

Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church  
We're glad you're here!



An open Bible is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, and the background is a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The text is overlaid in a large, bold, black font.

# **How to Remove the Grave Clothes**

**Scripture text: Ephesians 4, Part 3**

## **The Application (Eph. 4:25–32)**

Paul was not content to explain a principle and then leave it. **He always applied it to the different areas of life that need to feel its power.**

**Paul even dared to name sins.** Five different sins are named in this section, and Paul told us to avoid them and he explained why.

**Lying** (v. 25). A lie is a statement that is contrary to fact, spoken **with the intent to deceive**. If I tell you it is noon, and then discover that my watch is wrong, I did not tell a lie.

But if I gave you the wrong time so you would be late to a meeting and I would benefit from it, **that would be a lie**. Satan is a liar (John 8:44); and **he wants us to believe that God is a liar**. “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1)

Whenever we speak truth, the Spirit of God works, but whenever we tell a lie, Satan goes to work. We like to believe that we help people by lying to them, but **such is not the case**. We may not see the sad consequences immediately, but ultimately they will come. “**Ye know that no lie is of the truth**” (1 John 2:21). Hell is prepared for “*everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*” (Rev. 22:15).

This does not mean that anybody who ever told a lie will go to hell, but rather that **those whose lives are controlled by lies**—they love lies and they make lies—are lost forever. The Christian's life is controlled by truth.

Note the reason Paul gave for telling the truth: **We belong to each other in Christ.** He urged us to build the body in love (Eph. 4:16) and he urged us **to build the body in truth. "Speaking the truth in love"** (Eph. 4:15). As "members one of another" we affect each other, and we cannot build each other apart from truth. **The first sin that was judged in the early church was the sin of lying** (Acts 5:1–11).

**Anger (vv. 26–27).**

**Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us.** In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (Deut. 9:8, 20; Ps. 2:12).

Several times in the Old Testament the phrase appears, **“the anger of the Lord”** (Num. 25:4; Jer. 4:8; 12:13). **The holy anger of God is a part of His judgment against sin,** as illustrated in our Lord’s anger when He cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12–13). The Bible often speaks of anger **“being kindled”** (Gen. 30:2; Deut. 6:15), **as though anger can be compared to fire.**

Sometimes a man's anger smolders, and **this we would call malice**; but this same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and **this we would call wrath**.

It is difficult for us to practice a truly holy anger or righteous indignation **because our emotions are tainted by sin**, and **we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters**. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. The New Testament principle **seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people**. "You that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10).

It is possible to be angry and not sin, but **if we do sin**, we must settle the matter quickly and not let the sun go down on our wrath.

“Agree with thine adversary quickly” (Matt. 5:25). “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15).

The fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder (Matt. 5:21–26), because anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and Satan is a murderer (John 8:44).

Satan hates God and God's people, and when he finds a believer with the sparks of anger in his heart, **he fans those sparks, adds fuel to the fire**, and does a great deal of damage to God's people and God's church.

**Both lying and anger “give peace to the devil” (Eph. 4:27).**

When I was living Illinois, in Chicago, one out of every thirty-five deaths was a murder, and most of these murders involved relatives and friends.

They are what the law calls “**crimes of passion.**”

Two friends get into an argument (often while gambling), one of them gets angry, pulls a gun or knife, and kills his friend. Horace was right when he said, “**Anger is momentary insanity.**”

A woman tried to defend her bad temper by saying, “I explode and then it’s all over with.”

“Yes,” replied a friend, “**just like a shotgun**—but look at the damage that’s left behind.”

“Anyone can become angry,” wrote Aristotle. “But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, **for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.**”

Solomon has a good solution: ***Proverb 15:1*** *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

**Stealing** (v. 28). “Thou shalt not steal” is one of the Ten Commandments, and when God gave that commandment, **He instituted the right of private ownership of property.** A man has the right to turn his strength into gain, and to keep that gain and use it as he sees fit. God gave numerous laws to the Jews for the protection of their property, and these principles have become a part of our law today. **Stealing was particularly a sin of the slaves in Paul’s day.**

Usually they were not well cared for and **were always in need**, and the **law gave them almost no protection**.

When he wrote to Titus, Paul urged him **to admonish the slaves not to “steal”** but to be faithful to their masters (Titus 2:10).

But it was not only the slaves, but citizens in general, who **were addicted to thievery**, for Paul wrote to people in the Ephesian church who were gainfully employed (Eph. 4:28).

Just as Satan is a liar and a murderer, he is also a thief.

***John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.***

He turned Judas into a thief (John 12:6) and he would do the same to us if he could. When he tempted Eve, **he led her to become a thief, for she took the fruit that was forbidden.** And she, in turn, **made Adam a thief.**

The first Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise, but the Last Adam, **Christ**, turned to a thief and said, **“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

Paul added motive to the admonition. We should tell the truth because we are “**members one of another.**” We should control our anger lest we “**give place to the devil.**” We should work, and not steal, so that we might be able “**to give to him that has need.**”

You would expect Paul to have said, “Let him work that he might take care of himself and not be tempted to steal.” Instead, he lifted human labor to a much higher level. **We work that we might be able to help others.** If we steal, we hurt others; therefore, we should work that we might be able to help others.

Even honest labor could become a selfish thing, and this Paul seeks to avoid. Of course, it was a fundamental rule in the early church that **“if any would not work, neither should he eat”** (2 Thes. 3:10).

**A lazy Christian robs himself, others, and God.** Of course, Paul was not writing to believers who could not work because of handicaps, **but with those who would not work.**

Paul himself was an example of a hard worker, for while he was establishing local churches, he labored as a tentmaker.

Every Jewish rabbi was taught a trade, for, said the rabbis, **“If you do not teach your son a trade, you teach him to be a thief.”**

The men that God called in the Scriptures were busy working when their call came.

