

How to Live Like a Christian

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I Believe in the Church Series

Ephesians 4:25-31

I want to first of all wish all the moms, step-moms, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers a very happy Mother's Day. Do we have any great-grandmothers here? We are so grateful for you moms. Here at the Vineyard, we've got a gift for you. We have a coffee mug. Next year we are going to give out a huge Amish-made oak hutch for you to store all your Vineyard mugs in to display all the gifts you've received. If you have been in the Vineyard for 15 years, you have received lots of gifts and so you can proudly display the Vineyard dishware collection. But, if you are a mom, step-mom, grandmother or great-mother, I want to ask you to stand, if you would, so that we can pray for you – we pray thanks to God for your life and applaud you for all you've done in the lives of your children, step-children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

This morning, I want to plunge right into the text that we will be looking at. So, if you have a Bible, turn with me to Ephesians 4:25:

There fore each o f you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Next week I will be looking specifically at verse 32, *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* And we will be exploring in detail the issue of forgiveness. How is it that we are to forgive those who have hurt us? How do you forgive a spouse who has had an affair, or a parent who has abused you, or a fiancée who has broken their engagement, or someone who has stolen your boyfriend or reputation? Next week we will look specifically at the issue of forgiveness.

But today we are getting into the specifics of our Christian lifestyle. And Paul began the discussion of Christian lifestyle, Christian behavior, in verse 17 when he said, *I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as*

the Gentiles do. The Christian lifestyle is a distinctive one. If you are a Christian, you are to behave differently than the world around you.

But in what way specifically is the Christian to behave differently than the world around us? Many Christians throughout history have distinguished themselves from the larger culture by their dress. If you go to Amish communities or some Mennonite communities there are very strict regulations on what an individual is allowed to wear and not wear, the colors that a person can wear and the fact that they can only use buttons and not zippers, and only certain kinds of buttons. Different communities of Christians have marked off card playing or dancing, or movie going, or the use of alcohol or tobacco products, or the use of caffeine as those places that distinguish the Christian from the rest of the world.

Before we look at the Apostle Paul's specifics regarding the way he insists Christians live in the midst of a corrupt world, I want to back away from the text a moment and let's get the satellite view, the bird's eye view of the whole. Before we look at the individual parts, let's pull the cameras back for a moment so that we can gain a larger perspective on Christian behavior.

First of all, we always need to begin with the perspective that Christian behavior is not outside in, but inside out. In other words, Christian behavior is the result of the activity of God working in the human heart, not the other way around. We all know of people who are trying to behave like Christians, but who are not, in fact, Christians. All of Paul's injunctions here regarding what a Christian should act like are based on the assumption that a person is, indeed, a Christian. That there has been a change worked in their heart, so that the life of God is in the soul of that person.

Then Paul tells us that we must no longer live as the Gentiles do in verse 17. He goes on to say that all the behavioral changes that God expects of you are the result of us coming to know Christ. Verse 20: *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely, you have heard of him and were taught of him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*

Now, we never expect to get fruit from a Christmas tree. If a tree is not alive, if a tree is not planted in the ground, if there are not roots, then there won't be any fruit. Yet, very often, I have seen people right from the get-go make the mistake of insisting on Christian behavior from people who are not Christians. They are Christmas trees. They aren't alive. They aren't rooted in Christ. They don't know Christ.

This is the great problem of many Christian schools. The Christian school insists upon Christian behavior from students who are not regenerate, who do not have God's life within them. Oh, they might have come from Christian families, they might be raised in the church, they might know how to talk the talk, but there is no sign of spiritual life within that person. A dear friend of mine, who was a

teacher at a Christian school for many years, said to me only half jokingly, “The job of Christian schools is to take kids who are by nature wolves, and make them act like sheep. We teach kids how to say ‘baaaa.’”

And we parents do the same thing with our kids. We want Christian behavior from a child who is not a Christian. And Christians do the same thing with the larger society. We are trying to get the larger society through political action, protest or letter writing, to act in accordance with a Christian standard in sexual ethics or in any other realm of life.

Friends, we are getting the cart before the horse, or we are getting the horse in the cart, or the cart on top of the horse. We’ve got to get these things in the right order. Christian behavior is always inside out. A change has to be worked inside of us before it will come out.

The fundamental assumption of all that Paul is saying in verses 25-32 is that he is talking to Christians, people who have the life of God in their souls, people who have the power of God, who have come into the light and were bought with a price - the price of Christ’s own blood, whose lives are not their own, who understand that to live not for themselves, but for someone who died for them and rose again.

The Christian life does not begin outwardly, but spiritually. And it is not merely abstract, but it is practical. That life that is in you must work itself out into the practical details of life – your speech, your anger, your work habits. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if your Christian faith does not work itself out into the practical details and minutia of your life, then it is not real Christian faith no matter what you say. There are lots of people who are religious, who go to church and who can espouse a lot of Christian doctrine, quote the Bible; they know where and when to say “praise the Lord.” A lot of folks who know how to talk the talk, but whose faith never works itself down to the practical details of daily life.

The faith found in the Bible is not just an abstract philosophy. It is a very practical, down to earth, call to live in a certain fashion. One of the reasons I love the Bible is because it is so down to earth and so practical. It shows us the way to live, not just the way to think or to talk, but also the way to live. It speaks to the relationship of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of employers and employees, of singles and the church, of citizens to the government, of the society to the environment and to the creation around us. It even speaks about the relationship of people to their pets. This is a very practical book.

The Bible addresses all aspects of life, not just the positive or even the religious. Many people expect that when they open the Bible it is going to just be about religious issues, what you are to do when you are in church. Or it is just going to be about worship, praying, Bible reading, or about rituals. The Bible gets down

to the nitty-gritty of life and not just the happy side of life, but the negative, dreary, dreadful side of our existence. It addresses and speaks about divorce and addiction and abuse and violence. It addresses the issue of family incest that almost no one, even in contemporary 21st culture is willing to safely look at. It speaks to the affect of alcoholism on our lives. It deals with anger and unforgiveness, bitterness, and vulgarity.

The Bible everywhere condemns a kind of spirituality that simply remains in the abstract realm and doesn't work itself out into the practical dealings of men and women with each other and with the world around them. Just read the prophets. How often in the prophets does God say, "Get your religion always from me. Stop with all the spiritual talk and your worship and your dancing and sacrificing. Cut out the hyper-spirituality and bring your faith down to earth." It is not the non-Christian world that most hates hypocrisy, it's God. Listen to these words from Isaiah 1. And these words are echoed throughout the prophets in the Old Testament about abstract, impractical religion that doesn't work itself out into our lives.

Isaiah 1:11, The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me, says the Lord? I have more than enough of burnt offerings of lambs and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbath and convocations – I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you, even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Why? What's wrong? Because your hands are full of blood. Wash and make yourself clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right. Seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Or this famous text from 1 John 3:17, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongues, but with action and the truth.*

Friends, is it not the failure of our faith to work itself out in the practical realms of life that is the most often heard complaint by outsiders. I mean, of all the criticisms of Christianity, isn't it the fact that there is a disconnect between Christian profession and Christian behavior that is the most often criticized aspect of our Christian faith?

The non-Christian says, "You say that a relationship with Christ transformed your lives. Well, I don't see how Christ has transformed you. Christian, you are just as negative and critical at work as everyone else. Christian, look at your life.

You gossip about coworkers, you complain about the boss, you goof off. You certainly aren't the hardest worker around here. You use the office internet connections to shop on eBay. How are you any different?"

Let me ask you, how many of you have had a very negative experience with a Christian in your business dealings? If you are an employer, how many of you have had real difficulty with a professing Christian who was an employee because of that professing Christian's attitude or work habits or their unwillingness to receive correction? How many of you employees have had great difficulty at some point, with a Christian employer or business owner? How many of you don't assume that just because someone is a Christian that they are going to do a great job? Or be scrupulously honest?

My presumption is almost the opposite. When I see someone advertise that their Christianity at the front end of a business proposition, I am very wary because I wonder if that person is merely using their faith to make money? I love to find out after the job is done that someone is a Christian, rather than before. I am not opposed to Christian businessmen or women being outspoken about their faith. But I love their outspokenness to come after the job is done. Now that your carpets are clean and you are happy with the job; now that your furnace is clean; now that your pipes are repaired, now that your shirt is pressed perfectly – I would sure love to invite you to my church, if you would be interested. I say, "Fantastic, great." But prove your Christianity first by your behavior and then advertise it by your speech.

Isn't this one of the main problems facing Christianity in the 21st century? That our faith does not work itself out into the practical details of life? Friends, do you wince like I do when an athlete who has impregnated two or three women, or has been married 4-5 times and is a known womanizer praises the Lord Jesus Christ for his winning touchdown or his heavyweight knock out? Do you wince like I do when you hear an actress talk cavalierly about a nude scene that she did in a recent movie and also the fact that she speaks in tongues at her church? Does it cause you great pain, as it does me, when a football player is arrested for statutory rape, but publicly thanks the Lord Jesus Christ for his acquittal? Do you say to yourself, "Please, please, friend, hang your head and walk out of the courtroom saying, 'no comment.'" But do not invoke the name of my Lord Jesus Christ and associate that precious name with your life and your behavior."

It is this disconnect between claim belief and actual Christian behavior, between doctrine and deed, between faith and life that is, perhaps, in my mind the greatest impediment to the gospel going forth in every age, but particularly in America in the 21st century. We see presidents carrying the Bible to their church and then lying to the country. We see teenagers jumping up and down enthusiastically at Christian rock concerts and Christian festivals and then cheating on exams. We see workers witnessing on their jobs and then going ahead and getting divorced.

Something is wrong with this picture. The Bible everywhere tells us that if your Christian faith doesn't work itself out in the practical details of life, if it doesn't make you more forgiving, if it doesn't make you less angry, if it doesn't make you more generous, if it doesn't make you more humble, if it doesn't make you a better employee and a better spouse and a more respectful child, then you really need to check whether the faith you claim is real at all.

It is the practical effect of a philosophy that is always the test. Jesus said, "You will know a tree by its fruit." The main, unanswerable charge against communism is "look at its fruit." Don't tell me about this idyllic philosophy in which everyone shares what they have with those who are in need and where there is complete equality and where we have a society that is built upon the elevation of the common good over individual self-interest – don't tell me about your ideal world. Let's look at the fruit. Let's look at how communism has played itself out in the real world. Let's look at the gulags under Stalin and the tens of millions of people that were starved to death by Chairman Mao, and the effect of communism in Cambodia and in Cuba and in North Korea.

Isn't this the reason that many of us shudder when we hear of a nation falling under the sway of Muslim fundamentalists? Why does this bother us so much? It is because no matter what the philosophy is we've seen the fruit of Islamic fundamentalism. Look at the lives of women in Afghanistan right now. Women being beaten because someone saw their ankle exposed. Women dying in childbirth because they weren't allowed to go to a male doctor. Women being driven out of professions and out of schools, people being beheaded because they profess Jesus Christ.

Don't tell me about your Eastern philosophy. Hinduism has had a 3000 year opportunity to work out its practical effects in India. And I've seen the results. I've seen mothers take milk from their starving families and put it out on the road so that a rat or snake would be drawn out of a hole. I've seen the poverty and the effects of the caste system and the utter degradation of life.

Jesus said, "You can know a tree by its fruit."

The same test has to be applied to Christians. Does Christianity make people better? Or let me make this more personal. Does your Christian faith make you a better person? Does it affect the practical details of your life? What you spend your money on? Does it affect your wallet? Your day timers? Your leisure habits? Your speech? Your reading? Your relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend? How you relate when you are out on the basketball court and someone keeps elbowing you? Does your Christian faith work itself out there? Does your faith work itself out on the golf course when you slice a shot or when the foursome ahead of you is taking their sweet time and you want to play through?

The Christian life is not abstract, but practical. It is not compartmentalized, but it is total. Paul talks about every aspect of life – what we do with our hands, what we do with our mouths, what we do with our eyes. When we talk about the Christian life, we must remind ourselves that a Christian is never permitted to compartmentalize their life. You know, to be very religious at church and to show no Christian spirituality from Monday to Saturday. The kind of Christian that I have asked God to produce here at Vineyard is the Monday through Saturday Christian. I'm glad for exciting church services and lots of energy and activity. But frankly, after being a Christian for a little over 27 years, I am not that impressed anymore by exciting meetings. It is not hard to throw an exciting meeting. What I am impressed by is authentic lives that are lived from Monday to Saturday. We are not permitted to compartmentalize our lives. The church and the rest of the week we are supposed to be the same whether we are in public or in private.

How many people do you know who are wonderful at work – they are kind, considerate – but they are terrible with their wives and kids. And the classic example is that of the Christian counselor who sits down with his client and shows all of these wonderful traits. They are active listeners and they are warm and thoughtful and everyone thinks of them as being so empathetic and such great people and just oozing with Christian love. But they give no emotional support or attention or kindness to their wives or children.

There is an old saying that Jesus must be Lord of all, or he isn't Lord at all. Let's just for a moment apply this. Would you say that Jesus is the Lord of every day in your week or just some days or just Sunday? Is he Lord of your Friday afternoons and Monday mornings? Is Christ your Lord only when other people are around who can observe you? Or is he also your Lord when you are in private and God's the only one who can see you. Is Christ your Lord not only at work, but also in your family with your spouse? Would your children say, "Yes, my daddy (my mommy), yes they obviously love Jesus even in our home and live for him." Is there any area of your life where you would have to honestly say Christ has not been the Lord of this area?

During the Crusades, before one of those European knights would travel to the Holy Land, the crusaders used to be baptized by immersion. One of the famous practices was they would allow their whole bodies to be immersed except they would hold their right arms out of the water and would have a sword in their hands. What they were saying by doing this was Jesus Christ can have my entire life except I reserve to myself the power of the sword and the power of violence.

And so we might ask ourselves, what area have you kept out of the baptismal waters? What one thing are you holding back on regarding Christ?

"I am going to forgive everyone, except this one person who has really hurt me."

“I am going to open myself up to everything God might say, except this one possibility that I, for example, need to be reconciled with my spouse from whom I am separated. Or my ex-spouse from whom I am divorced. I will allow God to say anything to me except that. That’s what I’ll hold outside the baptismal waters.”

The Christian life is also not morals, but it’s relational. It is very unfortunate that when people think of living the Christian life, often they substitute the moral life. Christianity is so different than mere moralism. There are lots of radio talk show people who can give you morals. That’s not Christianity. You listen to someone give moral prohibition, for example, in the area of sexuality. Morals say don’t sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend because you could catch a disease or because you could get pregnant or because you could get AIDS or because you will get a bad reputation. Morals are all about an activity’s effect on you. How such and such behavior will hurt you.

But Christianity says something totally different. Christianity teaches that at the core of the universe is essentially relational, that life is not essentially about you and that the reason why you ought to do something or not do something is because of its effect on other relationships.

So look at Paul’s reasons for not lying, for example. In verse 25, he says, *Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* Because of the effect on other people, don’t lie. Or verse 28, *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but work, doing something useful with his hands, that he might have something to share with those in need.* Again, the issue is relationship – the effect on other people. Or verse 29, *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it might benefit those who listen.*

Do you understand it? Christianity is the very opposite of self-centered morals. The reason to do or not to do something is not what the modern therapists say because of its effect on you. That’s the lowest reason to do something. Life is not about you. The universe is intrinsically relational. It is not about how this thing just affects you or how you feel. It is how does my behavior affect others?

So when we are talking about divorce or the choice of separation, it is not just what my needs are or what your needs are. That is the modern therapeutic approach to life. The biblical approach to life is how does my behavior, my divorce, my separation affect other people – my parents? My children? My friends? My church? That’s why marriage is public and why we get married not privately, just the two of us standing in a field underneath the stars. But at the beginning of every wedding ceremony, we say, “We are now gathered here in the sight of God and these many witnesses.” We press this moral claim on others. We say to our spouses, “What you do, husband, what you do, wife, affects me.

You aren't just free to work 80 hours a week and think that oh well, that's just your choice."

