

Ephesians 4:17-32

“New”

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Intro. Following Jesus changes everything. You are a new person in Christ [2Cor. 5:17]. As soon as you receive Jesus, your position with God changes. Yet, in practice it takes time to stop living like unbelievers and start living like followers of Jesus. Today we learn what that looks like, and how to do it.

Subject: In Christ, you are a new person

Object: Live like followers of Jesus

Context: Ch. 4-6 re practice of Christian living. Here the focus is how your personal spiritual growth impacts life in your community of faith and beyond.

A. Stop living like unbelievers [17-22]

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰ But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as truth is in Jesus: ²² that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts

Followers of Jesus are to stop living like unbelievers [17]. The futility of the mind [17] refers to a life without eternal purpose, meaning, direction, or godly satisfaction. Jesus' followers should not live like those who are alienated from, ignorant of God, and who refuse God's revelation [18]. The blindness or hardness of heart [18] is the condition that develops as someone continues to reject God. The more sin dominates the easier it is to ignore God. The symptoms include lewdness or sexual sin, uncleanness or general immorality, and greediness which speaks of a lack of satisfaction and coveting material things to seek satisfaction [19] [See also Rom. 1:18-32].

Start learning from Jesus. Jesus' followers know not to live like unbelievers, because they have heard, learned and been taught differently by Jesus. Jesus is the subject of Christian Living, the teacher, and the One who validates the truth about God [20-21] [Jn. 14:6].

Stop living for the flesh Jesus' followers put off the old man in the sense that you are no longer dominated by the flesh and deceitful lusts [22]. Lust deceives because it promises satisfaction but can't deliver it.

B. Start living like followers of Jesus [23-32]

²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Believers need to be renewed in the spirit of the mind [23]. We need to change our thinking about God and sin [Rom. 12:1-2]. We are to not only put-off the old [22] but to put on the new man [24]. The Greek term translated "new" is *kainos* which speaks of different in character, not merely improved. This new life is created by God in His image. It is characterized by true righteousness which is right conduct towards others, and holiness which is right conduct towards God or purity. Paul lists six areas of contrast between the old and new life [25-32]:

1. Stop lying and speak the truth [25] ²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

We are to stop lying and speak truth, and speak truth in love [Eph. 4:15]. We are members of one another or one body. A lie is like a knife to the body and can cut deep. No one wants to be betrayed and no one wants to be lied to. Jesus is full of grace and truth, and Satan is a liar and the father of lies [Jn. 1:14, 8:44]. We tend to try to justify lies by color-coding them (e.g. white lies), but we need to stop lying and speak truth.

2. Stop sinning when angry [26-27] Be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ²⁷ nor give place to the devil.

Anger is a God-given emotion, but is to be submitted to God's Spirit. Make sure your anger is righteous. Jesus had righteous anger when He cleansed the Temple at the beginning and the end of His earthly ministry [Jn. 2; Matt. 21]. We, on the other hand, generally aren't purely righteous about things that we get angry about and how we act or react when angry. We need to put away unbridled anger [31]. Don't let the sun go down your wrath [26] implies resolving anger and conflict as soon as possible. Don't give the devil any opportunity to divide [27]. Unbridled anger divides relationships and a community of faith.

"Anyone can become angry, but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way is not easy." – Aristotle

Remember, a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger [Prov. 15:1].

3. Stop stealing, and work and give [28] Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

The Greek term that is translated steal is *klepto* which yields our English kleptomaniac to describe a compulsive thief. The eighth of the Ten Commandments prohibits stealing [Ex.20:15]. It contemplates more than taking something that belongs to someone else. For example, if you're being paid to work and instead you waste hours of your employer's time surfing the web, you are unjustly taking something that belongs to your employer. The essence of the principle is to stop taking from the community without contributing. Instead work and contribute so that the needs of others are cared for. Serving others and caring for the needs of the community of faith are traits of Jesus' followers. Jesus declared that He came to serve, not to be served, and to give His life to redeem man [Mk.10:44-45].

4. Stop speaking hurtful words and speak helpful [29] Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

What we say should help build up others rather than tear down. Corrupt refers to rotten fruit, and has the idea of offensive. We clean up our speech by changing our heart not brushing our teeth. Jesus declared out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks [Matt. 12:34]. Jesus' words are weighty and substantial but never corrupt. Jesus' words of correction, even the most stinging rebukes, are always to build-up and impart grace.

James reminds us that the tongue is an extremely powerful instrument and our words reflect our spiritual maturity [Ja. 3:1-12]. Words are like birds, once they're out they're hard to catch.

Let your speech always be with grace... [Col.4:6]

Gracious words help build-up and unite believers rather than tear-down and divide.

5. Stop grieving the Spirit and be holy and united [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal spiritual force, but He is the third Person of the triune Godhead. The Spirit is grieved by ungodliness and disunity, as a parent would be grieved by children fighting between themselves or backsliding.

Believers are sealed for the day of redemption. A seal was the symbol of ownership. The work of the Spirit in your life preserving unity between believers; and empowering you to live as set-apart to God lets you know that you are a follower of Jesus.

6. Stop resenting and be kind and forgiving [31-32] Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Wrath is explosive anger. Clamor is loud quarreling. Evil speaking refers to slander or gossip. Malice relates to ill-will or smoldering anger. These are sins associated with the temper and the tongue that breed disunity and impede reconciliation,

and are characteristic of the flesh [31]. Instead, we are to follow Jesus. Kindness relates to helping others even if the cost is great. Being tenderhearted refers to compassion, empathy and sympathy. And we are to forgive one another as God forgave us in Christ Jesus [32] [Matt. 18:23-28].

Study Guide Qs

Q1 What are some of the characteristics of unbelievers dominated by the flesh?

Q2 What have been some of the biggest changes that you've experienced as you are being transformed as a follower of Jesus?

Q3 Which of the six areas described above do you think are most challenging either for yourself or most Christians and why? Note: please avoid the cliché "all of them."

Q4 Since believers live by the Spirit, and in the flesh too there will always be a battle between the flesh and Spirit until we are with Jesus. What advice would you give to help someone stop living for the flesh and start living like followers of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

1. Read Romans 1:18-32. What are some of the characteristics of those who have rejected Christ?

2. Read Gal. 5:13-26. What are some of the works of the flesh, and fruit of the Spirit?

Neighboring Idea from Andrea Molina

Every year for Christmas we make little "treat bundles" for each of our adjacent neighbors (our apt is in a little 4-plex). We include a Christmas card that always mentions Jesus, has a blessing for the new year, and is signed with our names so they can check back to remember us. We always stay to chat for 10-15 minutes or so, but it opens up a line of communication with them for future encounters. And they seem to enjoy the homemade goodies.