

The Disappearance of Sin (Pt.1)
Ephesians 4:25-28
Dr. Steven R. Hereford, Pastor-Teacher
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INTRODUCTION

1. Please turn in your Bibles with me this morning to Ephesians chapter 4.
2. I was reading a book that Theresa just received in the mail a couple weeks ago by Jerry Bridges called, *Respectable Sins . Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*, and was encouraged to hear him say that the whole purpose of this book was to deal not with “the obvious sins of our culture but the subtle sins of believers.”
3. It was Solomon who that said it was the “little foxes that spoil the vine” (Sol.2:15).
4. It’s the sins that we don’t see as big or significant or as Jerry Bridges terms as “respectable.”
5. In our study today, I want us to begin to consider what some of these “respectable” sins are as we look at verses 25-28 of Ephesians 4.
6. So that you have the entire list, I want to begin reading at verse 25 through verse 31.
7. In his 1973 book *Whatever Became of Sin?* Psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote, “The very word, ‘sin,’ which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word...But the word went away. It has almost disappeared—the word, along with the notion.

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Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin?"

8. To reinforce his observations, Dr. Menninger noted that in the presidential proclamation for the annual National Day of Prayer, the last time the word *sin* was mentioned was in President Eisenhower's proclamation in 1953—and those words were borrowed from a call to national prayer by Abraham Lincoln in 1863!
9. So, as Dr. Menninger observed, "as a nation, we officially ceased 'sinning' some twenty [now over fifty] years ago."
10. Karl Menninger is by no means alone in his assessment.
11. Peter Barnes, in an article titled "What! Me? A Sinner?" wrote, "In twentieth century England, C.S. Lewis noted that, 'The barrier I have met is the almost total absence from the minds of my audience of any sense of sin.'"
12. D. A. Carson commented that the most frustrating aspect of doing evangelism in universities is the fact that students generally have no idea of sin.
13. "They know *how to sin* well enough, but they have no idea of what constitutes sin."
14. These statements only confirm what seems clear to many observers: The whole idea of sin has virtually disappeared from our culture.

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15. Sociologist Marsha Witten noted in her analysis of 47 taped sermons on the prodical preached by Baptist and Presbyterian ministers, that sin has almost disappeared from the church as well.
16. She writes, “How does the idea of sin fare in the sermons under study here? We should not be surprised to find that communicating notions of sin poses difficulties for many of the pastors...As we have seen here, a closer examination of the sermons suggests the many ways in which the concept of ‘sin’ has been accommodated to fit secular sensibilities. For while some traditional images of sin are retained in this speech, the language frequently cushions the listeners from their impact, as it employs a variety of softening rhetorical devices.”
17. It is true that strong biblical words for sin have been erased from our vocabulary.
18. People no longer commit adultery; instead they have an affair. Corporate executives do not steal they commit fraud.
19. We could probably concede in saying that it has not disappeared in the evangelical church but it has been deflected to those outside our circles who commit flagrant sins such as abortion, homosexuality, and murder.
20. It’s easy for us to condemn those obvious sins while virtually ignoring our own sins of gossip, pride, envy, bitterness, and lust, or even our lack of those gracious qualities that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit.

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21. In Greek culture, *sin* originally meant to “miss the mark,” that is, to miss the center of the target.
22. Sin was therefore considered a miscalculation or failure to achieve.
23. John defines it in 1 John 3:4 as “lawlessness” when he says, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”
24. Sin is sin and the Bible is not shy at calling it for what it is.
25. Thomas Watson in his book on *The Doctrine of Repentance* says, “Before a man can come to Christ he must first come to himself...A man must first recognize and consider what his sin is, and know the plague of his heart before he can be duly humbled for it” (18).
26. John Owen asks, “Do you mortify [sin]? Do you make it your daily work? You must always be at it while you live; do not take a day off from this work; always be killing sin or it will be killing you. Your position in Christ, and the new life that you have in Him, does not excuse you from this work” (The Mortification of Sin, 5).
27. Those sin that we tolerate in our lives are serious in God’s eyes.
28. Our religious pride, our critical attitudes, our unkind speech about others, our impatience and anger, even our anxiety—all

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of those are serious in the sight of God.¹

29. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul gives a list of vices or sins that the Ephesians are to put off.
30. The obvious ones are mentioned in verses 25-28 like lying and stealing.
31. The one's we tolerated are listed in verses 29-31 like corrupt speech, bitterness, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.
32. This list is certainly not all-conclusive nor is it the first time he mentions those I just noted. He includes them in his list in Colossians 3:8.
33. I want us to consider this entire list that begins in Ephesians 4:25-31 as we address those sins we tolerate.
34. Notice first how Paul tells the Ephesians to put off something and then put on something else.
35. It's not just stop what you're doing but stop doing this and start doing that!
36. He begins in verse 25 with the first vice: ***Lying***.

