

Quotes from the Fathers

For January 30, 2008

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

Compiled by Jim Anderson

Ephesians 4:25a

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

Since we have been “created in truth and righteousness” and reborn in baptism, in order to remain in it we are instructed to put away lying altogether. Hold fast to the truth. Do not cheat your brother in any way. Being members of one body, support one another’s causes in turn. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.25)

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430):

It is written, “The mouth that lies destroys the soul” . . . Therefore the apostle puts truth telling in the first place when he commands us to put off the old “nature,” under which name all sins are understood, saying “therefore, putting off lying speak the truth.” (On Lying 6)

Let no one mistake this. The apostle is not giving us room to tell a lie to those who are not yet members of Christ with us. The point of the saying is that each of us should consider everyone as we wish him to become, even if he has not become so. . . . We ought to deal with a person in such a way that he will cease to be an outsider. Regard him as your neighbor already, rather than an outsider. It may be that, rather than as an outsider. It may be that, because of the fact that he is not yet a partaker of our faith and sacraments, certain truths must be concealed from him. But that is no reason for telling him falsehoods. (On Lying 15)

Ephesians 4:25b

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

To be members of one another points to a great mystery. He is speaking of those who are very close to us in faith. For people are not generally considered “members one of another.” But the faithful indeed are members of the faithful. Christians are members of the body of Christ. We are members with the saints who embody purity of heart and consummate goodness . . . Hence we are being instructed to speak intimately of the truth of this mystery with the neighbor - to speak of the fullness of God’s truth. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.25)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

It would be extremely perverse, since we belong intimately to one another, to say things that are not true. For this is not the way the body functions. The eyes, for example, when they see cliffs and steep caverns, instantly report then to the feet so that they may turn aside and protect the whole body from harm. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.25)

Ephesians 4:26a**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

Note Paul's persistent wisdom. He speaks first to prevent our sinning. If we do not listen, he does not abandon us. His role as a spiritual father does not allow him to give up on us easily. It is like the doctor who tells the sick person what he must do. If the patient refuses to hear him, he does not write him off. Rather he continues to care for him by giving him further persuasive counsel. So too does Paul. He has already said, "Do not lie." But suppose anger should arise from lying. He then deals with this. What does he say? "Be angry and do not sin." It is better not to grow angry at all. But if one ever does fall into anger he should at least not be carried away by it toward something worse. (Homily on Ephesians 14.4.25-27)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

This is taken from the fourth psalm (Psalm 4:4), as I am sure no one doubts. It may seem contrary to what is said of anger elsewhere, that we must put away all anger (Colossians 3:8). . . . It is an oversimplified interpretation that does harm, especially when people imagine that the constraints against anger are being here relaxed. It is not only among us but among philosophers too that anger is spoken of in a double sense. Anger emerges first when we are understandably aroused by a natural stimulus after being wounded by an injury. Or it arises when, after the impulse has abated and our rage has been restrained, the mind is capable of judgment but nonetheless we find ourselves desiring vengeance upon the one who is thought to have inflicted the wound. In this Paul is speaking of the first kind of anger. He is allowing to us as vulnerable humans that in the face of some undeserved event we may be moved to some level of annoyance, as if a light breeze were disturbing the serenity of the mind. But on no account are we to be carried into swelling rapids by the impulse of rage. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.26)

Ephesians 4:26b**St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):**

Do you wish to have your fill of anger? One hour, or two or three is enough for you. But do not let the sun go down and leave you both as enemies. It was God's goodness that did not leave us in anger. He did not let us part in enmity. He shed his light upon those of us who were sinners. So when evening is coming on, be reconciled. Quell the evil impulses while they are fresh. For if night overtakes you, the next day will not be enough time to extinguish the further evil which has been increasing overnight. (Homily on Ephesians 14.4.25-27)

Ephesians 4:27

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

He is showing us how an opportunity is being given to the devil by these acts and desires. Once he has entered our body, he takes full possession of us. Or if he cannot take full possession, he at least pollutes the soul, having stuck his flaming darts into us unawares. At times these pierce us with a wound that goes down very deep. At other times we are merely temporarily inflamed. But it is indeed seldom that these burning darts are easily extinguished. They find their place to wound. (On First Principles 3.2.4)

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

The devil can do nothing to us unless we ourselves willingly allow him to do so. This is true in all our acts. Thus we are masters of our own will; otherwise we would deserve no good return for our good acts and no punishments for our bad acts. The devil's opportunity arises from our own vice. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.27)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

An angry mind will necessarily think evil thoughts, as the devil desires. If the devil finds a mind ready for evil and slipping toward it, he deceives the person who was created for life. The thought, you see, is human. But the devil completes it. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.27)

Ephesians 4:28a

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Sin does not consist in simply committing sin but in persisting in it. If so, there is always a place for repentance. There is a place for correction. So the apostle says: "let the one who has stolen not steal again." This should be applied not only to stealing but also to all sin. Anyone who has sinned in any way is now called not to sin again. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.28)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Those who live in the midst of this life's intense business appear to be forced, for the sake of food and necessary provisions, to buy and sell certain things and to seek unfair profit from business. It is difficult even for those who have been set free from the other passions – namely fornication, idolatry, adultery and murder – to escape being caught by this subtle vice. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.28)

Ephesians 4:28b

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

Idleness is a major source of sin. So it is reasonable for Paul to set honest work over against it. The text contrasts theft, which is an evil work, with honest labor, which is a good work. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.28)

Ephesians 4:28c**Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):**

Paul exhorts them not to return to their past vices and sins. He wants them to behave as new persons. What good is it to be called new if our evil deeds prove us to be still gripped by our old nature? The Christian is commanded not merely to avoid stealing but more so to care actively for the poor through his own hard work. Hence by commitment to good works he may restore what he formerly stole. We are not to be praised for refusing to steal. What makes one praiseworthy is to give of one's own to the needy. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.28)