

**Study Notes: Ephesians 4:17-32**  
**November 20, 2022: “It’s Time for a Change!”**  
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***So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.***

- In the verses that precede these, Paul spoke about the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. He wrote that the body was built up in love as each part or person works together to accomplish this goal. In light of these statements, Paul offered practical advice on what living a worthy life looks like.
- This section begins with Paul insisting on Christians living a different life than those around them. The Pillar New Testament Commentary explains the force of Paul’s statement, “The language shows that Paul’s admonition is both important and urgent, and that it comes with divine authority: I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord. The first verb, ‘I say, tell’, is strengthened by means of the second, ‘I affirm, declare’ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12), which stresses its solemnity and significance, while the additional in the Lord points to the source of its authority.”
- Paul described the Gentile’s way of life, who did not know Christ, with the phrase “futility of their thinking.” The Greek word translated as “futility” is *mataiotēs* and means “to be devoid of truth, depraved, and full of vanity.”
- Paul explained that this condition was a result of the Gentiles hardening their hearts and losing sensitivity towards what was right and what was wrong. The Pillar New Testament Commentary states, “Here it [lost all sensitivity] means to ‘lose the capacity to feel shame or embarrassment’, while the perfect tense describes a state of affairs that led to (or else accompanied) the loss of all self-control.”
- As a result of these things, they had given themselves to every kind of sin, and were always looking for more sinful pleasures.
- Much of what Paul said in these verses is echoed in Romans 1:18-25, which further described the process of how the minds of those who do not Christ become corrupted and lead to all kinds of sinful behaviors. The Pillar New Testament Commentary explains, “Because it lacks a true relationship with God, Gentile thinking suffers from the consequences of having lost touch with reality and is left fumbling with inane trivialities and worthless side issues. Romans 1, which is parallel to Ephesians 4 in its development of the human plight, states that the ungodly who have not recognized or honored God ‘became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened’ (NRSV).”

***That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 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.***

- In contrast to those around them, Christians have learned a different way of life. Though we all once lived as the Gentiles did (see Ephesians 2:1-3), we have been taught a new way of life. Paul used the metaphor of changing dirty clothes to describe what a Christian must do. We must take off the old self, which is corrupted by sin and unholy desires and put on a new self that is led by the spirit towards righteousness and holiness.

- This change takes place through the renewing of one’s mind and putting on a new self.
  - Renewing of one’s mind: This is not accomplished by human effort, but by the work of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us to have the mind of Christ rather than the mind of the flesh. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states, “The present tense of the infinitive suggests the ongoing nature of this action: they must continually allow God to renew them...In effect, for renewal to transpire, believers must allow God to transform their ways of thinking in the innermost recesses of who they are (cf. Ro 12:2: ‘Be transformed by the renewing of your mind’).”
  - Putting on a new self: Paul shifted verb tenses to show that this is a step for believers to take. We must choose to live out the traits of the Christian life, as the Holy Spirit renews our minds. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains, “The gospel shouts that believers are no longer prisoners to what they once were. It also reminds them they must engage in the process of becoming renewed in Christ. In theological terms, sanctification is not automatic but requires believers’ willful participation, as the next sections will make abundantly clear.”

***Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

- After commanding Christians to walk differently from the world, and put on this new self, Paul listed several specific areas in which Christians are to live and act differently from the world.
- The first area Paul addressed were lies and falsehoods. While the world chooses to lie, Christians must choose to speak the truth. This reiterates the truth about the importance of speaking the truth in love that Paul spoke about in Ephesians 4:15. Paul also gave a reason for speaking the truth and that is because we are members of one body, as lies cause division while speaking the truth, on the other hand, builds up the body.
- The next area that Paul addressed was anger. He began by quoting Psalm 4:4, and reminding Christians not to allow anger to lead to sin. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary says, “There may be times when a believer will get angry, whether justifiably or not, but sin can never be condoned. (In fact, v. 31 urges that anger be completely removed.) So if you find yourself in an angry state, do not allow your anger to lead you into sin.” Anger becomes a sin when it is harbored, held, and leads to action. In light of this, Paul reminded Christians not to let anger linger even past the close of a day because it would give the devil a foothold. These words are an allusion to the Lord’s words to Cain in Genesis 4.
- The third area Paul addressed was stealing. Paul suggested that there is no place for people to steal, even if that theft is accomplished by depending on others to get by. Paul promoted a Christian work ethic that looks to the interest of others, and cares for others, rather than simply trying to skirt by and think of oneself.
- The fourth area Paul addressed was unwholesome talk. In contrast to what the Gentiles do, Christians should seek to build others up and benefit those who listen to them by speaking the truth. Paul most likely had in mind here things like gossip and slander, which would cut others down rather than build them up.

***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

- In the midst of specific areas, Paul also wrote that we should not grieve the Holy Spirit. In this context, to grieve the Holy Spirit is to refuse to walk by the Spirit, and choose instead to live in the flesh.
- Paul listed several things that must not find root in the life of a Christian. These are things that typify the life of those apart from Christ: bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. This list is a summary of all the attitudes that lead to sin, but it is not all-inclusive.
  - The command in these verses is to get rid of these things. Quite literally, Paul was calling us to put them to death.
- After listing the behaviors of the old self that we are to put off, Paul then reminded us that we should treat others with kindness and compassion, and always be ready to forgive as we have been forgiven.