

God's People Part 2: How We Act
Be a Good Neighbor
Ephesus 4:25-28

Introduction: For those new to Venture, this was a church founded in the mill village of Hardin, just north of Dallas, NC. In October 2002, when I became the Lead Pastor, I knew I had inherited the leadership of a church with HUGE potential, but there were some deep-rooted mindsets in the church's culture that had to change for that potential to take off. Everything I did to try and focus the church on reaching and discipling the most lost generation in American history, no matter how insignificant a thing it was, was at best met with resistance, but more frequently met with all-out revolts! I couldn't understand how people could say they wanted the world to know Jesus, but then be against every single thing I tried to do to position the church to better engage a world that didn't know Jesus! It was so baffling to me that I couldn't even figure out how to articulate what was going on, that is, until a very angry lady came to me with her finger in my face and said, "The problem with you, preacher, is that you believe the church is a movement, and we believe it's a community organization for Christians."

Nothing could have been stated that more profoundly identified the problem than what that lady said. I finally knew what I was up against! I was trying to get a bunch of people who wanted people to come to Christ, but were unwilling to give up the mindset that they had joined a Christian club with rights and privileges based on their level of years of service in the club. As I thought back to the hundreds of churches I had preached in over the years, stuck in an endless cycle of stagnation or regression, I realized that what she had just said was the problem in every single one of them as well! Her statement so inspired me that I ended up writing my doctoral dissertation on how to change that kind of unbiblical culture, or ethos, within a church.¹

That mindset, which has been destroying the church in the West over the last century, is not new. Jesus confronted it in his own ministry. In Luke 10, we read,

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him

¹ <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/763/>

and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

The reason I started this sermon with that passage is that it provides extremely important Biblical context for the passage we are studying in Ephesians today. Jesus never once taught or even hinted at giving His life for some sort of Christian club, so when we read things that you may find yourself wanting to interpret that way, you have to stop yourself and realize the Bible doesn't contradict itself. Therefore, I must interpret everything I read in the Bible in light of the rest of it.

Therefore, what we read in Ephesians 4:25-28 is certainly first applied to life within the church – "for we are members one of another," but to think for a second that how we are to treat one another in the church doesn't immediately apply to the lost world around us is to ignore not only the outward facing mission of the church to engage those far from God with the Gospel (Matt 28) but also passages like Luke 10 that blast the idea the command to love your neighbor is somehow limited to people in our church. Therefore, how Paul is teaching the local church to treat one another is NOT to the exclusion of those outside the local church, because, Biblically, it can't not apply to how we, as followers of Jesus, treat those who are not followers of Jesus!

So, with that, let's read the commands that Paul gave the church in Ephesus on how God's People are to act with one another, but do so with the understanding that "our neighbor" is literally anyone our lives intersect with as we go through life. Paul writes,

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. (Ephesus 4:25-28)

Proposition: In Ephesians 4:25-28, Paul gives three instructions on how to be a good neighbor as God's people should be.

The first instruction is ...

(1) Speak truthfully. (4:25)

- A. 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.**
- B. "Therefore, having put away falsehood ..."**

1. "Strictly speaking, the Greek word is not *falsehood* in the abstract but 'the lie' (to *pseudos*). It is possible, therefore, that Paul is referring here as in Romans 1:25 to 'the great lie of idolatry', and that because his readers had renounced that supreme falsehood of paganism, the chief symptom of a futile and darkened mind (verses 17–18), he urges them now to forsake all lesser lies and speak the truth."²
2. "That there is a connection between this admonition and the preceding paragraph is clear from the repetition of the word 'putting off' or 'laying aside;' (same verb in the original; cf. verses 22 and 25) and of the reference to 'truth' (cf. verse 25 with verses 15, 20, 24). Based upon this evident connection, one might interpret Paul's thinking at this point as follows: 'In view of the fact that 'in Christ' you have been taught to put off the old man and to put on the new man, therefore, put off (or: lay aside) falsehood and speak truth.'"³
3. Since the sentence starts with the word "Therefore," we know we need to have the previous statement in mind to properly understand what he's about to say. Paul previously wrote this,
4. **17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ! —21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)**
5. So when Paul writes, "**Therefore, having put away falsehood,**" he's affirming that they have RENOUNCED and REPENTED from the lies they believed about God and the morality He created humanity to live in. He is affirming that they have put the lies away, tossed them overboard, or thrown them in the garbage. However you want to illustrate it, the point is that Paul is saying they have clearly turned away from the lies about God and the morality that was perpetrated by their pagan beliefs, and have now

² Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 184–185). InterVarsity Press.

³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, p. 216). Baker Book House.

surrendered their lives to Jesus, who is The Truth! Therefore, since they are now in Jesus, and thus in His love and TRUTH,

C. **“... let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”**

Note: The phrase “**members of one another**” takes us back to what Paul previously wrote in this chapter about the church being the body of Christ, and that we are all different parts of that body, but all in one body—Christ’s! This has led some scholars to say this command applies only to how we talk to other Christians, but Biblically, that’s absurd. That’s exactly why I began this sermon with Jesus reminding us that the word “neighbor” refers to anyone and everyone who intersects with our lives—saved or lost!

D. But what does it mean to “**speak the truth**”?

1. First, let me say that there is clearly no greater true thing to speak to one another than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but Paul is in no way limiting their conversations to the Gospel. The word “truth” is used here in the generic sense, and therefore it brings to mind Philippians 4:8,
2. **8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)**
3. In Philippians, the focus is on our thoughts; in Ephesians 4:25, the focus is on our words, but both commands come from the same principle. Paul could have said, “Don’t lie to one another.” That’s certainly Biblical as well, but here Paul doesn’t highlight what we are not to do; rather, what we are to do! Just as he does in Philippians 4:8, Paul points to God’s majesty and holiness as the standard. Therefore, the standard is not somehow being a little less like the world; he’s saying the standard is being fully like Him! The measure is not that I said something to somebody that’s not fully a lie, but rather that what I’m saying is fully true.
4. Ephesians 4:25 is a call to speak things to one another that are true and, as such, have no falsehood in them, because as children of God we have renounced and repented from all falsehood. Before Christ, our lives were rooted and grounded in falsehood, that is, the falsehood that we have every right to live in submission to ourselves! But the Gospel enlightened us to that falsehood and called us to renounce and repent from it and instead bow down in total glad submission to God! Therefore, the way we speak to one another should come out of who we are as God’s children, rather than who we used to be. How we speak should come from the enlightenment of our

souls that taught us the truth about Him and His LOVE, that rescued us from sin and into His eternally righteous and holy life!

5. Therefore, when it comes to the exclusivity of Christ, the truth is that Jesus said He is the only way (John 14:6); therefore, to say anything that points away from that is not to speak truth. When it comes to the penal substitutionary death of Christ, to say anything other than Christ died to fully pay the penalty of my sin is not saying the truth! But just as equally important as the words we use about Jesus and His Gospel are the words we use about everything else! From those big, important doctrines of the faith to the everyday things of life, as God's children, we have forsaken the darkness, ignorance, immorality, and unethical ways of the world and embraced God's love as our new identity, and thus our speech should match it! My speech should be trusted. There is nothing that can more clearly misrepresent who we are as God's people than words that are not true.
6. However, before we move on, it should also be noted that this isn't a license to be a jerk! Paul has already told us in Ephesians 4:15 to speak truth in love. Therefore, the truth must always be spoken in the context and purpose of love, meaning not everything that's true needs to be said anywhere and everywhere! For instance, Rahab lied about the spies' location out of love for the spies and for God! As a pastor, I hear all kinds of things that it would be the opposite of love to tell you. Someone demands that if they ask me something, I owe them an answer, because the Bible commands us to speak the truth. However, I couldn't speak in love if I told you something that's none of your business, unjustly damages somebody else's reputation, or unwisely damages the ability of the church to labor together in unity, which is why we don't broadcast everything that goes on behind closed doors in our meetings to figure out how to best lead the church.
7. Finally, we need to remember that sometimes speaking the truth is to reprove and rebuke, but if it's in love, the purpose is to build a person up, to bless rather than curse, to bring life rather than death. To point out where a person needs to be, you often must also point out where they shouldn't be. Sometimes things need to be destroyed so that they are out of the way of what needs to be built. Nonetheless, even in 2 Timothy 4:2, reproving and rebuking, if I am in Christ, I had better know that my heart is being driven by the effort to build and not destroy; otherwise, the speech can in no way be suggested as being "in love" and thus in no way an outflow of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in my life. If my words are only to rebuke and not a key part in a full commitment to appeal for life, then I cannot claim my rebuke is in love. If my words are to rebuke with no intention or desire for restoration, they are likely being given in vengeance.

