



## NG Study Guide: Ephesians 4:17-32 :: “In Christ You Are New” [6.2.24]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

### The Study

**Thesis:** Christ offers a new and better way of life. As we put off our old ways and put on the new way of life Christ has made available, we will enjoy the benefits of living in love and unity with God and others.

**Subject: The old man vs. the new man**

**Object: Live in the newness of Christ**

**Context:** In the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, we discover our position or identity as followers of Jesus. In chapters 4-6 we learn the practice of Christian living.

#### A. The old man [17-19]

*<sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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; <sup>19</sup> who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

We saw in Ephesians 4:1 this introduction of this idea of “walking.” And this is the example that Paul uses many times in a row. And what he means by “walking” is the way that those who are in Christ live their lives. Therefore, in Ephesians 4:1, we are called to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We are encouraged in verses 1-16 to walk in the gifts that we’ve been given and in unity with other believers. Verse 17 starts with the: “This is say, therefore” is linking this present concept with the previous concept, which was to be united in love with other believers and Christ [13-16]. As we are living united with Christ we are called to “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk” [17]. This is not an indictment on Gentiles simply because they are Gentiles, but Paul is referring to everyone who is not living their lives to honor God. He then expounds on the attributes of a non-believer (Gentile).

#### 1. Mind - emptiness, misunderstanding, ignorance [17-18]

The Gentiles “walk” in the futility of their minds or the emptiness, ineffectiveness, and uselessness of their ways of thinking [17]. Their understanding is darkened [18]. Now, this is a bigger issue than Paul just calling the Gentiles dumb. He’s not trying to slight them, but he’s demonstrating that their minds are lacking light. Therefore, they are acting in the emptiness of their minds. Throughout Jewish and early-Christian culture light is very much a picture of when someone is living their life for God and with God. We see Paul introduce this same concept earlier in the letter in Ephesians 1:18 “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” And Jesus states in John 8:12 “I am the light of the world.” Those who are apart from God have an emptiness of mind.

#### 2. Soul - apart of God [18]

In verse 18 Paul brings to light the main issue that he’s alluding to in their thinking: that they are alienated from God and the life of God [18]. So though we saw that their minds were empty, this is directly connected to the state of their soul. The fact that they are apart from God directly impacts how they are able to think, but also

their spiritual state in this life and for all eternity. Ephesians 2:1 refers to those who are not yet in Christ, as spiritually dead. Their minds are empty, but their soul is apart from God and spiritually dead.

### **3. Actions - every impurity [19]**

Now if someone's mind is empty, and their soul is apart from God, how can expect their actions to reflect anything different? Their actions are lewd (crude, offensive, often sexually impure), the work of all uncleanness (completely immoral), and greedy (selfishly motivated).

Therefore, those who are not in Christ have minds that are empty, souls that are apart from God, and actions that do not reflect any sense of honorable morality. These depict those who are not walking in Christ. This is the old man. For some reason, we have a desire to see people's actions change while their minds are still darkened and their souls are apart from God. We cannot expect to see a shift in their morality before seeing an illumination of the Spirit in their life. It's fascinating to me so many of us who are in Christ get frustrated by the overwhelming immorality of culture and expect to see a shift take place before they begin walking in Christ. It cannot happen.

### **B. The new man [20-24]**

*<sup>20</sup> But you have not so learned Christ, <sup>21</sup> if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: <sup>22</sup> that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, <sup>23</sup> and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup> and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

#### **1. Mind - learn truth, renewed mind [20-21, 23]**

There is this shift here, from the focus being on the old man, the gentile who is not in Christ, to the believer whom Paul is writing to. Their minds look completely different. Those who are walking as the new man, have learned Christ, they have been taught Christ, and His way [20]. They have been taught the truth that is in Jesus [21]. And their minds have been renewed [23].

This concept of our mind understanding the truth is so important. In the cultural moment that we live in, we're seeing a redefining of the term "truth." And this is really simply just replacing the term truth with beliefs and feelings. But truth is not a feeling, it is a matter of fact. It is the singular reality. So when Christ comes and claims to be the way, the truth, and the life [John 14:6], and here we see that the truth is in Jesus [21], we have to decide whether or not we believe Jesus and God's Word. But this is a belief, our beliefs do not impact the factual truth. If Christ actually is the truth, then it's important for us to seek to better understand that truth.

