



**MEMBERS OF ONE
ANOTHER IN CHRIST**



Four Bible Studies on Ephesians 4:25-32

In preparation for the 15th All-American Council

November 10-13, 2008

“Members of One Another in Christ”

Bible Study on Ephesians 4:25-32

**in preparation for the 15th All-American Council
of the Orthodox Church in America**

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Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 4:26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 4:27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. 4:29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, 4:32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Revised Standard Version).

At the very first meeting of the Preconciliar Commission responsible for organizing the 15th All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America these words from Ephesians made an impression and seemed to be a “word” addressed to our OCA and the turmoil it has faced in recent years. We were looking for a way to address issues of truth and accountability, but in such a way that our bonds as members of the Body of Christ would be strengthened through the crisis and not torn apart. This brief passage brought these concerns together. “Members of One Another in Christ” (based on Ephesians 4:25) became the theme of the approaching Council but the whole passage is worth careful – and prayerful – consideration.

The four studies that follow can be adapted as needed for individual or parish use as time and interest permit. The first study is introductory and gives some background on Ephesians, why this particular passage was chosen and how it might help the OCA’s discussions about truth, reconciliation and healing as we address the crisis our Church has faced in recent years and as we plot a way forward. The remaining three studies each begins with brief notes on particular words in the text and gives a selection of related scriptural texts to read. Additional selections of patristic and liturgical texts are suggested in the studies and are provided at the end of each lesson. A few questions are given on occasion, but on the whole the texts are allowed to speak for themselves and lead to reflection on how these words might apply today in our own lives, in our parishes and dioceses, in the OCA, in preparation for the All-American Council and in our Christian life generally.

Suggested beginning and ending prayers are also included.

St John Chrysostom’s commentary on the passage is added as an appendix.

Before beginning these Bible Studies it is recommended that you take time to prayerfully read through the entire epistle to the Ephesians.

Suggested Prayers

Beginning Prayers

O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere and fillest all things, treasury of blessings and giver of life, come and abide in us and cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (3x)

O Most Holy Trinity have mercy on us. O Lord, cleanse us from our sins. O Master, pardon our transgressions. O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.] Amen.

Prayer before reading Scripture

Illumine our hearts, O Master who loves mankind, with the pure light of Your divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind with the understanding of Your Gospel teaching. Implant in us the fear and love of Your blessed commandments, so that trampling down all carnal desires we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing to You. For You are the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and to You we give glory together with Your Father, who is from everlasting, and Your all holy, good and life creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Ending Prayers

Prayers for the increase of love and the eradication of anger

O Christ, you bound your disciples in a union of love and have bound us your believing servants to you with the same bond. Grant that we might sincerely and without hypocrisy do your commandments and love one another, through the prayers of the Mother of God, O you who alone love mankind.

Set our hearts on fire with love for you, O Christ our God, that in its flame we may love you with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, so that, keeping your commandments, we may glorify you, the giver of all good gifts.

Prayer in Preparation for the Council

O Lord our God, look down upon all of us, and upon all who are preparing for the All-American Council. Grant us wisdom and understanding that we may learn Your holy will; warm our hearts with love for You and for our neighbors; guide us on the way of truth and righteousness; keep our hearts from all evil; unite us in one mind and in one heart, and let mutual brotherly love abide in our midst; bless us for the doing of good and useful things. Grant us peace and serenity, unity of spirit, concord and fruitful action, and all those things needful for our temporal and eternal life. For You are our God, powerful in mercy and gracious in strength, and to You are due all glory, honor and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

To the Mother of God

O victorious leader of triumphant hosts, we your servants delivered from evil sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos. As you possess invincible might set us free from every calamity So that we may sing, "Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!"

“Members of One Another in Christ”

Bible Study 3: Conflict – Be angry but do not sin

Part 1: Anger and the Devil

Ephesians 4:26 *Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 4:27 and give no opportunity to the devil.*

4:26 (the bold text above quotes Psalm 4:4):

Be angry (orgizesthe), have angry or irritated feelings

Sin (amartanete), do wrong, miss the mark, fail in one’s purpose

Anger

Psalm 4

Mark 3:1-6, 11:15-17

Matthew 5:21-26, 43-48

James 1:19-20

Additional Reading: “4:26a *Being Angry but Not Sinning*”

Additional Reading: “4:26b *Not Letting the Sun Go Down on One’s Anger*”

4:27 and do not give opportunity to the devil – or: *do not make room for the devil*

Room (topos), place, occasion, opportunity

Devil (diabolos), slanderer, one who revels in malicious gossip

Do not make room for the devil

Spiritual warfare is a constant theme in Paul (as it is elsewhere in the Scriptures), who also uses the image of a battle between light and darkness. Jesus began his ministry by confronting the devil, whose aim was to distract Jesus from single-minded devotion to God.

Matthew 4:1-11 (see also Deuteronomy 8:1-10, the passage Jesus quotes)

Romans 13:11-14

Eph 5:3-14, 6:10-16

2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 10:1-6

1 Peter 5:8-11

Additional Reading: “4:27 *Giving No Opportunity to the Devil*”

Reflection: What makes you angry? How do you get over it?

