

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
II. PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE EPHESIANS

11.
C. WALK NOT IN VIOLENCE, BUT IN LOVE
EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

The third challenge Paul gave to the Ephesian believers about how to walk worthy of the high calling of Jesus Christ was to not walk in violence, but in love. Violence always has been a characteristic of life away from God. The fallen nature of mankind finds it natural to be hostile, critical, argumentative, vicious, and combative.

Violence began in the first human family, and the first son born into the world (Cain) murdered the second son born (Abel) (Gen. 4:1-8).

Before the great flood of Noah, "the earth was filled with violence (Gen. 6:11b).

In Abraham's lifetime, the men of Sodom demanded loudly in public to be allowed to practice homosexual rape, and no police force existed to restrain them (Gen. 19:1-11). Conquest by nations from the East, forced Abraham to organize his slaves to rescue his nephew Lot from the invaders who ravaged the plain where Lot lived (Gen. 14:1-16). He also lived in fear when he was in Egypt and when he lived in Philistia that the residents would kill him in order to possess his wife (Gen. 12:10-16; 20:1-18).

Abraham's son Isaac lived with the same fear when he was in Philistia (Gen. 26:1-6)

Isaac's son Jacob tricked his brother Esau out of his inheritance and had to flee from home because Esau was determined to kill him (Gen. 27:1-28:5). While a fugitive in Mesopotamia, Jacob's supposed benefactor Laban tricked him into marrying the wrong one of his daughters so he could make a virtual slave out of him for another seven years (Gen. 29:13-30). In turn, Jacob deceived Laban out of almost everything he owned and had to flee back to Canaan to avoid Laban's wrath (Gen. 30:25-31:55).

Before Jacob's sons' lives were changed, they were guilty of murder and defending it (Gen. 34:1-31), selling their brother into slavery and lying about it (Gen. 37:32-36), incest that caused Judah to lose his place as a forebear of the Messiah (Gen. 38:1-26; 49:4; 1 Chron. 5:1), and hiring a prostitute without hiding it (Gen. 38:1-26).

After the deaths of Jacob and Joseph, the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to slavery and tried to restrict their multiplication by killing their boy babies (Ex. 1:6-22). The Israelites escaped from their violent oppression only by the overwhelming power of God.

During the time of the Judges, Israel was constantly harassed, raided, oppressed, controlled, and corrupted by the petty nations that surrounded them (Jud. 2:1-3:6). At the same time, the Israelites were abused by their own kinfolk with fratricide and civil war (Judg. 9:1-57), as well as rape, mutilation, and genocide (Judg. 19:1-48).

In the days of Samuel, Israel sought a king to curb the violence that continued to plague them, but their kings brought them more violence than ever. Even their best king, David, had one of his bravest soldiers abandoned on the battle field, so David could take his wife (2 Sam. 11:1-27), and he tortured his enemies to death with saws, iron harrows, iron axes, and by burning them in a brick-kiln (2 Sam. 12:31; 1 Chron. 20:3). In disgust two of David's sons led rebellions against him that failed but brought much damage (2 Sam. 15:1-18:33; 1 Kings 1:1-53).

Solomon, David's son who succeeded him on the throne, executed those who resisted his being anointed as king (1 Kings 2:1-46) and drafted his people and the Canaanites who lived among them into forced labor gangs to construct his great building projects (1 Kings 5:13-18; 9:15-23; 11:20-40).

Solomon's son Rehoboam promised even greater oppression, so the ten tribes of the nation rebelled and set up a rival government in the northern portion of their land, which came to be called "Israel" to distinguish it from the southern kingdom that came to be called "Judah" (1 Kings 12:1-19).

The kings the northern nation got were even more violent. Ten of the twenty kings who ruled over the northern kingdom became king by leading rebellions against the previous kings and assassinating them. Three of the ten also assassinated all of the family members, officials, and supporters of the kings they overthrew (Zimri, 1 Kings 16:11-14; Jehu, 2 Kings 9:16-10:27; Menahem, 2 Kings 15:16). The Lord became so displeased with both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom that He allowed violent tyrannical nations to conquer and oppress them: first Assyria, then Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, and finally Rome.

This running survey describes only a few of the constant stream of violence that pervaded the world from the first family to the days of Paul. Old Testament history is full of violence from beginning to end. It was the way of life of the Gentile nations, and the Israelites copied after the Gentiles and practiced the same atrocities. Paul had plenty of reasons for decrying the violent ways of the world.

