

The Walk of the True Christian, Part 3

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Code: 49-26

It's time now to open your Bible to the book of Ephesians. We have been in Ephesians for quite a while. And with a brief apology to those who are visiting for the weekend—we'll sort of drop you in in the middle here, but I think the Word of God will penetrate your heart and be helpful to you. At least, that's my prayer.

In the book of Ephesians you have kind of a model of Christian construction. You have six chapters; the first three are about doctrine, and the second three are about practice—orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And all doctrine is for the purpose of practice. All biblical doctrine is but a foundation for how we live our lives. And so we are in the fourth chapter, which puts us in the second section, which is where we apply our theology in the way we live. And we've entitled this series "The True Christian's Walk." The true Christian was basically defined in the opening three chapters, and now we see how true Christians live. This is a definition for us; this is what describes a Christian; and you'll see that as I read to you the familiar words of chapter 4, starting in verse 17.

"So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles"—or the pagans—"also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." And here's the transition: "But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit; that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice"—or evil. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Now our theme in chapter 4 has been spiritual transformation; that identifies the true Christian. Verses 17 to 19, that I just read you, describe the unconverted person. And then you have, as I noted, the transition in verse 20—you have learned Christ. And that is a dramatic transformation. You have heard Him; you literally heard Him speak by His Spirit in your heart and in His Word. You have been taught in Him by the Spirit and the Word; you now know the truth in Jesus. And so with

reference to your former life, you laid that aside, that corrupt life. You have been renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you are a new self, created in the likeness of God. In fact, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. This is a dramatic, 180-degree transformation that takes place at salvation. And it becomes evident who is transformed by virtue of how we behave, how we live.

Back in chapter 2, we saw a very clear statement of this transformation in verses 8 through 10, chapter 2, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” And then verse 10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” That is an absolute statement of fact that if you have come to Christ for salvation, you have been created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Or in the language of chapter 4, verse 24, you have been “created in righteousness and holiness of the truth,” “in the likeness of God.” In other words, you take on the character of God, you take on the character of Christ, which manifests itself in righteousness and holiness and truth and good works. Christians are known by the transformation of their lives. It was what Jesus intended when He said, “By their fruits you shall know them.”

So we’re learning here where the great transformation shows up, and we started with that in verse 25, and we saw a series of exchanges here—dramatic exchanges. The first one is in verse 25, “Laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” And a few weeks ago we saw that the first exchange is lying is exchanged for speaking truth. And then in the next verse, we saw that anger, sinful anger, is exchanged for being angry but not sinning. Sinful anger is replaced by righteous indignation. So the first exchange is the new creation gives up lying for truth, gives up anger for righteous indignation.

Now this morning I want you to look at a couple more of these exchanges—very practical. The third one is in verse 28: “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.” You exchange lying for speaking the truth, you exchange the old life of sinful anger for righteous indignation, and you also, when you became a believer, exchange stealing for sharing. This is a complete opposite. So verse 28 says, “He who steals must steal no longer.”

What does the Bible say about stealing? What does it say about robbery? What does it say about theft? Oh, believe me, it says plenty; and we don’t have time to cover all of it, but I do want to introduce you to some of the things in Scripture that will help us understand how God feels about it. But let me say this to begin with: that it is another one of those default human sins that is very normal for fallen people. It is normal for fallen people to be liars; it is normal for fallen people to be angry; and it is also normal for all sinners to steal, to take things that do not belong to them. This is so normal that the Bible warns against it with specificity. Clearly: In Exodus chapter 20 and verse 15, God said, “You shall not steal.” Repeated it in Deuteronomy 5:19, “You shall not steal.” It’s a simple statement; it’s also a comprehensive statement. But let me show you something of its comprehensive nature by having you turn to Exodus 22, Exodus. As God is giving instruction just subsequent to giving the law, He has much to say about stealing. And it’s the beginning of the twenty-second chapter of Exodus, and we’ll look at the first nine verses or so.

