

Ephesians 4:17-24 Answers
Off With The Old Man, On With The New Man

Introduction: ESV **2 Corinthians 5:17** . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. It is impossible for a person to be hit by a tractor-trailer truck and not show it; so too with our salvation. Christ accepts us as we are, but He does not leave us as we are.

Overview: Ephesians 4:17 begins a new section about our total transformation in Christ. It is about renewal. This section runs from 4:17 all the way to 6:9. First Paul gave general renewal admonitions to everyone, followed by renewal admonitions to specific groups (husbands, wives, fathers, children, slaves, masters). 4:17 goes back to the original thought started in 4:1.

This lesson: The first paragraph (4:17-24) describes the old self that we are to put off. The next paragraph (4:25-32) describes the new self that we are to put on.

Scissors Example: You cut fabric with a *pair* of scissors. It is difficult to accurately cut out a pattern with a single scissor blade. It takes two. Similarly two steps are required for renewal: put off the old garment and put on the new one (Hendriksen, p. 214).

******What four steps (actions) did Paul want his readers to take (4:17-24)?** The required actions are found in 4:17, 22, 23, 24.

1. Why did Paul begin this section by writing, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord” (4:17)? Paul was about to write about the transformation of our lives in Christ. Doubtless his Gentile readers had come from a pretty rough lifestyle; it is possible they would read Paul’s words about change with skepticism. The old man is not so easy to shed! Paul had personal experience in the Lord concerning our new lives in Christ. The new life in Christ is a reality that needs to be appropriated. It is not pie in the sky. Paul knew what he was talking about and that it could also be theirs to experience.

How did Paul describe the Gentiles lifestyle in 4:17-19? See *1 Thessalonians 4:4-5*, *1 Peter 4:3*.

Word Study: “Gentile”; the Greek for Gentile is *ethnos* (“ethnic”) and means race or nation. From a Jewish perspective, a Gentile is a non-Hebrew, someone not descended from Abraham. Compared to the Hebrews, who had the Law of Moses, first century Gentiles were known for living pagan life styles. Here Paul uses Gentile in the sense of a pagan person who does not know the true God.

ESV 1 Peter 4:3 The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

What three things did Paul write about the pagan Gentile mind in 4:17-18? Here is how Paul described unbelieving Gentile thinking: **1)** futile minds (4:17), **2)** darkened understanding (4:18) and **3)** the ignorance (4:18).

Education: Secular humanists have the idea that higher education will lead to the eradication of social ills. This is not so. Many of the Nazis of Germany were very highly educated and cultured. So too the ancient Greeks were known for their educational achievements. The real problem is an unregenerate heart.

Paul warned elsewhere of people who were “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7).

2. What is a futile mind (4:17)? The word futile (*mataiotés*) means emptiness, purposelessness, transitoriness (BAGD, p. 495). The English idea of futile is ineffective, frivolous or useless. The KJV renders this as “the vanity of their mind”. A slogan of the United Negro College Fund is “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”; a futile mind is a wasted mind.

3. What does it mean to have a darkened understanding (4:18)? The idea of a darkened understanding was expressed by John Newton in Amazing Grace: “I once was blind by now I see”. The main idea seems to be not being able to perceive spiritual truths.

What is ignorance (4:18)? Ignorance is from *agnoia* and means a lack of knowledge (in this case, about God). The Greek word here, *agnoia*, is related to our word agnostic (those who don’t know if God exists or not).

4. According to 4:18, this Gentile ignorance resulted in something; what did it cause (as in “because”)? “Because” of their ignorance they were alienated (excluded) from the life of God. Spiritually, they are aliens.

5. Based on 4:18-19 how did the Gentiles become ignorant and darkened in their understanding? See *Romans 1:21-25*. It was “due” (4:18) to their hardness of heart; they were callous and had given themselves up to sensuality.

ESV Romans 1:21-25 . . . they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie . . .

