

# BaptistWay Bible Series for October 12: Follow the directions

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We all have been there. It may have been when assembling a toy or a swing set for our child. We may have been using a new computer or new computer programs. We think to ourselves, “I have done this—or something like this—before. I can do it now. Reading and following directions will slow me down. Who needs the instructions?”

The result? Well, we each have our own embarrassing story to tell.

In our passage, Paul gives us some directions to follow if we want to live differently than those who are separated from God (vv. 17-18). They also are instructions if we are to be “imitators of God” (5:1). Paul’s point to the Ephesian Christians was that their lives should look different than the lives of the lost around them. The same goes for us.

What are those directions? We might expect a checklist of things we do not do or things we do not think others should do. (The list might be somewhat like the old joke: “Baptists are people that do not drink, smoke, or dance ... in front of each other.”)

The directions God, through Paul, gives us in Ephesians 4 and 5 has more to do with our speech and our attitudes. We must admit that to control what we think and say are much more difficult to control than what we do. Perhaps that is why Jesus spoke in terms of being born again (John 3). Paul puts it this way in verses 23-24: “to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The new attitude and self to which he refers in verses 23-24 will show in the way we think about and speak to others. In verse 25, Paul tells us to speak “truthfully.” This obviously means we should tell the truth. However, it also means we should speak to others in a way that truly reveals who and whose we are. Notice that to do so is obedient to the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16). It also is the way God speaks to us—honestly and out of God’s character and nature.

Likewise, in verses 26-27, we are told to handle our anger correctly. This does not tell us to not be angry. Anger is simply being extremely dissatisfied with a situation. There are many ways we mishandle anger: holding a grudge rather than addressing the person with whom we differ, doing harm to ourselves or to another, or just “stewing” in our feelings rather than doing something constructive to resolve the situation.

Handling our anger this way simply gives “the devil a foothold” (v. 27). James 1:14-15 clearly describes the process: “but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” For us to live and act this way is neither healthy nor reflective of a changed life.

Even God gets angry. But God deals with it and us in ways that reflect what and who he is: holy and just, but also loving and gracious. Think about it: God was/is so angry with our sin that God came as his Son, Jesus, to die for us. Now, that is anger! And grace. And love.

Verses 28-29 call us to use three very special resources—our time, energy, and speech—wisely. The temptation (especially in our anger) is to use these solely for our own good. A changed nature will result in a changed perspective on these gifts. For example, often we so focus on the work ethic called for in verse 28 that we overlook the intended purpose of our work: to “have something to share with those in need.” Likewise, in our

speech, we can so stress not using vulgarity that we forget to use our speech positively and in ways that are helpful and edifying for others.

Again, compare the way we so often use our resources with how God works and acts. Yes, God holds us accountable and corrects us. However, God always does this in ways that show his love. God always acts in ways intended to ultimately help us grow.

Paul summarizes these directions in verses 30-32 and most succinctly in verse 32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” This is how we can “Be imitators of God” (5:1).

Long before Paul, God summarized his directions for us: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). God has shown us directions for living through the Bible, God’s written word. God demonstrated the living of these directions through Jesus, God’s Living Word.

Saved only by God’s grace through faith, we fail to follow these directions at our peril—and that of those around us.

### **Questions to explore**

- *How does living a more Christ like way build others up rather than tear them down?*
- How can you deal with your anger or others in a way that truly reflects how God deals with you?