¹Much of my introduction is either quotations or gleanings from Jerry Bridges book *Respectable Sins* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2007), 17-21.

I. Lying (v.25)

He says, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with His neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

Paul begins this verse with the word “therefore.”

We saw that word in verse 17 which referred us back to the first 16 verses. He uses it again to refer back to verses 20-24 in order to give the anticipated response that follows.

The words “laying aside” (apotithemi) refers to “discarding, stripping off, casting away” (MacArthur).

Paul uses the aorist participle here which translates this verse as “having put off once for all the lie” (Wuest).

The word “falsehood” (pseudos) means to “lie” or “lying” (GING). It is the “opposite of aletheia (truth)” (Friberg).

It “includes every form of dishonesty, whether it is shading of the truth, exaggeration, cheating, failure to keep promises, betrayal of confidence, flattery, or fudging on income taxes. The Christian's word should be absolutely trustworthy” (MacDonald).

A. God Hates Lying

1. Proverbs 6:16-17 says, “There are six things which

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the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, *a lying tongue.*”

2. Proverbs 12:22 says, “*Lying lips* are an abomination to the Lord.”

Again lying is referred to. The LORD hates it because it so directly opposes His standard of truth.

“How careful we should be about shading of the truth, white lies, exaggerations, and half-truths!” (MacDonald).

B. God Commanded the Israelites to Speak Truth and Not Lies

1. The ninth commandment says, “You shall not bear *false witness* against your neighbor” (Ex.20:16).

Bearing **false witness** is another term for lying.

Specifically, “This commandment forbids damaging the character of another person by making statements which are not true, and thus possibly causing him to be punished or even executed. It teaches respect for a person’s reputation” (William MacDonald, Believer’s Bible Commentary).

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2. Leviticus 19:11 says, “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, ***nor lie*** to one another.”

“The Israelites were not to steal (*Ex. 20:15*); nor to deny, viz., anything entrusted to them or found (*Lev. 5:21ff.*); nor to lie to a neighbour, i.e., with regard to property or goods, for the purpose of overreaching and cheating him; nor to swear by the name of Jehovah to lie and defraud” (Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002] 1:600.)

C. Those Who Speak Truth Give Evidence of Salvation

1. Psalm 24:3-5 says, “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, ***who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood*** and has not sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive a blessing from the Lord And righteousness from the God of his salvation.”
2. Jesus told the Jews in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

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It is clear from Scripture that...

D. God Will Punish All Liars

1. Proverbs 19:9 says, “A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells ***lies will perish.***”

A false witness will not go unpunished or as 6:19 means, “he will not be acquitted in court” or “he will surely be punished.”

“He who tells lies will perish” has “essentially the same meaning as the previous line.”

The negative “will perish” is parallel with “will not go unpunished” and “may need to be expressed, for example, “will not go free,” “will not be released” or positively “will be condemned.”

The Contemporary English Version (CEV) “combines will not go unpunished and will not escape by saying “Dishonest witnesses and liars won’t escape punishment” (William David Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, A Handbook on Proverbs, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators [New York: United Bible Societies, 2000]. 399.)

2. Revelation 21:8 further states that “the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers

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and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and *all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*, which is the second death.”

E. Believers Are to Put Away Lying Once-and-For-All and Speak Truth

1. Colossians 3:9-10 says, “*Do not lie* to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”

“Do not lie” is “either “stop lying” or “do not have the habit of lying” (A.T. Robertson, Robertson’s Word Pictures in the NT: Colossians).

“These Colossian saints had carried over into the new life, the sin of lying.

They should stop lying because they had put off the old man with his practices, that person they were before they were saved, and had put on the new man, that person they were now in Christ Jesus, this new person being constantly renewed with respect to a complete and perfect knowledge which is according to the image of the One who created him” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English

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Reader [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, c1984].
Col 3:9.)

“This present imperative wants to exclude all lying” (Lenski).

2. Ephesians 4:25 says, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

R.C. H. Lenski says this “does not mean, “putting away falsehood” each time we speak to our neighbor and uttering truth instead, but, “since we have once put away the lie or falsehood,” let us not use any of it when we speak to our neighbor. This is the same putting away that was mentioned in v. 22, even the tense is the same. Nor is τὸ ψεῦδος das Luegen, “lying,” or das luegenhafte Wesen, a course of conduct; but “the lie,” “the falsehood,” the opposite of “the truth” of the gospel (v. 24), “truth in Jesus” (v. 21). “The lie” = “the deceit” (v. 22) and “the deception or error” (v. 14). The sense is: because in our conversion we have once for all cast away the lie that dominated us.