Only a little thought is required to recognize that the world since Paul's day has continued as violent as before. After the Roman Empire fell, no nation arose that was violent enough to subdue the others. Warfare and every kind of atrocity continued unabated as nations divided, fought each other, and lived in isolated enclaves suspicious and resentful of everyone on the outside. Even when Christianity became the dominant religion in Europe, its leadership became so violent that they enlisted the aid of the governments of all the nations of Europe to torture, imprison, and kill those who disagreed with them. In the seventh century a violent reaction to the dominance of the Christian church resulted in the formation of a rival religion called Islam that became and remains even more violent in its efforts to force its views on the whole world. When a movement arose within the Christian church to reform its violent way, the reformers opposed, subdued, tortured, and killed those who opposed them as much as they had been opposed. When a secular reaction to violent religions arose, called the Renaissance, science replaced religion as the uniting factor of the world. It produced more violence than ever. In the 20th century it provided the philosophy and defense for the most violent dictators in all of history. Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, Lenin, Stalin, Mao tse Tung, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Osama ben Laden, and a host of lesser violent dictators made pikers of all the autocrats who ruled before them. No let-up can be observed anywhere in the world today.

We live in a violent world. It has been violent since the birth of the first boy. It continues in even greater ferocity today. When Paul called the Ephesians to practice what Jesus taught, it was necessary for him to call them away from violence.

Paul said Jesus introduced a new way of living into the world. Since the Gentiles in Ephesus, to whom Paul was writing, had become Jesus' followers, Paul called on them to give up the violent ways they had practiced previously and to replace them with love toward everyone. When they made that change in their way of living, they would demonstrate the kind of harmony Jesus will eventually bring to pass over the entire cosmos.

1. [Not in violence] (4:25-31)
 - a. ***Therefore putting away falsehood*** (4:25)
 - (1) ***Speak truth, each one with his neighbor*** [Zech. 8:16] (4:25b)
 - (2) ***Because we are members of one another*** (4:25c).
 - b. ***Be angry and do not sin*** [Ps. 4:4] (4:26-27).
 - (1) ***The sun must not go down on your anger*** (4:26b,
 - (2) ***And do not give space to the devil*** (4:27).
 - c. ***The thief must no longer steal*** (4:28).
 - (1) ***Instead, he must do honest work with his hands*** (4:28b)
 - (2) ***So that he has something to share with the one having a need*** (4:28c).
 - d. ***Any rotten word must not come from your mouth*** (4:29-30),
 - (1) ***But only what is good*** (4:29)
 - (a) ***For building up a needy one*** (4:29b),
 - (b) ***So that it may give grace to the ones hearing*** (4:29c).
 - (2) ***And do not grieve God's Holy Spirit*** (4:30),
 - (a) ***In whom you were sealed*** (4:31b)
 - (b) ***Until the day of redemption*** (4:30c).
 - (3) ***All bitterness and anger and wrath and shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with everything evil*** (4:31).

In Paul's day, Roman law prevented widespread violence between people who lived in all the lands they controlled, though violence was a regular practice of their armies and a common form of entertainment in their amphitheaters. The Ephesians were not inclined toward murder or manslaughter, but Paul let them know that they were tempted by other forms of violent behavior. He mentioned four of them.

Verse 25. Put away lying. Paul used the word "falsehood," which can refer to any kind of deceptive action. Since he contrasted it with the challenge "Speak truth," he showed that he was talking about a specific form of falsehood, which is lying or not telling the truth. Lying has the power to do great violence to others. It can destroy a person's reputation, force him to exhaust himself defending against the false accusations, break his heart, and sometimes destroy his will. It can be almost as devastating as physically taking a person's life. Paul told the Ephesians they should put away falsehood, meaning they should totally reject lying, no matter how big or how seemingly minor the falsehood might be.

Paul told the Ephesians that instead of lying, they should simply speak the truth. Paul said every believer is obligated to tell the truth when talking with his neighbor. The reason Christians should tell

the truth to our neighbors is we are members of one another. A believer in Christ should no more deceive another member of Christ's body than he would harm a member of his own physical body. Deceiving another believer can cause him to act inappropriately toward someone, bring about a rupture in fellowship, or embarrass the church before the world. No matter what a person's excuse might be for coloring the truth and no matter how great the temptation might be for hiding something that happened, a follower of Christ simply should not do it. The truth is always the only word a believer should speak. Even silence to keep a confidence is better than telling a lie.

