) words are the basis of judgment (cf. Matt. 12:36-37).

What kind of speech should we seek to cultivate?

Encouragement, truth, words that build confidence in others, words that remind others of their identity in Christ, praise, reassurance (esp. following failure), comfort, sympathy, instruction, rebuke for sin, loving criticism, warning of impending danger, etc.

Literally, Paul says we are to speak so as to "give grace" to those who hear. Many contend that this simply means "to do a favor" or "to confer a benefit." But could Paul mean that our words are vehicles or channels for God's grace to others? Does speech have the power to communicate God's grace to those in need? Before speaking, ask yourself four questions:

First, what is my motive for speaking? What is my reason for responding to this person? What do I hope to accomplish by opening my mouth?

Second, what impact will my words have on this person? Will it tend to tear them down or build them up?

Third, what impact would my words have on me if the situation were reversed?

Fourth, what would Jesus say?

I know from all-too frequent personal experience what happens when I rush to a conclusion and speak impetuously, without slowing down to pray and ask the Lord if this situation calls for a verbal response. When that happens, disaster is quick to follow!

(6) *Pleasing the Spirit, instead of Grieving him* – 4:30

Paul's language is taken from Isaiah 63:10. There we read that in God's "love and in his pity he redeemed them" (i.e., the people of Israel). "But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit." Again, speaking of the nation Israel, "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert" (Psalm 78:40). Thus, I concur with Clinton Arnold who states that "all forms of unholy behavior – deeply hurts the Spirit, whom God has given to his people to indwell them and empower them to live a holy life" (*Ephesians*, 305). This statement, together with other texts (1 Thess. 4:8; 5:18) indicates that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impassable, unfeeling, energy. The one who is said to be "grieved" (= to cause pain or hurt, to provoke or irritate) is the Spirit who is characterized by holiness and who is himself a co-equal member of the Trinity. "It is not a question of some offense aimed directly at the Spirit but rather that believers by committing the sort of sins that have been mentioned in the earlier sentences, sins which disrupt communal life, are thereby disrupting and opposing the work of the Spirit in building up the Church (cf. 2:22; 4:3,4). When believers act in a way that harms their brothers and sisters, God is hurt" (Lincoln, 307). Says Fee:

"Since 'spirit' does not tend to call forth personal images, and since our view of God is often laced with a kind of transcendence that keeps him especially distant from our everyday lives, it is easy for us to pass off our sins in a much too casual way. Here, then, is the text that forever reminds us that such sins bring grief to God" (715).

This Spirit whom we grieve by our sin is also the one by whom we were sealed (Eph. 1:13) for the day of redemption, i.e., that future day when the redemption that is already ours in terms of the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7) will extend to the glorification of our bodies, finally and fully setting us free from corruption in both body and spirit. By referring to the Spirit as the one who has sealed and secured us for eternal life, Paul rules out the possibility that such sin has the potential to remove the Spirit from our lives. In other words, "the Spirit does not depart when sin is committed. Instead, the Spirit deeply grieves over it" (Arnold, 307).

(7) *Unrighteous anger* – 4:31

Paul returns here to the subject of anger (cf. v. 26). He focuses on five different aspects of sinful anger, together with the "malice" that so often characterizes them all.

- "Bitterness" – refers to that hard-heartedness towards others that will not let go of the past (cf. Rom. 3:14; Acts 8:23; Heb. 12:15).
- "Wrath" and "Anger" – should be taken together. Some prefer to see them as synonymous, but it may be that the former points to those explosive outbursts of rage whereas the latter refers to the more settled, seething orientation of hostility toward another.
- "Clamor" – also translated "shouting" is a word that elsewhere in the NT has a neutral force and means simply to cry aloud or shout for help or in victory. Here "it suggests the lack of restraint which erupts in angry yelling" (Lincoln, 308-09).
- "Slander" – is literally, "blasphemy" (*blasphēmia*), but obviously refers to the verbal abuse and vilifying of other people, not God (see Col. 3:8; Mark 7:22; 1 Tim. 6:4).
- "Malice" – is probably to be applied to all the previous terms, and points to the attitude toward others that desires their harm or distress.

Most commentators recognize some sort of progression in the relationship of these terms. Lincoln's view is typical: There is a progression "from anger's inner center (*pikria*) through its initial eruption (*thumos*) and steady festering (*orgē*) to its external expression (*kraugē*) and damaging of others (*blasphēmia*)" (309).

There is considerable confusion among Christians as to the nature of forgiveness. I want to list five myths about forgiveness, followed by five truths. But before I do, please observe that forgiveness must never be done with a reluctant or grudging spirit. It is to be characterized by kindness and a tender heart. The Greek word translated “tenderhearted” is *eusplanknoi*, which literally means “to have healthy intestines or bowels” (Arnold, 309) but later came to mean a passionate internal feeling.