The same thing with our kids. Not by way of just provoking guilt, but by way of breaking a child out of their sinful self-centeredness, we might say to one of our children, "Do you understand the pain that you cause me when you do this?" And you know, verse 30 is the ultimate biblical reason for our Christian behavior. *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption.* Our behavior is driven by relationship. The effect of our behavior on others and the effect of our behavior on God.

Now, verse 30 is one of the most amazing statements in the whole of the Bible. That it is possible for a human being to bring sadness and pain to God, the Holy Spirit. If we are teaching sexual ethics to a young adult, who is a Christian, it is not enough to say, "Don't do this because you might get a disease, or don't do this because you are going to get pregnant." To a young adult who is a Christian, to an older adult who is single, or divorced or who is no longer a virgin and says, "Well, what difference does it make now?" we would say, "Do not sin with your body because if you do so, you bring pain and grief to God, the Holy Spirit."

It is one of the most wonderful things that could be said about our God, that he chooses by the exercise of his perfect freedom, he chooses to become vulnerable to the activity of men and women. Our God in his freedom could choose to be aloof, to remain unaffected by what we do or what we say. But his sovereign choice is to become vulnerable to us, so that like a parent with a child God grieves. He experiences pain and sorrow and sadness when we sin. And we must allow our hearts to become soft so that the reality of our causing pain to others and pain to our God affects our behavior. The reason for holiness is that we bring joy to the heart of God when we obey him and sadness when we don't.

Finally, by way of the bird's eye perspective, as we look down each of these individual injunctions, you will notice that something is missing. The apostle Paul doesn't say, "Pray about whether or not you should lie or tell the truth. Pray about whether you should let the sun go down on your anger or have an end-point to your anger. Pray about whether you should steal or whether unwholesome communication should proceed from your mouth.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, **(enough already...I know how to spell this guy's name!)** who was for about four decades the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London once said, "It is important to tell Christians that there are some things that you should not pray about." Now, it is an odd thing for a pastor to say to a congregation 'there are some things you should not pray about,' because we have the general biblical rule, "pray always." But there are some things you shouldn't pray about. The things you shouldn't pray about are the commands

that are urged upon you in the Bible. If you have a command, you don't need to pray about it.

I've had people come up to me and ask me a very basic question of Christian ethics. Is it all right for me to do such and such? Would I be wrong if I did this or that? And if the question is a straight forward one, in which I can give a simple biblical response, I will say to the person, "Well, here's what the Bible teaches about your question. Here's what Jesus said. Here's what the apostle Paul said." I can't tell you the number of times someone has responded to a straight forward command from scripture and say to me, "I guess I will need to pray about it." Why do you need to pray about it? Do you expect God to whisper something in your ear that is different than what he says, for example, here in the book of Ephesians? Do you expect that God is going to change his mind because you are asking him, so that his universal will is one thing for everyone else, but because you are praying about it, God is going to say something different to you?

Why do you need to pray about a black and white command that you read out of the text of scripture? What do you hope to gain, other than perhaps some time before you eventually have to obey? I say this with all affection, but other than a spiritual delay tactic, why do we pray about what is clear to us from the text of scripture? I want you to follow me on this for just a moment. I know it is unusual for a pastor to tell Christians that there are some things that you shouldn't pray about. That you and I just need to do and to obey. I want you to think about an area in your life that you struggle with regularly that is a sin. Maybe it is your temper or your work habits, or an area of your speech. Perhaps someone you haven't forgiven. Now, let me ask you a question: have you prayed about it? Most of you, if there is an area of struggle in your life, will say "yes, I've prayed about it dozens of times, maybe hundreds of times." Good Dr. Lloyd-Jones would say, "Well, that's your problem. You are praying about something that you need to act on." There are some things that God will not do for you, that he is asking you to do in his power.

You say, "Well, how? How am I supposed to do God's will?"

Here's three really simple points that you can jot down: Remind yourself that you aren't alone in life. That what you do or don't do affects other people and affects God the Holy Spirit. Preach that to yourself. If I step over this line, if I go ahead and do this or that, I am going to bring grief to others, I am going to affect the church and my family or my boyfriend, girlfriend or coworker, and I am also going to bring grief to God. Don't feed your old self that Paul tells you to put off. Don't feed it. Or as Paul says in Romans 13, *Make no provision for the flesh*. Don't help your sin nature along. Don't nurture it. Don't lead yourself into temptation, in other words.

