

Sermon – 26/10/2008 am

New Man, No Lying

Study Text: Ephesians 4:25

Is it an orange or is it a lemon tree? Can you tell the difference? Although a botanist can tell the difference by looking at the leaves, to most people the tree looks the same. It is only when the tree bears fruit that you know what sort of tree it is that you planted. Hopefully what you thought would bear sweet oranges does not turn out to be a lemon.

By their fruit you will know them (Matthew 7:20). This is what Jesus said. He said that a good tree bears good fruit but a bad tree bears bad fruit. He was not giving a lesson in horticulture but talking about the life and conduct of people. What is in a person's heart will be seen in their conduct, in what they do and say.

The old man that is still under the control of Satan will bring forth bad fruit; bitterness, bad temper, bad language, and selfish greed. The new man on the other hand, the person who has put on Christ and been renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit; *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control. Against these there is no law* (Galatians 5:22).

Here in Ephesians 4 Paul has just made it clear to the Christians that when they believed in Christ they put off the old man with its shameful and corrupt ways and put on the new man with its righteous and holy ways. They put off Adam and put on Christ. They put off lust and put on love.

This radical renewal, this total transformation, was the work of the Spirit of God in their hearts. They received grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit when they believed. The Holy Spirit continues to dwell in the heart of the believer empowering him/her to live the new life in Christ.

Put Away Lying

Therefore putting away lying (4:25). If you have been looking for practical teaching then here it is. Some people complain about doctrine saying 'give us practical teaching' – but then they do not like what they find. They cannot keep this moral law – 'put away lying'. 'But sometimes we have to tell lies' they say. 'We know lying is wrong but then sometimes it is okay'. The other day a man said to me 'I don't think God would make such high demands'. He, like many people, wanted to help God make his laws.

That is why we have the doctrine. That is why Paul explains the change that has taken place, and must take place, in the inner man before we can conform to moral law. And after that change has taken place we must continue *putting away lying*. We must remember who we are in Christ and press on in him.

This practical teaching, this moral law, is not just a random law that God dreamed up to try and trap us. It is teaching based on the truth of who God is and who Jesus is. God cannot lie. Jesus is the truth. *The truth is in Jesus* (4:21). That is what you as a believer have learned.

This is what you know as a believer. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, if you are a member of the body of Christ, then the truth is in you. *Therefore* – this is how this passage starts – *therefore putting away lying* or falsehood. You cannot walk in truth and falsehood at the same time. You cannot say it is okay to tell lies sometimes because that is denying the truth that is in you.

Lying is the first and greatest thing that must change in our conduct as a new creation in Christ Jesus. Lying was the original sin. Satan, who is the father of lies, spoke a lie to Eve. He insinuated that God told her she could not eat of any tree in the garden, when he said only one tree. Insinuation is indeed ‘in sin’ and ‘in sin u ate’ God said to Eve. The Greek word for lying here is ‘pseudos’ which we use to mean false. That is why we include all forms of falsehood – lies, deceit, gossip and even unspoken lies like that of not saying what should be said.

Lying was probably the first sign of sin in your life. Born in sin we are full of self and pride. We are born with the old man in our hearts. In our selfishness and pride we tell lies to get our own way, to get what we want, and to make ourselves look good to others. Lying soon becomes a way of life. We start living a great big lie, wearing a mask to work but taking it off at home. Even at home we lie to one another in the family. We make promises to children that we do not keep; we tell children ‘stories’ to keep the truth from them.

The tongue is very small but can get us into great trouble. James said the tongue is like a fire, a small spark that can set a whole forest on fire. It is a member of our body that can easily corrupt the whole body. Nothing corrupts more quickly than when the tongue speaks lies. *No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison* (James 3:8). No man, only God can tame the tongue. That is a major outcome of being a new person in Christ.

Speak the Truth

Are we to go about not speaking? Of course not! Sometimes that is what people do when they are angry – which is the next sin that Paul addresses. Rather, we are to speak the truth, to speak the truth in love. Paul told us this back in verse 15, and he will keep on telling us. We need to hear this every day – speak the truth in love. Here he just says *speak the truth with your neighbour*, quoting from Zechariah 8.

Zechariah was a prophet who spoke to the remnant returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. He was urging them not only to rebuild the temple but to be the people that God had called them to be. God brought them back to worship him and to be his witnesses in the world. Since God is truth they must also be men and women, and a community that lives by truth. This is exactly what God wants us to be.

It is interesting that Paul does not make direct reference to the Ten Commandments. He is saying what the ninth commandment says – you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour – but he is saying more. He is not only saying put off, but also put on. Put away lying and put on truth. He can say this because of the power of the gospel. The commandment Moses gave is good but it is powerless.

You cannot keep the law. Some do try to live by the law – we call them legalists. But *what the law was powerless to do because of the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh* (Romans 8:3). This is the

blessing of being under grace and not under law, of having his laws written on our hearts and in our minds rather than on tablets of stone (Jeremiah 31:33).

Members of the Body

Furthermore, Paul does not simply say put away lying and speak the truth. He gives a reason for doing so – for we are members of one another. The basis for the Law of Moses was ‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt’. God has not changed. He is the God who saved us from the bondage of sin. But there is something more under the New Covenant. *They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest* (Jeremiah 31:34). The New Covenant has come about because of Christ. In his precious blood we have been made new and we have been made members of his body – the church.

The church is the means by which God is making his wisdom, his love and his power made known to the world. *To God be glory in the church by Christ Jesus* (3:10, 21). Each member, each believer is vitally connected to the head of the body, Christ, and to one another. Because ‘in Christ’ we are members of one another we must not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9). To lie to a brother is to lie to self and to Christ – as Ananias and Sapphira tragically discovered (Acts 5).

The church was in its infancy and the Christians continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayer. They ate together and worshipped together with gladness. They shared whatever they had so that no one was in need. But then, then the lie came. Ananias and Sapphira colluded to keep back some money from what they sold. They were free to do what they liked with the money, but they gave the impression they were giving it all to the church. Such a simple thing you might say. But it was a lie, a lie to the church, a lie to the Holy Spirit and a lie to God. It was a lie prompted by the old man, by selfishness and by Satan. Without repentance they received the wages of sin – death.

Chrysostom is widely quoted as saying ‘if the eye sees a serpent, does it deceive the foot? If the tongue tastes what is bitter does it deceive the stomach?’ Lying is a great hindrance to the growth and fruitfulness of the body. Without openness and truth there can only be disunity and disorder. Therefore, put away lying.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon