



Shelby Christian Church

WE OVER ME: FOR YOU NOT AGAINST YOU JAMES 1:19-20, EPHESIANS 4:20-32
3/1/2026

MAIN POINT

Criticizing tears each other down and robs us of our joy. In Christ, God calls us to build each other up.

INTRODUCTION

What is one behavior or situation that really gets under your skin?

Everyone experiences anger at times. When it surfaces, do you tend to react outwardly, or do you bottle it up and let it simmer beneath the surface?

All of us encounter triggers that provoke anger, whether we want to admit it or not. It might be frustration on the road, annoyance when people talk during a movie, or something far more serious and personal. No matter the trigger, Scripture makes it clear that unchecked anger is sinful—except for righteous anger that seeks to honor God's holiness, as Jesus demonstrated in the temple.

People typically respond to anger in one of two ways: they either express it quickly and openly, or they suppress it until it eventually boils over. Whichever pattern we follow, anger is a common and powerful challenge we all face. Thankfully, God's Word offers clear and gracious instruction on how believers can respond to anger in a way that honors Him and leads to spiritual growth.

UNDERSTANDING

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:19-20.

What does it look like in everyday life to be quick to listen and slow to anger? Is this something you personally find challenging?

What practical steps can we take to become better listeners? What boundaries or safeguards can we put in place to help us respond more slowly and thoughtfully when we feel anger rising?

How does choosing forgiveness and exercising self-control lead us toward righteous living? In what ways does this reflect the character of Jesus and point others to Him?

Read James 1:25. What promise or outcome is given to those who diligently live according to God's law?

James urges believers to be slow to anger because anger often flares up quickly and, when left unchecked, leads us into sin. This kind of human anger does not move us closer to God's righteousness but pulls us away from it. James reminds us that even when anger feels justified, it

lacks the power to truly change a heart. Lasting transformation comes only through the saving work of Jesus, who frees us from the anger that seeks to control us.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:20-24

What contrast does Paul make between the “old self” and the “new self” in this passage?

According to verses 22–24, what does it mean to “put off” the old self and “put on” the new self?

How does Paul describe the source of the new self? What role does truth play in this transformation?

What are some patterns, attitudes, or behaviors that reflect the “old self” we are called to put off?

What does being “renewed in the spirit of your minds” look like in everyday life?

Where do you most clearly see the tension between your old ways and the new life God is calling you into?

In Ephesians 4, Paul turns from theology to application. After describing the spiritual condition of those who live apart from God (4:17–19), he reminds believers that life in Christ demands a fundamentally different way of living. Verses 20–24 form the theological foundation for Christian transformation.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:25-28

What commands are given in each of these verses (25–28)? Why do you think Paul gives such specific instructions?

Why do you think honesty is so crucial for healthy Christian community?

How does Paul connect our behavior (speech, anger, work) to our identity as members of one body (v. 25)?

What does Paul mean by “be angry and do not sin”? How can anger become sinful if it is not dealt with properly?

When you become angry, how do you usually respond—externally, internally, or by avoiding it altogether?

How does holding onto anger give “the devil an opportunity” (v. 27)?

Ephesians 4:25–28 flows directly from Paul’s call to “put on the new self” (4:24). Having established that believers have a new identity in Christ, Paul now gives specific examples of what new-life living looks like in everyday relationships. Each command follows a pattern: put off sinful behavior, put on godly behavior, and understand the Christ-centered reason behind the change.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:29-32

What types of speech does Paul forbid in verse 29? What kinds of speech does he encourage instead?

How do your words most often affect others—do they build them up or tear them down? How does Paul connect our words with the spiritual growth of others?

In verse 30, what does it mean to “grieve the Holy Spirit”? Why do you think this warning is included here?

Which of the attitudes listed in verse 31 (bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice) do you personally struggle with the most—and what are we called to put on??

Why is forgiveness often harder than anger or resentment? What makes it difficult to practice?

Ephesians 4:29–32 continues Paul’s practical application of the “new self” introduced in 4:24. Having addressed truthfulness, anger, and work, Paul now turns to speech, attitudes, and relationships, showing how inner transformation must express itself through words and actions. These verses emphasize that Christian holiness is deeply relational and Spirit-centered.

