

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Prison Epistles, Session 27, New Identity and Morality, Ephesians 4:17-32

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This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 27, New Identity and Morality, Ephesians 4:17-32.

Welcome back to a Biblical Studies lecture series on prison epistles.

We have covered nearly all the books in the prison epistles and we are getting close, somewhere in the middle of Ephesians. I hope you are enjoying it so far. Now we move on to begin to look at the second part of chapter 4 of Ephesians after looking at what I called United We Build, Paul's admonition on unity, and how different people with gifts and talents and the rest of the community can work together to promote this unity.

In this particular area, we will be covering the first part of the session that deals with chapter 4, verses 17 to 24, highlighting the need for a changed mindset, and then from chapter 4, verses 25 to 32, touching specifically on some moral principles that need to be evident in a church to ensure that that unity that we spoke about earlier on comes alive, becomes real in the church. Chapter 4, verse 17, begins the session. We are looking at reads like this: Now, this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk or live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. In this verse that you see here, Paul makes an appeal and in what sense seems redundant that he said this, I say and testify. The word he uses there for testify is the word that carries a sense of bearing witness, and sometimes it is used in a context to also exhort people who are closer to you.

So, he makes this strong appeal, or, if you like, a tender appeal with some sense of seriousness to it. I'd like you to pay close attention to this. I say and tell you this, and I'm saying and telling you this in the Lord. But he goes on to make another statement: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles. What does that mean? It is very important to begin to look at what Paul meant by no longer living or walking as the Gentiles.

In fact, that is the title of my book on Ephesians. I don't know when you are studying this by the time you are studying, you may be saying at a time when another book on Ephesians is out or something of the sort, but I have a book out that I call No Longer Living as the Gentiles where I look at Ephesians chapter 4 verse 17 to Ephesians chapter 6 verse 9 and looking at the ethical principles and what is going on there. What does Paul mean by no longer living as the Gentiles? It has been a good conversation that has been going on since 2006 with my colleagues on this subject,

and I'm very, very blessed. I should say I'm excited to see that newer commentators are yielding to the position I am trying to argue.

When Paul says no, do not live, don't do not live any longer as Gentiles when he was writing to Gentiles, what does it mean? For years, it has been held that when Paul says you should not live as a Gentile, he was referring to Gentiles in a literal sense. I argue that no Paul could not be telling Gentiles not to live as Gentiles in the same sense that Jews have stereotyped them. In Chapter 2, he said in Christ, those who call you circumcision that those who call you uncircumcision and those who are circumcised have become one in Christ.

He breaks down all the Jewish stereotypes in the community that is made up of a multi-ethnic Jew-Gentile setup. Here, when he uses the word Gentiles, I submit that it refers to outsiders. In other words, when the Jews look at the outsiders, people who are outside the people of God as unclean Gentiles, now, he is saying no longer live your life as the Gentiles.

In other words, as a people of God, you no longer live your life as an outsider. If we don't understand the text that way, it will be strange. It is almost to say you are an American. Okay, no longer live your life as an American. What does that mean? As such, to say you have some specific things about American culture in mind, you are asking the American not to live his or her life that way.

This is one of the things I bring into scholarship to tease out how we look at the rhetoric of differentiation in the way identity is formed. To tell Gentiles they are no longer Gentiles from the eyes of a Jew and so no longer live the life that is associated with Gentile outsiders is a way of even making them feel included and making them also realize the obligations involved in belonging to the people of God and living a life that defeats the people of God and he tackles that by first challenging their mindset. I have drawn your attention to Ephesians so far in how Paul talks or prays for the church in terms of knowledge, mindset, how they're supposed to have some transformation in their reasoning, and here to no longer live as the Gentiles he goes on to challenge them to first look at their mindset with all seriousness.

He said they no longer live like the Gentiles in the futility of their minds. This is a language that is fairly similar to what we find in Romans, and in Romans chapter 1, verse 21, you see this kind of language going on here. The word that is used here for futility is used in Romans, sometimes translated as senseless, for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him but became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.