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.” Not a good idea: You steal one sheep, and you’re going to lose four; you steal one ox, and you’re going to lose five. This is a defense—listen to me—of private property,

personal possession. God is not a communist; the Bible believes in personal property. And if you steal, you pay, and you pay abundantly.

Verse 2 says, "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account." Did you see that? What the Word of God is saying is that when somebody comes to rob you, and you defend yourself, and the thief dies, there's no guilt. That is self-defense. That is a protection of your own private property. "No bloodguiltiness."

"But if the sun has risen on him," verse 3—that is, he survives—"there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." In other words, if he doesn't have anything to pay back what he has taken or destroyed, he has to be an indentured servant. He has to sell himself to work for the person he defrauded, or someone else, so that he can gain back the restitution that is necessary.

Restitution is always God's design for the response to a crime. We have penitentiaries in our nation; penitentiaries were designed by Quakers to make people penitent. The idea was if they sat there long enough, they'd feel sorry. Well, it doesn't really work that way, does it? They sit there long enough, they just become more infested with criminal maneuvers. Restitution was always God's way; and if you had to, you sold yourself as an indentured servant to make restitution.

"If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double." So even if the person got back the property, you had to pay double for the criminal act.

"If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed bare and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard." One thing people used to do to their enemies was let their animals loose in their enemy's field to destroy the crop. If you did anything to harm another person's crop, you had to make restitution by giving the very best of your own field and the best of your own vineyard.

Here's another thing that enemies did: They would burn somebody's barn down, somebody's store of harvested grain. And verse 6 says, "If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field itself is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution." That could be significant. If you burn down someone's stacked grain or burned their field, you had to make restitution.

"If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep for him and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property." You give your possessions, your valuables to a friend, and you come back after he's held your valuables while you were gone, and he says, "Oh, it was stolen"; how do you know that it was stolen, and he didn't steal it? You have to take him to court to determine whether, in fact, there actually was a thief or whether the friend you trusted laid his hands on your property.

Then verse 9 sort of sums up: "For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor." If you steal, you

have serious, serious consequences.

In the book of Leviticus, just a few verses in chapter 6 to strengthen the understanding of this: “The Lord spoke to Moses”—chapter 6—“When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the Lord, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him”—and that’s what was in view in Exodus 22; how do you know that the guy who told you, “A thief took it,” didn’t make up that story, and he himself has it? So this is defrauding, any kind of fraud—“or through robbery . . . if he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering.” So he shall go to the priest and make a guilt offering. And on the very day he did that, he had to provide the restitution. This is what Zacchaeus did, didn’t he, in multiples. But he was following Old Testament law.

In Isaiah 61:8, God says, “I hate robbery.” “I hate robbery.” That assumes the right to private property, the right to personal possessions. And that assumes that God has designed that what you earn, you keep, because it’s yours, it’s yours.

In Jeremiah, Jeremiah indicts the people of Israel in chapter 7, and he does so, starting in verse 9: “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’?” “Are you going to have the audacity to steal, murder, commit adultery, speak profane languages, engage in idolatrous sacrifice following other gods, and then come into the Temple, which is My house, and say, ‘We are delivered! God is our Redeemer; God is our Deliverer’? Do you think that saying that allows you to do all these abominations?” And then verse 11, “‘Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,’ declares the Lord.”

Those are the very words that Jesus declared when He went in to attack the Temple; said, “You turned it into a den of robbers.” Why? “Because you come here, you ostensibly worship the true and living God; but your lives are full of sin. You commit adultery, you lie, and you steal. Don’t come into My house if you’re a robber and think everything is OK. It’s not.”

In Hosea chapter 4—and these are just some samples. But in Hosea chapter 4, verse 1, “Listen to [the Lord,] the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery.” It’s these same default sins that are common throughout all of human history: swearing, deception or lying, murder, stealing, and adultery. This is the case the Lord has against His people. God hates robbery. Don’t steal.

