

Eph 4:25 Understanding Biblical Instruction  
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## Eph 4:25 Understanding Biblical Instruction

We're going to continue in our discussion of the book of Ephesians this morning. We left off last week in Ephesians 4:24. If you'll remember, we spent the last several weeks talking about learning Christ as our life by faith. And then we looked at how, only as faith beholds the Lord in this way, are we able to put off what Scripture calls the old man, and put on the new. Only when we are renewed in the spirit of the mind can there be any genuine transformation of the soul.

Now we've come to a place in this letter that can only be understood rightly upon the foundation of what Paul has already said. Not only on the foundation of what he just said about the renewing of the mind and transformation of the soul, but also upon the foundation of all that he has said in this entire epistle.

It is only because we, as Christians, try to understand the next section, and portions of Scripture like this, without any reference to the foundational realities of the cross that they give us so much trouble. It's only because we often ignore, or fail to comprehend, the reality of our salvation that we turn verses like the ones we're about to read, into religion, works of man, "practical Christianity", steps to righteous living.

We have arrived at a series of verses here in Ephesians that are sometimes called "instructions for living", or "Christian living" verses. And I don't think that's a bad name for these verses because they certainly have a number of instructional types of things to say. But we have to understand what Paul is saying through these kinds of statements.

So, even though I'm considering this part of the Ephesians study, I'm not actually going to be looking at any specific verse this week. This week, and at least part if not all, of next week I'm going to be first talking about how to approach and understand these kinds of Scriptures in the New Testament because I think that they are largely misunderstood.

Let me back up and try to explain exactly what I'm talking about. Prior to understanding something of the reality of the cross, I used to gravitate towards verses that seemed to be telling me how to live the Christian life. At that time I didn't realize what it meant to be crucified with Christ. I had no idea what it meant to be raised with Him, seated with Him in the heavens, joined to Christ, in His Father. I didn't know what He had done, where I was, what I was, or what any of it meant. I was very familiar with the Bible as a book. I knew the words. I believed the words and loved the words. But the realities described by it were foreign to my heart.

I didn't know, for much of my life as a believer, that the only acceptable Christian "Life" was the life that Christ lives in me and through me. I might have agreed with that concept if I saw it on a bumper sticker. But I had not faced that reality in the light. And therefore...when I read the Bible I didn't spend very much time looking at the verses that described how I was baptized into Christ's death. I didn't try to figure out what Paul meant when He said that "I no longer live." You see, that was too strange for me. I know it must have meant something to me. I mean, I must have had some idea that crossed my mind when I fumbled through the multitude of Scriptures that described this reality. I probably just thought that being dead meant that I no longer lived the way that I used to before being saved. I honestly don't remember.

I didn't do it on purpose, but I kinda just stayed away from the enormous quantity of Scriptures that said things like "apart from me you can do nothing", "the flesh profits nothing", "in the flesh dwells no good thing", "in the flesh it is impossible to please God", "you have been buried with Him", "in Adam all die", and on and on one we could go. If I were to spend some time reading the book of Ephesians, I would have probably started with, or at least be more excited about, the passages beginning at the end of chapter four. The verses that we're getting to now. If I was going to read the book of Romans, I would find myself more interested in the verses that start around chapter 12 or 13. If it was Galatians, I would have gravitated towards chapter 5.

Those earlier, foundational, chapters were interesting...but they seemed to me more theological than practical. I thought that they had to do with things that were probably very important, but not very pressing when it came to Christian living. I thought Paul got to the meat and potatoes of Christian life closer to the end of his epistles. I couldn't have been more wrong.

The fact of the matter is that, without the foundational spiritual realities that He describes and declares in the beginning of each of these epistles, the final verses about Christian living are nothing more than dead religion and works of man. I mean, that unless these things that Paul describes starting here in Ephesians 4:25 are the necessary result and expression and outworking of the realities that he spent much time talking about, then they will be nothing more than Adam trying, once again, to live for God.

You'll notice something when you read Paul's letters. First and foremost, nearly every time, Paul reminds his readers of what he had already, no doubt, spoke to them about countless times in person. First he proclaims the reality and power of the finished work of God in Christ that must be working in them. Not just a finished work that has secured them some legal status. But a finished work that is being revealed in them and bringing them into true, soul-altering, conformity to what God has done in His Son.

First and foremost Paul insists, time and again, that Christ didn't just die for you. Rather, Christ brought you into His death. Christ brought the entire adamic kind, that entire race of man, into the judgment of the cross where they were put away forever from the presence of God. And then God raised up His Son, out from among the dead, so that any one of us who desires to live CAN live. But, if we desire to live, it is necessarily therefore no longer we who live, but Christ who is the resurrection and the life.

And so, in Ephesians, Paul begins this epistle describing this finished work. Think back through all that we have looked at in the weeks and months that we've been studying Ephesians. Remember, right at the beginning Paul is describing God's finished work in Christ. He *has* blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. In Him we *have* redemption. He *HAS* made known to us the mystery of His will. He *has* gathered together all things in Christ. In Him we *have* obtained the inheritance. This is how Paul begins. He then immediately prays that the Spirit of God would open the eyes of their heart and show them this reality. Not teach them this theology. But awaken them to the reality that God has finished in His Son.

Remember he prays that those who are *already believers* would be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the true knowledge of Him. That the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, and they would see the true expectation of their calling.

Then, in Chapter 2, Paul describes more of what God *has* done. As I mentioned earlier, Paul now tells the Ephesians that we, having been dead in trespass and sin, have been made alive together, raised together, seated together with Christ in God. He says that we are the true circumcision, those who have been circumcised from the entire body of the old man. Not the removal of foreskin, but the removal of the entire adamic man, the body of flesh, through the circumcision of Christ. This is the reality of our death with Him.

Then he tells us that through the cross both Jew and Gentile, have been put to death, and Christ has been raised up as the life of both, "thus establishing peace", and thus making of the two "one new man". One head, many members sharing one life. Through Christ we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. He ends chapter 2 by telling us that we are "growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit".

Chapter 3 tells us, in no uncertain terms that "the eternal purpose of God was accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's verse 11. Then Paul goes on to pray again for the church that they might be "empowered in the inner man, that Christ might dwell in them through faith." He prays that they would know and comprehend the love of God, all that God has given to their soul in the person of His Son.

All of this is mind-blowing...and yet he continues. He continues to lay down the foundational realities of salvation before he ever begins to talk to them about the so-called instructions for living. He doesn't want them to suppose even for a moment that he's talking about good works done in the flesh, or pleasing God in the adamic nature, or teaching humanity how to be spiritual.

In chapter 4 he describes this one new man in more detail. He tells the Ephesians that this one new man is Christ the head joined to a body. And there is just one Spirit in this man, one mind, one faith, one baptism into death, one expectation, one body. And the goal for this new man is stated in verse 10 – that Christ might fill all things. To this end he gave ministerial functions in His body that we would all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is genuine transformation. Not man trying to be something that He is not. But redeemed humanity realizing what they are! Realizing what they have been given. Growing in the reality and experience of new life in Christ. This realization is called

“being renewed in the spirit of the mind”. And it results in the putting off of all that has been put away by God. And it involves putting on all that God has given in and as the Person of Christ.

I just very briefly summarized the entire letter to the Ephesians. But do you see how carefully and deliberately Paul lays out the foundation of salvation? Can you see how anybody that understood what he had been saying would approach the end of this epistle with the awareness that, whatever he might have to say about instructions for living, it cannot be talking about me pleasing God in my flesh, with my discipline, my behavioral modification, my effort.

