

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 (ESV) ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

There is a dis-ease throughout our nation today that is infecting every state. It is a dis-ease that is easy to diagnose. You can see the disease in a person's eyes, on the expression of people's faces, and you can readily detect the disease by something that you hear whenever the dis-eased person speaks. I call the disease killer-speech. In their eyes you see darkness and hate. The facial expressions become contorted because the speech coming out is in the language of lying tongue. If words could kill there would be blood everywhere as people shoot their mouths off with killer bullets. I am not just speaking of the non-believers in our nation or people in power. I have listened to podcasts that speak of the virus as if it were a conspiracy set up by people in power purposely. The people speaking claim to be Bible-believing Christians. I am somewhat embarrassed by this. All bullet-speech or killer speech is given for the purpose of blaming people of another political party, of another race, of another tribe, of another religion for all the major problems in our nation. It is the blame and shame game. Those caught up in this are exceptionally self-righteous, thinking they know more or better than the rest and if you disagree with them you are down right not smart. There is nothing redemptive about such speech. When your entire speech pattern is putting other people down something has gone wrong, terribly wrong. Living to degrade those you disagree with does not originate from God. It originates in the pit of hell itself. That is where I see our national discourse today nationwide. Blaming everyone else without self-examination of one's own

faults, one's own personal failures, where one has fallen short helps no one and solves nothing. It is amazing the number of people who make their living to do just that.

There are five things in this passage that Paul tells us to take off and five things we are to put on. **1. Strip off lying and put on telling the truth (4:25-26).**

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Friends one of the two greatest commandments is to love your neighbor as yourself. The Bible tells us to speak the truth in love one to another. Friends, when we put one another down we are shooting ourselves in the foot because as Christians we belong to each other. We are one family in Christ. We are to treat others as we wish to be treated. The Bible tells us that speech devoid of love is useless. A person recently came to my office to express with me a personal disagreement. The person spoke clearly, to the point, and bathed with love. We prayed together and the conversation was good, healthy, and right. When you speak truth in love, the listener is encouraged and edified. We are even free to disagree with one another, but we must do it in a respectful way. God listens to every word we speak and one day we will be held accountable for every word spoken when Jesus comes again.

In today's society there is way of thinking called woke or cancel-culture. If you say something that the woke people or the cancel-culture people deems rude or insensitive, it means your entire life no longer deserves to be listened to ever again. They want you erased from culture completely. Free speech is an abomination to them. They are the judge and jury and always quick to condemn. A person's lifetime achievements are completely scorched to the earth.

I have a dear friend who almost always knows what I need to hear so I can learn and grow, and this person never holds back. He sees my failings and will not accept any of my excuses. Such Christian friends are priceless and one of the best parts of being a Christian.

In confirmation we study the 5th commandment, “Thou shall not kill.” Luther states, “We should fear and love God so that we do our neighbor no bodily harm nor cause them any suffering but help and befriend them in every way.” Friends, we can kill people with words. Yes they are still breathing but we can kill their spirit, discourage greatly, and put people in dire pain by words that ought not be spoken. Once the toothpaste is out of the tube it can never be put back into the tube.

Scripture condemns verbal sins such as lies, gossip, or insults as severely as it condemns adultery and murder. Please be careful what you say. God is listening to your every word. Your words can kill, and your words can give life. The choice is up to you.

2. Strip off uncontrolled anger and put on self-control (4:26-27).

Ephesians 4:26(ESV) ²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷And give no opportunity for the devil.” I believe we are living in a day of incredible anger and rage. Road rage is a term we are all too familiar with. People use their vehicles as a weapon to express their own inner rage. Our society today is filled with people full of anger and this anger is vented in such unhealthy and irrational ways. The further a nation goes away from God, the greater the role of the sinful nature taking over including unbridled anger. God’s love in a person’s life, God’s Holy Presence in a person’s life has a way of taming us or keeping us from expressing one’s anger that can be so dangerous. Without God’s restraint, a person’s sinful nature has free reign and do we ever see that today. We as Christians know that we have a better future for us in heaven. We know God’s love and God’s power. The non-Christian has none of this and therefore their anger knows no bounds.

