

Going Green

Ephesians 4:25-32

INTRODUCTION

- A. A denominational church in Longwood, Florida, is looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint.
 - 1. That group distributed to members a list of nine ways to care for the earth, including using energy-saving light bulbs, adjusting thermostats & fans, correctly insulating homes, and recycling.
 - 2. They also employed Raymond Randall, who attends that church, and works as a waste management consultant.
 - a. Randall & other members of the Creation Care Task Force don biohazard suits & study the waste the church generates.
 - b. Randall said, “If we want to reduce the amount of waste that the church generates, we have to look at what’s in the waste. There’s really only one way to do that—get our hands dirty! Once you know what types of waste you’re generating and where, you can develop effective programs to reduce that waste or implement recycling programs. In addition you can begin purchasing products that are more recyclable or made with recycled content.”
- B. This church needs to “GO GREEN.”
 - 1. Yes, I do believe that we have a responsibility to be environmentally conscious.
 - a. “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15).
 - b. At the same time, I believe we need to balance environmental concerns with the realization that this earth was created to serve us & not vice-versa.
 - 2. This morning, I want us to give some serious consideration to recycling as part of “GOING GREEN.”
 - a. I’m not speaking of recycling paper or plastic; I’m talking about recycling our lives.
 - b. The Apostle Paul has written to the Ephesians about the need to get rid of their former lives.
 - 1) “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” (4:17)—The fact that Paul says these Christians must “no longer walk as the Gentiles do” greatly implies that at one time they did walk in the “futility of their minds.”
 - 2) “Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and . . . be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and . . . put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24).
 - c. Paul is telling these Ephesian Christians to “GO GREEN”—to put their old selves in the recycle bin & to take out the new selves.
 - 3. But, the question would naturally be raised: “Paul, what do these new lives look like?”
 - a. The Ephesians knew the old life quite well—they had lived in their old lives for years & years.
 - b. But, the new life was quite another story.
 - 1) It was a completely foreign way of life to them & some of these brethren likely did not know what the new life looked like.
 - 2) Therefore, in this morning’s text, Paul tells the Ephesians what a recycled life is like.

The recycled life involves:

A RECYCLED MOUTH, vv 25, 29

- A. “Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another,” v 25.
 - 1. Falsehood belongs to the old life which we take off when we come to Christ.
 - a. It is through “deceitful schemes” that individuals are carried away from the truth of Christ (4:14).
 - b. The desires of the old life are themselves deceitful (4:22).
 - 2. The old life is so wrapped up in deceit that when we take off the old self there is no more room for deceit.
 - 3. The recycled mouth, rather, speaks the truth.

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- a. The Greek verb for “speak” here is in the present tense & indicates a continual action—The idea is that speaking the truth is to be a way of life, a habit for the new man.
 - b. Our recycled mouths must make speaking the truth a way of life:
 - 1) God himself “never lies” (Tit 1:2).
 - 2) Jesus is “the truth” (Jn 14:6).
 - 3) The word of God is truth (Jn 17:17).
- B. Not only does the recycled mouth speak the truth, but the recycled mouth is careful with what it says: “Let 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,” v 29.
1. The Greek term for “corrupting” refers to something that is rotten.
 - a. For example, Jesus uses this word in the Sermon on the Mount: “Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears **bad** fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear **bad** fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit” (Mt 7:17-18).
 - b. “Corrupting talk,” therefore, is speech that is diseased. In context, it is speech that tears down (rather than builds up), does not fit the occasion, & does not give grace to the hearer.
 2. Recycled speech builds up, fits the occasion, and imparts grace.
 - a. The Lord expects us to encourage others through what we say. For example, after explaining the resurrection of the dead, Paul says to the Thessalonians, “Encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18).
 - b. The Lord also expects us to speak “as fits the occasion.”
 - 1) The Greek here is literally “according to the need.”
 - 2) Thus, we are to encourage as the need arises.
 - c. Such speech will impart grace to the hearer.
 - 1) The word grace often refers to a gift.
 - 2) The idea is that by encouraging others we are providing them with a gift.
- C. It is said that a man once came to a wise sage & asked how he could make amends for falsely accusing a friend.
1. The wise man told him to put a feather on every doorstep in the village.
 2. The next day, the man was told to collect all the feathers.
 - a. “But that is impossible,” said the man, “the wind has scattered them beyond recall!”
 - b. The sage replied, “So it is with your reckless words.”
- D. Jesus tells us, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mt 12:36-37).
1. What will your words say about you on the day of judgment?
 2. Do you need to recycle your mouth?

RECYCLED HANDS, v 28

- A. “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.”
- B. Paul tells the thief to recycle his hands.
1. The Greek doesn’t use the word “thief” here.
 - a. Instead, the Greek reads, “The one who is stealing.”
 - b. The participle is in the present tense, not the past tense, as the King James translates it.
 - 1) Paul, therefore, doesn’t envision that all the Ephesians have given up stealing altogether, but some are still struggling with it.
 - a) When we come to Christ, there is certainly a recycling of our lives: “We were buried . . . with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
 - b) I believe, however, that we do a grave disservice to people when we act as though this recycling is easy or instantaneous.
 - i. The change between us & God is, indeed, instantaneous.
 - ii. However, there is a growth process that takes place and even those who diligently strive

to recycle their lives may struggle with falling into past sins.