So, you are going to see in this passage Paul will use the word darkness, he will use the word futile, he will use senseless mindset, and you see Paul in Ephesians using the same language, and in Romans, he's using the language to associate those who

don't know God. Paul says you believers, you are no longer like that, and so don't let that be the way you think in the futility of their minds, referring to that which is associated with the ungodly Gentiles. By the way, I should be qualifying that a Greek would never call themselves a Gentile. It was a Jew who called them Gentiles, and so Paul made this qualification to tell them to look, you are included, you are important, you are part of the people of God, but do not have the mindset that the outsiders have in the futility of their minds.

Their minds or their understanding has been darkened, and I read verse 18, they are darkened in their understanding. Can you imagine their mindset, their way of reasoning is full of darkness. In Ephesians, Paul explains that the life of darkness is a life without Christ; it is also darkness, and it's also the domain where the principalities and powers exist.

Here he says their minds are filled with darkness, no good news. The things they think about are full of darkness, and they are separated from the life of God, the life that God would have for his people. They are alienated from the life of God.

The second part, verse 18, is alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They are alienated from the life of God, and the causes for alienation are ignorance and stubbornness. Paul prayed and urged them to develop the knowledge base they need, and he also talked about allowing themselves for the spirit to work in their inner mind and in their heart, but here they say he said for the gentle outsiders, God is not at work in their hearts, their hearts are hardened.

Nothing godly can penetrate because their hearts are so hardened. Do not live like them; that is Paul's line there. Do not live like them, and because they have availed themselves as gentiles to make this happen, Paul wants the church to understand that it is because of that this is happening as a result. They have become callous.

Perhaps I should read from verse 19 that they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality and greed and practice every kind of impurity. They have given themselves over to sensuality. With their darkened understanding and futile mindset, they have ushered themselves out into all kinds of sensual evil behavior.

I mean, let me qualify when I say sensual evil behavior; this is how the Christian moral framework is. People who give themselves to all kinds of sexual lifestyles just sleep around and mess around with people, like in the Greek culture. In the early part of this lecture, I showed you something about the philosopher Demosthenes, who said that the Greek man may have a wife and may have a concubine and may have mistresses, and he says that they keep the legitimate wife so that she can give them legitimate children and good heirs for their life.

In other words, they can use their lives, and people reduce themselves to all kinds of promiscuous lifestyles. Paul says their darkened understanding and their futile mindset have actually led them to all this consequently. And on top of that, there is a clear sense of greed and every kind of impurity.

The word impurity comes from the Hebraic roots, which have a sense of ritual and cleanliness, but in Greek, in the New Testament, sometimes the word is used in association with sexual behaviors, referring to all kinds of sexual deviance that is impure. But Paul will put that with another word that is sometimes used in a context of sexual ethics: greed. Greed in sexual ethics often carries the connotation of someone who is greedy to try to take somebody's wife or jealous about somebody's partner and trying to go and get that person, where lust driven by greed will make one do everything they can to try to be with someone else's partner or someone else.

That sense of compulsion is driven sexually by greed. So, look at where sexual desires and greed meet. The word is sometimes used to carry that sense, and the philosophers, the ancient philosophers themselves, condemned greed, but it was still prevalent in society anyway.

In fact, if you read stoic philosophy, one of the things you come to realize is that sometimes they are frustrated about how they promote the ideal, and they say that in popular culture, people care less about that. Sometimes, they even insult them by saying that animals will not do what they do, yet people don't care. I'll give you an example of one particular philosopher who condemns greed in particular.

I'll give you an example of Dio Chrysostom. Dio Chrysostom, in his treatise on Convertiousness, write, greed is not only the greatest evil to a man himself, but it injures his neighbors as well, and so no one pities for sooth the covetous man. The same word is used here in Ephesians.

All care to instruct him, but all shun him and regard him as their enemy. You may think that if people like that condemn greed, greed is not prevalent. No, I have often said in modern discussions on morality and ancient morality that one of the things we have been confusing in our moral discourses is the difference between the ideal and the popular culture.

As one who spends my time studying how these things worked in the first and second centuries more than I do in our contemporary culture, I find it intriguing to find what the moralists are saying should be and what is happening in the popular culture. When I think about it today, sometimes it strikes me it's like what are the laws of the United States and how people in the United States live. Are they the same? Not quite the same. So here, the philosopher even condemns what is

prevalent, and Paul's point is for those who have come to know Christ, that is not actually part of their way of life.

