

Cooperate With the Carpenter

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Introduction

A local phonebook from last year shows 15 different congregations in this area. Only one is Seventh-day Adventist. Does Bonners Ferry need *this* congregation?

Heaven has an audacious answer. God intends that this church family, this gathering, not only make a decided contribution to the spiritual life of this area, but, if we live according to our privileges, we will have a part in bringing the Great Controversy between good and evil to an end. God will use this congregation to demonstrate to the community outside these doors what it looks like to be end-time followers of Jesus. That is what we all signed up for.

Please open to Ephesians, chapter four.

Time does not allow our review of this chapter's rich truths of Christian unity, how God gifts His church for mission, or His plan to bring us to full maturity, protecting us along the way from voices that exploit and confuse. But we will consider three biblical behaviors by which we can grow in our walk with Jesus and which are vital if we would become the Third Angel's Message enfolded.

First, though, let's get some background surrounding the text. We are studying the Bible; it is kind of like detective work. When a fireman is called to a fire, immediately he works to put out the fire. But when the detective arrives, he starts by ascertaining what the facts are. He asks a lot of questions, like who was seen there, when, and what were they up to. When we come to study the Bible, we are like the detective who has just arrived.

Let's gather some facts now. Our study begins at Ephesians 4:14. Rather than being tossed about by crafty, deceiving teachers of false doctrine, Paul desires that the church grow up

into Christ. This is accomplished as we “speak the truth in love” (4:15). It is as the body labors together that it is built up in love (4:16).

We are no longer to behave as the unconverted (4:17). Unconverted people are trapped, deadening themselves, living corrupt lives (4:18, 19). But we have not so learned Christ. If we have heard Him, if we have been taught by Him, our behavior will be altogether different (4:20, 21). We put on the new man, created in righteousness and true holiness. We must be converted, again and again. We need continuous renewal. It is like respiration; unless we are continually breathing, we will die. Our need is continuous.

Heaven calls for different behavior. And so, today, three wrong behaviors and their replacements.

Not Lying But Speaking Truth

Here is the first:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another (Ephesians 4:25).

The old behavior, the behavior of the unconverted person, is lying. The contrasted replacement behavior, is that we are to “speak every man truth with his neighbor.” This is not only about what one might say; it goes deeper.

The word used in the original language here illuminates Paul’s meaning. That word is “*pseudos*.” From it, we have the prefix “pseudo-,” as in “pseudoscience,” appearing to be scientific, and “pseudonym,” as in a name that conceals another name. “*Pseudo*” means “whatever is not what it professes to be” (Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 676).

We are all too familiar with pseudo. Pseudo is when a politician runs on a platform saying one thing, and as soon as he is elected, begins to do the opposite. Pseudo is when you buy tires you are told will last 40,000 miles and they last 20,000. And so, in Christianity, when a church claims that it is following the Bible, but then you discover that they are teaching disobedience regarding the seventh day Sabbath, there you have it: pseudo. Our “putting away lying,” is the putting away of all false profession. One who claims to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, to be a Seventh-day Adventist, should be a living representation of the claim, an example of genuine profession.

Our Scripture mentions the neighbor. Who, exactly, is my neighbor? A lawyer asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked what was written in the Torah. He replied that our supreme allegiance must be to God, and that each is to love his neighbor as himself (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Jesus says, Right answer; do it and you shall live! But that was not good enough for the lawyer. He wanted eternal life but did not want to acknowledge any deep responsibility to others. He asked that Jesus specify exactly who his neighbor was.

And so Jesus tells us about a Samaritan. A traveller is assaulted by thieves, robbed, and left in the ditch to die. Along comes a priest, and avoids him, then a Levite, who does the same; both Jews. At last, a hated Samaritan comes along, who stops, risks his own life, and helps the victim. Jesus asks, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?” (Luke 10:36). The answer was that the man who showed mercy to the victim was his neighbor—the Samaritan.

In 4:25 Paul says that “we are members one of another.” Were the Samaritans members of Jews and Jews of Samaritans? We must say Yes, or deny the teaching of Jesus. I read this in Ellen G. White’s book, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 376:

This question [Who is my neighbor?] Christ answered in the parable of the good Samaritan. He showed that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is every one who is the property of God.

My neighbor is every other human person. My neighbor is every other Seventh-day Adventist, every Mormon, Mennonite, Methodist, Baptist, Muslim, Hindu, and Catholic. We can put it this way: My neighbor is every person who needs Jesus and His Present Truth.

The Bible here teaches that we are to put away all misrepresentation of God. Our behavior must represent Him. We are to “speak the truth every man to his neighbor.” We are to be faithful in representing, in word and deed, our Lord. God’s call to us is to speak of His truth to others. We are to witness to it, speak of it, engage them. This will take thoughtfulness, study, tact, prayer, and God-helped timing. Can we do it? We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

Not Stealing But Responsible Activity

A second item is at verse 28:

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Ephesians 4:28).

To become a Christian means changed behavior. Paul chooses a practical example. One who had been a thief before knowing Christ, is to turn to practical labor. He works; he earns an

honest living. There is a spirit of restitution. He used to be a thief but now he labors, and has something above his needs to give to others in want.

Idleness can be a curse, part of the threefold sin of Sodom (pride, satiation, and idleness) (Ezekiel 16:49). Idleness is opposite the Proverbs 31 woman (Proverbs 31:27). The Christian is called to activity. There are Marthas and there are Marys (Luke 10:38-42). But remember—both were active. Martha was working in the kitchen. Mary was engaged in learning. Neither was sitting idly in front of a television, randomly web-surfing, or chattering into a cell phone.

Learning is indeed a form of activity—one highly commended by Jesus, who said that Mary was engaged in “the one thing needful” (Luke 10:42). The different kinds of Christian activity have their place. We should be careful to keep in a balance between our tendencies and what is more needful. If inclined to study, we want to be self-controlled enough to also engage in mechanical things. If more inclined to the mechanical, we should also encourage in ourselves a penchant for study.

We need to be about our Father’s work. Jesus is our example, and He balanced it well. As a Carpenter, He engaged in practical labor. He was also a voracious student of God’s Word. He mixed the mechanical and the mental. Again, Ellen White has laid it out plainly:

Take a lesson from the gardener. If he wishes a plant to grow, he cultivates and trims it; he gives water, he digs about its roots, plants it where the sunshine will fall upon it, and day by day he works about it; and not by violent efforts, but by acts constantly repeated, he trains the shrub until its form is perfect, and its bloom is full. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ works upon the heart and mind as an educator. The continued influence of his Spirit upon the soul, trains and molds and fashions the character after the divine model. Let the youth bear in mind that a repetition of acts, forms habit, and habit, character (*The Youth’s Instructor*, September 7, 1893).

It matters what we do. And it matters that we give to others. We have strengthened our tendencies to selfishness. In giving to others in need, we counteract our selfish tendency to build bigger barns and keep more stuff for ourselves. If we would develop Christian characters, we need to be engaged in activities that are right for Christians. We are always forming character; the process never ceases. Heaven calls us to be actively following Jesus. We are to cooperate with the Carpenter.

Not Corrupt Communication But That Which Builds Up

Our third item is seen at verse 29:

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

How do you prevent a corrupt communication from leaving your mouth? By God's grace, you refuse to own it; you reject; you exercise self-control. In verse 29 Paul is addressing believer-toward-believer behavior. This call is for that which edifies, builds up. We are not to communicate with each other in language that is corrupt. The original here means language that is worn out, that is of no further use because it is old.

For the Christian, all of our language from before we gave our hearts to Jesus is old. We no longer have the same interests or thoughts as before. God sets up His church on earth because we need each other. We minister to one another. Every one of us is called by our God to minister grace to our hearers in the church.

This leads to several points:

1. I need to be a hearer. Some are not used to listening to others. They plow their own road and aren't interested in anyone else's suggestions. It's not just "don't bother me with

the facts,” but, “don’t bother me.” And yet, we are part of God’s church because we want Him to “bother” us. God speaks to us through nature, through inspired writings, pastors and deaconesses, and yes, brothers and sisters. We do not have perfect self-understanding. We fail to recognize defects in our own behavior. And so we need others to help us along—gently—on the way to the kingdom. A church full of members who cannot hear is nothing more than a gathering for war.

2. I need to be a speaker. God wants us to help each other grow. But the necessity in this is that we first remove the log from our own eye before we consult with a brother about the dust speck in his. Before I correct another, my own issues need to be addressed, or I have no positive power of persuasion. To try to address a small matter, while leaving an obvious unchristian behavior in myself unaddressed, influences, but with negative persuasive power. It serves as a power against the correction one is seeking to make.

3. God wants to use me to build up my fellow church members in the faith. Not just a pastor or conference president or camp-meeting speaker and not just a sermon, a worship talk, or a book, are healing. Every member is intended by God to speak in a new way, a healing way, with each other. If a church has 170 members, each one should be God’s agent. We need to be converted, before we can expect that God will give us success in reaching others with His end-time message about Jesus.

4. These are new communications, edifying, positive, helpful, constructive. If we gather together as converted persons today studying, hearing from God, fellowshiping after the message, what kind of people will we be? What effect do we expect this would have on Seventh-day Adventist witness in Northern Idaho?

Remember, we are replacing corrupt with edifying communication, unconverted communication with converted, old with new, that which does not build up, does not minister grace, with that which does.

Three Behaviors for End-Time People

Consider now, the three behaviors at the center of this message. The church is the scene where God gives gifts. The gifts are to build up God's people to Christian maturity in the end-time. They are to protect us against false teachings that will gain prominence in the last days and seek endorsement among God's people.

But we need more than the gifts; we are members one of another. We need to make the changes we see in Ephesians four.

In putting away lying, all that is not as it seems, and each instead speaking truth to our neighbor, we present living examples of Christianity to the world. The Holy Spirit working in us (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27) draws to Christ and His present intercession for us in the heavenly sanctuary. We witness to the truth of God, the work of Christ. We become people with persuasive power for the kingdom. The second behavior—rather than stealing, engaging in practical labor and with enough left over to help the crucial needs of others—also reshapes our character. It is cooperating with God so that the developed weeds of selfishness are removed from us. And the third—replacing corrupt communication in the church, tearing down, judging, gossiping, with edifying talk that actually serves others and builds them up spiritually—begins to heal the church, repair relationships, and make this a house of prayer and help for all people. This sanctuary is to be where we gather and grow.

Conclusion

There is much more in Ephesians chapter four. Today, three biblical behaviors will change us. The work Heaven wants to do through Bonners Ferry Seventh-day Adventist church is vital. The doors of this congregation were opened so that followers of God would be ready to live and give Jesus' Third Angel's Message. Doubtless, there have been high and low points along the way. Today is a new day. Present Truth has not changed. God's Holy Spirit awaits our reception. Our best argument is our great need.

God is not through with me or with you. We are members one of another. Will you help me to become more like Jesus?

I believe that God has heard our plea, and will purify the hearts of His children.

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.