I have been challenged with the statement that at times it has become necessary for a person to lie to save a life. For instance, in Hitler's Third Reich some Christians hid Jews in their attics or basements and lie about it to officers who were searching for them. In the next verse, Paul said Be angry, and do not sin." Was hiding fugitives from oppression and death a case of, "Lie, and do not sin"? Perhaps it is appropriate to say that sometimes we are forced into an occasion when we do not have a choice between right and wrong, but between the lesser or greater of two wrongs. For sure, not many of us ever face such a desperate choice. If we do, God does forgive. Such extreme situations should never provide an excuse for lying

in much less desperate circumstances. In the great majority of circumstances, lying causes much more harm than good. The best approach is to tell the truth, and trust God to use it for good.

Verse 26. Be angry and do not sin. Anger is a hostile action toward another person; however, Paul's statement indicates that sometimes anger can be right. To support that surprising statement, he quoted Psalm 4:4.

The Hebrew text of Psalm 4:4 reads literally, "**Tremble, and do not sin.**" The word translated "Tremble" means "to be agitated," "to shake," "to quiver," or "to be perturbed." It is used in the Old Testament to refer to trembling from anger, from sickness, from fear, and from awe. The question is, what did David mean when he used the word in Psalm 4:4?

Interpreters and translators reach different conclusions on that question. Various versions use the following translations:

KJV	"Stand in awe"
NIV	"In your anger"
TNIV	"Tremble"
NASB	"Tremble"
NRSV	"When you are disturbed"
NIrV	"When you are angry"
NKJV	"Be angry"
RSV	"Be angry"

Paul was using the Septuagint Greek translation, and it reads, "Be angry." Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, accepted the Septuagint translation; therefore, we should consider the Septuagint view to be a divinely revealed interpretation of the meaning of the verse. It reveals that "Tremble" in the Hebrew original refers to trembling from anger.

In the Hebrew original and in the Septuagint translation, the words "**Be angry**" are in the imperative mood. They are a command, which strongly indicates that at times being angry is legitimate, even necessary to be in obedience to God. Times do exist when it would be wrong not to be angry. Examples are: when we see or hear about a child's being abused, when someone

defrauds an elderly widow, when someone curses an invalid, when a hostile government persecutes and even executes a convert to Christ or jails a pastor for preaching the Christian gospel, or when some other heinous evil is committed. Therefore, it is legitimate that both David in Psalm 4:4 and Paul in Ephesians 4:25 instructed believers to "**Be angry.**" However, both David and Paul also emphasized that we must be careful not to sin while we are angry. The words "and do not sin" are also in the imperative mood in Hebrew and in Greek. They also are a command.

Anger becomes sinful when it leads a person to retaliate, to be vindictive, to curse, or to hate. Anger is sinful also when it is triggered too easily or when it is directed toward an innocent person. We must be careful to keep our emotions under control, so as to be angry when it is legitimate and to be calm when it is legitimate. Some people become agitated more easily than others, but the Holy Spirit provides the strength to subdue and direct our emotions, if we will cooperate with Him.

Paul also gave two bits of advice about how to behave when we do become angry. His first word of advice was, "**The sun must not go down on your anger.**" To follow that advice, we must not fan our anger into flames, but restrain or distract ourselves until the intense emotion passes. When we have calmed ourselves, we need to take action to correct the problem that aroused our anger. We should act as swiftly as possible after we have calmed down. Paul advised that we should make every effort to complete the whole process before sundown. If anger is not dealt with, it will fester and grow into bitterness, hatred, and hostile actions. Whatever causes us to be angry needs to be settled quickly.

Paul's second word of advice was, "**And do not give space to the devil.**" If we give the devil an opportunity to influence us, he always will lead us to act in ways that will make the situation worse. The word translated "space" was used frequently to refer to a place where people lived, such as a city, a town, or an area. Paul used it to indicate that we must not provide a place for the devil to reside or live in us. If the devil comes to influence us when we are angry, we must be quick to drive him away

or he will take up residence in us and continue to lead us into more and more evil.

Jesus gave an even stronger warning against anger in His Sermon on the Mount. He said, “***But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire*** (Matt. 5:22, KJV). Anger is a violent crime. Believers should seek God’s strength to learn to react to attacks or disappointments in a more Christ-like way.

Verse 28. Steal no more. Stealing is also a violent action toward someone else. Paul acknowledged that some of the Ephesians had been thieves. He said they should not practice stealing any more. God recognizes private ownership, and He commands people not to violate that principle. He commands us to respect other people’s property and possessions. Another person’s property belongs to him, and we have no right to take it away from him. Jealousy or wishing we had what he has is no excuse for stealing.