This is the great lie that rules all who have not put off the old man, the lie by which they are darkened and blinded, alienated, because of the ignorance and hardness of heart, the lie that impels to all uncleanness in life (v. 18, 19). This lie lies about God and about man, about sin and about

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punishment, about godliness and about morality. Rom. 1:18, etc., describes how it operates; it strangles the truth in unrighteousness, it renders man inexcusable.

This lie is the natural man's religion. It appears in multitudinous forms but is here viewed as a unit. Truth is reality, every lie is a fiction, a pretended reality, that asserts that something is so when it is really not so at all, or that something is not so when it really is so. To trust any lie is to head for a great wreck, especially to trust "the lie" which substitutes fictions for the saving realities of God and the gospel; the wreck that ensues is irreparable" (The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians [Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937]. 573).

Paul quotes the first part of Zechariah 8:16 which says, "speak the truth to one another."

"Quoting Zechariah 8:16, Paul goes from the negative prohibition on to the positive command, 'speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor.' Christ is Himself 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6); the Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of truth' (v.17); and God's Word is truth (17:17).

When a person becomes a believer he steps out of

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the domain of 'falsehood' into the domain of 'truth,' and every form of lying therefore is utterly inconsistent with his new self" (John MacArthur, Ephesians, 183).

- a) David said in Psalm 51:6 when he was confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheeba and the murder of her husband that God desires "truth in the innermost being."
- b) The apostle John told his readers in 1 John 3:18 to "not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."
- c) Even the Proverbs gives this exhortation in 23:23: "Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding."

William MacDonald says, "Truth is a debt we owe to all men. However, when Paul uses the word, neighbor, here, he is thinking particularly of our fellow believers. This is clear from the motive given: for we are members of one another (cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). It is as unthinkable for one Christian to lie to another as it would be for a nerve in the body to deliberately send a false message to the brain, or for the eye to deceive the rest of the body when danger is approaching" (Believer's Bible Commentary).

II. Anger (vv.26-27, 31)

“Be angry , and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

Verse 31 also mentions putting off “anger.”

A. When We Are Angry it is to Be Righteous Anger (v.26)

Paul says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.”

1. This is righteous anger or righteous indignation

The word “anger” (orgizo, pres.mid.imp.) means “an abiding, settled attitude of righteous indignation” (Wuest).

This is “anger at evil, at that which is done against the Person of the Lord and against His will and purpose. It is the anger that abhors injustice, immorality, and ungodliness of every sort” (MacArthur, 184).

2. This is illustrated in the New Testament

- a) Mark 3:1-6
- b) John 2:12-17

“Jesus was always angered when the Father was maligned or when others were mistreated, but He

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was never selfishly angry at what was done against Him. That is the measure of righteous anger” (MacArthur, 185).

3. We are to have anger at sin but not anger that causes us to sin

Paul says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.”

This is the “check and restraint” (Wuest).

“Anger that is sin...is anger that is self-defensive and self-serving, that is resentful of what is done against oneself. It is the anger that leads to murder and to God’s judgment” (MacArthur, 185).

Aristotle said, “Anybody can become angry—that is easy; 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—that is not easy.”

- B. We Are to Resolve Our Anger Immediately (vv.26-27)

Paul says, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

“The day of anger should be the day of reconciliation” (Fritz Rienecker, *The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, 534).

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1. Anger that is not resolved can turn into bitterness
 - a) Heb.12:15 says, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”
 - b) Eph.4:31 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”
 - c) James 1:19-20 says, “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

2. Anger that is not resolved can “give the devil an opportunity” (v.27) to carry out his purposes

“If we don’t resolve our anger immediately the devil can ‘feed our anger with self-pity, self-righteousness, vengeance, defense of our rights, and every other sort of selfish sin” (MacArthur, 185).

We must do what the Scripture says when we are angry:

- a) We must be slow to anger

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- (1) Prov.14:17 says, “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.”
- (2) Prov.15:18 says, “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger calms a dispute.”

b) We must be gentle with out response

- (1) Prov.15:1 says, “ A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”
- (2) Prov.17:27 says, “He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”
- (3) Prov.18:21 says, “ Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.”

III. Stealing (v.28)

Paul says, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”

A. The Old Self is Inclined to Steal

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The word that Paul uses for “steal” is the Greek word klepto (pres.act.part.) which means “to take away something secretly, without the owners permission” (Friberg).

A kleptomaniac is one who has a recurrent urge to steal.

“Stealing may take many forms— all the way from grand larceny to nonpayment of debts, to witnessing for Christ on the employer's time, to plagiarism, to the use of false measurements, and to falsifying expense accounts” (MacDonald).

