

Putting on the New Self in the Digital Age

In **Ephesians 4:20-24**, Paul explained that we Christians should put off the old self and put on the new self that is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (ESV). Then in **Ephesians 4:25-32**, he gave some illustrations of these changes.

We know what this passage says. We are working on it in many aspects of our lives. There is one aspect of modern life, however, in which this work is often overlooked—the Internet. The faceless nature of the Internet and e-mail often allows us to sin without even realizing it. Certainly, we are careful with the biggies—no pornography, no gambling, no stalking. But what about some of the sins mentioned in **Ephesians 4:25-32**?

We are to speak the truth. Did we check to make sure that e-mail we are forwarding actually tells the truth? I am often shocked at the number of Christians who forward an e-mail to me with the disclaimer: “I don’t know if this is true, but it sure makes you think.” Sadly, forwarding false e-mails simply gives atheists and skeptics fuel for their accusations that we are gullible people who won’t do our homework. Lying by forwarding an e-mail is still lying.

We aren’t supposed to sin when we’re angry. That means even though we are angry we don’t dwell in bitterness, have outbursts of wrath, clamor, slander, or gossip. We definitely don’t pursue malice. Because we can’t see who we’re talking to when we e-mail, blog, or comment, we often talk in ways we would never speak face to face (of course, if you would speak that way face to face, that doesn’t make it right, that just means you are sinning face to face as well as on the Internet). When we write on the Internet, even if we are having highly emotional discussions, we must still write with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness no matter how anyone else has written to us. I know this one is tough; I violate it all the time and Marita calls me down on it.

We aren’t supposed to steal. Did we download someone’s song from a website or simply copy it from a cd someone else purchased and then put it on our mp3 player without paying for it? Some musicians allow it, but for the most part that is illegal. It is theft.

We must let no corrupt word come out of our mouth, but only that which will build up. When we are e-mailing, blogging, commenting, facebooking, or pleonasting are we saying things that build up? Or are we just displaying our own arrogance, mocking others, belittling them, tearing them down? Certainly, we can educate people even about things where we disagree, but is our goal really to help people grow or is it to vent our spleen and take down anyone who gets in our way? Sadly, I’ve been in the midst of “Bible studies” online that were the least edifying discussions I had ever seen. Even more sadly, I know times where I crossed the line on this. It is just easy to violate these principles online and not even realize it.

We are to remove clamor, slander, and malice. Clamor simply means to make a lot of noise, an outcry. Sadly, far too many are blogging, facebooking, twittering with nothing in mind but to raise their own outcry of clamor about one topic or another. Sadly, many gossip and slander by forwarding e-mails (especially political ones) that aren’t based in truth and are specifically designed to make us think ill of the subjects in the e-mails. Sadly, many people pursue malice by working hard to sharpen their wit in order to hurt, belittle, and mock others online. They think they are being funny or just making a point. They are sinning. It is so easy to do. But instead, even online, we are to speak with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.

The digital age provides many blessings. But it has also provided many opportunities to turn from the Lord. Remember what Paul said, “That is not the way you learned Christ!” Let’s act like Jesus even when we’re online.