

Ephesians 4:17-35

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[0 : 00] Well it's good to be back with you this morning. It's always an honour to come and to preach! God's word to you here at Ealing IPC. We're going to be looking at Ephesians chapter 4 verses! So please have that open before you in your Bibles. Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 17 to 25. As we come to God's word let us pray. Lord God you are the maker of heaven and earth and our help is in you. So please now by your Holy Spirit would you come and would you teach us to speak the truth for the sake and for the glory of your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

I want to start this morning by telling you something that I know about you. Yes that's right you. I'm not talking about the person beside you or in front of you or behind you.

I'm talking about you. I know something about you. And now I'm going to announce it to everyone. you talk. You talk. You talk a lot. From the moment you rise in the morning saying it's not the time that I have to get up to the moment you go to bed saying good night I love you to your loved ones. You talk all day long. You talk talk talk talk talk. On average you speak about 25,000 words a day.

Yes. The quiet ones among you. Yes. The quiet ones among you. It's a bit less. The talkative ones among you. It's a bit more. But we all talk. There is something else I know about you.

And I'm also going to announce it to everyone. And this time it's more personal. When you talk you reveal your heart. When you talk you reveal your heart. Every time you speak. Every time you open your mouth. It is a revelation. A revelation of your heart. As Jesus said out of the overflow of the heart. The mouth speaks. Now this connection between heart and mouth. Self and speech.

Character and communication. It might be obvious to us as Christians. But it's not so obvious to our secular society. Let me give you an illustration. Do you remember about two or three years ago there were two cases of racism in the English Premier League. Luis Suarez who we've all just seen fight a player in the World Cup. Luis Suarez was accused of making racist comments against

[3 : 00] Patrice Evra. Black player for Manchester United. And John Terry was accused of making racist comments against Anton Ferdinand at Queen's Park Rangers. And I watched all the commentary about these two incidents. And they were both found guilty these men. And I heard it from the media.

I heard it from football pundits. I heard it from managers. I heard it from black footballers who thought they were both guilty. And this was the comment that was made. These men made racist racist comments. But they made racist comments. But they are not racist. What they said was just in the spur of the moment, in the heat of the moment. It doesn't mean that they were racist. And the Bible comes along and says out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Do you see how the world thinks about the connection between heart and mouth, self and speech, character and communication? There is no connection.

It's like Ryan Babel, the professional footballer who said on his Twitter account, I may not always say the right thing, but my heart is always in the right place. Do you see the disconnect? And the Bible comes along and says there is a connection between your heart and your mouth, between who you are and what you say.

If these men made racist comments in a football game, then they are racist. Their words were not an aberration, a mistake. Their words were a revelation. A revelation of their hearts at that very moment. As Paul Tripp says, situations and people do not make us say what we say.

They are the occasions for our hearts to reveal themselves. Now boys and girls, you can relate to this. You know when you've said something nasty to your brother or sister and your parent, your mum or your dad tells you to go and apologise.

[5 : 24] And you say, look, I'm sorry, Thomas, for saying that I hated you, but I didn't mean it. Well, you did mean it. And that's why you said it. Do you see how direct the Bible is about the connection

between heart and mouth? And that connection is in the passage that Paul read to us.

There is a connection between heart and speech. And that's why words matter, because word matters our heart matters. When you speak, you reveal your heart. I wish I had time to explain why that is, but it's very simple. It's because we are made in the image of God. And when God speaks, he reveals his heart. And because we are made in his image, when we speak, we reveal our hearts. And this connection between heart and mouth is fundamental. It undergirds Paul's argument here in Ephesians chapter 4. Miss it, miss the connection, and you miss the force of his argument.

Well, Paul makes two very simple points in this part of Ephesians chapter 4. And the two points are connected like the heart and the mouth are connected. Number one, don't walk like who you once were. Walk like who you now are. Don't walk like who you once were. Walk like who you now are. Chapter 4, verses 17 to 24. I'm sure you've heard the phrase, walk the talk, which basically means practice what you preach. Well, this idea of walking in a certain manner was a common way of speaking in the first century. A person's life was referred to as their walk. And what Paul means here is you must no longer walk, you must no longer live, verse 17, as the Gentiles do. And then in verse 18, the second part to verse 19, he unpacks who we once were, how we once walked, before addressing who we now are. In verses 20 to 24. So in verses 17 to 19, he explains who we once were. Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