They should no longer live like those who are there who have subjected themselves to all kinds of mindsets that are influenced by all these levels of greed. No, I could go on and on. Elsewhere, where I wrote about virtues and vices and efficiency, I list countless philosophers and moralists who condemn greed to the T. But greed was everywhere.

They condemned promiscuity. It was everywhere. They condemned drunkenness.

But in their spare time, the philosophers play one of the games they will have is to bring gallons of wine and see who will get a gallon down early. They themselves, the ideal and the popular culture. In Christianity, the ideal is what befits the children of God, and that's what we should all live our lives by because that is the life worthy of the calling for which we have received.

In the formation of the mindset, now he says this is what you should no longer be. But now he moves on to try to get them to form a mindset that is Christ-like, and so he's going to show them specific things that should make them make that radical shift and live a life no longer as Gentiles. From verses 20 to 21.

But that is not the way you learn Christ. Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him and the truth is in Jesus. In verses 20 to 21, in particular, you find some keywords there that are not in the Bible.

The key words are to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new self-created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. In verses 20 to 21, in particular, you find some keywords there in the way that the futile mind has changed and needs to be acknowledged so that people don't live that same life again. You did not learn Christ.

This is an expression that seems awkward, right? When you are talking about learning, you don't actually think about learning a person. You think about learning a book or learning some kind of information or something. For a long time in scholarship or Ephesians, this expression, which is very, very different than such expression in the New Testament, perhaps the only time we have this kind of awkward expression. We have taught that it was Paul creating something that is very new.

But now we are finding help from our friends in the classics, showing us that some of the ancient Greek writers used this kind of expression in reference to the gods. And what they use when they say you have learned a particular deity, as here you have

learned Christ, what they meant, they use that language to actually carry the strong sense that it is not learning only intellectually, but you are learning the person. You are experiencing life with the person.

You are experiencing the person; not only have you heard about the person's values and identities, but you are living spiritually with the person and are learning from this spiritual being. So when Paul says you did not so learn Christ, he is saying you actually learn something of Christ as a personal experience, not only with the body of knowledge that was imparted. That is great, I think.

And if you are embodying all this, then you no longer live as the Gentile because your mindset has changed. If you learn something and you did not learn it, like some of my students who chew and memorize the material, pour it back to me if I ask them those questions in exams and forget everything I have taught them. If you actually learn Christ and process and embody it and experience it, then a radical mindset has taken place, and you no longer live as those Gentiles in the futilities of their minds.

He goes on to highlight something else. Assuming you have heard about him, the word heard, hearing, hearing as hearing instruction, hearing something about him to learn and to grow, and you even go on to say that you were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus. So you may ask what Paul is doing here.

He actually condemns a mindset that is futile, and he says this is what is the truth, the qualities associated with Gentiles, but this is not you because actually who you are is this. You are people who have learned Christ. You are actually people who have heard about him and you are people who were taught in him.

So, in terms of what is going on upstairs intellectually, your mind has been transformed. It's the concept that Paul explains elsewhere in Romans, talking about the transformation of the mind. I must say it is also stoic to some degree because, both in Christianity and in stoic philosophy, the way you think tends to drive the way you behave.

So, for you to have a change of conduct, there has to be a change of reasoning. Paul says the Gentiles live in such corrupt moral contests and exhibit corrupt moral traits because they have a darkened understanding and corrupt mindset. For the believer in Christ, they have learned, they have known, and they have been taught differently.

And so, their mindsets have changed, and they cannot get steered in the right direction. It is on that note he calls for radical change. He calls for radical change using a clothing metaphor to take off the old, take off the old garments, and take off the former way of life.

He also outlines that the former way of life is corrupted by deceitful desires. And he put it in the imperative. Take off.

Here, he is asking for personal responsibility. Now that they have learned, they know, and they have been taught, they have the responsibility to take off, to strip off the old garment that gives the false impression of who they are. They have had inward change.