Many ways exist by which a person can steal. A person can steal by stealth, sneaking into a person’s home or business when he is asleep or away and taking what belongs to him. He can steal by force, using a gun or club to overcome a person and to take from him what he has. He can steal by dishonesty, misrepresenting something he sells to another. He can steal by manipulation, maneuvering a person’s circumstances so as to cause him to take unwise actions that benefit the manipulator. He can steal by embezzlement, secretly taking funds or goods entrusted to his care and hiding the discrepancy. He even can steal by accident, receiving something from another person by mistake and failing to report it or to return it to the owner. None of those forms of stealing are legitimate for a believer in Jesus.

Paul stated the cure for stealing. He said a person should get an honest job, so he will have what he needs to take care of himself. Then he will have no need to steal. When a person has his own job and earns enough to meet his basic needs, he

finds dignity, self-worth, and confidence. He does not want to be dependent on others. Taking unjustly from someone else makes him lose his sense of being worthwhile. For the sake of his own feeling of self-assurance, he does not want to steal. He even begins to realize that he can feel even more worthwhile if he can help someone else in need. So Paul said a person should aim toward earning enough to have some extra funds to give to someone else in need. Thus, he not only prevents himself from stealing, he also takes away another person’s temptation to steal. Stealing is evil and ungodly. Diligent work and generous giving are righteous and Christ-like.

Verses 29-30. Belligerent speech must not come from your mouth. Hostile language is another way to be violent toward others. In referring to that kind of speech, Paul used a word that was regularly used to describe spoiled food. He called any such word “a rotten word.” While the expression can rightly apply to filthy, salacious, or scatological words, Paul used the expression to apply to hostile words or curse words. He said a believer should never use any such word even once.

Hostile words quickly escalate into exaggeration. The purpose of hostile words is to hurt, and the person wants to hurt as much as possible. He colors the action to which he is hostile and then embellishes it with offensive and vulgar words. Such hostile words can hurt a person as deeply as a blow with a stick. They can cause wounds that fester and will not heal. When a believer is displeased, he should strive to be silent and wait until he has control over what he says. By that means, he will avoid making statements he will regret and will have a hard time overcoming. When he has time to think, he will find ways to deal with his frustration in positive and productive ways.

Paul offered three cures for belligerent speech. The first was to practice using encouraging and uplifting speech. Paul said a believer should speak only words that build up a person who has needs and lacks in his life. Good and kind words help a troubled person do better, instead of tearing him down. In addition, kind words give grace to those who are listening. Those who hear the words of a person who speaks kindly become inspired by

the thoughtful way the person handled his disagreement, and God's grace enables them to learn how to do the same.

The more a person develops the habit of complimenting and praising others, the more difficult it becomes for him to use cutting and bruising words. He soon finds that he can even find a kind way to correct and instruct others. Instead of becoming angry and belligerent at other people's mistakes or even deliberate offenses, he speaks in ways that seek reconciliation and understanding. The other person accepts the correction and improves himself. Instead of breaking a friendship, the words preserve a relationship and make it better.

Paul's second suggestion for curing belligerent speech was to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit. Paul pictured the Holy Spirit, not only standing ready to help believers when they need it, but also watching to observe the progress believers are making in learning to live like Jesus. God's Spirit rejoices in our progress and our victories, and He is saddened by our failures. When we know that our Companion and Coach is observing how well

we are doing, we are inspired to always do our best. We certainly will make every effort not to make Him sad. Especially, when we realize He is the One who sealed us into salvation to keep us safe until the day when we will be totally redeemed from all sin, we will take great care not to say anything that will disappoint Him.

Paul's third suggestion for curing belligerent speech was to just eliminate all such words and expressions from our vocabulary. If we keep out of our minds and off of our lips every kind of expression that is bitter, angry, wrathful, boisterous, or slanderous, those kinds of expressions will become so unnatural that we will have difficulty even remembering how to use them. When we keep them out of our minds as a part of getting rid of everything evil, we will find it hard to think of words to say that will hurt another person. All kinds of violent words and actions will become foreign to us. We will not know how to use them anymore. We will discover that kind and encouraging words are a much better way to deal with every frustration.

2. [But in love] (4:32-5:2)

- a. *And to one another be kind and compassionate* (4:32),
 - (1) *Forgiving one another* (4:32b)
 - (2) *Just as God in Christ also forgave you* (4:32c).
- b. *Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children* (5:1).
 - (1) *And walk in love* (5:2a)
 - (2) *As Christ also loved us* (5:2b-2d)
 - (a) *And gave Himself up for us* (5:2c)
 - (b) [As] *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a fragrant perfume* (5:2d).

As a contrast to violence, Paul recommended love. Love is the opposite of hardness and violence. Love cares about others and longs to see them helped. Doing harm is the last desire of a person who has love. Paul knew if the Ephesians learned to really love each other, they would easily turn away from anger, stealing, and cursing. They would replace those ugly deeds with attractive generosity.