[7 : 59] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Now when we read that, who do you think of in our modern society? Do you think it's a portion of our society gets on like this? Or is this Paul's description of our general society? Well, it is the latter. This is not referring to the people who stand on your street corner, drink beer on a Friday night, cause a bit of ruckus, the police pick them up, put them in the cell for the night. This is the Oxbridge graduates that it's describing. It's the people in the city of London doing their business. Now if that is shocking to you, it was just as shocking to Paul's original hearers. He was writing to a group of Gentiles who have been converted to Christ out of Gentile paganism, the non-Jewish, non-Christian way of life. Now when we hear Gentile or pagan, we mustn't think first century barbarians, you know, savages of the first century. No, pagans and Gentiles came from a sophisticated culture. They were well-mannered, they had a culture, they were sophisticated in their way of life. Paganism in the ancient world was the pursuit of the development of the mind. And now look at what Paul says, they are darkened in their understanding. It was about the development of their mind, their body, their emotions, their character, their speech. It was the modern day equivalent of the self-improvement movement.

You know, you go to Amazon.com, you stick the word self in, and you see all these books about self-improvement. This is just Gentile paganism refashioned in a new way. There is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon said. Now look with me again at how Paul describes this modern pursuit of self-development. It is futile, it is darkened in its understanding, it is alienated from God, it is willful ignorance of God, it arises out of the hardness of heart, it has lost all moral sensitivity, it is sensuous, it is impure, it is greedy. What a damning indictment of our secular humanistic culture with all its apparent wisdom. And this is why when Paul comes to address how we are to walk, how we are to live in this world, he doesn't turn to the principles and beliefs and convictions of a sophisticated Gentile culture that says, we have done PhDs in how to speak.

We should, Paul doesn't say we should go and learn from these people and imbibe some of their philosophy and some of their insights. No, rather, he turns to who we have become in Christ.

Verses 20 to 24. He's explained who we once were, now he explains who we now are. Verses 20 to 24. But that is not the way you learned Christ. Assuming you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus. 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 minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Now this metaphor of putting off and putting on, it's like taking off a jacket and putting on a jacket. That's the sort of picture that Paul has here. At our conversion, he says, we were taught to take off our old self like an old jacket. To take it off and throw it away and then to go and get a new jacket, the new self, and to put it on. It was a decisive act. It's just another way of speaking about biblical repentance.

You know, the Bible speaks about repentance and it speaks about it as an about turn. You're going

in one direction, so you turn and go in the other direction. Well, this is just another picture of repentance. Taking off an old jacket, putting on a new jacket. And Paul is saying we should live out the implications of our repentance. Now the way he describes it could suggest that we were the ones who converted ourselves. Do you see that? We were taught, verse 22, to put off the old self. We were taught, verse 24, to put on the new self. Well, that sounds a bit like we were the ones who changed ourselves, converted ourselves, doesn't it? Well, there are a few things in these verses that show us that we were not the main agents in our change, in our conversion. Yes, we had a responsibility to repent, to put off and to put on. But look at verse 22. The reason the human self cannot change or improve itself is because it is being corrupted through deceitful desires. The human self does not have the ability in itself to change itself. Why? Because it's deceiving itself. Verse 23. Did you notice the past tense?

We were not the ones who made ourselves new. God made ourselves new. To be renewed. We could not do that ourselves. In verse 24, he uses the word create. A word that is used only of God in the Bible. We can't create anything in ourselves. Only God can create something new. C.S. Lewis captures this point wonderfully in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader. Some of the young boys and girls, I hope you read the Narnia series.

[14:35] Let me remind you what happened, or happened at this point in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader. Eustace is this annoying little brat of a cousin to the kids. And Eustace has come to an island, and he's gone exploring, and he comes into a cave with all of this treasure in the cave. And he finds a gold bracelet, and he puts it on his arm, and he turns into a dragon. And then one evening, he is met by a lion who leads him up a mountain and into a garden. And Eustace recalls to Edmund what happened. In the garden there was a well. I knew it was a well, because you could see the water bubbling up from the bottom of it. The water was as clear as anything, and I thought, if I could get in there and bathe, I would ease the pain in my leg from the bracelet.

But the lion told me, I must undress first. Mind you, I don't know if he said any words out loud or not. I was just going to say that I couldn't undress because I hadn't any clothes on, when I suddenly realized that because I was now a dragon, dragons are sort of sneaky sort of things. And snakes can cast their skins. Oh, of course I thought, that's what the lion means.