#### **2. Soul - in Christ [20, 23]**

Paul begins verse 21 by contrasting this old man, the former ways, with the new man. And states that you have not so learned Christ. Now this phrase carries two similar, yet distinct meanings. The first is that you have not so learned to behave in the ways explained in 17-19, but rather live like Christ. The second meaning is that those who are *in* Christ have learned that this is not proper conduct amongst themselves. There is a slight distinction between learning Christ, and those who are in Christ learning. They carry similar connotations, and both are true, but those who are in Christ and learning how to conduct themselves aren't just learning behavioral modifications, but the state of their soul has shifted. And therefore they are learning and living their lives as new creations. The picture of the new man is one who is renewed in the spirit; one whose soul is securely in Christ and sealed with the Spirit [Ephesians 1:13]. This is a stark contrast from the old man whose soul is alienated from God. The purpose of this new man is not just behavior modification, or acting less bad, but rather to recognize that through the renewing of our mind and soul or spirit flows actions of obedience.

#### **3. Actions - righteous, holy [24]**

Those whose mind and spirit have been renewed in Christ are able to put on the new man, and not just positionally receive the status of righteous and holy (which is amazing!) but are also able to live in a way that is righteous and holy. The instruction is to "put on" this new man, which is active.

Putting on righteousness and holiness can only happen because of Christ, it can only happen as we learn Christ, it can only happen when we are in Christ, but there is also an element of active effort. Now this effort doesn't save us [Ephesians 2:8-10], and we will continue to struggle [Romans 7], but we still must be actively living our lives according to the righteous and holy calling that God has given us.

We will grow to be more like Jesus in our actions as we are daily spending time with Him, or learning Him and His word (concept of osmosis), but we also must intentionally seek to love and honor God through our actions. These are the clean clothes he offers us to put on.

### **C. Conduct of the new man [25-32]**

*25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 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. 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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 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.*

In 25-32 Paul gets into some practical examples of what it looks like to actively live as holy and righteous people. He demonstrates to us in these verses the conduct of those who are new in Christ. And we see this three-fold pattern that Paul points out. It demonstrates the previous actions of the old man, with the contrast of better actions, and finally, the best action that demonstrates the love of Christ for those around you. So we see bad, better, best pattern that is demonstrating a transition from selfish actions to loving one another.

#### **1. Lying < Truth < Community of truth [25]**

Verse 25 begins to commanding us to "put away." Again, this is the old man, that we are putting off, and we are putting away lying [25]. We are then encouraged to speak truth. This is a great encouragement, rather than seeking to preserve ourselves, let's put on the action of telling the truth. But Paul takes it further than just telling the truth and points out that there is a benefit to this that is greater than just an individual putting off the old, lying, and putting on the new, telling the truth. And that benefit is not just related to self, but it really benefits the community/believers around us. As we all put on our new selves, we should be speaking truthfully to one another, we should be a noticeably different community because we all speak truthfully. There should be a huge distinction between a community of people who are still wearing "the old man" verses a community who has put on "the new man."

#### **2. Acting in anger < Acting peaceably < Resolving conflict [26-27]**

In verse 26 we see the way of the old man: acting and sinning in anger. But the way of the new man is to "be angry, but do not sin." Now this is quite confusing because it seems that elsewhere in Scripture we may be instructed away from anger [Psalm 37:8 - refrain from anger, James 1:9 - slow to anger, Ephesians 4:31 - let anger be put away from you]. Therefore, if we are given permission here to be angry, and later on in this passage even if we are told to put away anger, there must be a distinction. This distinction points back to the righteous actions of believers in verse 24. Righteous anger is distinct from selfish anger. We are never instructed to think or act in anger that is self-seeking. God demonstrates righteous anger that is directed at sin and unrighteousness [Romans 1:18, John 3:36]. Therefore, if we find ourselves angry, we should be slow to anger, but it must be a righteous anger, that does not move us to sin [26]. Bad: acting in anger towards others. Good: being angry, but acting peaceably with others. Best: Being angry, but actually seeking to resolve the conflict that arose causing the anger [27]. There is this incredibly practical instruction to the new man, do not let the sun go down on your wrath [26]. This is a great practice of the new man to keep peace and actually resolve conflict. We've all experienced the waiting period prior to working through conflict with others and it is miserable. This is why Paul states that allowing anger to stew and go unresolved gives the devil a foothold [27]. It allows the devil to devour and destroy [1Peter 5:8]. Therefore, the new man, the one who has put on righteousness doesn't act in anger, doesn't just act peaceably, but actually seeks others out to resolve and conflict between themselves.

#### **3. Stealing < Working honestly < Giving generously [28]**

We see a third shift in the lifestyle of the new man. The old man steals from others, and the new man works to provide for himself [28]. We can be confused as to what role work should play in our lives as believers, but work was something that God commissioned mankind to do prior to the fall [Genesis 2:15]. Therefore it's important for us to know that we were created by God to be productive and contribute to our families and community we live in. Therefore the new man does not steal from others to provide for himself, but goes out and earns an honest

wage to provide for himself. But Paul takes it again further than just moving from stealing to working, he then goes as far as to say that the new man will move from stealing from others to giving generously to those who are in need [28].

#### **4. Harmful language < Edifying language < Language that benefits all [29]**

Again we see Paul lay out this format of moving from course language or corrupt talk, which is the behavior of the old man, to helpful language [29] the language of the new man. The words that come out of our mouths can significantly impact others, we've all been hurt by the words of others. They can be incredibly destructive, which is why Paul encourages believers not only to avoid harmful language, but use words that are helpful, edifying, and encouraging to others. Using edifying language to others is great and should be a behavior of those who are in Christ, but we're then told that our language should benefit all who are hearers [29]. Therefore, our language shouldn't be course, it should be edifying to those we are speaking to, but it should also be filled with grace so that anyone who may hear or listen will be edified.

#### **5. Wrath < Kindness < Forgiving like Christ [30-32]**

We see this anecdote in verse 30 that refers to what is mentioned in the previous verses and what is mentioned in the following verses. It states that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God [30] and this is directly quoted from Isaiah 63:9. It is grieving, or disappointing, to the Holy Spirit who has sealed us [Ephesians 1:13] when God has redeemed us and sealed us, He has given us His holiness and righteousness, and yet we still live the old man. We live like the unholy, choosing to lie, act in anger, steal, use harmful language, and then continue in the actions mentioned in 31-32. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice be put away. These can be summed up into wrath, but the new man is not wrathful, but rather kind and tenderhearted toward others. But he takes it even further than just kindness, to those who are in Christ, living as the new man, forgive one another, as Christ forgave you [32]. What a high calling, we don't just move from wrath to kindness, but forgiving others like Christ. We are to forgive those we were previously wrathful towards, as Christ forgave us.

And these holy actions of the new man are amazing because they allow us to live united with God (our salvation is not by works, but by grace through faith. Our works simply demonstrate our understanding of that saving work and the transformation from the old man to the new man.) But this new conduct also allows us to live united with one another. God, through His people, creates a community of believers who put off the old man, whose mind, soul, and actions are transformed, put on the new man, and live in unity with one another. A community of believers that live out truth, resolve conflict, give generously, grace-filled language, and forgiveness like Christ.

#### **Study Guide Qs:**

**Q1. *If Christ has made a way for His people to live as a "new man", why do you think it's so easy to find ourselves still wrestling with the ways of the old man?***

**Q2. *What are some ways that those who are in Christ can know, determine, and learn the truth?***

**Q3. *As you've grown in Christ, have you experienced active transformation (intentionally seeking to live differently) and passive transformation (Christ has transformed you)? Explain your experience.***

**Q4. *Why is it important for believers to understand that their actions can positively (or negatively) impact the community around them?***

**"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)**

**1. A commentary on Eph. 4: [https://blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik\\_david/study-guide/ephesians/ephesians-4.cfm](https://blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/ephesians/ephesians-4.cfm)**

**2. An article about putting off the old man: <https://www.gotquestions.org/put-off-the-old-man.html>**

## Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

## Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:  
**Seek to intentionally use grace-filled, edifying language this week with a neighbor.**

## Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

## Notes:

**1. Preparation and participation:** Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

**2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?**

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

**3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

**4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better.** As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

**5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples.** Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

## Next week's passage:

Ephesians 5:1-17 :: "In Christ You Are Imitators of God"