They have had a radical change of mindset. They have to change in outlook. It is their responsibility to take that off and to let those embarrassing behaviors like torn apart clothes on them and ragged clothes be taken off.

They should take off. But look at verse 23. That is a very interesting line there.

Being renewed. That one is not imperative. That one is in the middle and is a participle in Greek, where they should avail themselves to be renewed in their minds.

Take off the old. Now, let's get back to the mindset again and be renewed in the mind. Do not be transformed, but be renewed in the mind, Romans 12.

That's the concept here. Let God work in your mind. Avail yourself for the spirit of God to transform your mind so that it can reflect your behavior.

And then you go on to say if this renewal takes place in your mind, the second imperative is put on the new. And the nature of the new, the new is created, verse 24, and to put on the new self, which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Note the word created.

Where did we come across the word created? We found the word created in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 10, when he said, you are created beforehand to do all these good deeds. Then, in Ephesians chapter 2, God created a new community in Christ. He said you are actually created in verse 24 here. You are created after the likeness of God to live a certain life.

That befits God. Your identity is linked to God. Your character should reflect that identity.

As I was thinking about this lecture today, I thought about a kind of book that you may have on your shelf as you try to study. And it occurred to me that many of you may have the old good Matthew Henry commentaries. So, I thought, yeah, let's do that for fun.

You can put it on your shelf, and then you can check it and see what Matthew Henry has to say. So, I said, let's look at what Matthew Henry has to say about this particular, particular passage. And this is what he has to say.

Sinful desires are deceitful lusts. They promise men happiness but render them more miserable and bring them to destruction. If not subdued and mortified, these, therefore, must be put off as an old garment, a filthy garment; they must be subdued and mortified, but it is not enough to shake off corrupt principles.

We must have gracious ones by the new man, which means the new nature, the new creature directed by a new principle, even regenerating grace, enabling a man to lead a new life of righteousness and holiness. Those who are no longer Gentiles are now enabled and have the ability to have a personal responsibility to take off the old, be renewed in mind, put on the new, which is created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness, reflecting the character of God in two essential areas. Righteousness is sometimes explained as the right relationship with God, reflecting on the right relationship with fellow human beings.

Righteousness, holiness, being set apart for God's use, being set apart for sacred purposes. The character of God should be reflected in the people of God. Tillman writes in Ephesians 4, 17 to 24 that Paul says that the lives of readers should reflect the dramatic transformation that took place in them at their conversion.

They should no longer live in the way that speaks of their confusion, demonic control, and despair that characterizes those who are estranged from life God provides. Instead, they should live in ways that show that their thinking is continually renewed spiritually and that they are regenerated in the image of God, who is righteous and holy. As Paul ends that note, recalling how they have been created for righteousness and holiness, now you can move on to talk specifically about some virtues and vices that need to be dealt with in the midst.

So, I'm going to go step by step from verses 25 to 32, looking at some of the virtues and vices, some of the things they should do, and some of the things they should not do. And I should draw your attention to the fact that from here onwards, you will see Paul using more of contrastive patterns. Earlier on, he had used contrastive patterns, but they were not so clear, except in chapter 2, when he uses the contrast in terms of then and now more.

In chapter 4, he uses the contrast from verse 17, but it's not that clear, where he talks about the gentle mindset that contrasts the mindset that needs to be developed among the children of God. From here on, he's going to be very explicit in many ways, especially as he shows in the Greek text, drawing contrast not to say he's making parallels, but as a very useful rhetorical strategy in ancient moral discourse to

contrast what not to do, so that people will understand with all clarity what they need to do. The first on the list is to move from falsehood to telling the truth.

Verse 25. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, who, for we are members of one body. It is very important as we look at the text here.

Put away falsehood, speak the truth. This is a culture of no television. This is a culture where it is community culture, more communal and not individualistic.

For unity to prevail in any community, truth is essential. Each member of the community, or each member, has the right to know the truth in order to develop trust. Paul said they should let falsehood be put away, and they should speak the truth with their neighbors; in reference to neighbors, he's referring to fellow believers.

They must be honest with fellow believers because we are members of one another. You may think he was going to say, we are members of Christ. No, we belong to one another.

