

**“Building Better Relationships: The Basics of Lasting Change”**  
**Ephesians 4:25-28**

*Introduction:*

1. True Christianity is not a “pie in the sky in the sweet by and by.” Yes, there is a glorious eternity for all who trust in God through Christ. But the Lord Jesus wants you to start slicing and eating and enjoying that pie now. To say this another way, the Christian life is much more than Sunday morning. It is the lifelong pursuit of exalting and enjoying God in this lifetime and forever. If we are going to show the greatness of God and experience the joy that he wants us to have, we will become involved in seeking positive changes in our relationships with other people.
2. From this point on in the letter, the Holy Spirit through the apostle concentrates on very specific and practical changes that the followers of Christ must experience in their walk or lifestyle. In our day we hear much talk about “alternative lifestyles”. So then, let us pay close attention to what the Spirit says is the Christian lifestyle. Here is the way that shows the knowledge of Christ in concrete and observable terms. There are three items mentioned in our text. This morning, let us focus on the first and third.

*Exposition:*

I. The first requirement for true and lasting change is a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. “Therefore...”

- A. Those apart from Christ do not realize the seriousness of their problem.
  1. As we saw last week, they think that their problem is external and situational, instead of internal and spiritual. In other words, they don’t see the full nature of their problem.
  2. This leads them to adopt a “band-aid” approach. They might try a little religion, a little reading of self-help books, or a little therapy from counselors. But they still think they can handle it!
- B. Many who know Christ fail to realize the greatness of salvation.
  1. They fail to understand that they are truly new in Christ.
  2. They feel that true and lasting change is impossible. It is too easy to have a defeated attitude through weariness in the struggle with sin.
  3. But the Lord tells us to make changes. **By his grace as we live by faith in Christ**, what he commands can occur. God does not command us to do what is beyond the power of his grace, which is ours in Christ Jesus.

*Note carefully:* I am not talking about doing something “in the flesh”—not at all. I am talking about new life in the Spirit of God.

*Apply:* I can almost hear someone saying, “If I would have heard this years ago, it might have helped, but you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” To which I reply, “You are not an old dog, are you? You are a new man or woman in Christ. Therefore, live like one!”

II. The framework for lasting change

*Illustration:* Do you remember some of the old corny jokes you used to tell as a child? The humor value of most was quickly exhausted, but you kept on telling everyone! I watch as we all hide from embarrassing memories. One of these old chestnuts went like this: “When is a door not

a door?" The answer was: "When it is ajar!" Very punny! But it illustrates a point, as I hope you'll see in these verses. "When is a door not a door? When it is **something else**.

A. The example of speaking truthfully

1. Those who follow Christ must "put off falsehood".

a. To lie and to deceive is to imitate the ways of the chief liar and deceiver, the devil (Jn 8:44). God's wrath is against all liars (Rev 21:8). Thankfully, Christ's shed blood is more than sufficient to cleanse us from that sin's guilt and punishment. However, we must clearly see that we who follow Christ not follow the ways of lies and deceit any longer. The Lord commands us to get rid of the sin of lying.

b. However, we should also realize that true Christians might struggle with this sin. If we could not, then what is the point of the command? But since the Lord is truth, he wants his followers to show his glory by living lives of truth. Perhaps he found you in a swamp of lies and deception. But now he wants you to put off those old ways.

*Comment:* Our nation was greatly influenced by Christian principles at its founding. "A man's word is his bond." A simple handshake meant more than a lengthy contract with all kinds of penalties attached for non-performance. However, lies and deceit are just "the way things are". As Christians we must be different.

2. Those who follow Christ must put on the practice of speaking truthfully.

a. Let's return to our old pun, "When is a door not a door?" But now we ask, "When is a liar not a liar?" The answer is "when he/she becomes a truth teller." Until you become a truth teller, you are just an unemployed liar waiting for your next lying job.

b. God has so made us that we cannot just stop doing one thing to live in a vacuum. No, we must replace one practice with another. Notice this in the text: "put off falsehood and speak truthfully...."

c. Now what does speaking the truth have to do with building better personal relationships? Everything! Telling others the truth is the foundation for trust, which supports all good relationships between people. Let's think of a few examples.

*Example:* Before I was called to be pastor of this church, you asked me what I believed, and I plainly and truthfully answered those questions. We shared a question and answer session in which you asked Sharon and I whatever you wanted to ask. That sound beginning laid a good foundation for our relationship.

*Example:* In a marriage, a husband and wife must have complete trust in each other. This trust is created and develops as they consistently speak the truth to each other.

*Example:* As parents, one of the greatest lessons you should put into your children's hearts is to always tell the truth. Tell your children that the worst thing they can ever do to you is to lie to you. Make truth telling rule number one, and exact the strongest correction and discipline when they fail to tell the truth. Then your children will become free to tell you the truth in all situations, however they sin or fail, because they know that the worst thing they can ever do is lie to you.

B. The example of becoming one who works and shares

1. We must put off stealing.

a. God created humanity and gave us the right of private ownership of the things of this world. Certainly, all things are God's (Ps 24:1), but he freely gives us all things to enjoy (1 Tm 6:17). God gives the ability to produce wealth (Dt 8:18) and expects us to work to provide our needs and to satisfy our desires (2 Th 3:6-10). What we work for and produce becomes ours.

b. However, the way of sin is to steal—to rob someone of his or her possessions. It is a way of life that is characteristic of people in rebellion against God (Rev 9:21). Those who steal are under God’s judgment (1 Cor 6:10). A Christian should never be a thief (1 Pt 4:15). But as we said before, thank God for the power of Christ’s blood.

2. We must put on working and sharing.

a. As we said concerning lying, a Christian might struggle with the sin of stealing. However, that does not excuse anyone. We must replace stealing with God’s way of working and sharing. When is a thief not a thief? When he becomes someone that works to obtain money and possessions and then shares with others.

b. When God created man, he put in him the garden to work (Gen 2:15). In the new creation, God expects his adult sons to work. Idleness and laziness are the ways of evil. Even if you are retired from your career, you still should be working. You may already have produced all you need for the rest of your life. But that is not the issue.

c. A Christian should not only view work as the means to produce wealth for the needs of his own family. He should also look at work as an opportunity to produce the means to share with others in need. In addition, every believer has the obligation to support the work of the ministry (1 Cor 9:1-14; Phil 4:10-19; 1 Tm 5:17-18).

d. We should also observe that Christians should be engaged in “useful” work. We ought to have a vision of contributing to the good of humanity. This should direct us to careers promote the general welfare rather than hindering it.

*Apply:* Don’t try to be an “unemployed thief”. Realize that you must replace stealing with working that enables you to give to others. When you are a giver, you are no longer a taker.

*Apply:* Understand that work is an essential part of being human. Get busy and become creative and so show the greatness of the God who created everything!

*Apply:* Develop a vision of community. God wants us to make this world a better place. Find the joy in work that God wants you to have. Wherever a Christian works should be a place that is brighter and happier and more peaceful. In this way we will attract people to our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.