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## A Time to Look in the Mirror

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### Ephesians 4:25-32 (ESV)

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. 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. 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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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.

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When we consider that God is looking at us—not at our external appearance, but upon our heart—it is something for us to pay attention to. Lent is a time of paying attention to ourselves and what drives us in our hearts. What's going on inside of us? It is a time of reflection.

I've come to really appreciate the practice because we don't naturally do this in our everyday course of life. Lent is a great spiritual discipline. The Bible talks often about mastering our bodies and making them our slaves, while also paying attention to what God is doing on the inside of us. The great work going on is the work inside of us that eventually works its way to the outside.

When we consider our lesson for today, it is actually a mirror. When we look into the Bible, it is a mirror that reflects back to us truths about ourselves. James talked about the Bible being like this, as if we are looking in a mirror—it reveals things to us about ourselves. We don't want to forget what it says; we want to remind ourselves of what it says so that we can respond to the truth it reveals about us.

That is what the Scripture does. When we turn to Paul's lesson here, which he wrote to the believers in Ephesus, it is a mirror through which we can ask ourselves: Are these things true about us? If so, what would God have us do? Ephesians 4, as we read in our lesson, says, "Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth to their neighbor."

He is encouraging us to have a level of honesty with each other—real honesty—not to be deceptive or lie to one another as we relate to each other. Then he says this: "For we are all members of one another."

Of course, the Bible—the New Testament—is written to believers, those who are in Christ and have come to the knowledge of our Savior. It is written to the church in the world. What Paul is saying here, even though he wasn't a part of their specific congregation, is that we are all members of one another. This is part of what God wants us to know.

We are part of a great family in the world, a massive family that exists in every nation, tribe, and tongue that has been reached with Jesus. It is not just this part of His family—there is a whole family.

We were just on vacation and went to a coffee shop one morning. I happened to be sitting by an individual who was talking with his girlfriend—I believe it was. We were so close in this coffee shop that it was a little awkward, like eavesdropping. You couldn't help but hear what was happening next to you.

I noticed that on his arm, he had the Bible verse Philippians 4:13 tattooed. I said to him, "Hey, I like your tattoo."

He turned to me and said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

"Yes, yes! Fantastic! That's a great power you have within you," I replied.

We had this little moment of connection because we are part of the same family—we are members of the same body. The Bible refers to this as *koinonia*, or the fellowship and unity of the Spirit.

A little later, I needed to use the restroom. As I walked down the aisle of tables, I saw a gentleman sitting at the last table with his laptop open. I briefly glanced at his screen and noticed a PowerPoint slide with a Bible verse on it.

It was Friday, and watching him type struck a chord with me because I do this every week—I put Bible verses into PowerPoints. I thought, *Ha! That's probably a pastor sitting in this coffee shop, preparing his Sunday message.*

So I said, "Hey, what are you doing there? Preparing a message?"

He said, "Yeah, I am."

I asked, "Well, what are you speaking on?"

He replied, "It's really pretty exciting. There are seven of us churches in this area—this is in Irvine, California, a pretty metropolitan area. Seven of us, from different backgrounds, are all preaching the same thing this week. We've gotten together and decided that even though we have little differences in

belief, we are all on the same mission. We're preaching the *blessed* way of reaching our community because we want our congregants to be the hands and feet of Jesus—reaching out to them."

I got his card and later looked up what the *blessed* method of reaching the community was about. I was so encouraged because he was embracing the idea that we are all members of one body and that what we do affects one another.

The Lord was just reminding me of what a great family we are a part of—the family of God. Everywhere we go, we can meet people who know Him and have fellowship with Him.

We should pay attention to how we treat one another and how we relate to one another. That is what all of this is about.

Paul said earlier in this chapter, "As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

And then he said this about being members of one another: He said, "There is one body in the world, one Spirit—the Holy Spirit of God. You were called to one hope when you were called—to one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and through all."

And so, knowing this—that we're called into this glorious, eternal family of God—he coaches us up into how to live: paying attention to our hearts, being self-reflective. None of us lives to ourselves. None of us dies to ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord.

And then he says this to those in Rome: "Why do you judge your brother or sister?" This is in the family of God. "Why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. As surely as I live," the Lord says, "every knee will bow before me, and every tongue will acknowledge God."

So then Paul writes, even though we're all members of this one family, "Each of us individually will give an account to God for ourselves. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another."

Jesus uniquely said it this way in Matthew chapter seven, emphasizing the need for our own self-reflection in our spiritual journey:

*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. In the same measure that you judge others, it will be dished out to you. And why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother or sister's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite!"* Jesus said. *"First, take the plank out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

Be self-reflective. Be self-aware before you go criticizing others.

David, needing more of this, said:

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any grievous way in me, and then lead me in the right way."*

As we head towards Easter, it's a great time for us to have some quiet before the Lord and invite Him to search us and speak to us. Because we're in His family, we're a part of this sanctifying process that He is working in our hearts—softening us and cleansing us until that day we meet Him.

And so, the mirror in Ephesians 4 says to us, first of all, pay attention to your emotional life.

*"Be angry,"* it says. It's okay to be angry, but don't sin in your anger. Don't let the sun go down on your anger.

As we're heading toward the celebration of Easter, it's good to think about this: How are we stewarding our frustrations in life? We all have them. Sometimes they snap within us. It's not wrong to have anger—the Bible says, *"Be angry."* But be very careful with your emotional life when you're angry, because you never know when you're stepping over that line to be destructive in your anger.

