

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY SIXTEEN

Steps That Lead to Freedom

Ephesians 4:25–32

How hard it is to break old habits. But Christ paid the price for you. The strings to your old life have been cut. You have the wings to fly; you have a new nature with which to fly. Now, go!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THERE once was a man selling quail in a bazaar in India. He attached strings to a stake and tied the other ends to little bands on the birds' legs so they could only walk in circles. A stranger felt sorry for the quail, so he bought the entire covey and set them free. Cut loose, the quail flew away about twenty yards to a patch of dirt where they landed and began walking in circles again!

These habit-loving quail illustrate how hard it can be to break free from our old ways. Like the compassionate stranger, God “purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son” (Ephesians 1:7). He cut the strings that bound us to sin and set us free to fly on the currents of His will, doing all “the good things he planned for us long ago” (2:10). However, old habits can keep us walking in circles!

What must we do to live in the full measure of freedom God has given to us? As we saw in the previous study, we need to put off the old self and put on the new. In this study, we'll examine examples of sins that God intends for us to shed so that our new life can take flight. Paul lists five traits of those who spread their wings and let their new nature soar. Let's take a closer look!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may already enjoy the freedom from an old habit through the power of the Holy Spirit. If so, in the space below, give thanks for your liberty using [Psalm 28:7](#) as your prayer guide.

Paul's list of traits in Ephesians 4:25–32 may reveal an area in which you are seeking freedom. Use [Psalm 118:5](#) as a prompt for prayer as you prepare your heart to embrace the freedom God intends for you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul often waved the flag of liberty in his epistles and called us to follow him into a new life. To the Galatian believers, Paul proclaimed:


It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1 NASB)

With Paul's hopeful freedom call sounding in your ears, read [Ephesians 4:25–32](#). Notice how all his commands concern relationships. Holiness happens in the real world where we rub shoulders with people in our family, church, workplace, and community. Imagine an entire society in which people followed Paul's commands—what freedom and goodwill would fill the world!



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 **Observation: Traits of Those Who Live Free**

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we pull out our detective’s magnifying glass and look for the smallest details in the text.¹ Sometimes a pattern emerges. In this passage, Paul balances negative commands with positive ones, and he provides a principle on which the commands are based. Christian morality is always tied to a spiritual principle.

In the following chart, list the negative commands, the positive commands (if there are any), and the principle in the verses. We’ve filled in the first one as an example.

Scripture	Negative Command	Positive Command	Principle
Ephesians 4:25	“Stop telling lies.”	“Let us tell our neighbors the truth.”	“For we are all parts of the same body.”
4:26–27			
4:28			
4:29–30			
4:31–32			



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Reflect a little longer on Ephesians 4:25–32 and use the following space to record any other observations you find. Do you see any common threads linking the behaviors Paul tells us to lay aside? Any points of comparison between Paul’s positive commands? Can you identify a truth that is the foundation for all the principles?

Remember, as a Christian you’re not a victim. You can keep from lying by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your anger does not have to get out of control. That’s the old life. You’re supposed to fly free from such things, and you can! —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Deciphering the Meaning

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand the meaning of parts of the passage that may not be immediately clear. Consult your Bible study resources as we focus on interpreting Paul’s teaching on anger in Ephesians 4:26–27.

“Be Angry, and Yet Do Not Sin”—Ephesians 4:26 NASB

Paul allows anger and even commands it in certain circumstances. The Greek word Paul uses is, *orgē*, which is “an abiding and settled habit of the mind that is aroused under certain conditions.”²² Evils such as abuse, violence, or mistreatment *should* arouse anger in us, filling our sails with a passionate zeal to defend the helpless or stand up for God’s standards. Our Lord was rightly indignant over money changers extorting worshipers at the temple (Matthew 21:12–13).



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However, Paul put a necessary restraint on *orgē*: “yet do not sin.” What characterizes anger that slips into sin? Consult your resources or the online resource, *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, to find examples throughout Scripture of ungodly anger and its devastating consequences.

To guard our anger from veering out of control into sin and hurting someone, Paul adds another “don’t” command.

“Don’t Let the Sun Go down While You Are Still Angry”—Ephesians 4:26

In this command, Paul used another Greek word, *parorgismos*, which “refers to anger that is accompanied by irritation, exasperation, embitterment.”³ Scripture always forbids this resentful type of anger because it poisons relationships and sours the soul.

What does Paul’s figurative language about not letting “the sun go down on your anger” mean (Ephesians 4:26 NASB)? Use your Bible resources to find possible answers. For an online resource, consult *William Barclay’s commentary on Ephesians* at studylight.org.

“Do Not Give the Devil an Opportunity”—Ephesians 4:27

Angry brooding over unresolved offenses opens the door to our enemy the devil. “He loves to lurk round angry people,” observes commentator John Stott, “hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship.”⁴



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Formulate Paul’s teaching on anger into a timeless principle that is true for all people. Write it in the space below and share it with someone.

If you have a problem with someone, connect with him or her and deal with it. Don’t act like it will go away. It won’t. Don’t let it get out of control. Don’t let it fester. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Better Way

How do we resolve an offense before it festers into sinful anger? Paul laid out a plan in *Romans 12:17–21*. What did Paul instruct his Roman readers to do when someone treated them wrongly? Write down Paul’s positive commands in these verses as your checklist for handling offenses.

The next time someone offends you, try following Paul’s steps and, having done all you can to mend the relationship, leave the results in God’s hands.

*I do everything that’s possible to make peace. And still I have not made peace with some people because they don’t want peace. They want to fight. But I don’t keep fighting with an individual. I don’t take revenge. Instead, I pray, “Lord, my heart is right. I’ve done all I can do. I’m willing to confess whatever wrong I’ve done. Lord, You take over.”
—Chuck Swindoll*



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Application: Be Kind, Tenderhearted, and Forgiving

What characterized our old life? Lies and deception, uncontrolled anger and resentment, taking what wasn't ours, foul and abusive language, and bitterness. We kept walking in circles and couldn't break these relationship-killing habits.

To continue in these ways would “bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30), who empowers us to live free. What characterizes our new freedom? Review the list from earlier in our study and, in the space below, summarize the positive traits that can be yours in your new life in Christ.

Paul's final commands in Ephesians 4:32 capsule his counsel: “be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” There's no greater antidote to anger and all the poisonous vices on Paul's list than forgiveness—receiving it from God and giving it to others.

Has God revealed to you an area of bondage in which you are seeking God for release? Write down the issue as well as some steps you can take this week that lead to freedom.



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When we walk in freedom—loving as Christ loved, caring as Christ cared, and forgiving as Christ forgave—we reflect His light in this dark world. We honor the One who secures for us a beautiful future with God, and we soar on the wings of His good plan for us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, everything within me yearns to move in the direction of freedom. I don't have to walk in defeat, pacing around in circles of the same old sins. You've cut the string. You've set me free. Right now, give me power to guard my lips, respond kindly, forgive an offense, and let Your love for me flow through me to others. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 113.
3. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, 113.
4. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 187.