Someone recently said, "My girlfriend and I are always falling into sin. I prayed about it over and over again, but I keep falling into the same trap."

“Well, how does this happen? What are the circumstances in which you keep falling into sin?”

“Well, just this last Friday we were up in my apartment. We were alone and sitting on the sofa and it was about midnight and we just fell into sin.”

Hold up...stop the film. If you don't want to drive the car, then don't unlock it and slip into the seat. Don't start the car up. Don't rev the engine. Don't put it in gear. There is a certain progress to sin. The Bible everywhere teaches this. In James 1, *Each of us is tempted when by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed. After desire has conceded, it gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death.*

There is a beginning point to sin. It starts with a thought and it gets enflamed as we feed it and give it opportunity and we nurture it. If you don't want to sin, then stop sin at the front door, don't let it enter. Don't dwell there.

So let's look at the specifics quickly. Here's how we live like Christians. Paul gives us a negative injunction and a positive injunction and a reason. Over and over again, he follows that pattern – negative, positive, reason; negative, positive, reason. The reasons are all relational. They are all about us being connected to each other and to God.

Specifically, don't lie. Verse 25, *Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor for we are all members of one body.*

Don't lie. Christian, you claim to be related to the God of truth, who always speaks the truth and who never lies. Who in the book of Matthew alone, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth” 31 times. He uses that phrase 31 times. I tell you the truth. The word “truth” shows up 183 times in the New Testament. Psalm 51 says God desires truth in the inward parts.

Christian, you claim to be in relationship to the God who is true. You know that God's enemy is a liar. Jesus said that the devil is a liar and the father of all lies. All lies share the spirit of Satan. It is all part of the kingdom that he rules. The kingdom that God rules is the kingdom of truth. The kingdom that Satan rules is the kingdom of lying. The very essence of the devil's being is lying. The way that he gets you to sin is to lie in your ear, to tell you that sin is actually ultimately going to be beneficial to you, it is in your interest to sin.

Christian, you need to know that no liar, no habitual liar will ever enter God's kingdom. Revelation 22:15 classes people who lie along with the co-practitioners and witches and murderers and the immoral. The apostle John says in Revelation 22, “Outside of the kingdom are liars.”

But, of course, lying is a way of life here in America. My generation grew up being lied to by the government. I am part of a generation of Viet Nam and Watergate. Do you remember in 1960 when the Russians shot down one of our spy planes, President Eisenhower gave an explanation to the American public that was a lie about what happened and why that plane was flying there. When Americans found out that President Eisenhower lied to them, there was this universal shock. People expected the American government to tell the truth in 1960. By 1975, people expected the American government to lie.

Our whole experience of life, if you are a young adult, your experience of life has been the cynical expectation that people in power would lie to you. There is the shaking of the finger, and "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." Or Iran-Contra, or File-Gate, or Korea-Gate or all the other gates. And exposure and exposure of large corporations and their lies and cover-ups to the public.

You say, "I don't lie." Liar. Do you exaggerate? Do your stories, your memories, your achievements become larger with the telling? Do you exaggerate? Do you ever lie to save face, to cover-up another sin or another flaw? Do you lie to your boss? Do you lie to a customer? Do you say that work is done or is being done when you haven't started on it? Do you refuse to admit a mistake? Do you make up an excuse, something to save face?

What's wrong with lying? Paul says, *We must speak the truth to our neighbors for we are all members of one body.* What is wrong with lying is that lying destroys relationship. From the perspective of the person who is lied to, a person who is regularly lied to becomes wary of anything that a liar will say. You are afraid to hope any more. You are afraid to trust. Have you ever been in a relationship with a liar? They come back and say something else to you and you want to believe them, but you've been burned over and over again, so you are wary about opening up your heart to them. You are wary about hoping again. Lying destroys our capacity to have relationship because relationship is built on a foundation of trust and truth. And if you spend down trust, if you make too many withdrawals from the bank of trust, there is no relationship. It takes a long time to put those deposits back in.

