

## Put off the Old Self, Put on the New

Ephesians 4:17-32

### ❖ Ephesians 4:17-19—The Futility of Gentile Thinking

1. Paul uses the term Gentiles here to describe nonbelievers even though he is writing to Gentiles who have come to Christ. According to the following verses, what are some things the “Gentiles” do that produces *“futility of their minds”*?
  - a. 1 Corinthians 12:2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. 1 Peter 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Some people are ignorant of God’s love because they have never heard the gospel. Ephesians 4:18 tells us others are ignorant for another reason. Explain why in your own words.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Romans 1:18-23 with Ephesians 4:17-19. Why has God become so angry with *“the Gentiles”*?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ❖ Ephesians 4:20-27—Paul Contrasts the Believer's and Gentile's Mindset and Behavior

4. What are some of the characteristics of the “*old self*” that we must put off? (See also Colossians 3:5-11.)

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5. What does Ephesians 4:22 say about assuming personal responsibility for our behavior?

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6. How does unresolved anger give the devil a foothold in your life?

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7. What kind of behavior will help keep anger from becoming a destructive force that destroys unity? (See Proverbs 15:1, 18; Hebrews 12:15.)

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### ❖ Ephesians 4:28-30—Paul Continues His Exhortation

8. What does 4:28 give as a reason a person should be employed?

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9. Fill in this chart with some of the advice from 4:25-32.

Do Not:	Do:	Reason For or Result of Such Behavior

10. Why is unwholesome speech particularly displeasing to the Holy Spirit? (See also Ephesians 1:13-14; James 3:2-6.)

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### ❖ Ephesians 4:31-32—Paul Explains How to Please the Holy Spirit

11. Verse 4:31 lists sins that grieve the Holy Spirit. Write a definition for each one below:

a. *bitterness* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. *wrath* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. *anger* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d. *clamor* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e. *slander* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

f. *malice* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Verse 4:32 gives more positive instruction. Write a definition of

a. *kind* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. *compassionate* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. What is the standard by which we measure our level of forgiveness of others?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Apply what you have learned.** Our “new self” has been created to be like God, and we are “predestined ... to the praise of His glory” (1:11-12). But how can we praise and glorify Him when we still lose our temper at the drop of a hat? Or when we are known as a liar? Or when we tell off-color jokes and make sexist or prejudicial remarks? What do you need to change? Ask God for wisdom and courage and strength to proceed.

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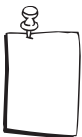
## Put off the Old Self, Put on the New

Ephesians 4:17-32

### Putting on a New Person (Ephesians 4:17-24)

What, specifically, does it mean “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”? (4:1). This is what Paul addresses now. “Now this I say and testify in the Lord,” begins Paul. “No longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds ... darkened in their understanding” (4:17-18). The Ephesians *were* Gentiles who had become Christians. In urging them to “no longer walk as the Gentiles do,” Paul exhorts that they not behave as they did before their conversion, though their former behavior was fully acceptable to the Gentile world. The change Paul speaks of runs deep, so he appeals to the mind and understanding (4:17-18). A worldly mindset results in a fundamentally wrong way of seeing self, others, the world, and God.

Paul’s exposure of the unconverted understanding is thorough. He speaks of its futility, that is, its emptiness, frustration, and lack of true purpose. He speaks of it being darkened, the exact opposite of the enlightened inner self he prayed for in Ephesians 1:18. “Ignorance” (4:18) is a serious matter; the ignorance Paul speaks of here is the consequence of a hardened heart, not a lack of education. A rare word in the New Testament, *porosis*, translated as “hardness,” means *numbness* or *deadness*. Becoming morally “callous” leads to depravity, “to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (4:19).



**Think about** how believers are not in danger of the spiritual hardness that leads to eternal death, but we must, nevertheless, be careful not to flirt with sin, for the strength of its magnetic field seems to

increase with exposure to it. And believers can be affected. The writer to the Hebrews warned, *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”* (Hebrews 3:12-13).