So I started scratching myself, and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper, and instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started to peel off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana. In a minute or two, I just stepped out of my skin. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a moment, sorry, it was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bath. But just as I was going to put my feet into the water, I looked down and saw that they were all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly, just as they had been before. Oh, that's all right, said I, it only means I had another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I'll have to get out of it too. So I scratched and tore again, and this underskin peeled off beautifully, and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one, and went down to the well for my bath. Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, however many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time, and took off a third skin just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water, I knew it had been no good. Then the lion said, but I don't know if it spoke, you will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now, so I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know, as if you've ever picked the scab off a sore place. It hurts like billy-o, but it is so fun to see it coming away. I know exactly what you mean, said Edmund. Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off, just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt. And there it was, lying on the grass, ever so much thicker and darker and more knobby looking than all the others had been. And there was I, as smooth and soft as a peeled switch, and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me. I didn't like that very much, for I was very tender underneath now, that I had no skin on. And he threw me into the water.

It smarted like anything, but only for a moment. After a bit, the lion took me out and dressed me. Edmund said, dressed you? With his paws? Well, I don't exactly remember that bit, but he did somehow in new clothes. The same I've got on now, as a matter of fact. And then suddenly I was

back here, which makes me think that it must have been a dream.

[19 : 26] No, it wasn't a dream, said Edmund. Why not? Well, said Edmund, there are the clothes, for one thing, and you have been, well, undragoned, for another.

Well, what do you think it was then, asked Eustace? I think you've seen Aslan, said Edmund.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, then you have seen Christ. And in seeing him, he undressed you, and redressed you with a new you. At the very heart of the Christian life, and this is why I took time to read that story, at the very heart of the Christian life is a conversion, is a change, is a regeneration, is an undressing and a redressing, that only God can bring about.

This is not how our secular culture thinks. You won't find this in the University of London's class on the philosophy of the human person. You need to go to God if you want to change your behaviour. I wish I had time to unpack this, but at the risk of oversimplification, there are two general approaches in our secular culture to changing the self. The first approach is this. You don't need to undress and redress yourself. You just need to address yourself.

[21 : 16] You don't need to undress or redress yourself. You just need to address yourself. All you need is a better understanding of yourself, of your family, of your environment, of your experiences, and having understood yourself better. You need to resolve to take more responsibility, to exert your mind, to control your tongue, your emotions, your body. And if you do that, then you can improve yourself. You can change yourself. You see this in some of the more research-based psychologies and sociologies. For example, Sam Harris. Have you heard of him?

He's the new sort of Christopher Hitchens, the new atheist guy. He wrote a little essay called Lying. It was a fascinating essay. I read it a few years ago, and he said the only thing he could say. He disagrees with lying. He thinks it's wrong. And he says, you need to outgrow your lying.

You need to, quote, resolve within yourself to stop lying. Do you see what this approach does? It says you are the solution to the way you speak. There is no mention of regeneration. There is no mention of conversion. The resources to change yourself lie within yourself. That's the one approach. The other approach comes from the more superficial self-help psychologies and therapies.

You know, the sort of pop psychology you see in Oprah or Dr. Phil or Ellen DeGeneres on TV. You know, 10 easy steps to make a brand new person. These are the sort of quick fix techniques where you're locked in here of people creating themselves anew, having a makeover, facially, financially, personally. I saw one book on Amazon.com said, breaking the habit of being yourself, how to lose your mind and create a new one. You see similar things in the celebrity magazines. You know, when you go to the dentist and you pick up a hello magazine or an okay magazine, and what is it? So and so has recreated themselves. So and so has branded themselves anew. On the 1st of January, I got an email from iTunes entitled, New Year, New You. If the problem with the first approach is that it lacks a doctrine of regeneration. It's just secular moralism. Do, do, do, do, do, do, do in order to change. If that's the problem with the first approach, the problem with the second approach is that it wants regeneration. Have you noticed? They always talk about recreating yourself and having a makeover. It is the language of regeneration. It is the language of recreation. But it looks for it in all the wrong places. Both approaches are like Eustace trying to undragon himself by himself. And in stark contrast to both is the wonderful, liberating good news of Jesus Christ. In the gospel, God doesn't come to you with good advice.

He comes to you with good news. In the gospel, God doesn't come to you with a quick fix makeover. He comes and offers you a heart transplant. The life that we should have lived, we haven't, but Christ did. And the death that we should have died, we couldn't, but Christ did. And what Christ has done for us, we could not do ourselves. And when we accept that, through faith in Jesus Christ, God remakes us anew. Not just forensically on the outside justifying us, but he makes us anew a part of the way. And we believe in our very essence. And we believe in our very essence and being. What as Christians we call regeneration. In the words of Jesus, you need to be born again. And Paul's point is this.