This leads to the second instruction.

(2) Exercise emotional intelligence. (4:26-27)

- A.** Ephesians 4:26 and 27 are nothing more than a command to live a life of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is not a secular concept. It is very Biblical, and ultimately, its Godly version is a product of living in submission to the Holy Spirit's leadership in our lives (Galatians 5:19-24)!
- B.** **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.**
- C.** Anger is not of itself a sin, but rather at times a righteous feeling, that if not had would of itself demonstrate an unethical and immoral failure.
- D.** Paul gives three commands regarding our anger to ensure it doesn't lead to anything the law of love cannot endorse, that is, that our anger is expressed with emotional intelligence.
 - 1.** He says, "Do not sin," that is, don't do anything that misses the mark of God's righteousness and holiness.
 - 2.** Don't let it linger. Anger is an ethical and moral emotional response when it is directed at that which should anger us, but it is not an emotion that one whose life is identified by love can continue to live with. This is why God's anger is but for a moment (Psalm 30:5). It should be noted that this is a Hebrew idiom, not a law. Sometimes the loving and wise thing to do is not to immediately confront what angered you, but instead go to the Lord, then go to bed and wait on the wisdom of the Lord to get louder in your heart than your anger.
 - 3.** Finally, he commands us not to let our anger be the open door for the work of Satan. The Bible is clear. We are to live in total glad submission to God and loving others as God loves them. Satan comes to justify saying no to God. Satan comes to convince us to prioritize our desires over God's and our interests to the exclusion of others. If we stay in our anger too long or justify anger as the authoritative leader of our words and actions, we will not only start to act with emotional stupidity but, more importantly, act outside the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Anger is not our leader; the Holy Spirit is!
- E.** I also need to address an unbiblical application of this passage that is often asserted: that violence is the sin Paul is speaking of; that Paul was saying, "Be angry but never be violent." Violence is not universally condemned as sin. Sometimes, the ethical implementation of anger must be violence. It is not love for me to walk into a room and see a man trying to kill a child and then try to reason with him to stop. It is only love if I immediately and without hesitation do everything in my power to neutralize the threat against that child, which, in that case, would be to use whatever force I can immediately apply to the

situation to cause the man to stop immediately! I'm not ethically or morally obligated to measure what I do by some calculation of the minimum violence needed to keep the man from killing the child, but rather to do whatever I can and feel the need to do in the split second I have to do it to keep the man from killing the child. Anything other than that would be cowardly, loveless, and ungodly!