Moses was caring for sheep; Gideon was threshing wheat; David was minding his father’s flock; and the first four disciples were either casting nets or mending them.

Jesus Himself was a carpenter.

**Corrupt speech (v. 29).**

**The mouth and heart are connected.**

**Matthew 12:34** You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

**We expect a change in speech when a person becomes a Christian.**

It is interesting to trace the word mouth through the Book of Romans and **see how Christ makes a difference in a man's speech.**

The sinner's mouth is **“full of cursing and bitterness”** (Rom. 3:14); but when he trusts Christ, **he gladly confesses with his mouth “Jesus Christ is Lord”** (Rom. 10:9–10, niv). As a condemned sinner, his mouth is stopped before the throne of God (Rom. 3:19); but **as a believer, his mouth is opened to praise God** (Rom. 15:6). **Change the heart and you change the speech.**

Paul certainly knew the difference, for when he was an unsaved rabbi, he was **“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”** (Acts 9:1). But when he trusted Christ, a change took place: **“Behold, he prayeth”** (Acts 9:11). **From “preying” to “praying” in one step of faith!**

The word **corrupt**, used in Matthew 7:17–18, **refers to rotten fruit**. It means “that which is **worthless, bad, or rotten**.” Our words do not have to be “dirty” to be worthless. Sometimes we go along with the crowd and try to impress people with the fact that we are not as puritanical as they think. Peter may have had this motive in mind when he was accused by the girl of being one of Christ’s disciples. “Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, ‘I know not the man’ ” (Matt. 26:74).

The appetites of the old life sometimes show up when we permit “filthy communication” out of the mouth (Col. 3:8).

**Colossians 3:5-10** Put to death therefore what is **earthly in you**: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and **obscene talk from your mouth**. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Remember, before we were saved, we lived in spiritual death (Eph. 2:1–3) and, like Lazarus, **our personal corruption produced an odor that was not pleasing to God.**

No wonder Paul wrote, **“Their throat is an open sepulchre”** (Rom. 3:13).

**The remedy is to make sure the heart is full of blessing. So fill the heart with the love of Christ so that only truth and purity can come out of the mouth.**

**Never have to say, “Now, take this with a grain of salt.”** Paul told us to put the salt of God’s grace in everything we say. **“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt”** (Col. 4:6). And **keep in mind that your words have power, either for good or evil.** Paul tells us to speak in such a way that what we say **will build up our hearers,** and not tear them down. Our words should **minister grace and help to draw others closer to Christ.** Satan, of course, encourages speech that will tear people down and destroy the work of Christ. If you need to be reminded of the power of the tongue, read the third chapter of James.

**Bitterness** (vv. 30–32). These verses **warn us against several sins of the attitude** and amplify what Paul wrote about anger. **Bitterness refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man.**

Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill will against him.

“Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them” (Col. 3:19).

Bitterness leads to wrath, which is the explosion on the outside of the feelings on the inside. Wrath and anger often lead to brawling (clamor) or blasphemy (evil speaking).

**The first is fighting with fists, the second is fighting with words.** It is difficult to believe that Christians would act this way, but they do, and this is why Paul warned us, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”** (Ps. 133:1).

A elderly man called me one day and asked me if I would perform a wedding for him. I suggested that he bring the bride in so that we might chat together and get better acquainted, since I hesitate to marry strangers. “Before she comes in,” he said, “let me explain this wedding to you. Both of us have been married before—to each other!

Over thirty years ago, we got into an argument, I got mad, and we separated.

Then we did a stupid thing and got a divorce. I guess **we were both too proud to apologize.** Well, all these years we've lived alone, and now we see how foolish we've been. **Our bitterness has robbed us of the joys of life,** and now we want to remarry and see if the Lord won't give us a few years of happiness before we die."

**Bitterness and anger, usually over trivial things, make havoc of homes, churches, and friendships.**

**Paul gives three reasons why we must avoid bitterness. First**, it grieves the Holy Spirit. He lives within the Christian, and when the heart is filled with bitterness and anger, the Spirit grieves. We parents know just a little of this feeling when our children at home fight with each other. The Holy Spirit is happiest in an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace, for these are the “fruit of the Spirit” that He produces in our lives as we obey Him. The Holy Spirit cannot leave us, because He has sealed us until that day when Christ returns to take us home. We do not lose our salvation because of our sinful attitudes, but we certainly lose the joy of our salvation and the fullness of the Spirit’s blessing.

**Second**, our sin grieves God the Son, who died for us.  
**Third**, it grieves God the Father who forgave us when we trusted Christ.

Here Paul put his finger on the basic cause of a bitter attitude: **We cannot forgive people.**

**An unforgiving spirit is the devil's playground, and before long it becomes the Christian's battleground.**

If somebody hurts us, either deliberately or unintentionally, and we do not forgive him, then we begin to develop bitterness within, which hardens the heart.

**We should be tenderhearted and kind, but instead we are hardhearted and bitter.** Actually, we are not hurting the person who hurt us; **we are only hurting ourselves.**

**Bitterness in the heart makes us treat others the way Satan treats them, when we should treat others the way God has treated us.**

**In His gracious kindness, God has forgiven us, and we should forgive others.** We do not forgive for our sake (though we do get a blessing from it) or even for their sake, but for Jesus' sake.

**Learning how to forgive and forget is one of the secrets of a happy Christian life.**

Review once again the motives for “walking in purity”: We are members one of another; Satan wants to get a foothold in our lives; we ought to share with others; we ought to build one another up; and we ought not to grieve God. And, after all, we have been raised from the dead—so why wear the graveclothes? Jesus says of us as He said of Lazarus: **“Loose him, and let him go!”**