Jesus repeated that command in Matthew 19:18, “You shall not steal.” Paul repeated that command in Romans 13, “You shall not steal.” Titus 2:10 says, “Not pilfering,” or embezzling. So this is another very clear command directed at a default kind of sin that is very, very normal to all fallen humanity. We are an entire race of robbers.

Children have to be disciplined firmly to learn that some things don't belong to them. Greediness is in the heart—profound, selfish, proud greediness—and stealing is a function of greed. People don't really steal out of need. It is possible that that does happen on occasion, of course, for a person who is destitute and at the end and has no choice; but they don't generally steal out of need, not in the modern world, because well, for example, in our country the government provides a trillion dollars' worth of protection against the kind of starvation that people would be threatened by, by providing all the available government resources that people can access.

But psychologists say people don't steal out of need; that's very rare. They steal out of greed. They steal out of what is basically suggested as deprivation: "I don't have what you have; I want what you have." And that's why another of the Ten Commandments is, "Don't covet." It's envy, it's jealousy; and the envy and the jealousy leads to theft, and it can also lead to massive upheaval in society as people collectively become jealous and seek vengeance.

It's a universal problem; you know that, because we have to have a key to everything, we have to have passwords ad nauseam, we have to put our money in banks; they have to be in the bank but in the safe. We lock everything. We have to have codes, security systems, guards. We have to have police, detectives, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, juries. All of this entire system, for the most part, of all the kinds of crimes there are, is devoted primarily to the crime of stealing.

Now we have new crimes of identity theft, hackers—one of the reasons I don't drive an electric car. I have a 2006 car. Nobody can hack into my 2006 car. I get to go where I want to go; nobody can reroute some electric machine and stop me before I can get to Grace Church. You do understand that if you have an electric car, at any point you can be rerouted by powers you don't even know exist.

We have every imaginable kind of theft—from smash and grab, people raiding drugstores and just taking everything they can get their hands on, smashing cases in jewelry stores, auto theft—all kinds of theft. Non-payment of debt, that's stealing; falsifying expense accounts, that's stealing; cheating on your taxes, embezzling money, holding back wages that are due. But this is the way of the world because there's just corruption in the world. And corrupt people lie, and they get angry, and they steal. That's just the way it is in the world.

Now today, instead of our society trying to help people stay within the framework of honesty and not steal, we have a society that wants to allow for stealing, and the new justification for it is something called "crimes of survival" or "crimes of equity." It's a new trend. It was explained this way in one article: "The homeless, the poor, and the people of color commit robberies and theft to survive. Any enforcement of the law on these is a violation of their basic human rights." Now we're seeing this play out right in front of us.

This is the reverse of a theory that was very effective not too many years ago; it was called the "broken window theory" of enforcement. It had a dramatic effect on a lot of cities, particularly New York. And the broken window theory of behavior is this: You stop people at the lowest level of crime—a broken window—because if you don't stop them at the lowest level, the thing will escalate rapidly beyond control. Why? Because people are by nature greedy, and they are discontent, and they feel deprived, and they are covetous; and that's what the fallen heart is like. Even the most well-dressed, well-educated person can embezzle millions of dollars because in his heart, there is this same bent toward being a thief.

But the broken windows approach to policing—stop crime at the lowest level—had a dramatically positive effect on crime. It's been replaced now by what's called "survival crime," the assumption that, well, these people are so deprived, they do this to survive, so we should let them do it. An illustration of that in California's Proposition 47. Proposition 47 downgraded stealing property of less than \$950 from a felony to a misdemeanor, and not to be prosecuted; and the goal is "to eliminate racial disproportionality." So do people—because they don't have what somebody else has, even though they have access to social provision, do people who are on the low end in terms of resources, do they have a right to take something that's not theirs? Let me show you an answer to that in Proverbs 6.

Proverbs 6, verse 30, "Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry." You say, "Well, wait a minute, that's the opposite of what you're saying." No. What it says is we don't "despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he's hungry"; in other words, we understand that, we understand that. We understand somebody doing that. That's a real issue, where somebody steals because he's hungry.