Here’s why I reviewed all of that... **So that you could see that Paul does not go through all of this, only to conclude his letter by telling the Ephesians to shape up and try to act like Jesus. He doesn’t describe the finished work of the cross and pray for the inward awakening and empowering by the Spirit of God, and describe the renewing of the spirit of the mind unto the putting on of Christ, only to finish with a list of do’s and don’ts for practical Christian living.** Can you see how that doesn’t make any sense? That’s what I’m trying to show you before we start this next section.

As I was saying before, I remember when my mind would natural gravitate towards the end of various epistles. I thought I could at least understand the do’s and don’ts. I really didn’t understand much of all that I just summarized. I suppose I had some sort of theological framework that I would fit all of the verses into. I’m not saying I didn’t know what they said. I’m just saying that it wasn’t until I got to verses like “cease lying” or “let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth” that I felt I really connected with what Paul was trying to say. I mean, I know what lying is. And I know its bad. And I know that I should stop doing it. That makes sense. I knew I had a dirty mouth, and I understand that, as a Christian, I should stop acting like Tommy Toilet-mouth. Ok...it’ll be tough...but I can do that.

And because that is what made sense to me in the natural mind...a list of do’s and don’ts...that is much of what I understood Christianity to be. Forgiveness for sin plus a better way to live. Redemption from hell and a self-improvement plan. You see, that’s just not what Christianity is. That’s not right. And we know that having spent the last two years looking at the first 4 ½ chapters of this book.

We know that Christianity is Christ living in you. We know that Christianity is the Person of Life, imparted to the human soul, through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We know that truth is an encounter with the finished work of God in the light of His life. We know that change is the putting on of Christ through the renewing of the Spirit of the mind, and the subsequent putting off of us. The increase of one man, the destruction of another.

Well then, what are these portions of Scripture about? How does Paul understand them? One thing is certain right from the outset...Paul is not blatantly contradicting himself. He’s not taking four and a half chapters to say “not I, but Christ”, and then wrapping it all up by saying “not Christ, but I”. Even in his natural mind Paul was far too intelligent for that.

In my mind, the so-called instructions for living verses fall into three general categories. I’m not suggesting that Paul saw them in these categories. He just spoke out from the truth. I’m simply saying that for us, who are so accustomed to

reading all of these things from a wrong foundation, and generally applying them to the wrong man, to ourselves, with various forms of a works mentality, it might be helpful to think about them in these three categories. We're only going to get to the first of these three this week.

The first, and what should be the most obvious category, are things that Paul is telling us to put on and put off because we are putting on Christ and putting off the old man. Remember, everything that he goes on to tell the Ephesians is standing securely on the realities that he has already proclaimed. Paul has just told them that they are growing up into the fullness of Christ. He told them that they are learning Christ as their life by faith, and that this is having an effect in their soul. Because the light of His life is shining in their heart, showing them where they are, what is now real, what God has done, showing them the death they have died, the Life they have gained...because they are learning Christ in THIS way...then the effect is that they are putting off from themselves the old man. They are putting on Christ, and all that is Christ.

Look at how this reads.

*Eph 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "LET EACH ONE OF YOU SPEAK TRUTH WITH HIS NEIGHBOR," for we are members of one another.*

Can you see that when he goes on to talk about putting away lying (which is actually a bad translation and we'll talk about that probably next week)...this is just one facet or characteristic of the entire man that we are putting off? This isn't a single specific sin that Paul is singling out and warning them about. This is one of many adamic fruits that are put away together with the root. This is part of what should be passing away from your heart as the old man is put away.

This is how Paul gives similar instruction elsewhere. Consider these verses:

***Col 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,***

Notice that the old man is put off together with his deeds. The new man is put on by being renewed in true knowledge to accord with the image of Him who created him. This is precisely what we read in Ephesians.

Look at what Paul says in Galatians:

***Gal 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its lusts and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.***

Again we have the flesh crucified *together with* its lusts and desires.