I did a study of anger a few years ago and this is what I discovered. No one can make you angry. Anger is an emotion of choice. You choose to get angry. Anger in itself is not a sin. God Himself gets angry. Where sin enters the picture is when we vent our anger in unholy ways that harms not only ourselves but others too. Anger can be used for good when it motivates you

to do the right thing that pleases God. You see little children sitting alone in a locked car at Walmart and it is 98 degrees, hot with windows barely open. Your anger can spare their lives as the parent has forgotten how long they have let the children sit there. Abuse is abuse. Anger used wisely can save lives. Anger used foolishly takes lives. All lives matter to God.

3. Quit stealing and do useful labor (4:28).

Ephesians 4:28(ESV) ²⁸*Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.* I am very good friends with the former chief of police of Antioch, Jim Forester. He gave me an education on how much is stolen out of the Walmart in Antioch. You read about stores out in California where people walk in, steal whatever they want, and the police can't do anything about it due to the rules of how much can be stolen without being prosecuted. It's crazy. Thou shall not steal. It is so clear.

4. Strip off harmful speech and put on helpful speech (4:29-30).

Ephesians 4:29-30(ESV) ²⁹*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Unwholesome language is foul language. The term foul can be used of rotten fruit, vegetables, or other spoiled food. When you eat foul food you can get real sick. And when you speak using foul language you poison the conversation around you. Cursing, swearing, telling dirty stories, speaking falsehood, lying, are never to be part of our speech. James tells us how corrupt our tongue can be spewing forth the fires of hell.

On the other hand, God can speak his truth in love through you that supernaturally touches people constructively. Love builds up. God has uniquely placed you in particular situations because he has given to you the wisdom that needs to be spoken to meet the given need. Your words will bring God's grace into the room, into a person's life, into the situation

When we grieve God's Spirit, we are doing something so contrary to God that it puts the Holy Spirit into a state of grief. And it is dangerous. It means you are about to do or have done something that is almost irreparable. You are about to, or you have done something that goes so against God that if it were not for God's grace you would be instantly consumed like the sin of God's people in the Exodus when the earth swallowed those who had rebelled. I know of no greater sin that to grieve the Holy Spirit. We can grieve the Holy Spirit through hurtful speech or behaviors that deeply offends God and violates the will of God. The only solution to grieving the Spirit of God is to fully repent of the sin that grieves. It is turning around completely from the sin and walking toward Jesus, away from the sin of grieving the Holy Spirit. Jonah grieved the Holy Spirit by heading the opposite direction God wanted him to go and he ended up in the belly of whale. One reason I must do my best to be faithful to my calling in the ministry and not grieve the Holy Spirit is I do not want to end up being seafood. I do not want to have a whale of a time.

5. Strip off all of your bitterness, layer after layer, and be clothed in love, God's love (4:31-5:2).

Ephesians 4:31-32(ESV) ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. These two verses summarize much of what has been said. I define bitterness as hatred toward a person so strong that all you can see is what the person does wrong, and you cannot see anything at all that the person does right.

Bitterness is an inner attitude that you so dislike the person you deep down wish that person was not alive. Bitterness is smoldering resentment that can fire up at any moment burning yourself hoping the other person to be burned. It keeps you in perpetual animosity making you sour and venomous. Bitterness is a deep brooding resentment that ages you prematurely and harms your soul making you an ugly Christian that most people do not want to be around.

These lists of sins that Paul states destroys Christian friendships and can easily destroy churches. When Christians cannot speak to each other because they are so bitter, something is wrong, terribly wrong. It grieves God's Spirit, and it takes a work of the Holy Spirit to soften a person's heart enough for God to surgically remove the bitterness, layer by layer. The Bible says in James when you have bitterness in your heart your insight is not from God but your insight toward that person is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

You fight bitterness with love, God's love. You yield over to God the person you would love to destroy. You pray at the foot of the cross with that person using your imagination. You realize that God has forgiven you a zillion sins. Who are you to think that God does not want you to forgive that person those so few sins against you? Bitterness quenches God's Spirit as God's Spirit withdraws partially from your life, and you lose that close fellowship with God. What helps you overcome bitterness is for you to repent of your bitter attitude. This opens the door for God to fill you with His perfect love and it is out of that overwhelming love that you begin to let go of your bitter spirit until it is no longer there. May God cause you do just that, then you will be imitators of God, walking in his love even as Christ loved us and gave himself for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Amen and Amen.