APPLICATION

What practical steps help you actively “put on” the new self rather than simply avoiding the old one?

How can Scripture, prayer, and Christian community help renew our minds?

What is one specific area where God may be inviting you to live more fully in righteousness and holiness this week?

What does it look like in practical terms to “not let the sun go down on your anger” in today’s context?

Ephesians 4:28 contrasts stealing with honest work and generosity. What does this shift teach us about true repentance?

How can our work—whether paid or unpaid—become a way to bless others rather than serve only ourselves?

What does it look like in everyday life to speak words that “give grace to those who hear”?

How can we become more aware of the Holy Spirit’s work before we speak or respond in difficult moments?

What is one relational situation where God may be calling you to respond with kindness or forgiveness this week?

PRAYER

COMMENTARY

James 1:19-20

Verse 19 —James opens with strong emphasis: “Know this.” He is calling attention to a foundational principle of Christian maturity. Addressing them as “my beloved brothers,” James speaks with pastoral care while issuing a firm exhortation.

The three commands form a deliberate sequence:

Quick to hear – This involves more than listening politely; it refers to a posture of humility and receptivity, especially toward God’s Word and toward others. True wisdom begins with attentiveness.

Slow to speak – James echoes wisdom literature (cf. Proverbs), reminding believers that careless words can cause great harm. Thoughtful restraint reflects self-control and spiritual maturity.

Slow to anger – Anger often arises when we speak before listening. James does not deny that anger can occur, but he insists it must be restrained and examined.

Together, these commands promote a teachable spirit, a defining characteristic of genuine faith. James now explains why believers must be slow to anger. Human anger—rooted in pride, impatience, or self-interest—cannot bring about the righteousness God desires. While Scripture recognizes the existence of righteous anger (cf. God’s own anger against sin), James focuses here on human anger, which is typically impulsive and self-centered.

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This kind of anger: Distorts judgment, Damages relationships, and Often leads to sin rather than holiness.

Rather than advancing God’s purposes, uncontrolled anger hinders spiritual growth and undermines the witness of the believer. True righteousness is produced not through emotional outbursts or harsh reactions, but through obedience, humility, and transformed character shaped by God’s Word.

Ephesians 4

Verse 20 – “But that is not the way you learned Christ!” - Paul draws a sharp contrast between the believers’ former way of life and the new life they have received in Christ. To “learn Christ” goes beyond acquiring information; it is relational and transformative. Paul’s wording is intentional—he does not say they learned about Christ, but that they learned Christ Himself. This highlights that following Jesus is rooted in personal discipleship and spiritual formation, not merely the adoption of moral principles.

Verse 21 – “Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.” - Here Paul appeals to the Ephesian believers’ shared experience of hearing the gospel and being instructed within the sphere of Christ’s life and lordship. The phrase “the truth is in Jesus” emphasizes that truth is not simply a set of doctrines but is embodied in a person. Christian living and ethics, therefore, flow directly from the character, life, and teaching of Jesus Himself.

Verse 22 – “To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires” - Paul describes the “old self” as the person we were before Christ—shaped

by sinful habits, distorted desires, and a way of life separated from God. The language “put off” reflects the imagery of removing old clothing, emphasizing both intentionality and decisiveness. This old identity is described as “corrupt,” meaning it is progressively decaying, driven by desires that promise satisfaction but ultimately deceive. Sin distorts what we want and leads us further from God’s design for human flourishing.

Verse 23 – This transformation begins internally, within the mind. Paul describes an ongoing process of renewal rather than a one-time event. The “spirit of the mind” refers to one’s inner orientation—how a person thinks, perceives, and responds to the world. As believers continually submit their thoughts to Christ through Scripture, prayer, and obedience, the Holy Spirit reshapes their desires and perspectives. This continual renewal produces lasting change, aligning the heart and mind with God’s truth.

Verse 24 – “And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Just as believers are called to put off the old self, they are also commanded to put on the new self. This new identity is not self-produced but created by God, echoing the language of creation found in Genesis. Through Christ, believers are being restored into the image of God, reflecting His character in “true righteousness and holiness.” These qualities are not mere external behaviors but the outward expression of an inward transformation rooted in union with Christ.