- F.** This is important at this moment in history because Pope Leo recently made an outlandish statement about war. He denounced all war as a universally sinful act by people living in rebellion against God.⁴ He insists that God never commands or endorses war. Unfortunately, Roman Catholic Popes have a long history of picking and choosing when they actually submit their opinions to the Bible. They have a habit of picking a couple of random verses that sound like their opinion and then confidently asserting them as proof texts, with no regard for context or overarching Biblical doctrine. An elementary school reading level is all that's needed to be able to read the Bible and see that Pope Leo could not have made a more unbiblical and morally twisted statement. God commanded Israel to go to war on numerous occasions and did so with instructions to kill everybody He sent them to war against! When Jesus comes back, He is going to wage war on Satan and all who serve Satan. Jesus will conquer Satan and cast him, his demons, and all who are with Satan into the lake of fire! That's about as violent as it gets! Jesus is going to avenge the martyrs of the faith, not with kind words but with unspeakable wrath! The mission of the church is never advanced by war, but the purpose of God-ordained governments most certainly is (Romans 13)!
- G.** So, the idea that freedom-loving governments around the world should not eventually resort to war if a nation refuses to completely stop its efforts to finance and facilitate terrorism around the world to advance the cause of a demonically inspired religion that oppresses women and denies people basic freedom, is Biblically insane! After reading Romans 13, it is completely absurd that the Pope would say something as dangerously unbiblical that it is sinful for a nation to destroy the fighting capability and fighting potential of any nation whose government has for decades, not only openly called for their death, but has also financed efforts to achieve it; it is Biblical insanity to suggest it is sinful for a nation to remove the threat of another nation who frequently calls for and continual finances efforts to violently eviscerate one of its freedom-loving allies! It is completely absurd to suggest that allowing a government that threatens you and your allies in this way, not to mention killing tens of thousands of its own people for doing nothing but expressing an opinion, should be allowed to continue doing so, just with financial constraints that make them work harder to do it! Imagine if your neighbor kept paying people to shoot your house up, but all our society did was refuse to do business with your neighbor, all while we

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-leo-says-god-rejects-prayers-leaders-who-wage-wars-2026-03-29/>

knew they were still doing business with people who were helping you get the money to pay people to shoot your house up! You would rightly say you lived in the most unjust and unloving society possible!

- H.** Now, let's be clear, I'm not saying all war is just, nor am I saying that war is just simply because our country decided to fight it. Furthermore, as much as I think the United States actions in Iran are long overdue and beyond justified, that is not a theological opinion. Whether or not the current war to destroy Iran's fighting capabilities was the wisest course of action at this time, and whether or not it's been prosecuted in the best way, isn't going to be answered until all the noise of the self-serving, politically charged maneuvering stops on both sides, and all the facts are totally revealed. (i.e., at this point, it's hard to justify America ever going to war in Vietnam in the 1960s or invading Iran in 2003, but the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, despite how we ended it, still stands as a totally justified invasion.) As with every war, it's rational, and prosecution can't truly be tested until history has a chance to sort out truth and falsehoods. Therefore, I'm not presenting a Biblical argument for or against this being the time and the way to destroy Iran's fighting capability, but rather, I'm confronting the absurdity of the Pope that there can never be a Biblical rationale for going to war (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) and the idea that somehow violence in any circumstance is the sin Paul is speaking of in Ephesians 4:26. There is NO biblical support at all for pacifism.
- I.** Therefore, what I'm addressing is the Pope's unbiblical statement that going to war is inherently sinful and that violence is always sinful. It is a statement that ignores basic Bible knowledge and offends common-sense ethics! If only the world had threatened war against Germany when the news of what Hitler was doing to the Jews started coming out in 1933! Christians cannot claim to love and promote freedom and justice and, at the same time, refuse to be a part of protecting it. Therefore, I thank God for the many Christians in Venture who faithfully served our country in War. I thank God for my grandfather, who ran up Omaha Beach to kill German soldiers and, in so doing, did the only thing that would eliminate one of the vilest empires in modern history. I thank God for the many police officers who are willing to use violence not only to protect themselves, but also each of us as well. Until sin is destroyed, violence will at times be a necessary and righteous tool of love.
- J.** "There are three words for "anger" in the Greek New Testament. *Thumos* (Θυμος) speaks of a turbulent commotion, the boiling agitation of the feelings, passion, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding, which is forbidden in Ephesians 4:31. *Parorgismos* (Παροργισμος), translated "wrath" in 4:26, is also forbidden. It refers to anger that is accompanied by irritation, exasperation, embitterment. *Orgē* (Ὀργη) is an anger which is an abiding and settled habit of the mind that is aroused under certain conditions. This is the anger spoken of in the words, "be ye angry." Trench says: "Under certain conditions, *orgē* (ὀργη) (anger) is a righteous passion to entertain. ... When guided by reason, anger is a