But look at the next verse: "When he is found, he must repay sevenfold; he must give all the substance of his house." I don't think anybody understands that in this culture. Even if you're stealing at a low level in your life, there are other ways that God wants you to have your needs met than stealing. Even in the most desperate situation, you don't steal because if you're caught, in the biblical mandate, you're going to pay sevenfold. And where's that going to come from? They're going to take your house. So there's just no wiggle room in the Scripture, as it lays out this issue of stealing. Those who belong to the kingdom, those who belong to the Lord, exchange stealing for sharing.

Go back to verse 28: "But rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need." We don't take, we—what?—we give. "Such were some of you," 1 Corinthians 6. You were thieves; you're not anymore. Now we must labor, that's *kopiaō*, "to work to the point of sweat and exhaustion"—hard work. Even God had a six-day work week. Exodus 20:9, "Six days shall you labor and do all your work." If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you exchange stealing for sharing.

Listen to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 10, "For even when we were with you," Paul says, "we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." There's no place in the Bible for beggars and tramps and bums and street people begging.

Now I understand the homeless issue. I understand that a vast majority of those people have basically put themselves in a situation like that, not because there aren't resources available, not because they don't have families, not because there's no one to help, but because they have destroyed themselves on drugs and alcohol. I understand that. Our society used to be compassionate toward those people to the degree that we had places where those people could go and be cared for and fed and given a bed. Oh, there was some stigma with what was called a mental hospital, but it provided safety for them. It provided protection and met their needs. Now they're just turned loose in the streets, to their own sad destruction.

If you don't work, you don't eat. That's the general rule. If you have reached a point in your life, whether by disability or by self-destruction, you can't work, that's where we come in. We work so that

we can provide what is good for those who have need. But go back to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, if you're "not willing to work," you're "not to eat, either." Paul says in verse 11, "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread," "eat their own bread." First Timothy 5:8, "If anyone doesn't provide for his own"—his own family—"and especially those of his household, he's denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." If you're a Christian, you provide for your family, or you're worse than an unbeliever. Why does he say you're "worse than an unbeliever"? Because even unbelievers do that, even unbelievers do that.

So we don't steal. What we do, on the other hand—back to verse 28—is, "Performing with [our] hands"—energetic effort with our own hands—"performing . . . what is good," what is *agathos*; that's a word that means "perfect in its kind," "brings pleasure," "brings satisfaction," "inherently good," "inherently beneficial," "please to God." Why do we do that? So that we "have something to share with one who has need." This is what we do; we help the destitute, so that they aren't tempted to steal, by providing what they need. First John says if you see your brother have need, and you shut your compassion to him, how does the love of God even dwell in you? How can you be a Christian if you don't meet needs?

So if you are a believer, there's some dramatic exchanges in the transformation: from lying to speaking truth, from sinful anger to righteous indignation, from stealing to sharing. And let me have you look at verse 29 for one more: There's an exchange of corrupt speech for gracious speech. Corrupt speech is exchanged for gracious speech. Verse 29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Your heart is transformed, your mind is transformed, your behavior is transformed, and oh, by the way, your mouth is transformed.

On the negative, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." That's *sapros* in the Greek. It means "rank," "foul," "rotten," "putrid," "disgusting"—very strong word. This, too, is another normal vice. The profane corruption of our culture is manifest constantly in the speech of this culture. The music is often filthy and vile. The films, television, the discourse, the conversations—it's nothing new. I read some things about ancient Rome around the time when Ephesians was written, and there was a terrible, terrible swearing problem, and it was mostly the soldiers who were the most profane of all. It's nothing new to speak foul, profane language. That, too, is a default position because "out of the heart the mouth speaks." So let that kind of speech never come out of your mouth.