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Paul states, *“But that is not the way you learned Christ!”* (Ephesians 4:20). It is somewhat unnatural to speak of “learning a person” but Paul’s wording intends to refute heresies and false teachings (see 4:14). The idea seems to be *to learn the truth about Christ, or to be schooled in Christ.*

In 4:22-24, Paul uses the illustration of taking off and putting on clothes. Defining the Ephesians’ former thinking and conduct as the *“old self,”* Paul orders them to strip it off and *“put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* He sharpens this image by using three infinitives. *To put off* means a once-and-for-all act, to say good-bye forever to the past pattern of behavior. The second infinitive, *to be made new,* is in the present tense and means *to keep at it,* to commit oneself to the ongoing task of renewal. The final infinitive, *to put on,* means to make a final, resolute decision *to put on the new self.*

That the *“old self”* is dead is the true view of a believer’s life, because it is God’s view! If each believer is truly a new creature in God’s eyes, we then have a responsibility to act in ways that are consistent with that truth. One need not worry that some residue from the past still lingers, for we *“are being transformed”* into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18)—and almighty God is helping us in the process. The point is to get started, right now, *“to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4:24).

### **What, Why, and Wherefore (Ephesians 4:25-32)**

Paul focuses on six sins that characterize the *“old self”* and six virtues of the *“new self.”* He follows a pattern: first a *prohibition,* then a *commandment,* and finally the reason for both. Paul begins with a commandment *against* falsehood and *for* truthfulness. Falsehood is a sin against trust, upon which all civilization and society, including the

society of believers, is built. Turning to the emotion of *anger*, Paul quotes Psalm 4:4: “*Be angry, and do not sin.*” The implication is that there is anger that is not sinful.

In Ephesians 4:28, the negative is *stealing* and the positive is “*honest work.*” Stealing, of course, is wrong because it unjustly deprives others of their property. But that is not the only reason Paul condemns it. He urges us to “*labor, doing honest work,*” so we “*have something to share with anyone in need.*” Paul implies that honest work enables generosity.

In 4:29-30, the negative is “*corrupting talk,*” and the positive is speech that “*is good for building up.*” The Greek word for *corrupt, sapos*, means *rotten, worthless, or lifeless*. Paul is not denouncing obscenity or profanity only, but any speech that fails to build up its hearers! The purpose of language is “*for building up ... those who hear.*” Paul’s point is not simply that certain words are unbecoming or offensive; language that fails to edify “*grieve[s] the Holy Spirit of God.*” Three options are open to any speaker: to be destructive, to be meaningless and mediocre, or to be constructive. Any but the last grieves the Holy Spirit!

In 4:31, the listed negatives — “*bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander*”—are all attitudes revealed in forms of speech that grieve the Holy Spirit. The Bible is clear that *speaking* a sin gives it permanence and paves the way for doing it.

The Christian characteristics of Ephesians 4:32 are not merely personal virtues but qualities that produce healthy relationships and Christian fellowship: “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.*” These qualities do not come from ourselves; they are things that Jesus Christ has modeled *for us*, and that God has given *to us*. Only “*in Christ*” do we receive the desire, the ability, and the pattern to become “*imitators of God*” (5:1).

## Personalize this lesson.



Resentment and anger break the unity of the body. This brokenness has brought far too much disrepute upon the church and disarray into the families within it. But God is more than able to help us with our anger. He can help us get to the roots of anger—which are often unmet expectations—and heal those wounded places in our hearts so that disappointment, irritations, and even provocations no longer cause us to seethe or boil over. If you struggle with anger, consider asking God a few questions: Why does \_\_\_\_\_ cause me to get so angry? Do I hold an expectation about this situation that is not being met? (e.g. “Life should always be fair,” “I always need to be in control,” or “If I don’t perform perfectly, bad things will happen.”) What do You think about this expectation? Is there a more healthy expectation You’d like me to have about this? Wait on Him silently to allow Him to reveal things to your heart. Respond to whatever He shows you with confession and a request for healing and help. His power is greater than your anger, and He longs to help you!