From the perspective of the liar, do you know what's wrong with lying? Every time you tell a lie, it becomes easier and often more necessary to tell another lie. You get hard. Pretty soon, you don't care. "Well, hey, I've already told 20 lies about what I'm doing; 21 won't hurt."

The apostle Paul says that we are to live a life free from lying. Christians shouldn't lie. We should live lives free from sinful anger. Verse 26, *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.* I am going to address the issue of anger more completely next week when I talk about forgiveness.

It says we are to live lives free from theft. Verse 28, *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need.* Again, we have Paul's method – negative, don't steal; positive, work with your hands; reason, relationship – so that you might have something to share with those in need. You say, "This one is an easy one. I don't steal. I don't shoplift. I haven't since I was a little boy or girl. I don't break and enter homes. I don't steal cars."

Well, what does it mean to steal? Stealing means taking what doesn't belong to you. You don't steal, is that true? Do you steal from your job? Do you steal from your employer? The US Chamber of Commerce reports that about 50 billion dollars is lost annually to employee theft and fraud. 20% of all businesses fail in the US due to internal theft and fraud. The FBI reports that employee theft is the fastest growing crime in America. Do you steal from your employer? Do you take supplies that belong to the company home for personal use? Do you use company supplied internet for personal use? There is a new term that is being tossed around by companies. It is called cyberslacking. It is employees who spend a bunch of time surfing the net for personal use, personal reasons. Cyberslacking is another way to describe theft.

You probably saw the article on the Internal Revenue Service recently. They discovered in an audit that more than half the time, 51% of the time, that IRS employees were on the internet was for personal use, for participating in online chats, for internet shopping, for checking on personal finances and stocks, for engaging in gambling, for checking up on sports, for visiting sex sites.

Do you steal from your employer? One of the most shocking ways that Americans steal today is by the abysmally low work ethic that characterizes many workers. When I was in college, I worked in a maintenance department for about a year or so. I was repairing flat roofs and for a brief season they put me to work with some guys to repair air compressors. We needed to go in and take the compressor apart and fix the belts. Nothing terribly complicated, or they wouldn't have had me doing it.

But these guys I was working with were the most amazing slackers. Work was supposed to start at 8:00 a.m. They wouldn't get out of the shop until 8:15-8:20. We would drive off in one of those little three-wheeled vehicles to the job. I would be in the back. 8:20 a.m. they would say, "Oh, my goodness, we forgot a tool." Every day. "Oh, my goodness, we forgot our screwdriver." So we would drive back to the shop. We would waste 10-15 minutes going through their stuff looking for their screwdriver. They would go to the job and size it up. They would do about 20 minutes of work and look at their watches and say, "Time for coffee break." We would wash up for coffee break. Drive to the little cafeteria where they would eat donuts and drink coffee. Then they would wash up again. You don't want to get any powder from the donuts or jelly on the air compressor. We would drive back to the job and look it over again. Do a little bit of work and

then wash up for lunch. We would wash up after lunch. They had the cleanest hands in the world. Repeat the same pattern. We would get about 2-2½ hours of work in, wind up at the door at a quarter to four waiting for the 4:00 bell. Nothing other than theft from the employer.

Students, do you plagiarize papers? Have you ever used or copied a term paper or an essay from someone else? Stolen their work? Have you ever copied whole sections from a book or a magazine article or encyclopedia? Stolen, taken what didn't belong to you and put your name on the top? It is a big scandal now at the University of Virginia. Huge plagiarism scandal. Plagiarism is nothing other than theft – the theft of someone else's words, of someone else's thoughts. It's lying to your professor or teacher.

Do you steal from the government by under reporting your income or over reporting your deductions? Do you steal from God by refusing to tithe as the book of Malachi commands you? Are you a thief?

Paul says the cure for stealing is working hard. See, stealing is the lazy person's way of getting something without working for it. We don't want to work hard and write our own paper, so we steal someone else's. We don't want to work hard and actually earn more money, so we steal it. We don't want to work hard and actually earn a compliment, so we steal credit from someone else. The essence of stealing, the essence of theft, is laziness. It is the lazy person's way of getting the benefit without paying the price.