- 2) That is because this present participle points to a habit, a way of life. Habits are so easy to fall into, but they are often so very hard to give up.
2. What is one to do who finds himself struggling with sin?
 - a. He's to stop.
 - 1) Paul says, "Let the one who is stealing steal no more."
 - a) He doesn't say, "If you were a thief before your conversion & still struggling with it, don't worry about it—We all know how hard it is to give up such a sin." He says, "Stop!"
 - b) When the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, he says to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (Jn 8:11).
 - 2) I want to make it clear on the one hand that this change we're speaking of this morning is often difficult & it takes time. But, on the other hand, we dare not use the difficulty of the change as an excuse not to change.
 - b. Do we need to stop stealing?
 - 1) You might be thinking, "Now, wait just a minute, Justin! I've never stolen anything & I don't plan to start." Good!
 - 2) But, are you greedy?
 - a) Do you want more & more money? Do you lust after the things that others have? Do you see something on TV & just "have to have it"?
 - b) Greed has no place in the recycled life: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tm 6:10).
 - 3) Are you a lover of money or have you recycled your life?
- C. The thief's recycling his hands means that he does honest work with his own hands so that he will have something to share with anyone in need.
 1. The recycled life is concerned with doing "honest work."
 - a. Paul literally writes here, "Let the one who is stealing no longer steal, rather let him labor working with his own hands the good [thing]."
 - b. The idea is that our profession—whatever that is—must be one that is proper for a Christian to have.
 - c. I helped in a week-long campaign several years ago & the congregation where we were had several members who worked at the local Jim Beam distillery. Quite frankly, this passage forbids such, for our occupation is to be a "good thing."
 2. I'm not aware of any of us who works in a profession he/she shouldn't, but the rest of this text speaks volumes to us: Why are we to work honestly? So that we will have something to share with anyone in need.
 - a. Notice that according to this passage the purpose of our work is to share with others.
 - 1) There are other texts that tell us to take care of our families, etc.
 - 2) But, in this passage, the idea of working is not to accumulate wealth, but it's to give wealth away.
 - b. Without any doubt, God expects his people to share with those in need.
 - 1) "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Mt 6:3-4). Notice that Jesus says, "**When** you give," not "**If** you give."
 - 2) Luke praises Cornelius as a man who "gave alms generously to all the people" (Acts 10:2).
 - c. The English Standard translates the last phrase of this verse as "with anyone in need."
 - 1) I like that. The Greek is literally: "with the one having a need."
 - 2) Paul doesn't inform the Ephesians to give to some people & not to others. The only criterion for our giving is whether or not the person has a need.
- D. It has been said, "We make a living by what we get out of life, but we make a life by what we give."
 1. What kind of life are you making?
 2. Have you recycled your hands to work honestly & to give to the one who is in need?

A RECYCLED HEART, vv 26-27, 31-32

- A. The Ephesians needed to recycle their hearts.
- B. They were to recycle their hearts by getting rid of anger: “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil,” vv 26-27.
 - 1. As we have said before, there is nothing inherently wrong with anger.
 - a. Paul here cautions the Ephesians to be angry but not to sin in their anger.
 - b. Jesus became angry & ran the moneychangers out of the temple.
 - c. God himself becomes angry: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18).
 - 2. Yet, as we all know, anger can quickly turn into sin & cause us to do things we soon regret.
 - a. “A man of quick temper acts foolishly” (Prov 14:17).
 - b. “The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (Js 1:20).
 - 3. How many times have we “acted a fool” because we became angry?
 - a. How many people have we hurt in our anger? How many careless words have we uttered in anger?
 - b. Paul’s point is that such behavior belongs to the old life & must be recycled.
 - 4. In the new life, we do not let the sun go down on our anger.
 - a. Instead of brooding over insult & injury, we deal with them appropriately.
 - 1) I go quickly to the one whom I have wronged: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24).
 - 2) I also go quickly to the one who has wronged me: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (Mt 18:15).
 - b. How responsibly are we dealing with anger? How are we dealing with those who have wronged us & those whom we have wronged?
 - 5. If we do not deal with anger appropriately, we give the devil an opportunity.
 - a. We allow him to come & plant sin in our lives that will grow & grow & grow.
 - b. Is it then any surprise that someone has said, “Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured”?
- C. The recycled life is also a forgiving life: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you,” vv 31-32.
 - 1. Instead of harboring all this poison in my soul, I’m to forgive.
 - 2. We Christians must be a forgiving people.
 - a. “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15).
 - b. We are to bear “with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Col 3:13).
 - 3. God has forgiven me through Christ; therefore, my obligation to my fellow man is to forgive.
 - a. No one has ever wronged me like I have wronged God.
 - b. No one has ever injured me like I have injured God.
 - c. How can I not forgive when God has forgiven me of so much?
 - 4. Shortly after the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky woman who took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her home.
 - a. There she cried bitterly that its limbs & trunk had been destroyed by Union artillery fire.
 - b. She waited for Lee to condemn the North or at least sympathize with her loss.
 - c. Lee paused, and then said, “Cut it down, my dear madam, and forget it.”
 - d. Let us do the same with the anger, the insults, & the injuries in our lives!

CONCLUSION

- A. Recycling is a wonderful, wonderful process.
 - 1. Because of recycling materials that would have lain in landfills until the Lord’s return have been put to good use.

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2. Through recycling, we are able to care for the planet God has made for us to inhabit.
- B. But as wonderful as the recycling of aluminum, plastic, rubber, paper, & other materials is, the best recycling is what Jesus can do to battered & worn lives.
 1. He can take your life, battered though it be, & recycle it into a glorious life for his praise. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).
 2. Do you need to come & allow Jesus to recycle your life this morning?