And each member deserves to be told the truth. From then on, having touched on the truth, let's go to one of the sensitive issues here. Let's talk about anger.

So, let's look at what he has to say about anger—verses 26 to 27. Be angry and do not sin, but do not sin.

Do not let a sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Here, you are going to see something that Paul would do later because in verse 31, he will talk about anger too. So, he contrasts anger and anger in this discourse.

Wow. Contrasting anger and anger. Is it okay to be angry? Let me show you some vivid pictures as I like to do.

Is this familiar? Have you ever seen someone who is so angry talking to someone on the phone that they look at their phone and they feel like crashing the phone? Or is that familiar? Have you met someone who is so angry, pointing at this strong figure like a sword hitting your soul? What about courage? Now, if you think all the young men and women in their mid-twenties and forties get angry, do you think children get angry too? When Paul says to be angry and not sin, what is he saying? Anger was all over. People like to be angry, and when people are angry, it is not good. This is a culture in which drinking wine is a staple in the way they put food together.

Literature showed that drinking more than enough was very common. In other words, people get a little bit more in, and they say things they're supposed not to

say. They behave the way they're supposed not to behave. In a Romanian expression, they get encouragement.

When they see someone who is semi-drunk behaving badly, they say the person has an encouragement. And I say encouragement from the bottle. So, when you talk about anger in that context, anger can take things so far.

But there's also something you need to know about how the moralists talk about anger in the ancient world. And Aristotle, for instance, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he would set the pace of what later philosophers will be building on significantly. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* 4, he says, the man who is angry at the right things and with the right people and further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.

In other words, it is actually noble to be angry for the right things, at the right time, with the right people, within the right framework, for a good cause. Paul says, be angry; I tell you, the Greek reads, be angry but do not sin. So, the imperative carries the sense of, I am giving you the command to be angry.

Or, I entreat you to be angry. Perhaps Paul knows that he cannot stop people from getting angry. Maybe as you participate in these studies, you have never become angry and say you are like, what is this all about? I thought Christians were supposed not to be angry.

God bless you for that. Some of us do get angry here and there. Paul says to be angry but not sin.

Aristotle's point is that anger is important. In fact, in that treatise in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle goes on to make a case that if people are not angry at evil in society, there will not be justice. People need to be angry about injustice so that they can address those wrongdoings and make sure they do not repeat.

He expands on talking about a courtroom scenario where a judge needs to be angry enough to impose the right penalty for wrongdoing so that society will be peaceful. Sometimes, he even suggested that a judge could pretend to be angry when they are issuing the sentence so that when they impose the sentence, the person who is going to work out a sentence knows that if they dare show up again in front of that judge, it's not going to be good. Angry for the right cause.

Paul says be angry but do not sin. What does he mean? Think about that. Aristotle also said, just in case you think it's all for anger and all that angry and just do whatever you like, he also said in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 4 that same treatise, to good temper, we oppose the SS rather than defeat, the defect, sorry.

Not only is it commoner since revenge is human, but bad-tempered people are worse to live with. Have you ever lived with a bad-tempered person? Aristotle says they are very bad people to deal with. In chapter 4, verse 31, here Paul says to be angry but not sin.

In 431, he gives a list of anger as he writes, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Look at those words carefully, anger, clamor, slander because they are Greek words that express different forms of anger, and here he says let them be put away from you even though in verse 26 he's saying be angry but do not sin. Don't let the sun set on your anger.

What he is saying here in 31 is this: prolonged anger is problematic, and here, even when he says to put it away, he puts that expression in the passive as if a person has allowed himself to be so stuck in the spirit of anger that they need an external help that God can deliver them out of this anger. But let me show you the meaning of the words Paul used here for anger reflecting wrath, anger, clamor, and slander because English translations cannot do us enough favor with the connotations of these words. The first word translated as bitterness in Greek word bitterness is a deep-seated anger that may burst out or overflow in the form of curses, harsh or bitter words, and thus the root and the underpinning of it is like a bitter gall when this form of anger is not exploded it sits in a person's heart and engages the mind like cancer eating away all the good qualities God has given the individual, and so we call it bitterness.