right affection, so the Scripture permits it, and not only permits, but on fit occasion demands it. ... There is a 'wrath of God' (Matt. 3:7, Rom. 12:19); who would not love good unless He hated evil, the two being so inseparable, that either He must do both or neither; a wrath also of the merciful Son of Man (Mk. 3:5); and a wrath which righteous men not merely may, but, as they are righteous, must feel; nor can there be a surer or sadder token of an utterly prostrate moral condition than the not being able to be angry with sin—and sinners. ... "Be ye angry, yet in this anger of yours suffer no sinful element to mingle; there is that which may cleave even to a righteous anger, the *parorgismos* (παροργισμός), the irritation, the exasperation, the embitterment which must be dismissed at once, that so, being defecated (purified) of this impurer element which mingled with it, that only may remain which has a right to remain."⁵

- K.** "The words, "be ye angry," are a present imperative in the Greek text, commanding a continuous action. This *orgē* (ὀργή), this abiding, settled attitude of righteous indignation against sin and sinful things, is commanded, together with the appropriate actions when conditions make them necessary."⁶
- L.** "Anger as such need not be sinful. It is ascribed even to God (1 Kings 11:9; 2 Kings 17:18; Ps. 7:11; 79:5; 80:4, 5; Heb. 12:29), and to Christ (Ps. 2:12; Mark 3:5; John 2:15–17). In fact, the age in which we are living could use a little more "righteous indignation" against sin of every type. Also, the more angry every believer is with his own sins, the better it will be."⁷
- M.** "'Be angry, but sin not' is an echo of Psalm 4:4. It seems clear that this form of words is a Hebrew idiom which permits and then restricts anger, rather than actually commanding it. The equivalent English idiom would be 'in your anger do not sin' (NIV). Nevertheless, the verse recognizes that there is such a thing as Christian anger, and too few Christians either feel or express it. Indeed, when we fail to do so, we deny God, damage ourselves and encourage the spread of evil. Scripture plainly teaches that there are two kinds of anger, righteous and unrighteous. In verse 31 'anger' is one of a number of unpleasant things which we are to 'put away' from us. Evidently unrighteous anger is meant. But in 5:6 we are told of the anger of God which will fall on the disobedient, and we know that God's anger is righteous. So was the anger of Jesus. There must therefore be a good and true anger which God's people can learn from him and from their Lord Jesus. I go further and say that there is a great need in the contemporary world for more Christian anger. We human beings compromise with sin in a way in which God never does. In the face of blatant evil we should be indignant not

⁵ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 4, pp. 113–114). Eerdmans.

⁶ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 4, p. 114). Eerdmans.

⁷ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Ephesians*](#) (Vol. 7, p. 218). Baker Book House.

