

“Portrait of a Mature Person”

Ephesians 4:25-32

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Introduction

What is the portrait of an immature person like? It’s someone who has an immature mind filled with worldliness, who lies and is deceitful. Someone with immature emotions cannot control their temper, whether it’s in the expression of anger or in silence. They close you off in their relationship, getting bitter or angry. Someone who has immature hands doesn’t share, but always gets. They do something so that they can get what they want from you. Someone who has an immature mouth talks to hurt, and not to edify. Someone with an immature heart is not kind, tender-hearted, or forgiving of other people. As we think about these things and ourselves, we can see our own immaturity. This passage gives us that portrait of a mature person.

1. Redeeming – Ephesians 4:24

Verse 24 says, “²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” This passage gives us five concrete instructions on what to put off and what to put on, and we balance negative prohibition with corresponding positive commands in our daily life. It is not enough to give up lying, stealing, or losing our temper unless we start to speak the truth, work hard, and be kind to people. Our goal as Christians is not to not sin but to be the most like Christ so that he will be shown and glorified.

2. Relational

This passage is also relational because all five things are related to relationships. Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced only in relation to God and in isolation from human beings. We cannot be good in a vacuum, but only in the real world of people: in church, in work, and in the classroom.

3. Theological

This passage is also theological in the sense that the reason for everything is either blatantly or implicitly theological. The reason is so that we can be more like Christ. Each and every one of us can build the body of Christ as a whole church, and as a church of Jesus Christ we can be a

powerful force in our community and the world. The theology always has to be practical to apply in our lives, local to influence our surroundings, and global so that each person and church is building the Church of Jesus Christ in the whole world.

In all of these things, the battle starts with our hearts. A mature person is someone who can control their hearts and desires. It becomes their habit and part of their character when they say no to the wrong things in order to say yes to the right things. There are five things in this passage that shows the portrait of a mature person. It talks about the maturity of the mind, emotion, hands, mouth, and the heart. Then it will tell us what we must do to become a mature person.

I. Mature mind – Fill your mind with the truth [25]

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

A. Put off the habit of lying and being deceitful

Verse 25 starts off by saying, "*Therefore, having put away falsehood.*" The word "falsehood" in the original language is *pseudos*, which means the lie. Lying was an epidemic for the Greeks as well as for Israel's Semitic neighbors. The practice was brought into the church by those who had recently become Christian, like today when we bring worldliness into the church of Jesus Christ.

Why is lying forbidden? The main reason is that it is a sin before God. However, in this context, it shows the result of sin against the body of Christ. We can lie in different ways. We can lie deliberately, misleading another person for selfish gain. We can also lie unintentionally, which can lead to slander or exaggeration of other people.

There is an interesting illustration of a baker who suspects that a farmer, who was supplying the butter, was giving him short weight. The baker's suspicion was confirmed after he carefully checked for a few days, and the farmer was arrested. But the judge threw the case out when the farmer explained that since he had no scales, he used one pound of bread from the baker to measure the weight of the butter. What goes around comes around.

Another illustration about the body: the eye did not like the mouth, because the eye sees the food but only the mouth can eat it. The eye lies to the hand that feeds the mouth and tells the hand that the mouth is higher than where it is. So the hand stabs the eye with a fork. Lying hurts the body. Don't tell the truth only for the sake of telling the truth; it is for the building of the body and the glory of Christ.

There are three suggestions on being honest:

1. Honesty in wisdom
For example, if someone appears ugly, telling them would be honest, but not wise.
2. Honesty in edification
For example, you should not teach sex education to children, even though it is the truth and they need to know it eventually. Speaking the truth in an unedifying way should be avoided because speaking the truth is for others and for the glory of Christ.

3. Honesty in love

There needs to be honesty in love for God. This is love out of your spiritual nature in consideration of other people's heart, because they may have both their spiritual nature and sin nature. You need to be carefully honest. If the truth is going to hurt people and cause them to sin, we sometimes need to withhold the truth and consider honesty with wisdom.

B. Put on the habit of speaking truthfully

The second part of verse 25 says to put on the habit of speaking truthfully in the word. Although it is implied that you need to be honest, it is especially important that the truth is through the word of God. The verse says, *“let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”* The “truth” here is not just talking about anything that is honest, but in the context of Ephesians 4, it is the truth of God's word, which comes from Christ and is about Christ.

