

p 65 WEEK 9: WALKING IN A NEW LIFE

Ephesians 4:17–32

The Place of the Passage

In Ephesians 4:1–16, Paul focused on the believer’s growth within a local congregation—with “one another” (v. 2) in “the whole body” (v. 16). Paul turns now to the believer’s growth in dealings among “the Gentiles” (v. 17)—outside the church in wider society. Reminiscent of the discussion in 2:1–10 of the change from depravity to salvation, 4:17–32 shows that life in Christ demands a radical change in one’s behavior. The change distances the believer’s character from behavior acceptable to those hostile to Christ.

The Big Picture

The believer’s new life in Christ leaves the practices of the old life and takes on the character and practices of Christ. Paul portrays the Ephesians’ former Gentile ways as acts of ignorance. The Christian life will raise the bar on civility and morality.

p 66 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete text for this study, Ephesians 4:17–32. Then review the questions below concerning this important passage of Ephesians and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2269–2270; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Ignorance as Gentiles (4:17–19)

Paul will “testify in the Lord” against believers who are living like unbelieving Gentiles. What tone does this give to the coming discussion? Why is this tone important for the exhortation that follows?

Paul diagnoses the Gentiles’ futility as atheistic ignorance (4:18) and amoral behavior according to “every kind of impurity” (v. 19). How then should the Ephesian Christians have evaluated the common and accepted worldviews and moral standards of the Gentiles?

2. Renewal in God (4:20–24)

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!” In 4:20–21, Paul draws a sharp line between the believers’ former manner of living and the new life found in Christ. How important are correct hearing of the gospel and faithful discipleship p 67 to shedding the old life and taking on the new way of living? What connection does Paul make between sound doctrine and sanctification?

Paul will develop the distinction between the “old self” and the “new self” in 4:25–32. What initial contrasts does he make between the old and new manners of life in 4:22–24? How does “renewed” thinking affect the unclothing of the old self? Why is renewed thinking needed to make clothing oneself in Christ effective?

3. Reflection of Christ (4:25–32)

Paul gives several imperatives for practical contrasts that should distinguish a believer’s new manner of life from the old. Broadly speaking, the morality of the believer will go beyond common altruism and the standards of the Mosaic law because of the new law found in Christ. Why does a believer’s new membership require a renewed thinking about truth in personal relationships? What does the phrase “members of one another” suggest about the motives behind the falsehood that controls the Gentiles’ lifestyle?

The believer has a renewed outlook on anger. Not every expression of anger is acceptable. There are both righteous and corrupt forms of anger. How might a believer fall prey to sin while displaying anger? How does quickly resolving p 68 anger show the likeness of God? In what ways does a wrong handling of anger allow an “opportunity” for the Devil in the life of a believer?

Renewed thinking also influences the work ethic and speech of a believer. What newness does the power of Christ bring to the Ephesians’ work habits? What must be “put off” and “put on” in the believer’s speaking? What unique elements of Christian speech display the gospel’s working in a believer?

Why is the Holy Spirit’s work in sealing a believer significant to that believer’s renewed speech? (See also 1:13–14).

What message might removal of “all bitterness and ... all malice” give to non-believers around us? How would the removal of slander and personal malice work to the benefit of each believer within a congregation?

p 69 The Christian virtues named in 4:32 anticipate the occurrences of disagreements both within and outside the assembly. What might kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness have looked like during and/or in the aftermath of a conflict in the church in Ephesus? How does reflection on the forgiveness found in Christ contribute to peace among believers and a powerful witness in society at large?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

IGNORANCE OF GOD. The Lord's holiness hides him from the eyes of unbelievers. While his work as creator is visible and tangible to all people (Ps. 19:1–3), unrighteousness moves us to disregard what we see and feel. Lack of knowledge of the one true God renders mankind susceptible to God's judgment. Only the proclamation of the truth of Christ in the gospel removes ignorance about God and makes possible experience of the gospel as the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16–17).

NEW LIFE. A popular and unfortunate teaching in some Christian communities creates two categories of sanctification among believers: "mature" and "carnal" Christians. Carnal believers would be those who profess salvation but lack any discernable sign of a changed life. In contrast to that teaching, Paul portrays a marked contrast between the new and former manners of life in a believer transformed by the spiritual blessings given in Christ. Christ's power so overcomes those in whom he lives that they increasingly exhibit godly traits such as trustworthiness, proper handling of anger, a healthy perspective on work, mature use of language, and a wealth of resources for addressing conflict. We don't achieve perfection in this life, but as we are continually renewed in Christ, increasingly we take on the image of God and his holiness.

p 70 Whole-Bible Connections

SHARING WITH THE POOR. Caring for the poor has been a hallmark of God's people throughout history. Israel was taught not to charge her poor members interest on loans and to protect them from prejudiced perversions of justice in lawsuits (Ex. 22:25; 23:3, 6). The law made provision for the poor to eat at the expense of those with means and to maintain their meager goods with dignity (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; 25:36, 39; Deut. 24:12–15). Remembering the Lord's kindness toward their spiritual poverty, the sons of Jacob kindly returned kindness toward those in physical poverty (Prov. 14:31; 19:17). The early church collected funds to provide supplies for believers facing poverty (Acts 11:27–30; Rom. 15:25–26; Gal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 16:1–3). Christ's atoning work graciously directs the use of a believer's financial resources to help the poor (Eph. 4:28).

TRUTHFULNESS. Many people think of deception in their personal and business transactions as acceptable as long as they are not caught. The shock from news stories about shady and unscrupulous practices dissipates quickly as further cases of deception arise. Being a person of complete truth, however, is one of the great changes Christ produces in his people (Eph. 4:21, 25).

Theological Soundings

THE DEVIL. “Give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). The great enemy of God and Christians looks for occasions to bring about spiritual failure in God’s people (1 Pet. 5:8). It is part of his chosen work to destroy the ministry of Christ in the church’s proclamation of the gospel so that people will not believe (Luke 8:12). The Devil was bold enough to tempt the Lord to sin (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:13); he constantly tempts believers toward pride (1 Tim. 3:6–7). His power is great enough to oppress people physically and even incite murder (John 8:44; Acts 10:38). A believer’s only recourse against this powerful foe is the might of Christ (6:10–20). In Christ alone will believers find strength to resist the Devil and make him flee (James 4:7). He is a formidable opponent of the believer, and his reality should not be minimized or dismissed. Yet he is no match for God, who created him. His future destruction is certain (Matt. 25:41; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 20:10). As Martin Luther wrote, “One little word shall fell him.”

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 4:17–32 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent [p 71](#) of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Ephesians 4:17–32

[p 72](#) As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ephesians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.