[25 : 53] I'm taking a long time to get to the point about speaking the truth. Paul's point is this. You can't change the way you talk until you change the way you walk. And you can't change the way you walk until God undresses you and redresses you with a new you. You can't change the way you talk, 25,000 words a day.

You can't change that until you change the way you walk. And you can't change the way you walk until God undresses you and redresses you with a new you. And when God has done that, Paul says, talk like it. Talk like it. Has God converted you? Talk like it. That's the second point that Paul comes to. Don't talk like who you once were. Talk like who you now are. Don't talk like who you once were. Talk like who you now are. Verse 25. Therefore, therefore, having been undressed and redressed, having been renewed in your inner person, therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth. And you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

It is the therefore that connects the heart to the mouth, the self to the speech, the character to the communication. I mentioned earlier the little phrase, walk the talk. Well, Paul turns that idiom around in a surprising way. He says, don't just walk the talk. He says, talk the walk. This is who you now are.

This is how you now walk. Now talk like it. Talk the walk. And the first application Paul gives us of how we are to talk is in relation to speaking the truth. You see it there in verse 25. Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor. Now this word falsehood is the word from which we get the word pseudo, false, something that's fake, a lie. Paul says, precisely because that was part of your former way of life. See verse 22. Deceitful desires. Deceit was part of your former way of life. It was like that old jacket. You took it off. You put on a new jacket. So talk like you're wearing the new jacket.

Right? Put away the falsehood. But the question is, what is falsehood? What is a lie? If you, for example, ask me the time after church, and I said, oh, it's three o'clock, and I sort of get it wrong. Have I lied to you? Well, no. I made a mistake. You ask me the time. I looked at my watch. I misread it, and I made a mistake. That's not a lie. A lie is a word or act that intentionally deceives a neighbor in order to hurt or gain some advantage over them. A lie is an act or word that intentionally deceives a neighbor in order to hurt them or gain some advantage over them. I think there is some wisdom needed here as we look at this. Remember a couple of years ago, there was a rugby game. I think it was Leicester were playing another team in England in the Heineken Cup. It was the semi-finals, and then the clock had run down. It was the 80th minute, and the Irish team, Munster it was, the Irish team had the ball.

[29 : 37] And you know in rugby, the ball's got to be kicked out for the end of the game. And these phases of play were being played. One minute, two minutes, three minutes. And on RTE radio, this commentator was getting more and more exaggerated. Oh, and it's the 33rd phase. It's the 34th phase. And it was going on and in the end, the ball comes to Ronan O'Gara in the 38th phase. And he drop hits it between the posts, and they win. There was one point in it, and Munster had to score to win the game. And the commentator went absolutely crazy. And he says, after a hundred thousand phases, Ronan O'Gara has just kicked the goal one with you. Now, I don't think anyone in Ireland listening to that went, he's just lying.

There was only 38 phases. What's he talking about? Hyperbole. There is a place for it. And I'm not just saying that because I'm Irish, and we use it all the time. Didn't God say to Abraham, I will make your seed like the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore.

There is a place for hyperbole. There is a place for jokes. What do you do with a joke? Is a joke a lie? If I was to tell a joke, Patty and Seamus sitting together on a Friday afternoon, and Patty says to Seamus, you're looking a bit down. What's wrong with you? And Seamus says, well, I'm trying to sell my car.

And he says, well, why can't you sell it? He says, well, I've washed it, I've waxed it, I've got it all cleaned up, no one's interested. And he says, well, how many miles are on it? He says, 230,000 miles. He says, well, no wonder no one wants to buy it. All you need to do is turn the clock back on it, the 10,000 miles on the mileage, and then you'll sell it. The next week they're together.

Seamus is looking all happy, and Patty says, so you're looking really happy, you must have sold the car then. And he says, no, why would I do that? It's only got 10,000 miles on it.

[31 : 54] Now, Paul Levy tells jokes just for the sake of them in a sermon. Why would you laugh? There's deceit in that.

Patty has told Seamus to deceive a potential buyer. And the joke is that Seamus has been deceived by his own deceit. That's the joke. And it's Irish, so it's okay to laugh.

