

Particular Details – the first four**1. Speaking the Truth**

Paul is still dealing with the actual living of the Christian life. He has told what our lives should **not** be like ^{☐1} and what our lives **should** be like ^{☐2}. Now he gets down to details. He concentrates on six particular details.

^{☐1} 4:17-19
^{☐2} 4:20-24

1. **Telling the truth.** The Christian life begins with large sweeping principles, but eventually everyone has to get down to the details. Paul gets more and more practical as he goes along. He begins with being predestined before the foundation of the world ^{☐1}, but eventually he gets to telling the truth and not getting angry ^{☐2}. He begins in such heights but then gets down to practicalities. Yet the great heights help the practical details. *‘Therefore putting away lying, speak the truth each one with his neighbour, for we are members of one another’* ^{☐3}. He asks us to speak the truth. This is something that a lot of thinkers and philosophers ask of us also. But the important thing to notice is that Paul gives **Christian** reasons for what he says: ‘for we are members of one another’. Lying is ugly in and of itself, but Paul points to something that makes it even more ugly. The thought of deceit within the Christian fellowship makes lying even more repulsive. Paul is going beyond the Mosaic law. ‘You shall not bear false testimony’ was one of the ten commandments – but Paul goes higher than the Mosaic law in what he says. We belong to each other! It is terrible to be trying to deceive fellow-members in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

^{☐1} Ephesians 1:4

^{☐2} 4:25-27

^{☐3} 4:25

It is notable that Paul obviously has Christians in mind. ‘His neighbour’ in this passage clearly means our fellow Christian. Why does he specially ask us to tell the truth to Christians? Are we not to tell the truth to others as well? Yes, we are, but Paul’s concern is with the Christian fellowship. The church of Jesus Christ ought to be a loving fellowship which is a testimony to the world.

2. Dealing with Anger

2. **Anger.** There are times when we ought to be angry. *‘Be angry but do not sin. Let not the sun go down on your anger’* ^{☐1}, and do not give opportunity to the devil ^{☐2}. The **absence** of anger is often a sign of complacency. Think how Jesus was angry at the hardness of heart which characterised the Jewish leaders of His day. Think how He made a whip and drove out money-changers from the temple. He did not regard anger as always sinful.

^{☐1} 4:26

^{☐2} 4:27

- **The right kind of anger**

- **Recovering peace and harmony before the day ends**

Yet most of the time when we get angry we are getting angry about the wrong thing and in the wrong way. It is being bad tempered and easily angered that Paul condemns. ‘Do not let the sun go down on your anger’ says Paul. He means ‘Settle the issue and recover your calmness before the day is ended’. It is to be noted, he does not say ‘Let not the sun rise on your anger’. Is this important? I think it is. Oftentimes when we are angry we are tempted to go to bed angry, but the next day we take no notice of what happened. The sun does not rise on our anger. But Paul asks for something better and greater than this. It is no good pretending the next day that nothing happened, and expecting things to disappear just because you act as if nothing happened. This is ‘Not letting the sun **rise** on your anger’. Paul says: deal with matter

before the day is ended. Recover peace and harmony **before** the day ends.

Anger gives opportunity to the devil. Some disastrous mistakes and temptations and sins come if anger continues unquenched.

3. No more stealing

- **Honest work**
- **Giving**

3. **Stealing.** Paul's third detail concerns theft. *'Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him do some hard work, doing something honest with his own hands, so that he may have something to give to those in need'* ^{☞1}. Again we notice how far above the Mosaic law this command is. Paul is **not** simply repeating the Mosaic law. The law said 'Six days you shall labour' and 'You shall not steal'. The Christian gospel **fulfils** the law but it is not 100% identical to it. There is no legislation about six days as there was in the Mosaic law. And the gospel adds details about generosity to others that was never mentioned in the Ten Commandments. Life in the Spirit fulfils and goes beyond life under the Mosaic law.

☞1 4:28

4. Talk

4. **Talk.** *'Let no corrupt talk come out of your mouth, but only what is good for meeting the need of the occasion. Your purpose should be to minister grace to those who hear you'* ^{☞1}. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* ^{☞2}. The Greek of verse 29 more literally says 'Every corrupt word – let it not proceed out of your mouth'. It gives the impression that something corrupt and ugly is 'on the tip of your tongue', but Paul says 'Let it not come out!'

☞1 4:29

☞2 4:30

Paul asks for godly and sweet talk. The Christian is to hate indelicate, coarse, foolish talk as an ugly thing, and not talk in the way the world talks. How much of worldly conversation is slanderous, sceptical, cynical, bitter. What precious things sinners make jokes about. How self-centred and self-admiring it all is.

Christian talk should – says Paul – have these three characteristics.

- **Good talk**
- **Helpful talk**
- **Not grieving the Spirit**

- (i) It must be good and suitable for the occasion.
- (ii) It should be helpful and minister God's grace to those who listen to us.
- (iii) It should not grieve the Holy Spirit. The sealing of the Spirit gives us great assurance and joy, but something of that joy will be lost if we grieve the Spirit by the way we talk.

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