Verse 25 – “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” - Paul begins with honesty because truthfulness is foundational to Christian community. To “put away falsehood” is another clothing metaphor—lying and deception belong to the old self and must be removed. However, Paul does not stop at avoiding lies; he commands believers to actively speak truth.

The reason given is deeply theological: “for we are members one of another.” In Christ, believers are part of one body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). Lies damage the body from the inside, just as deception harms trust in any relationship. Truth is not merely a moral obligation; it is essential for unity, health, and mutual dependence in the church.

Verse 26 – “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” - This verse acknowledges that anger itself is not always sinful. Paul quotes Psalm 4:4, implying that there is such a thing as righteous anger—anger that responds to injustice or sin in a God-honoring way. However, because anger is dangerous, it must be carefully controlled.

Paul warns believers not to let anger linger. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” emphasizes urgency: unresolved anger easily turns into bitterness, resentment, or revenge. Even justified anger becomes sinful when it is nursed, rehearsed, or allowed to harden the heart.

Verse 27 – “And give no opportunity to the devil.” - Here Paul explains why unchecked anger is so serious. Prolonged anger creates a foothold—literally “a place” or “opening”—for the devil to work within a believer’s life and within the church. Satan often exploits anger to divide relationships, distort truth, and hinder spiritual growth.

This verse reveals that everyday relational sins are not merely personal struggles; they are spiritual battlegrounds. Dealing quickly and humbly with anger is an act of spiritual resistance and obedience to Christ.

Verse 28 – “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.”

Paul now addresses behavior related to work and possessions. Again, the pattern is clear: Put off stealing, Put on honest labor, and Move toward generosity

True repentance is not just stopping sinful behavior; it is replacing it with righteous action. The former thief is not merely to earn a living but to become a giver. This radical transformation reflects the gospel itself—Christ not only forgives our sin but reshapes our hearts toward love and generosity.

Paul’s vision of work is also significant: labor is not merely for self-sufficiency but for serving others. Honest work becomes a means of participating in God’s care for those in need.

Verse 29 — Paul prohibits “corrupting” speech—language that rots, harms, or tears down. This includes not only profanity but also gossip, sarcasm, slander, harsh criticism, and careless words that wound others. The focus is not simply on avoiding bad language but on intentional, redemptive speech.

Christian speech is meant to: Build up rather than tear down, Fit the occasion, showing wisdom and discernment and Give grace to the hearer.

Words, in Paul’s view, are powerful tools of discipleship. Speech shaped by the gospel becomes a channel through which God’s grace is experienced by others.

Verse 30 — “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” - This is one of the New Testament’s clearest affirmations of the personal nature of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit can be grieved—deeply distressed—by attitudes and behaviors that contradict God’s character. Paul reminds believers that the Spirit has sealed them, marking them as God’s own and securing them for final salvation. This sealing Spirit, but they can live in ways that disrupt fellowship with Him.

Sin, especially relational sin like harmful speech and bitterness, damages our intimacy with the Spirit and hinders spiritual growth.

Verse 31 — “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” - Paul lists a progression of destructive attitudes: Bitterness – a settled resentment, Wrath and anger – explosive and ongoing hostility, Clamor – loud, quarrelsome behavior, Slander – speech that damages reputation, and Malice – ill will or a desire to harm

These attitudes poison both individuals and communities. Paul’s command to “put away” echoes the imagery of discarding old garments, reminding believers that such behaviors no longer fit their new identity in Christ.

Verse 32 — The negative list of verse 31 is replaced with positive virtues: Kindness – active goodwill toward others, Tenderheartedness – compassion rooted in empathy, Forgiveness – releasing others from indebtedness and resentment. Forgiveness is grounded in the gospel itself. Believers forgive not because others deserve it, but because they themselves have been forgiven by God through Christ. Paul presents Christ’s forgiveness not merely as an example, but as the source and motivation for Christian mercy.

This verse reveals the heart of Christian ethics: transformed relationships that reflect God's grace.