tolerant, angry not apathetic. If God hates sin, his people should hate it too. If evil arouses his anger, it should arouse ours also. 'Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake thy law.' What other reaction can wickedness be expected to provoke in those who love God? It is particularly noteworthy that the apostle introduces this reference to anger in a letter devoted to God's new society of love, and in a paragraph concerned with harmonious relationships. He does so because true peace is not identical with appeasement. 'In such a world as this,' comments E. K. Simpson, 'the truest peace-maker may have to assume the role of a peace-breaker as a sacred obligation.' At the same time, we need to remember our fallenness, and our constant proneness to intemperance and vanity. Consequently, we always have to be on our guard and act as censors of our own anger. If we are wise, we shall be 'slow to anger', remembering that 'the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God'. So Paul immediately qualifies his permissive *be angry* by three negatives. First, *do not sin*. We have to make sure that our anger is free from injured pride, spite, malice, animosity and the spirit of revenge. Secondly, *do not let the sun go down on your anger*. This instruction illustrates well the folly of excessive literalism in interpreting the Bible. We are not to understand Paul 'so literally that we may take leave to be angry till sunset', for 'then might our wrath lengthen with the days, and men in Greenland, where days last above a quarter of the year, have plentiful scope of revenge'. No, the apostle's intention is to warn us against nursing anger. It is seldom safe to allow the embers to smoulder. Certainly if we become aware of some sinful or selfish element in it (and if our *orgē*, anger, degenerates into *parorgismos*, resentment, the word used at the end of verse 26), then it is time for us to cease from it, and either apologize or be reconciled to the person concerned. In the Old Testament a moneylender who took a poor person's cloak as a pledge was required to restore it 'when the sun goes down', so that he might sleep in it, and an employer who had any servants who were poor and needy was required to pay them their wages daily 'before the sun goes down'. There are many similar situations in which it is wise to live a day at a time. 'Never go to bed angry' is a good rule, and is seldom more applicable than to a married couple. Paul's third qualification is *give no opportunity to the devil* (verse 27), for he knows how fine is the line between righteous and unrighteous anger, and how hard human beings find it to handle their anger responsibly. So he loves to lurk round angry people, hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship."⁸

- N. "Literally, **"And do not give a place to the devil."** ... What he means, therefore, is that *from the very start* the devil must be resisted (James 4:7). No *place* whatsoever must be given to him, no room to enter or even to stand. There must be no yielding to or compromise with him. He must not be given any opportunity to take advantage of our anger for his own sinister purpose."⁹

⁸ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 185–187). InterVarsity Press.

⁹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, p. 218). Baker Book House.

The third instruction is ...

(3) Be a **contributor**. (4:28)

- A. **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.**
- B. I found this verse odd. Why would you need to tell Christians to stop stealing? I mean, isn't that kind of obvious? Apparently, theft was so common in the culture that Paul needed to clarify that it was a sin, because people in the church were continuing to justify it. Paul instructs them to stop stealing but instead work with such excellence and productivity that they have an abundance to share with people in need; to be a giver instead of a taker; a contributor instead of a problem!
- C. Scholars point out that much of the labor in ancient times was slave labor, including work as admirable as managing a person's finances or serving as a physician. When you think of the normal system of slavery in the first-century Roman Empire, think more of what happens in professional sports. In professional sports leagues like the NBA, NFL, or MLB, once an athlete signs a contract with a team, that team can choose to trade or sell them to another team, provided the new team agrees to the contract the athlete signed. Similarly, if you sign a contract to serve in the United States military and then try to skip out on fulfilling that contract, you can end up in prison!
- D. Now, why is that important? Well, apparently, among the populous, who were mostly serving masters as contracted slaves, if you could get away with stealing, nobody would say you did anything wrong, even though you took something you were not contractually given the right to have. That attitude towards stealing was apparently still being held by enough people within the church that Paul needed to confront it! Fast forward to modern times.
- E. **"1 in 50 employees engaged in some form of theft in 2023. By 2024, this number increased to 1 in 40. In 2025, reports show this number rose slightly to 1 in 35."**¹⁰
- F. **"The year 2023 recorded approximately \$46 billion in losses due to employee theft, which increased to \$50 billion median loss by 2025."**¹¹

¹⁰ <https://metrobi.com/blog/employee-theft-statistics-for-2025/#:~:text=In%202025%2C%20tech%2Dbased%20theft,billion%20median%20loss%20by%202025.>

¹¹ <https://metrobi.com/blog/employee-theft-statistics-for-2025/#:~:text=In%202025%2C%20tech%2Dbased%20theft,billion%20median%20loss%20by%202025.>