Let me show you what our Lord said about that in Matthew 12:34. He says, "You brood of vipers"—condemning those who rejected Him—"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?" That's the basic. If you're evil, how can you speak good? Well, you can't because if you're evil, it's going to come out of your mouth. The heart speaks out of the mouth. And the next verse says that: "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." So your speech is defining your spiritual condition.

Verse 36—you may think you can say anything you want and get away with it. Listen to this: "I tell you every careless, every useless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Wait a minute, wait a minute. We're condemned by our words and justified by our words? What are we hearing? Is this works salvation? No. What it means is that when you stand before the Judge,

and the adjudication of your eternal destiny is at stake, the evidence of your regeneration will show up in your words. The record of your words will validate the transformation because your words are going to be transformed. Every careless word, for those who were never transformed, is kept in the divine record and will be the reason, the list of crimes, for which they will be everlastingly condemned. God keeps a record of everything we say, everything.

In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 8, in a somewhat parallel text, we read this: “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.” If you’re a new creation in Christ, there’s no place for that.

Let me give you the illustration of all illustrations in the New Testament: James chapter 3. Just listen to this; it doesn’t really need much explanation. James chapter 3, listen—you can follow along in your Bible; we’ll go down through verse 10. James 3, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” If you’re a teacher, you’re going to have a stricter judgment because you’re going to be in a position where you’re saying more words publicly.

And “we all stumble in many ways. If anyone doesn’t stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.” In other words, you’d better be careful before you become a teacher and you put yourself in the public, and you know that all your words are going to be heard. And in this generation, heard and recorded and kept forever and ever and ever and ever; you’d better think before you want to put your entire life on public record, because all stumble. And controlling the tongue—to do it perfectly, you’d have to be a perfect man.

Verse 3, James says, “If we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.” Wow, what a description of the tongue.

“Every species of beasts and birds, and reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.” The tongue is an instrument of hell. It starts fires; we know that.

Let’s go back to Ephesians, then; kind of wrap it up. “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth”—no abusive speech. Down in verse 4 of chapter 5, “No filthiness,” no “silly talk,” no “coarse jesting”—dirty jokes—“which are not fitting. But rather”—back to verse 29—“only such a word as is good”—*agathos* again—“only such a word as is good”—noble, pleasing. And how is something deemed to be good? Well, there are three ways. It “is good for edification.” That is to say, it is good to build up someone. In other words, your words all ought to be uplifting. They ought to be illuminating. They ought to be instructive. They ought to be enlightening. They ought to bring to people the truth that helps them understand better, know better, and live better.

And not only that, secondly, our words should be “according to the need.” This means “appropriate,” “purposeful,” “on point,” “pertinent,” “suitable.” And, thirdly, “So that it will give grace to those who

hear.” Our words are to edify; that is to instruct and uplift. Our words are to be useful, appropriate, purposeful, suitable, and pertinent to the issues at hand. And our words are, most of all, to be gracious, beneficial, loving, kind, amiable, even gentle.

It was said about Jesus in Luke 4:22 that “gracious words . . . [fell] from His lips.” Paul says in Colossians 4:6, your “speech . . . [should be] seasoned with salt.” Salt was used to stop corruption, putrefaction. There should be no corruption in your speech—not ugly, not harsh, not bitter, not abusive, not vindictive, not boastful, not demeaning, not unkind, not harmful, not filthy, not coarse. All of that pretty much defines speech in our culture. Things have changed.

I found a quote this week that struck me with the contrast between a few centuries ago and now, in our country. This is a general order that came from George Washington; he wrote this general order on August 3, 1776, and he sent it to the entire American army. This is what he wrote: “The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice hitherto little known in our American Army is growing into fashion. He hopes that the officers will, by example as well as influence, endeavor to check it and that both they and the men will reflect that we can little hope for the blessing of Heaven in our army if we insult it by our impiety and folly. Added to this it is a vice so mean and low without any temptation that every man of sense and character detests and despises it.” Signed, General George Washington. Even in Washington’s day there were still some residual social impact from the Christian establishment of this nation. The General didn’t believe that the Army could be blessed if its language was filthy and profane. So our prayer should be the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 141:3, who said, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; [and] keep the door of my lips”—guard my lips.