Part 2: Repentance, service and conflict

Ephesians 4:28 *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.*

Thief (o kleptōn), one who steals, takes something secretly without permission; connotations of cheating, lying, treachery, fraud

Labor (kopiātō), work to the point of weariness; strive, struggle

Honest (to agathon), work well, uprightly, usefully, of benefit to others

The first part of the verse is not just about stealing; it's more broadly about abandoning ones old selfish ways -- in other words, repentance.

Matthew 7:13-27

Acts 2:37-47

Luke 3:7-14

James 1:22-25

Additional Reading: "4:28a No Longer Stealing"

The second part of the verse is about embarking on a life of service directed towards the needs of others out of reverence for Christ.

Matthew 20:20-28, 22:34-40

John 13:1-35

Mark 12:28-34

Additional Reading: "4:28b Doing Honest Work;" "4:28c Giving to Those in Need"

This radical love and service to one another was taken as a practical model for ordering community life in the first Christian community in Jerusalem.

Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-35

Reflection on conflict: The early Jerusalem ideal of shared community life didn't last long. First, one of the married couples (Ananias and Sapphira) introduced a note of deceit by conspiring to pretend that they were contributing all the proceeds from a land sale to the common fund (Acts 5:1-11). Then, what began as an act of communal charity (the collection for the poor widows) became a source of jealousy and conflict. The multicultural Christian community, mixing Jews from Palestine ("Hebrews") with Jews from elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world ("Hellenists"), faced this head-on under the leadership of the apostles.

Read Acts 6:1-7 and consider how the community dealt with the conflict. Hint: all the names of the elected helpers (traditionally the first deacons) are Greek.

Bible Study 3 Additional Reading

Part 1: Anger and the Devil

4:26a Being Angry but Not Sinning

John Chrysostom: Note Paul's persistent wisdom. He speaks first to prevent our sinning. We do not listen, but he does not abandon us. His role as a spiritual father does not allow him to give up on us easily. It is like the doctor who tells the sick person what he must do. If the patient refuses to hear him, he does not write him off. Rather, he continues to care for him by giving him further persuasive counsel. So too does Paul. He has already said, *Do not lie*. But suppose anger should arise from lying. He then deals with this. What does he say? *Be angry and do not sin*. It is better not to grow angry at all. But if one ever does fall into anger he should at least not be carried away by it toward something worse.

Jerome: This is taken from the fourth psalm [Psalm 4:4], as I am sure no one doubts. It may seem contrary to what is said of anger elsewhere, that we must put away all anger [Col 3:8]...It is an oversimplified interpretation that does harm, especially when people imagine that the constraints against anger are being here relaxed. It is not only among us but among philosophers too that anger is spoken of in a double sense. Anger emerges first when we are understandably aroused by a natural stimulus after being wounded by an injury. Or it arises when, after the impulse has abated and our rage has been restrained, the mind is capable of judgment but nonetheless we find ourselves desiring vengeance upon the one who is thought to have inflicted the wound. In this [verse] Paul is speaking of the first kind of anger. He is allowing to us as vulnerable humans that in the face of some undeserved event, we may be moved to some level of annoyance, as if a light breeze were disturbing the serenity of the mind. But on no account are we to be carried into swelling rapids by the impulse of rage.

4:26b Not Letting the Sun Go Down on One's Anger

John Chrysostom: Do you wish to have your fill of anger? One hour, or two or three is enough for you. But do not let the sun go down and leave you both as enemies. It was God's goodness that did not leave us in anger. He did not let us part in enmity. He shed his light upon those who were sinners. So when evening is coming on, be reconciled. Quell the evil impulses while they are fresh. For if night overtakes you, the next day will not be enough time to extinguish the further evil which has been increasing overnight.

4:27 Giving No Opportunity to the Devil

Marius Victorinus: The devil can do nothing to us unless we ourselves willingly allow him to do so. This is true in all our acts. Thus we are masters of our own will; otherwise we would deserve no good return for our good acts and no punishment for our bad acts. The devil's opportunity arises from our own vice.

Part 2: Repentance, service and conflict

4:28a No Longer Stealing

Marius Victorinus: Sin does not consist in simply committing sin but persisting in it. If so, there is always a place for repentance. There is a place for correction. So the apostle says: *let the one who has stolen not steal again*. This should be applied not only to stealing but also to all sin. Anyone who has sinned in any way is now called not to sin again.

Jerome: Those who live in the midst of this life's intense business appear to be forced, for the sake of food and necessary provisions, to buy and sell certain things and to seek unfair profit from business. It is difficult even for those who have been set free from the other passions—namely fornication, idolatry, adultery and murder—to escape being caught by this subtle vice.

4:28b Doing Honest Work

Theodoret: Idleness is a major source of sin. So it is reasonable for Paul to set honest work over against it. The text contrasts theft, which is an evil work, with honest labor, which is a good work.

4:28c Giving to Those in Need

Ambrosiaster: Paul exhorts them not to return to their past vices and sins. He wants them to behave as new persons. What good is it to be called new if our evil deeds prove us to be still gripped by our old nature? The Christian is commanded not merely to avoid stealing but more so to care actively for the poor through his own hard work. Hence by commitment to good works he may restore what he formerly stole. We are not to be praised for refusing to steal. What makes one praiseworthy is to give of one's own to the needy.