So Paul isn't concocting a list of individual actions and desires that he is demanding the Ephesians abstain from. Paul is describing the things that should be passing away from them because they are putting away the source of those actions and

desires, the adamic man. Again, notice how he says "THEREFORE putting away the false" (which the better translation). And when he continues by telling them to "speak the truth to one another" it is not given as a command of law but rather as a natural consequence of what they had become. Speak the truth BECAUSE you are members of one another. In other words, relate to one another in the truth because there is one Spirit, one life, one body, one faith.

We are naturally, as the light of God's truth, the light of the finished work shines in our heart... putting off those things that are part of the wrong man. The things that are part of the man that God has, in fact, circumcised from our soul. It's like Paul is saying, "since you threw away the rotten tree from your yard, you should expect to cease finding rotten fruits." And simultaneously, as we come to see the truth, we are quite naturally putting on the things that are aspects of Christ and our relatedness to Him. We are abiding in that truth, experiencing that truth, and relating in that truth with one another.

So, in instances like these, when Paul gives lists of specific adamic fruits that should be disappearing from these believers, he does so for a couple reasons. First of all, I think, because he's just pointing to where this thing should be heading in terms of outward manifest expression and change. But second of all, and maybe primarily, so that nobody among them would actually be fooling themselves, or others, into believing that they are actually being renewed in the spirit of their mind when there is no accompanying life change. As James so strongly points out, true faith, which is nothing less than the mind of the Lord working in our soul, will necessarily bear the fruit of His nature, the fruit of that tree. Faith lives, and living will involve what we do and say and feel and think. You cannot both abide in the light and walk in the darkness.

There were many in Paul's day, there are many in our day, who believe that they know the reality of faith, they believe they are being renewed in the spirit of the mind, learning the reality and truth and life of God...and yet there is no genuine transformation of the soul. There may be change of behavior, there is change of activities and goals and beliefs. But the soul remains largely the same. It was that very realization that drove me crazy for much of my life as a Christian. What drove me to despair was the gnawing, persistent realization that my soul was not truly being conformed to the realities that I read about, and lived for, and believed, and served. And it was only when I couldn't help but face the fruit of my nature that I started asking some of the right questions. I started asking what was wrong with the entire tree, and what could be done about it.

So, again, this is all under what I would call the first category of so-called Christian living or instruction verses. Its not so much that Paul is insisting that we attempt to be something that we are not, or do something that we cannot do. He is not trying to rally the flesh to give it one more college try. **It is rather that Paul or Peter or whoever, is insisting that the renewing of the mind, and the putting off of the old man, should correspond quite naturally with the putting off of the desires and deeds and lusts that are part of his nature.** That's just the way that it works. If that is not happening to some degree, then there is a problem.

And though Paul doesn't get into it until the next chapter, this is also how it works and what it means to "put on" attributes of Christ. You will find, in various places in the New Testament, the believers encouraged to put on love, or put on humility. Once again, this is not something that belongs to the natural man, but these are

qualities of Christ Himself that work in us and through us by faith. Man's love, even at its greatest, is still something far less than the love that Paul desired to see operating in the church. Man's humility is nothing more than suppressed pride. So for us to put on these attributes and walk in them is for us to put on Christ and abide in Him.

Notice how Paul says this very thing in Colossians chapter 3. In verse 9 he talks about how they have put off the old man together with his deeds. In verse 10 he then says that they have put on the new man and are being renewed in true knowledge until they accord with the image of Him who created them. In verse 11 he says that this new man is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, slave or free, but is Christ all and in all. AND THEN, in the next verse, verse 12, he says THEREFORE put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering.

Can you see how Paul understands this to work? These are not the deeds of a disciplined Christian. These are the fruits of Christ working in the souls of those with a heart to know Him as their life. These are the fruits that grow out from true faith. They are the fruit of God's Spirit, not the fruits of your effort.

We'll stop with that and pick up next week.