Let me take you to verse 30. I may say more about this next time, but for now it’s important. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Probably the people who are most kind to you, people who are most generous with you, people who love you the most, the people who do the most for you, hear your best speech. Fair enough? I think you probably guard your tongue when you’re around the people that you admire, the people who have done the greatest good in your life.

Oh, that’s exactly what this is saying. Do you know who has done the greatest good for you? The Holy Spirit. And what does He do for you? He sealed you for the day of redemption. We saw that back in chapter 1. The Holy Spirit secured your eternal reward. The Holy Spirit is keeping you. You’re guarded by the Holy Spirit. You’re protected by the Holy Spirit to receive your eternal inheritance. No human being has ever done you such a favor. But if you lie, and if you are angry, and if you steal, and if you speak perverse words, you grieve the Holy Spirit, the one who has done the most for you. Other people might not hear; He hears every word, and He is grieved.

The Holy Spirit has suffered such grief for a long, long time. Way back in Isaiah chapter 63, verse 7, God recalls all that He’s done for Israel: “I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel”—Isaiah is just recounting God’s lovingkindnesses—“which He has granted them according to His compassion and according to the abundance of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, ‘Surely, they are My people, sons who will not deal falsely.’ So He became their Savior. [And] in all their affliction He was afflicted”—isn’t that amazing; He took them to Himself, and He became their Savior, and He suffered their affliction. “And the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, and lifted them and carried them all the days of old.” That could be

said of us, right? That's salvation talk. Look at verse 10: "But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them." Grieving the Holy Spirit is not some minor issue.

By how you live your life, you set the course of what the Spirit does in your life. If you grieve the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit turns against you to discipline you. If you please the Holy Spirit, He blesses you. You say, "Does the Holy Spirit really get sorry about my life?" Yes, the Holy Spirit grieved—and the term used here means "severe grief." Look, we know God, in the book of Jeremiah, shed tears. And Christ in the gospel of John, chapter 11, shed tears. And the Holy Spirit is sorrowful. That word means "sorrow" as well.

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to secure your eternal salvation. So the Scripture's not saying, "Don't sin, or the Holy Spirit might let you go." He's saying, "Don't sin *because* He will never let you go." So it's not that you're not sinning out of fear, it's that you're not sinning out of love. The one who has done the most for you is God the Holy Spirit, and your motive for holiness is gratitude and worship.

Put away lying, put away anger, put away stealing, put away unwholesome words—and you will not give a place for Satan, and you will not grieve the Holy Spirit, and you will experience His fruit and blessing. Let's pray.

Father, we have come to the point where it's our desire that Your Holy Spirit would take the Word that we have heard and make application in our hearts. It is not that we sit under the preaching of the Word of God in order that we might be spiritually entertained; it is that we might be instructed and convicted and encouraged. And I know, Lord, even as I pray, that there are many people in this congregation, surely the vast majority of them, who heard this Word today and loved what they heard, desired what they heard to be true in their lives, longed to be faithful, longed to be obedient, because You have transformed them, so that even this confronting of sin is an encouragement to the true believer because the true believer says, "Yes, yes"; and that is the Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they do belong to You.

But there are some here who have no sense of longing or desire for these righteous things, and therein lies the evidence that they are without God, callous, insensitive in their sin because they desire the very things that are opposite of what true believers desire. And thus, we can examine our own hearts this morning and know our spiritual condition. Is our response, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. This is what I desire for Your glory. I don't want to grieve the Spirit who has done such eternal good for me"? Lord, in that sense, even a convicting message like this becomes cause for rejoicing, because the Spirit is affirming this in our hearts, and this is what we know we desire. Thank You for that witness.

For those who don't know You, Lord, grant them saving grace and power this day, we pray in the name of our Savior. Amen.

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