

## Ephesians 4:17-32

Paul is continuing his theme of “*living a life worthy of the calling you have received*” (4:1). He emphatically urges the Christians to put off every trace of their past life, as if it were a muddy coat, and to put on the virtues and excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were no longer Gentiles; they were Christians. There should be a corresponding change in their lives.<sup>1</sup> The Gentiles Paul is referring to in this passage are pagan, non-believers, not the Christian Gentiles that belong to the church.

### **Paul urged them not to live as the Gentiles (vv. 17-19)? How does Paul characterize the Gentiles’ lives?**

1. *The futility of their thinking* – their lives were empty, without purpose or worthy aim in life.
2. *Darkened in their understanding* – blind to the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). They live blindfolded in a world of illusion.
3. *Separated from the life of God* – at a great distance because of their choosing. Their ignorant choices lead to hardening of the heart which in turn leads to moral unresponsiveness.
4. *Given themselves over to sensuality* – The cardinal sin of the Gentiles was and is sexual immorality. Sin hasn’t changed much over the centuries. They descended to unparalleled depths of depravity.
5. *Continual lust for more* -- Insatiable in their quest for more of the same sins. They were never satisfied. They never had enough (Romans 1:24-28).

### **Where do we find these “Gentiles” today?**

**Paul contrasts the Ephesian Christians’ lives with the pagans Gentiles’ lives in vv. 20-24. What is the message of (v. 20)?** You did not come to know Christ by living like the Gentiles. Paul is saying that to become a Christian is a matter of coming to know Christ personally.

**In contrast to the Gentiles, who rejected the truth about Christ, how did the Ephesian believers come to know Christ (vv. 20-21)?** The Ephesian believers had heard about Christ, received teaching about Christ, which revealed the truth about Him and enabled them to trust Him as Lord and Savior. Paul describes here their progressive path to salvation – a process that was overseen and directed by the Holy Spirit.

**What were the Ephesian believers taught (v. 22)?** Once they were saved, they were taught that Christians should put aside their “*former*” unsaved way of life. The “*old self*” is the person the Christian was before his or her regeneration with their sinful nature reigning and under the control of Satan.

**How do we put off our old self?** Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we must choose to just say “No.” There must be a break with the past. We put off the old self by replacing it with the new self (v. 24). The Christian life is all about surrender – to the Lordship of Christ.

**How does Paul describe the mental condition of the Ephesian Christians (v. 23)?** They had been “*made new in the attitude of their minds*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). They had done a complete about-face in their thinking. They now think and reason from God’s view point, not from that of unsaved men (1 Corinthians 2:16).

**How can we be made new in the attitude of our minds?** By exercising the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, scripture memory, singing, meditation, etc. Paul describes it in Romans 12:2 as “*the renewing of your mind*.” Our role is to set our minds on the right things (Colossians 3:1-3; Philippians 4:8). This renewing is an ongoing transforming process in the life of the Christian (i.e., progressive sanctification – 2 Corinthians 3:18).

**What is the message of v. 24?** Our responsibility is to “*put on the new self*” -- like putting on a garment. The “*new self*” is the person the Christian is after he/she experiences regeneration (2 Corinthians 5:17). We put on the new person as we pursue the things of Christ rather than the desires of the flesh. The put off/put on process has to be done each day; it is not a one-time deal. It is a spiritual battle with the sinful nature/old self.

**In vv. 25-32, we find seven exhortations to Christians regarding our conduct. What is the first exhortation (v. 25)?** “*Put off falsehood and speak truthfully.*” The new man tells the truth. No deceiving, no half-truths, no embellishing (Colossians 3:9). The motive for doing this is because we are together in this life experience; the Christian belongs to, and must function honestly in, a group—the church.

**What is the second exhortation (v. 26)?** To avoid sinning when angry, and to deal with sin quickly if it does accompany anger (Psalm 4:4). There should be no nursing of grudges, no harboring of resentments, no festering over irritations. Unrighteous anger is a sin and sin mars fellowship with God and/or with our fellow believers; it should be made right immediately both to God and to the victim of our anger by confessing it as sin (1 John 1:9).

**What does “not letting the sun go down on your anger” mean?** Nursing anger.... allowing emotional embers to smolder. To help prevent anger from degenerating into sin, put a strict time limit on it, e.g., sunset. **How does not letting the sun go down while we are still angry “give the devil a foothold” (v. 27)?** Satan’s work is to accuse and divide the family of God and to sow discord. When we harbor anger in our hearts, we do the devil’s work for him. Satan is able to exploit the situation by provoking us into hostility creating a breach of fellowship with both God and our fellow believers.

**What is the third exhortation (v. 28)?** Don’t steal, but work instead so “that he may have something to share with those in need.” This is true Christian charity, the most noble of motives -- alleviating human need. Stealing covers all forms of misappropriation ranging from grand larceny to nonpayment of debts, plagiarism, falsifying expense accounts, etc. This exhortation is a reinforcement of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:15).

**What is the fourth exhortation (v. 29)?** Don’t use your mouth for evil but rather for good. Anything that injures others or causes dissension in the body is “unwholesome.” Christians should use words to build up people rather than to tear them down. Encourage others.... dispense grace (Colossians 4:6). **What are some examples of unwholesome talk?** Suggestive comments, flirting, off color jokes, inappropriate language.

**What is the fifth exhortation (v. 30)?** “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” **Since we can grieve the Holy Spirit, what does that tell us about His nature?** He is a person – not merely an influence. He is an emotional being. He loves us – otherwise our actions would have no effect on Him. Only a person who loves can be grieved.

**What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?** To “grieve” means to make sad or sorrowful; causing emotional pain or distress. **How do we do that?** Through our sins of unholiness, disunity and impurity. We grieve Him by failing or refusing to follow His leading. We grieve the Spirit by living like the pagans (vv. 17-19). **What point does Paul make about the Holy Spirit (v. 30)?** He is the seal that guarantees our preservation until Christ returns for us and our salvation is complete. A seal speaks of ownership and security.

**What is the sixth exhortation (v. 31)?** To get rid of six specific sins which grieve the Holy Spirit:

- Bitterness harbors resentment and keeps a record of wrongs done (1 Corinthians 13:5).
- Rage refers to outbursts of uncontrolled passionate frustration.... temper tantrums.
- Anger is inappropriate noisy assertiveness and abuse. Grouchiness, animosity, hostility.
- Brawling or clamoring describes loud outcries of anger/bickering, shouting down of opponents.
- Slander refers to words that hurt another person.... insulting language, abusive speech.
- Malice is wishing evil on others, spite, meanness. Someone has defined “malice” as “congealed hatred.”

**What is the seventh exhortation (v. 32)?** Paul gives three virtues to adopt. The former six sins are *natural vices*; the following are *supernatural virtues*: We are “kind” when we display an unselfish concern for the welfare of others, and a desire to be helpful even at great personal sacrifice. We are “compassionate” when we display a sympathetic and affectionate interest in others, and a willingness to bear their burden. We are “forgiving” when we let offenses and grievances go, freely and graciously. When we overlook personal wrongs against ourselves and harbor no desire for retaliation.

**What is the forgiveness illustration Paul used (v. 32)?** The greatest example of One who forgives is God Himself. The basis of His forgiveness is the work of Christ at Calvary. And we are the unworthy objects. God could not forgive sin without proper satisfaction being made. In His love He provided the satisfaction which His righteousness demanded. In the work of Christ, God found a righteous basis on which He could forgive us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1937). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 1940