It's a form of anger that has found a home and is kept intact, and as it gets intact there, it builds and builds and builds and builds and becomes so bitter and begins to translate into how people live their lives as if they are swallowing a bitter pill every given minute. The other word, translated as wrath, conveys the sense of wrath as being the manifestation with the most violent expression, so anger expressed itself. I like to tell my Italian friend that this is the Italian form of anger in my home country, Ghana. We have a particular tribe in northern Ghana, and that is how they express their anger. I mean, if you just burst off like take it easy, come on, come on, take it easy. Paul says there are people who are trapped in bitterness, which is sitting there and is eating them, and it's wearing them out, but some people who also have that problem with this kind of rage let it be put away from you in other words avail yourself for God to take that from you because it hinders community life and it affects so many people.

The other form of the words of anger used here is the traditional word that was used earlier. It is sometimes understood as the quiet, definite reaction of the human soul it is kept inside its cool. They are angry, but they are pretending nothing is happening, and it's sitting there and sitting there for a long time. The other one, sometimes translated as clamor, is the angry shouting and yelling, and the other one is blasphemy, which is rather blasphemy or sometimes evil speaking. Sometimes,

malice is actually a word that is used to refer to speaking against God or slandering or defaming others as a consequence of irritation or frustration. Do you know someone who is angry who justifies like oh, in my family, that's who we are you know, we always we're always like this. We're always angry.

Paul says to be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun set on your anger but just in case, out of your own doing or not out of your own doing, something perpetrated against you is trapped in bitterness and rage, and all this form of anger that I pointed out he said let it be put away from you ask God to help you out of it because it affects you. In counseling, it is said that hurting people hurts people. To put it in a way that is understood well in English is to say that hurting people hurts people.

People who are hurting on the inside hurt other people, and when they hurt other people, they often don't even realize they are hurting other people because they are hurting, which is so normal to them. on application, let this be put away from you if you are dealing with any of such things because it is God's will that you live freely. Seek help talking to some Christian leaders and counselors.

Anger is one of those things that destroys. Paul's point here, if I summarize it well, is this: And perhaps before I do that, let me read this from Plutarch, a philosopher who questions wine and anger and how these things play together.

For a mixed wine produces nothing so intemperate and odious as anger does. Words flown with wine go well with laughter and sport, but those that spring from anger are mixed with gall. When anger swirls within the breast, restrain the idly backing tongue.

Make sure you control your tongue. But let me now tell you Paul's remedy for anger management here. From verses 26 to 27, he says anger is a necessary emotion.

Be angry. Feel free to express yourself in anger. But do not let the sun set on your anger.

Let there be the time limit. Anger should be short-lived. If you do not forgive or deal with the issue, it finds residence within you, and it causes harm.

Verse 27 is what is not often talked about. Because when you look at verse 27, verse 27 is joined by verse 26 with a very simple conjunction linking the discussion on anger and showing part of the effect on anger. And it reads, And give no opportunity to the devil.

Meaning anger has a potential diabolic influence. If you let anger reside in your heart for a long time, you give a loophole, the Greek word *topos*, you give an opening for

the devil to settle in. Paul talks about how, in Christ, victory is won over all his powers.

And yet he's suggesting here that the believer has the ability to open the door for the devil to come in to cause harm. Anger has a devastating effect when it is not managed or controlled. And so, in verse 31, the believer should then ask for help and ask God to deliver them from that situation.

And Paul contrasts that quickly with verse 32, talking about anger. Instead of anger, he writes in verse 32, Be kind to one another. Tender heart, excuse me, tender hearted.

Forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. This is very important. Because what he's saying here is this.

Instead of anger, let the opposite qualities happen. Instead of finding all this stuff in your heart, let that heart be tender. Find a place in your heart, in your mind to forgive.

Forgiveness should be directed toward it; it's supposed to be reciprocal. It's supposed to be towards one another. And as you forgive one another, it is not only a simple forgiveness.

Christ, who first forgave us, should be the model for forgiveness. Do you remember the line in the last prayer that says, forgive us our debts as we forgive those, or as we forgive our debtors? Or translated sometimes as forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

In other words, God, may you not forgive us if we don't forgive those who offend us. It's another kind of prayer we want to make. Paul said, instead of anger, let's emulate the life of Christ.