Ephesians 4:20-23 – ²⁰But that is not the way you learned Christ! – ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

If we speak out of wisdom and out of the system of God's word, it edifies other people. This passage is teaching us to be generally honest, but also to be honest with the truth. Even though the verse talks about speaking, it is really talking about our mindset – our minds ought to be word-oriented and word-saturated with biblical thinking.

Immanuel Kant said, “Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life.” The word of God is organized spiritual and eternal life. Knowledge is seeing things and knowing the facts but wisdom is seeing through things. Biblical wisdom is seeing through the word, the eternal reality. When you have this kind of mindset, you will be wisely honest and also speak the truth of eternity in such a way that it impacts the lives of other people.

II. Mature emotions – Control your temper [26-27]

²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil.

A. Discern the motive of your anger

Verse 26 says, *“be angry”*. As believers, we have two natures – sin nature and spiritual nature – so we have two kinds of emotions, and two kinds of anger. Even God, with only His holy nature, has mixed emotions. He is complex in that he is both loving and holy. We are the image of God, so we have mixed emotions even in one nature. We need to discern the motive of our emotions and anger. Our sin nature says, “I am not getting what I want,” but the spiritual nature says, “Christ is not glorified.” The inner workings of God's heart as well as the hearts of His people are not simple. We need to understand and master why our emotions are there.

We know that there is righteous anger. Mark 3:5 says, “⁵And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.” Jesus was angry not for selfish reasons, but out of His love for other people, grieving at the hardness of their hearts and sins.

B. Even with righteous anger, be careful of how you react

You can start off with righteous anger, but you can sin after that. Verse 26 is an echo of Psalm 4:4. This Hebrew idiom permits anger, restricts anger, but it does not command anger. The NIV translation of this phrase says, “In your anger, do not sin”. You can have righteous anger and “reaction sins.” According to this passage, anger can lead to many sins like malice, slander, and other destructive sins that hurt other people and the body of Christ. Sinful emotions are like the vomit of a proud heart and uncontrolled spirit; when you get angry, you are vomiting your sins onto other people. You need to be cautious of the reaction sin if it hinders your function as a believer in Christ, and your response in your callings.

C. Deal with your anger quickly if possible

Verse 26 continues, “do not let the sun go down on your anger”. This means that if our anger is nursed, it becomes highly sinful and personal. The only thing to do is to confess the anger and root it out as rapidly as possible. If we obey this, we should be angry far less often than we are. We can be loudly angry or quietly bitter. The apostle’s intention in this passage is to warn us against nursing anger, to prevent it from growing in our hearts and affect every sphere of our being. It is not about bad emotions but about emotions going bad.

This verse is a good rule for married couples. It is seldom safe to allow the embers to smolder; even the small ones will continuously burn different parts of your soul.

D. Do not harbor anger to avoid temptation

Verse 27 says, “and give no opportunity to the devil.” If you harbor your anger, Satan can use your sin to stimulate and break the body of Christ. He does this through unforgiving and angry people, especially when they try to get what they want and do what they believe to be God’s work. They end up dividing the church and hurt the family of Jesus Christ as well as their own families.

E. Redeem your anger for repentance and love

Get rid of your anger as much as possible so that you can start to love. Use the conflict as an opportunity to elevate the depth of your relationships. When we think about social justice, it is showing the holiness and anger of God, but many people fail to love. Love can lead people into repentance, restrain sin, and it leads us to love others. Biblical justice is always merciful justice.

Corrie ten Boom said, “Do you know what hurts so very much? It is love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill that love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or we can ask God to open up another route for that love to travel.” She was in the Nazi camps

during World War II, and her family was killed by the Nazi soldiers. But she is known for being able to forgive the Nazis.

When you do justice work, think of it as blocked love. You are angry because the love of Christ cannot be shown to both the victims and the victimizers. Take action so that victims can receive the love of Christ, and victimizers can receive the forgiveness of Christ. Be merciful and just, as an expression of our love for God and for others.

III. Mature hands – Learn to share [28]

²⁸Let 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.