But why is it okay to laugh at that? Because we know it's a joke. That's the context. No one's trying to hurt or get one over on their neighbor. We understand it's a joke. What about board games? Are

we allowed as Christians to play board games where you have to actually try and deceive the person or withhold information?

Well, of course that's okay. It's a board game. World War II, we used Morse code to deceive the enemy. Well, of course, in order to save lives.

Now, all those things are exceptions. They're all exceptions. What Paul is saying to us here is in our everyday speech with each other, in our normal communication at church, home groups, deacon meetings, elders meetings, whatever the connection is in church, in our normal communication, outside the context of a bit of banter, Paul says that your yes be a yes and your no be a no.

[33 : 19] We are to communicate with each other without spin, without evasion, without denials, without deceit. Simple, clear, honest, truthful communication.

Now, as I've had to reflect on this in my own life, and have you ever thought about this? Why is Paul telling Christians to stop lying? Because we're all prone to it.

We are all prone to it. And as I've had to reflect on this in my own life, here are some of the questions I've had to ask myself.

Do I spin and tell white lies to get out of a tricky situation? Do I exaggerate in order to be seen to be someone I'm not in public or on Facebook or on Twitter?

Do I lie to avoid embarrassment of being found out? Do I lie to disguise wrongdoing? Do I lie to avoid hurting the feelings of that person if I was to actually be honest with them?

[34 : 29] Do I compliment and flatter people when I don't actually mean it? Do I lie because I'm scared of the emotional cut off if I was honest with that person?

Do I falsely encourage something when I know it would be unhelpful and I'm just saying it to the person because I'm people pleasing? Do I shade the truth for my own advantage?

God says to us this morning brothers and sisters don't speak lies speak the truth. why? because you've been changed because you've been changed from the inside out you've put off that old self with its deceitful desires you've put on the new self therefore talk like it talk like who you are not who you once were Paul gives us another reason why we are to speak the truth did you see it there at the very end of verse 25 for because we are members of one another what he's referring to there is we are members of the church of Jesus Christ in the book of Ephesians the church is referred to eight times as the body of Christ and here in verse 25 Paul does it again and what he's saying is to lie is to seriously injure

Christ's body injuring or sorry lying and truth speaking is of church significance imagine this afternoon you go for a walk out in a park somewhere and there's a there's a rough bit of ground along the path and as you're walking your eye sees a ditch in the grass but it doesn't communicate to your foot that it needs to make an adjustment and so you just keep walking normally and next thing you put your foot in a ditch you've strained your ankle what has happened injury has come to a member of your body because your eye lied to your foot it said there's no ditch there just keep walking normally but it's not just the foot that gets injured you've strained your ankle so bad you now have to go to accident and emergency and so your pants that wanted to go for a walk in the park and enjoy the fresh air they're now sitting twiddling their thumbs in A&E; and your eyes that wanted to look at this beautiful park and trees is now staring at heart disease posters in A&E; the whole body has been affected why?

because one member lied to another member but do you see how it was of church body significance and it's not just the short term injury that comes it's the long term injury you get your bandage on you get your crutches and you go home and three weeks later you get the bandage off and you throw away the crutches but how do you walk at home?

[37 : 42] well you walk a bit and we live gingerly the injury is over there's no pain there's no ditch on your floorboards at home but why are you walking gingerly?

because your foot no longer trusts your eye you think I will double check everything next time and that's what lies do lies destroy trust and therefore lies destroy relationships I have two brothers older brother younger brother and we all lived at home until we were in our 20s or went off to university and each of us for as long as we were at home can always remember our mother coming to us finding us wherever we were in the house every night and before she would go to bed she would come and she would say to us I love you you know what mattered most for each of us three boys not necessarily those words but that she is telling us the truth it's built trust it's built a deep bond anyone can tell anyone they love them but some people could be lying it is truth that builds relationships that creates that strong bond so brothers and sisters in this church in your home

groups in your families in your youth groups in your deacons elders meetings whatever the connection is let us having put away falsehood let us speak the truth to one another for we are the body of

Christ in Cambridge Jackie and I often go out for a meal now and again on a special occasion and in nearly every case the reader or the waitress has had a foreign accent and so we often start off a conversation where's your accent from they tell us where they're from different parts of Europe or South America and so they say and where's your accent from it's not English and there we enter a conversation of where we're from wouldn't it be wonderful that as a church as we speak to one another with grace humility and truthfulness wouldn't it be wonderful if the world listened in on our conversation and said you folk speak with a different accent an accent of truthfulness where are you from let's pray thanks thanks thanks thanks thanks