First, five *myths* about forgiveness. It is largely due to these misunderstandings of what is entailed by forgiveness that people find it so hard to obey Scripture.

- *First, forgiveness is not forgetting.* Why? Because: (a) God does not forget, notwithstanding what you think Jer. 31:34 is saying. This is a metaphor, a word picture, designed to emphasize God’s gracious determination not to hold us liable for our sins. (b) It is intellectually and mentally impossible to forget. Try to forget and you can be assured you will remember! (c) It is experientially devastating. Once having successfully “forgotten” an offense, any occasion that provokes the memory of it can lead to guilt and shame and depression for having failed so miserably to forget. One becomes unwilling ever to forgive, knowing that they will, in all likelihood, remember.
- *Second, forgiveness does not entail the absence of feeling pain.* (a) The only way to stop hurting is to stop feeling and the only way to stop feeling is to die emotionally. (b) This myth is one of the primary reasons people refuse to forgive. They know they can’t stop feeling the sting of the sin and they don’t want to be hypocrites.
- *Third, forgiveness does not mean you cease longing for justice.* Vengeance is not a bad thing. If it were, God would be guilty of a sin (see Rom. 12:19). It’s simply that he’s better at it than we are. Leave it to him. Forgiveness does not mean you ignore that a wrong was done or deny that sin was committed. It simply means you decide to let God be the avenger. One reason people refuse to forgive is that they believe to do so would be to minimize the offense . . . “and that’s not fair!” Never forget that “forgiveness is not flippancy toward sin. It sees it and names it—and then covers it” (Piper).
- *Fourth, forgiveness does not mean you make it easy for the offender to hurt you again.* He or she may hurt you again. That is their choice. But you must set boundaries on your relationship with them. True love never aids and abets the sin of another. True forgiveness is not incompatible with holding a person accountable for their actions and calling them to repent. Forgiveness does not mean you become a doormat for someone else’s sin.
- *Fifth, forgiveness is rarely a one-time, climactic event.* It is often a life-long process. It may well begin with an act, but it often requires reaffirmation.

Second, five *truths* about forgiveness. Paul says we are to forgive one another “as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). The “*as*” points to two things: we are to forgive “because” God forgave us and “as” or in the same way he forgave us. Or, as Paul puts it in 5:1, we are to imitate God when we are faced with someone who has deeply offended and hurt us. So how did God forgive us?

- *First, God forgave us by absorbing in himself the destructive and painful consequences of our sin against him. Forgiveness is therefore the decision to live with the painful consequences of another person’s sin.* You are going to have to do so anyway, so you might as well do it without bitterness and rancor and hatred.
- *Second, God forgave us in Christ by cancelling the debt we owed him.* We are no longer held liable for our sins or in any way made to pay for them. To forgive someone thus means you promise not to bring it up to the offender, to others, or to yourself, as a way of using it against them. Sadly, we saw an explicit violation of this principle in the recent church split that we all experienced.
- *Third, forgiving others as God has forgiven us means you resolve to revoke revenge.* It means you refuse to let the anger and pain energize an agenda to exact payment, be it emotional, relational, physical, or financial. *You cancel the debt by refusing to use past suffering to justify present sin.*

- *Fourth, forgiving others as God has forgiven us means a determination to do them good rather than evil. See Rom. 12:20-21.*
- *Fifth, God forgave us in Christ by reconciling us to himself, by restoring the relationship our sin had severed. True forgiveness pursues restoration. True forgiveness longs to love again. However, relationship is built on trust, and trust is not built in a day. Also, restoration and reconciliation are not always possible. Said Paul: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18).*

I need to mention one other important principle about forgiveness. People have in recent days pushed back against my insistence that once you extend forgiveness, that does not mean there will be no additional consequences for the sin committed. Yes, there may be, but those consequences can never be imposed by the person who extends forgiveness. God may, in his sovereign ways, decide to impose consequences in the aftermath of a sin that he has forgiven. Take King David, for example. He was clearly forgiven for his adultery with Bathsheba and his complicity in the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (see Psalms 32 and 51). But in the aftermath of his sin God took the life of their first-born son and allowed David's other son, Absalom, to wreak havoc in the kingdom.

But remember: ***that was God's doing***, not of any other person who might have forgiven David. Simply put, if you forgive someone for any particular sin, you cannot turn around and then say: "Oh, although I have forgiven you, I'm going to use your sin against you. I'm going to throw it back in your face whenever it serves my purposes. I'm going to use it to justify doing you harm. I'm going to hang your sin over your head and appeal to it so that you might suffer in some way." That is not forgiveness! It empties forgiveness of grace and love and all value.

Let me say it once again. When you sincerely forgive someone for their sin, you are making a ***promise*** never to bring it up to the person who sinned, nor to others, nor to yourself, as a way of using it against them or bearing a grudge.



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