A. Do not steal

Verse 28 says, “*Let the thief no longer steal.*” This is the eighth commandment of the Mosaic laws. There are many different ways that we can steal – stealing of possessions and money, tax evasions and custom dodges, an employer’s oppression on his workers, and when we don’t dedicate our best work to our calling. If we are in business, we can steal by overcharging for the services that we render. We steal if we sell an inferior product, by borrowing without repaying, and damaging another’s reputation. We steal from ourselves when we waste the time, talents, and resources that God has entrusted to us. When you are late, you are stealing other people’s time. We steal from God when we fail to worship Him, honor Him with our lives, or tell others of His love.

B. Work

Instead, the verse continues, “*but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands...*” The work theology comes from Genesis 1. God worked and then rested, so we picture God when we both work and rest. As we work, we are serving other people – in our occupations, jobs, homes, and church – because someone else is using your service. There is inherent value in your work because you are doing it for God and serving other people. Serve and contribute through the work that you are doing in your life. Then with the income that you gain, live with necessities as you receive God’s provisions.

C. Share

Verse 28 says, “*so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*” This verse says that we must work and earn so that we can give to other people.

This is CFC’s financial policy:

1. Work hard and earn all that you can
There is nothing wrong with earning a lot of money.
2. Live with necessities
Prayerfully decide what your necessities are.
3. Share or be ready to share
From a young age, we know how to be frugal, but we still don’t know how to share and be generous to people. We need to grow as a congregation to that level.

As we think about this passage, there is a progression from an inferior to a superior way of life. The inferior way of life starts with illegal greed, like stealing, and legal greed, like earning all that you can so that you can live for yourself. The lifestyle of loving grace is when you get, and then live with necessities so that you can give to other people. Everything is in the service of grace, not greed. We are living to give and display the power of grace.

Of course, if you have been stealing, you can be forgiven. The robber at one side of Jesus Christ was forgiven right at the last moment of his life. Zacchaeus stole as a tax collector for all of his life, but after he repented, he gave so much more to people. When we live to get, we are living like the first Adam who sinned by eating the fruit. Our second Adam, Jesus Christ, gives with two hands—extended—to give to others.

IV. Mature mouth – Talk to edify [29-30]

²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

A. Don't let corrupting talk come out

This is similar to the first point, which emphasized the mind, but this point emphasizes how you talk. The word “corrupting” is used in other passages for “bad fruit.” The words that come out of our corrupted heart bears bad fruit. Words are powerful because we are spiritual beings. The apostle turns from the use of our hands to the use of our mouths. Speech is a wonderful gift of God. It is one of the human capacities that reflects the likeness of God and distinguishes us from other creations. We can communicate the meaning of our heart through the means of our mouth and our words. Words have the power to penetrate into the hearts of other spiritual beings. We have two natures. Our words can be edifying, but we have corrupted hearts and thoughts; corrupting words will still come out of our mouths. Therefore, we must learn to control our speech.

B. Talk to build up to deliver grace

Building up means using the words that come out of a pure heart and biblical mind to build up others. Verse 29 says, “*as fits the occasion,*” which means that it takes wisdom and strategy in order to communicate to other people. Continuing, “*that it may give grace to those who hear*” means that we can deliver the grace, intent, love, and mercy of God to others by the means of our words. Raise your words, not your voice.

C. Talk with the power available

How can we deliver the grace of God through our words? We have divine help. Verse 30 says, “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,*” which means causing sorrow by our sin. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we choose not to exalt Christ in our hearts, and instead we seek to exalt ourselves. The opposite is also true. The Holy Spirit rejoices when we do exalt Christ, and He is there to help us. Continuing, the verse says, “*by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” “Sealed” means the beginning of our Christian lives and the ownership of the Holy

Spirit over our lives. Redemption is the end of our sin nature. From the beginning to the end, the Holy Spirit will be there, eternally pouring His grace and heart into us.

Matthew 12:36 – ³⁶*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,*

We need to be careful with our words – content, tone of voice, face expression, and body language. Instead of hurting people with our words, we should want to use them to help, encourage, cheer, comfort, and stimulate their spiritual nature. We need to converse in such a way that our words become a vehicle and demonstration of the grace of God. Gossip hurts other people; it comes out of your sin nature and stimulates the sin nature of other people. Carefully craft your words—not to hurt—but to build others up. If you have the chance to compliment or thank somebody, do it. Engage in holy gossip, which means talking positively about someone not in their presence, so that you can build up their relationship with others. Think about how careful you are with your words when you are in the same room with someone that you respect. The Holy Spirit is always with us to help, strengthen, and empower us. Do not mix your words with your mood. Words are like water: once you spill it, you can never get everything back. Words can inspire as well as destroy.