The Big Picture: Everyone in the world is descended from one of the three brothers who were on the ark (Shem, Ham or Japheth). That was roughly 2500 years before Jesus was born. Thus, we can say for a certainty that all people groups in the world at one time had an accurate knowledge of God. Their descendants spread out across the globe, taking the truth about God with them. However, as time went on, that knowledge was suppressed and exchanged for a lie. The only people group in which the true knowledge of God was preserved accurately was the Hebrew peoples and the Hebrew Scriptures.

6. What does it mean to have a hard heart (4:18)? It means to resist the things of God. Moses told Pharaoh that God wanted him to free the children of Israel, but Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not obey God.

Hard Hearted Hannah: "In old Savannah — I said Savannah . . . They got a gal there . . . Who's colder than an arctic storm; Got a heart just like a stone. Even ice men leave her alone. They call her Hard-hearted Hannah, The Vamp of Savannah, The meanest gal in town. Leather is tough, but Hannah's heart is tougher. She's a gal who loves to see men suffer . . . I saw her at the seashore with a great big pan. There was Hannah, pouring water on a drowning man. She's hard-hearted Hannah, The Vamp of Savannah, G, A."

The Point: Sin has a petrifying effect on the heart. You are not soft to the things of God.

Paul wrote in 4:19 that they had become callous. What does callous mean? When you work with hand tools, your hands become calloused. The Greek word here (*apalgeo*), means to cease to feel pain. The KJV thus says translates this as "past feeling". The NIV says they have "lost sensitivity". This is like having a seared conscience. They no longer feel bad or guilty when they do wrong.

7. According to 4:19, what had the Gentiles given themselves up to? See *Romans 1:24, 26-27, 28*. They had given themselves up to sensuality and were greedy to practice every kind of immorality. They are as addicted to sin as drug addicts are to narcotics.

ESV 2 **Timothy 3:13** . . . evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Once a person gives himself up to sensuality, God may in turn give that person over to his own depravity:

ESV **Romans 1:24** . . . God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves . . .

ESV **Romans 1:26-27** . . . God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

ESV **Romans 1:28** . . . since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Application: As the West continues down the post-Christian road, this more and more describes our society.

Mental Illness: It is quite possible that rampant sinfulness is responsible for the large number of people today who have mental problems (McArthur, p. 171).

What contrast did Paul make in 4:20? “But”, Paul wrote, that is not the way (of life) you learned in Christ.

8. What assumption did Paul make about his readers in 4:21-24? (*Reread it*). Paul assumed that when they learned about Jesus they were told to put off the old Gentile self and put on the new God self.

Application: You also must put off the old you (your old self, your old man). There are three steps involved: put off (v22), be renewed (v23) and put on (v24).

Technical Note: Statements like this (4:21-24) have caused some to question if Paul was really writing to the Ephesian church or someplace else. However, Paul had been gone from Ephesus for a time when he wrote this and these could be people who converted after he left (and that he had never met nor taught).

9. How does 4:22 help us understand what Paul meant by “the old self”? The old self is associated with our former (before Jesus) way of life and it is corrupted from deceitful desires. It is a pagan Gentile way of life.

Truth Nugget: There is in fact an old man; putting him off will be a battle (Romans 7-8).

10. Paul declared our old self to be corrupt through deceitful desires. What is a deceitful desire (4:22)? See *Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 1:32*. Apart from Christ, people often deceive themselves into thinking evil is actually good.

ESV Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

ESV Romans 1:32 Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

11. Paul pointed out three different ways that the Gentile mind is corrupted (4:17-18). What hope did he offer in 4:23)? See *Romans 12:2*. In Christ we can have the spirit of our minds renewed. We can have saved thinking!

NAS Romans 12:2 . . . do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .

What did Paul absolutely insist that his Gentile readers take off and put on (4:24)? Paul wanted the Gentile believers in Ephesus to stop acting like Gentiles! They were to put off the old pagan self and put on the new God-like self.

12. What do we learn about the new self in 4:24? The new self is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Thus we are to put off the flesh man on put on the fresh man! We are to go back the God's original design for man.

So What?

13. What Gentile ways are still in your life that God wants you to put off?

14. In what areas do you still need to put on the new self?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher's note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Coving each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

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