1. Rachel stole her fathers gods (Gen.31:25-32)
2. Anchan stole some of the spoil from the capture of Jericho

Anchan confessed to Joshua in Jos.7:21, “when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.”

3. God said in the eighth commandment in Exodus 20:15, “You shall not steal.”
4. He said it again in Lev.19:11 and Deut.5:19

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B. We Are to Put this Part of the Old Self Aside and Labor with Our Hands

1. We labor for our own needs

Paul told the Thessalonians in 2 Thess.3:10-11, “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.”

2. We are to labor for the needs of others

a) Rom.12:13 says we are to be “contributing to the needs of the saints.”

“Distributing” is the Greek verb *koinoneo*, which means, “to share with others” (Strong) or more specifically, “to share one’s possessions, with the implication of some kind of joint participation and mutual interest” (Louw-Nida).

“The basic meaning is that of commonality or partnership, which involves mutual sharing” (MacArthur).

Kenneth Wuest says, “The exhortation is to make one’s self a sharer or partner in the

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needs of our fellow-saints in the sense that we act as if those needs were our own. We would satisfy our own needs, and the exhortation is to satisfy those of our Christian brother” (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament).

Kent Hughes says, “Our care for brothers and sisters in Christ should reach down right into our wallets and purses and cost us...When Christ's Church is living in love, the needs of its people are met through sharing and caring” (Romans : Righteousness from heaven. Preaching the Word).

- b) James uses this as a test of true living faith when he says in Jas.2:14-17, “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

This refers to a Christian member of the church.

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James says they are “without clothing” (which is referring to being poorly and insufficiently clothed. The word *gumnos* means, “scantily or poorly clothed” [Vines] or “poorly dressed” [BADG]).

This suggests that they were “cold and miserable due to lack of proper clothes” (MacArthur).

Further he says they were “in need of daily food.”

This does not indicate starvation but rather insufficient nourishment for normal, healthy living.

The reference is to those who are deprived of the necessities of life.

The provision given is words without acts of compassion. He says, “and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and be filled.’”

“Depart in peace” is equivalent to “God bless you.”

This is a “heartless and foolish statement, by which James indicates an attitude of total

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disregard for the welfare of others to the point of absurdity” (MacArthur).

The further, “Be warmed and be filled” is tantamount to saying, “God take care of you”—while having no intention of being a channel for that care.

It could even be understood as a prayer: “May you be warmed and fed by God.”

But the use of “the middle/passive voice of the Greek verbs rendered *be warmed and be filled* suggest an even more indifferent, cruel, and sarcastic attitude, which says, in effect, ‘warm and feed yourself,’ as if such a needy person would not already have done so if able” (MacArthur).

“Yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”

The answer is implied. The heartless, outrageous comment, “Depart in peace, be warmed, and filled,” is of no use at all, being totally worthless.

“Just as professed compassion without kindness and care is phony, so is that faith which is nothing but an empty claim”

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(MacArthur).

- c) The apostle John essentially says the same in 1 Jn.3:17-18 when he says, “But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

CONCLUSION

1. We are to labor for the needs of others.
2. We are to share with the saints—meet each others needs.
3. Both James and Jesus says your reaction to a brother or sister reveals whether you are truly saved or not.
4. So we are not to lie, have unrighteous anger, or steal but to speak truth, hate the things God hates, and share with one another.
5. How are you responding to these sins?
6. Are you giving in or putting them off?
7. You might not have a problem with lying or stealing but what about unrighteous anger?

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8. We must never forget what Ralph Venning said in his book *The Sinfulness of Sin*, he said, “Sin is contrary to, and set against the glory of God, and all that should and would give glory to him, or has any tendency to do so.

Confession of sin and repentance gives glory to God (Joshua 7:19), and sin endeavours to obstruct and hinder this. It began to practise upon Adam and Eve, and still carries on this trade among the children of men” (35).

9. John Owen said, “It is our duty to be ‘perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ (2 Cor.7:1, AV) to be ‘growing in grace’ everyday (1 Pet.2:2; 2 Pet.3:18), so that our inner nature should be renewed day by day (2 Cor.4:16). This cannot be accomplished without the daily mortifying of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and every degree of spiritual growth. We will not be making progress in holiness without walking over the bellies of our lusts. He who does not kill sin along the way is making no progress in his journey” (10).
10. I want to encourage you not to give in to the struggle but to continue to “mortify the deeds of the flesh” (Col.3:5, KJV) and give glory to God.
11. In the words of Romans 13:12-14, “The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and

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jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

12. If you have been overcome by the flesh today, confess it to Christ, repent and “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and stop making “provision for the flesh.”
13. Let’s pray.