- G. “The financial impact of time theft is larger than most business owners realize. Industry estimates suggest time theft costs U.S. employers upwards of \$400 billion annually, and roughly 75% of businesses are affected in some form.”¹²**
- H.** Sadly, for years, one of my side hustles was helping a local private investigator catch employees who stole from their employers, and on too many occasions, the person stealing was also someone who claimed to be a follower of Jesus! What more terrible way could there be to influence your employer and fellow employees to follow Christ than to steal money from the very business you're supposed to be helping to be successful, and in so doing, stealing money that could have benefited the very people you work with!
- I.** “... It must not be forgotten that some, perhaps many, of these early converts were slaves. Now, lack of trustworthiness in matters material was characteristic of slaves, ... According to Philem. 18—a letter written during this same imprisonment and delivered at about the same time—Paul suspected Onesimus, the runaway slave, of having wronged his master in this respect. And after the release from the present (first Roman) imprisonment, Paul was going to write to Titus: ‘Urge slaves to be submissive in every respect to their own masters ... *not pilfering, but evincing the utmost trustworthiness*’ (Titus 2:9, 10). Is it altogether improbable that even the ‘converted’ slave might, in a moment of weakness, say to himself, ‘My master has left home. This is my opportunity to take something away from him. After all, he owes me much more, for by what right does he exact all this labor from me? Therefore, when I relieve him of some treasure, I am simply depriving him of that to which he has no right?’¹³
- J.** “What is Paul’s solution? He wants the Ephesians to stop stealing and to practice honesty. But he wants more than that. He realizes that back of this sin of stealing lies a more basic fault, namely, *selfishness*. Hence, he strikes at the very root of the evil, for, by turning the attention of the thief, whether actual or potential, away from himself to the needs of other people, he strives to give him a new interest in life, a new joy. ... As to working for a living, Paul himself had set an excellent example. Not only did he perform an amount of religious labor, of the highest quality, that is almost beyond belief, but in addition, he at times even worked with his own hands in order to supply his own needs and those of others. He was able to say to the Thessalonians, ‘For you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship: by night and by day (we were) working at a trade (or: ‘working for a living’), in order not to be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God’ (1 Thess. 2:9; cf. Acts 20:33, 34).”¹⁴

¹² <https://www.shiftflow.app/blog/time-theft>

¹³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, pp. 218–219). Baker Book House.

¹⁴ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, pp. 219–220). Baker Book House.

Challenge: Where are my speech, emotional practices, and efforts pointing people?

We are going to see Scriptures that dive deeper into each of these as we continue through Ephesians, so for now, I want us to think about them on a broad level. Where are your speech, emotional behaviors, and efforts in life pointing people; where are they pointing the people in your neighborhood, your workplace, your school, your church, and most importantly, your family? This is a place of deep conviction in my life, where the Lord continues to convict me and grow me. My passion for people to know Jesus gets me rightly angry at the stupid stuff that gets in the way of people being reached with the Gospel. It drives me nuts, which is where I find myself moving from righteously angry and driven by the Holy Spirit to lead people to live sold out to Christ and His cause, to being eat up with anger, that even if I can hide it my official conversations as a pastor, will finally come out at home with a grouchy, negative dad telling his kids Jesus is worth following! Sounds convincing, doesn't it!

So, today, will you be honest about what your speech, emotional behaviors, and efforts are pointing people to, and, in so doing, be honest with yourself? The direction of your speech, emotional behaviors, and efforts is the direction of your heart! The change we need is not outward but inward, and in that we should be encouraged because the change we need is the change the Holy Spirit is absolutely working in us! The question is: will you join Him or fight Him? Joining Him starts with confession, and for some of you, that could be a really serious matter.

For some of you, you are going to have to confess that you've been stealing from your employer, whether in lying about the hours you're working or in taking cash or materials.

For some of you, you're finally going to have to stop acting like the anger in your life is righteous. You need to confess it as sin, and own the fact that it's nobody's fault but your own. You don't need new circumstances; you need God to change your heart.

Some of you may need to be honest about your speech. We are going to get into this a lot more in next week's passage, so for now, let's just say when you read that we need to put away falsehood and speak truth, you knew right away there was something you needed to get right.