Verse 32. Be kind and compassionate. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be kind and compassionate to one another. Being kind to another person means to voluntarily do thoughtful

and generous deeds for others. The compassionate person does not wait to be asked. He is sensitive to the needs of others and seeks to meet those needs whenever he sees them. Being compassionate means to be sympathetic and patient with others when they failed or fell short of what they should be. Compassionate does not mean to be lenient on a person who is hard-hearted and unrepentant. It means to recognize when a person is sorry for his wrongdoing and to reach out to help him overcome his mistake. Believers need to be sensitive to the feelings of others and to encourage them to do better, not to be harsh and to put others down when they do wrong and want to do better.

Paul especially encouraged the Ephesians to forgive each other. The highest expression of kindness and compassion is to forgive someone who has harmed or offended us. Forgiveness is unselfish, but it is as liberating to the one who forgives as it is to the one who is forgiven. Refusing to forgive extends the offense and the pain. It raises fences and leaves a person bitter and lonely as he nurses his grudges alone. It is a sad sight to see a person who is holding a grudge when he meets the person he resents. He turns away when he sees the person he will not forgive. The person who turns away because he will not forgive always does so with a frown on his face. It is obvious he is hurting because he remembers what made him angry and feels the pain all over again. He is denying himself a friend he could have, and it leaves him withdrawn and lonely. The burden that person is carrying could be removed if he would just soften his heart and forgive.

Only forgiveness can remove the hurt we feel when someone has offended us, but believers have an even greater reason to forgive. It is that God in Christ forgave us. Every time we think we cannot forgive someone, we need to remember how generous Jesus was in forgiving us. Remembering the relief that came to us when Jesus forgave us of all our sins will be more than enough incentive for us to get over our hurt and to forgive the person who offended us freely and fully. Then the one who offended and the one who was offended will both be set free.

Verse 5:1. Walk in love. Paul then defined the feeling that enables us to be forgiving. It is love. When we learn to forgive others because Christ forgave us, we naturally go further and want to imitate God like children who are loved want to imitate their parents. The characteristic that makes us most like God is to have love for others.

The word Paul used for “love” was that distinctly Christian word *ἀγάπη* (*agapé*). *Agapé* is one Greek word that almost every Christian knows. It means to care about others more than we care about ourselves. It means to be willing to do without or to forgo a privilege in order to help someone else. That attitude is the exact opposite of violence. It is so far away from the way humans

naturally act that it can come to a person only when he is made new by Jesus. When Jesus makes us new, we want to be like Him. Soon we replace our ugly attitudes toward others and replace them with a genuine unselfish love.

Paul explained the reason that believers ought to love. It is because Christ loved us. He demonstrated the God kind of love that is described by the word *agapé*. He loved us so unselfishly that He gave Himself up for us. Paul defined Jesus’ giving Himself up for us as making Himself “an offering and a sacrifice to God.” When Jesus was on the Cross, He turned the Cross into an altar and made Himself an offering to God to pay for our sins. The Son of God, who was appointed to be the Creator, Revealer, Savior, and Finisher of all of God’s works in the created universe gave up every privilege that belonged to Him to become a man and then gave up His life as a God/man to make a way for sinners to be saved. It was the most excruciating agony anyone ever suffered. It was the most unselfish deed anyone ever done.

Seen with human eyes, Jesus’ death on the Cross was the ugliest scene ever committed in all of history. However, when God saw Jesus on the Cross, it was a fragrant perfume to Him. It smelled good to God because it provided God with the thing He wanted most in all of the world, which was a way for His creation to be saved. We are accustomed to saying God turned away from Jesus when He was on the Cross because He could not look on sin, but the Bible says Jesus’ suffering and death on the Cross was a fragrant perfume to God. God the Father indeed was separated from God the Son on the Cross for the one and only time in all of history. That separation was necessary for the full payment for sin to be paid; but we should know that, when the Son was suffering, the Father was suffering also. He was separated from the Son as much as the Son was separated from Him. But all of that suffering had a delightful odor, a sweet fragrance to God. It was making a way for His people and His cosmos to be saved. It was the supreme expression of true love that has ever been extended.

Since Jesus made that kind of sacrifice for us because of love, we certainly can be loving

enough to reach out to others in kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Hostility and violence will become foreign to us, and our lives

will become witnesses to the limitless love and grace of God.

Conclusion. When we learn to love like Jesus loved, hostility and violence will become foreign to us. Gentleness and helpfulness will become our desire and way of life. We will be living examples of how Jesus can bring harmony among people. We also will be a small example of the universal harmony God eventually will give to all things at the End.