As in Christ, God forgave us. We should be able to forgive. Truth be told, a lot of anger is harbored because we are not ready to forgive.

A lot of bitterness, resentment, slander, blaspheming, and gossiping take place because we are not ready to forgive. I like the Greek word *aphiemi*, to forgive because that word can translate divorce.

And actually, I think 1 Corinthians 7 is the word used for divorce. To let go, to let go, to let go of the cause of pain. Be it your spouse, which is the pain in the neck, or somebody harming you to let go.

Let's avail ourselves. And it goes on to introduce what I call work ethic. In verse 28, it reads, let a thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Stealing is prohibited. And I must say that a lot of moralists I read with ancient philosophy condemned stealing. But stealing was very common.

In fact, in places like Crete, they used to even praise those pirates who go on the sea to rob people. They praised them. In contrast, the moralists are condemning stealing.

The positive contrast here is that instead of stealing, members should work hard with their own hands. And the basis for this is that they may be able to help those who are in need. Generosity was a big thing in the ancient world.

And those who are generous and give to help others are held in high esteem in society. And so even one philosopher, a Roman philosopher, Cicero, writes questions against those who want to be generous only for honor but not out of their heart. But Paul says that those who are in church should work hard so that they can be generous to many other people.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. That reminds me of Two Thessalonians, which says, for even when we were with you, we would give you this command. If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

For we hear that some among you work in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now, we command and encourage such persons in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and earn their own living work. I like Proverbs chapter 10, verse 4. I like it, particularly from the Good News translation, which says being lazy will make you poor, but hard work will make you rich.

Paul says one should not steal. Stealing destroys society. Stealing of various forms.

Work hard, make a living, and earn something so that you can be generous, not so that you can hoard, but so that you can be generous. And last on my list of contrasts is the contrast between vulgarity and edifying speech. Paul touches on four areas here.

He issues an injunction on rotting speech, and he marks the positive aspects of speech and the negative consequences. The injunction is this. Do not let bad words come out of your mouth.

It destroys the community. Do not grieve the spirit. He calls everyone to personal responsibility.

The word for rotting words sometimes has come into being something that scholars discuss, but you want to know that the word is used here figuratively. It appears somewhere in the New Testament literally as rotting or decayed fruit, but it's used figuratively to refer to that which is harmful and unwholesome. Here, it refers to abusive language, vulgarity, or contemptuous talk or speech.

Paul says that believers should have the kind of language and diction that builds other people up, meets people's needs, and ultimately benefits those who hear what they have to say. Lastly, the speech had clear negative effects. It destroys or harms or poisons other people, and it grieves the Holy Spirit.

It is important as we think about Ephesians to realize that, indeed, we all have a charge to keep and a goal to glorify. And talking about speech and ending this session on speech, I'd like to end this particular session with the words of Jesus Christ. It is very important for us to remind ourselves of how we use words.

And Jesus says, sorry about that, Matthew 12, verses 33 to 37. Either make the good tree and its fruit good, or make the bad tree and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

You brood of vipers, how can you speak good things when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure. And the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.

Verse 36 of Matthew 12, I tell you, on the day of judgment, you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter. Verses 27, 37, for by your words, you will be justified. And by your words, you will be condemned.

Understanding that unity is what the community of faith is called to. God is at work in his community, and yet community members have responsibility. In the way we conduct ourselves, relative to truth and falsehood, the way anger is expressed, honesty, integrity, the way we are ready to work, to make a living, and be able to help others, the way we use words.

Words have power. They have the power to build community or destroy a community. They have the power to build families or destroy families.

It is one thing we all share. We have been given the gift of words. May I encourage you to use your words helpfully, to edify, and to bring grace to those who hear you, all in the quest of building a community or living an exemplary life in the world without Christ.

Thank you again for studying with us, and I hope you are finding these studies fruitful. I also hope that you stay with us because we just have three more to go on the prisoner pistols, and you don't want to miss that. Thank you, and God bless you.

This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 27, New Identity and Morality, Ephesians 4:17-32.