And there's a real spiritual danger around the emotion of anger. He says it can give the devil a foothold, which can cause even more destruction.

So one of the things that's good to do in our lives, especially during this Lenten season, is to say: *God, how am I dealing with my frustrations and my anger? Am I sinning in them? Am I housing them, going to sleep on them, nursing them? Do I have anger fantasies? Am I ruminating over how I might deal with my anger?*

Paul has talked about being honest with one another. Are we telling the truth to each other about how we use our anger? Pay attention to the misuse of anger.

And then he says: *"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 provide for anyone in need."*

Paul is here addressing the stewardship of our lives and our work. Are we actually being lazy, or are we being productive with our lives? Are we working with our hands, contributing to the world around us? Are we being deceptive, trying to get away with what we can in a dishonest way?

We should pay attention to that. Obviously, this is wrong before the Lord. *"Let the thief no longer steal,"* but instead, *"let him labor, doing honest work with his hands in a disciplined way, so that he may have something to provide for others in need."*

And then he continues:

*"Let no corrupt 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."*

The root of our hearts comes out through our mouths. Jesus said it this way: *"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."*

This is a good time to ask ourselves: Are we primarily critical in nature? Primarily negative in what comes out of our mouths? Or do we have a spirit that, as it fits the occasion, gives grace to those who hear?

Are we operating in a life-giving spirit?

Now, I know there's a lot of unwholesome talk in the world. But one of the things that has challenged me over the years is how many unwholesome words get spoken right in the family of God. And that says something about the hearts of God's people.

James said, *"Who can tame the tongue? No one can do it except with the help of the Spirit."*

So Paul is helping us reflect here on our lives:

Are they productive? Are they disciplined? Are they deceptive in some way?

And then, what is the fruit coming out of our hearts through our mouths?

Are we being an encouraging spirit, an uplifting spirit?

*"Do not,"* he says at this point, *"grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

God is paying attention to all of this. His Spirit lives inside of us. If we're doing things that are dishonoring to Him and hurtful to others, it actually saddens the heart of God.

To grieve is to be deeply saddened. If you've been around people who are grieving, you know they grow quieter.

I have this sense sometimes when I've grieved the Holy Spirit—He quiets down in my life and waits for me to come back to Him and be honest with Him.

That is a time of confession.

*"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."*

This is about the deep inner workings of the Spirit and how we steward our lives and our hearts.

And so, Paul is helping us see that this is what David prayed for:

*"Search me, O God. Test me and try me. And know my heart. See if there is any hurtful way in me."*

And then expose it. Bring it out into the light so I can deal with it honestly before You, confess it, and then leave it.

And then he comes to this litany at the end of this section for us to pay attention to in our lives. After talking about all these other things—anger, and then the things that would come out of our mouths—he says this, getting really down deep into what is driving us:

*"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor—" (clamor is this idea of loud verbal bickering) "—let all clamor, let all slander—" (speaking negatively about others).*

And here's what he says: *"Be put away from you."*

If the Spirit is showing you that some of this is a part of your life, ask Him to help you put it away. Separate yourself from it. This can only be done by the work of the Spirit.

Bitterness—that idea of wanting wrath to bring punishment to someone.

Anger.

Loud verbal bickering.

Speaking negatively.

Slander, along with all malice—a general state of ill will towards someone you know.

The Bible is not a story of good people. It's a story of people who are, according to the Bible, deceptive in their hearts. But it is also the story of a good God who comes and teaches us about ourselves, gives us grace, and leads us down the pathway of cleansing through repentance and the forgiveness of sins—so that we can not just behave well, but so that you and I can be made into new creations, with this old heart being done away with,

And a new heart, a new spirit, surging in us.

I don't know about you, but as I've come before the Lord over the years and He exposes my sinfulness to me, sometimes it can become oppressive to me. And if I concentrate on it too much, it gets even worse.

So when I read the text and it reflects to me things that I need to work on, I simply say: *God, You're right. I agree with You. I have a sinful heart.*

And then I quickly move to other truths, like Romans 8:1:

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ."*

Or 1 John 1:9:

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I not only try to distance myself and repent of my sin, but I also try not to dwell on it. I ask the Lord to take it away from me and stir in me the actual opposite of those things.

And that's where Paul ends—encouraging us in the positive:

*"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."*

As we then move from focusing on the negative into the positive, we align ourselves with the Spirit of God in our lives, and we will have this power to live the way He intended us to live.

And this—this is the great work of the Lenten season: for you and I to be self-reflective, to let the Bible speak to us about ourselves, to agree with the truth that it reveals, to confess that which needs to be confessed, to receive forgiveness, and then to move in the good things that God has given us to do.

If we don't follow those steps all the way through, the Bible talks about a house being left empty—and getting worse in that emptiness.

So then, we have to concentrate on being life-giving spirits, giving life-giving words, being disciplined, and contributing in our lives. And then, we align ourselves with God—being tenderhearted, kind, forgiving, even as God forgave us.

Perhaps you have something this season that God would want you to address.

Maybe there is some repentance.

Maybe there are some amends that need to be made.

I will just trust—and we will trust—that in this time, in this season that we set aside in Lent, the Holy Spirit will speak to you and lead you in this for greater transformation with God.