And so the apostle Paul says, "You need to work." Literally, labor, sweat, do something – not just for your own good, but that you would have something to share.

And finally, we are to live lives free from corruption. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it might benefit those who listen.* Speech has incredible power. Negatively, don't let anything unwholesome come out of your mouth – cursing, slander, gossip. I want to underline one phrase in this in closing – *according to their needs*. The apostle Paul says positively we should say what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.

When you speak, it is not enough to say things that are true, to say things that are correct. If you want to live the Christian life, along with telling the truth and getting rid of sinful anger and working hard, there is a sensitivity, a discernment, so that when we speak what we say meets the real need of this individual. The only question you should ask yourself is not "Is what I said true?" That's an easy one. A more difficult question is "Was what I said to that other person appropriate? Did it meet their needs? I need to consider what this person's needs are. What is their situation? What is their circumstance?"

I think that sometimes Christians come along and talk to someone as if they were preaching a sermon to them. Something that is totally appropriate when we are coming to church and we are gathered with thousands of people, but totally inappropriate if we are sitting down having coffee together. Yeah, I could share this whole thing over coffee, but it would be totally inappropriate. It wouldn't fit the occasion.

I feel the same way about many canned approaches to the gospel. It's helpful to have a method to share your gospel, but it is often very unhelpful when your method doesn't meet the need. I remember when I was in college. I was going through a period of tremendous doubt about my Christian faith. I was taking a number of religion classes from very liberal professors who would just tear into me in front of the class. One of my professors used to call me "The Man of Faith" and would just mock me in front of the other students. "Well, let's hear from The Man of Faith." The implicit message was, "You idiot, you Neanderthal, you moron."

Well, I was emotionally being battered and then I came home and right next door to us lived a guy who was getting his Ph.D. in Philosophy, who had been raised in a Baptist Fundamentalist home, but who had walked away from the faith. He knew all the biblical arguments and he used to find it, I guess, fun and sporting to come over and point out all the problems with Christianity. He did this every day. "Hey, Rich, I'd like to talk with you..." and then he would run through all the problems.

I was personally going through a bad place in my own life. I was depressed. Marlene and I didn't have very much money. I was going through a time of doubt. I was really struggling with my faith. I was walking along the street one day and saw a Christian from our fellowship and we started to talk.

I said, "You know, I am really having a hard time in my faith right now. I am really struggling."

He said, "What's the problem?"

I said, "Well, you know..." and I went on to describe the situation. He looked at me and just icily said to me, "Well, your problem is you haven't read such and such a book. You need to read it. It will answer all your questions." The book might have answered some of my questions. His communication to me didn't meet my need. I needed understanding. I needed him to listen for a moment.

It takes time to do verse 29. The selfish person, the self-centered person, the overly busy person cannot speak to someone else according to their needs. It is easy to give off the shelf counsel. Here's the medicine I hand out to everyone. That's easy. But to hear your situation, grapple with your issues, that takes time. That takes patience. We need God's help to say the appropriate things.

How's your life, Christian? Do you bring pain or joy to the Holy Spirit? Pain or joy to others?

One Christian author named Kent Hughes suggested that we have a little test that we do together with our spouses, or if you are single, with a friend. Take the categories in succession. Is my Christian life working itself out in practice? Do I compartmentalize? Do I lie? Do I take what doesn't belong to me? Is my speech appropriate?

If you find you are blowing it, ask God's forgiveness. Bring joy to His heart. Let's pray.

How to Live Like a Christian

Rich Nathan

May 12-13, 2001

I Believe in the Church Series

Ephesians 4:25-31

I. The **Christian** Life

- A. Not Outward, but Spiritual
- B. Not Abstract, but Practical
- C. Not Compartmentalized, but Total
- D. Not Morals, but Relational (Eph. 4:30)
- E. Not Prayer, but Behavioral

II. **Christian Lifestyle Specifics**

- A. A Life Free from Lying (Eph. 4:25)
- B. A Life Free from Anger (Eph. 4:26, 27)
- C. A Life Free from Theft (Eph. 4:28)
- D. A Life Free from Corruption (Eph. 4:29)