V. Mature heart – Be kind with a tender heart [31-32]

³¹*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³²*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

A. Learn to deal with your sinful unforgiving heart [31]

Verse 31 is all about things related to your heart; it says, “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*”

B. Learn to treat others with tenderhearted kindness [32]

We must replace these things with treating others with tenderhearted kindness. Verse 32 says, “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*”

C. Learn to grow from forgiveness to kindness

1. Identify with the wrongdoer – Jesus became a “sinner”

How did Jesus forgive me? Jesus identified with us as sinners by becoming a sinner for us. As you think about forgiving other people, think about your own sin and how Christ forgave you. You are not better than other people. The Holy Spirit will give you the strength to forgive.

Corrie ten Boom said, “God takes our sins – the past, present, and future – and dumps them in the sea, and puts up a sign that says ‘No Fishing Allowed.’” If God does this for you, then you need to do it for other people. As soon as our hearts are ready, God forgives us, and we must do that for others.

2. You need to inwardly pay the debt of the wrongdoer – Jesus paid for our debt. Although it was not His pain or sin, Jesus went through it for you, so you must inwardly pay the debt of the wrongdoer. This means that it has to hurt. Verse 31 says, “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.*” This is countercultural and counter-psychological. People say that it will get worse if you hold it in your heart; you need to express everything so that it does not pile up. This is true only if you hold it in your sin nature. But as you repent of it, you can replace your sin nature with your spiritual nature using the love of Christ. You need to replace your sin nature with the habits and desires of your spiritual nature. If it hurts in your sin nature and you are still able to love, it means that you are growing to become more like Christ and can become free. The phrase, “*Be put away*” is hopeful because it is passive – the Holy Spirit will help you as you repent of your sins and ask for His grace.

3. Do what is good for them – Jesus continues to bless and discipline us. We have to replace reaction sin with reaction love. After Jesus takes our pain, He continues to discipline us – telling us the truth and teaching us not to sin to again – but also continues to bless us. Verse 32 says, “*Be kind to one another.*” Forgiveness is only the beginning. It has to lead to kindness. The power comes from having a tender heart that receives His forgiveness, grace, and kindness, and delivering that to other people. This doesn’t mean that there is an absence of ill emotion and feeling; release it to Christ so that you can have the tenderheartedness of God and have spiritual desires that will replace the desires of your sinful nature. Forgiveness is not a feeling, but a commitment and a fight. Forgiveness not only gives freedom to others, but also leads to our freedom from our sinful nature and unforgiving heart.

In marriage counseling, the question that I often ask to couples that are on the verge of divorce is: are you happy in your marriage? It means asking: are you getting what you want from your marriage? They often explode and respond with over twenty years of stories. The counter-question is: do you think that your spouse is happy? Or, have you been giving or loving the other person? We are always an expert in seeing what we want, what we don’t get, and the sinful things that the other person is doing. But we are not really seeing what we are doing, or not doing.

It is a worse sin to not be able to forgive someone. This is how Jesus treats people in Scripture. He forgives people who have sinned and are repentant, but Jesus is harsher on the people who are unforgiving – Pharisees, or self-righteous people who cannot see their own sins. You need to be healed and learn to forgive. Being a sinner in need of forgiveness is better than being a sinner in need of forgiving.

Conclusion

Psalm 147:3 says, “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*” Sometimes, pain is the best teacher of ministry. Pain can help you minister to your small group and family members because you can understand people. But you cannot stay there; it is only when you overcome the pain that you become like

Christ. The best ministers, counselors, parents, and spiritual parents are the people with wounds that heal and become scars. You can have a memory of your scars from the past, but you cannot have bitterness and keep bleeding in life. When wounds become scars, you can finally become like the Savior, who will eternally be known to His people by His scars.

God wants to heal you and use you. How does He heal the brokenhearted and bind up the wounds as promised in this verse? Often, through His people who have been healed. In God's kingdom, the strengthened always becomes the strengthener. I pray that you would be used by God.