

# “The Old Man”

## Ephesians 4:17-32

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**Ephesians 4:17 -32** *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 the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 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. 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, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

### 4:17

Again Paul begins a section of this letter with the word “therefore.” So He is again saying, “*in light of what we have already covered...already said, we need to DO the following*”: Having already called upon us to walk in unity with others, he is also now calling us to *not* walk like the rest of the world. It is a sad thing that we even need to be told such a thing, don’t you think? To stop walking in the ‘futility of our minds.’

There are no philosophical twists or a high esoterical box to wrap it up in. Paul effectively just says, “stop it.” Out go the shrinks, the psychotherapy’s, the excuses, the blame shifting, as well as the hyper-emotional self defenses. Paul unceremoniously puts it all back squarely where it belongs...*on our laps*. He has already called us to grow up and be men and women and not children. Now he is telling us...*that in that state*, we need to take ownership of our sin and shortcomings.

Know this however, the answer does not lie in our strength or, *at least at first*, our hearts. It lies in our *heads*. We have to move away from justifying our sin and shortcomings and acknowledge the issues. We have to “put it out on the table.” To stop making excuses. God actual expects our daily conduct...our *practical living*, to reflect the internal salvation transformation that we received from Christ. For many of us, our faith is simply a lofty goal...an idealistic aspiration. We fail to hold it out as a real and radical transformation of not only our *hearts* but our very living!

Many of us will often feign a “spiritual cultural engagement,” ...we say we are out there in the world ministering...but in fact we are quite simply just friends of the world. The people around you can tell the difference! How many of us are *not* radically affecting the world around us, but rather *it is affecting us*. Our “friendship with the world” has watered down our commitment, our focus, and our resolve...not to mention simply watering down our holy living!

What does scripture tell us about this issue?

**2 Cor 6:14-16** *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.*

**2Co 6:17** *Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."*

**Am 3:3** *Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*

#### **4:18-19**

Listen to Paul’s description of those in the world: *their understanding (is) darkened, (they are) alienated from the life of God, ignorant...a blind heart, past feeling, surrendered to their ‘lewdness’ (lust) and their “uncleanness and greed.”*

The author Ruth Paxson says... *To be in Christ and not grow up into Christ makes the Christian life an anachronism, a monstrosity, a lie. The revelation of Christ in truth must result in the realization of Christ in life. Paul writes, Ye have heard and accepted "the truth as it is in Jesus"; now you must live, act and speak according to this new standard. There can be no compromising alliances, no stultifying reserves, no divided interests. "Ye were"... "Ye are"... "Be ye." Here is Paul's forceful challenge to become what you are.* (Paxson, Ruth: *The Wealth, the Walk and the Warfare of the Christian*. 1939. Revell)

D L Moody's once said quite accurately, “If I can walk with the world, I can’t walk with God!” The trouble lies in the fact that we think we can be carefree and flippant on this issue and survive it. When we have been rescued from drowning and we decide to ‘wade into the water’ a little, we will eventually find ourselves right back where we were...*drowning once again*. It has been said that “sin will take you further than you ever wanted to stray, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay and cost you more than you ever dreamed you would pay.” Such not only affects our own well-being, but it also brings shame upon the cross and the church.

Those out there apart from God have a “darkened understanding.” That means they are blind to the fact they are walking where there is no light. They make a wreck of everything because they can’t see where they are going nor the dangers around them.

It’s not that they cannot see, but rather because sight is meaningless in a room that is dark! Moreover, they *choose* to live in the darkness. But 1Thess 5:5 reminds us that “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.” Christ Himself stated “*I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.*” (John 12:46) Because of their *choice* to ‘live in the darkness’ rather than the light, they have thus chosen to live separate from that light, and that light is Christ.

Why would someone make such a choice? “...everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (John 3:20) Moreover, after spending weeks, months...years, running into things in the dark...living with the physical and spiritual cuts, bruises, and abrasions, they eventually get to where they are “past feeling.” They simply no longer feel it. They are calloused to the Spirit’s call. *They are lost...*

This passage has been translated: “*having got over the pain.*” How accurate! When the conscience is at first denied, there is a twinge of pain; there is a protest that can be heard. But if that voice is silenced, soon the voice becomes less clear and distant; the protest of the heart is smothered; the twinge is less acute, until at last it is possible to “get over the pain.”

#### 4:20-21

“*But you have not...*” This is attempting to speak to the believers reading this letter, as I am attempting to speak to those present here that are reborn. Paul reminds them that they have not learned such a lifestyle from Christ. That is, *if* they are indeed one of the redeemed! There is no middle ground offered up here. No exemptions or ‘free passes.’

No doubt there are some of us that will immediately rise in our own defense and begin to offer the same dribble that we have pre-programmed for such a situation. It’s like the fire sprinkler system...at a sign of trouble, out pops our excuses that are somehow expected to smooth over the emphatic ‘throw down’ of scripture!

It goes like this: “*I know I should be living holy...I know I should be serving God...I know this is an issue of the flesh that has bondage over me...BUT (and there it is!)...you just don’t understand the magnitude of the situation...the extreme of the problem...the necessity of the rejection...etc etc. We believe ourselves as “special” and somehow think God will overlook **our** shortcoming and ignore our failure to “step up” and be men and women of God.*

Over the years I have known alot of folks who think... “well, I am going to disregard His instructions and do as I want, and later I will seek and receive his forgiveness.” Maybe. But maybe after wandering around the darkness for a time you will never find the light switch again, and will cease to feel the pain...

Paul addresses those that have “heard Him”; meaning heard his call and have experienced His “lighting” of your path and life. This is more than an intellectual endeavor. We here in this church must be more than a school classroom for which one listens to a lecture once a week. This speaks of the experiential learning the person of Christ in my life, not just learning his “do’s and don’ts” and attempting to obey with a snappy salute or trying to emulate his attributes. This is the learning that is the understanding, the acceptance of such as truth, and then the actual living Him out in our life...His nature, His behavior, His passion, His love, and His commitment. In this we become more and more like him. This is the “learning Christ.”

After all, do you “learn how to swim” in a classroom with a textbook? No, you learn how to swim by getting into the water and swimming. At first you do so in shallow water and you do so poorly. But by doing it, you *learn how* to do it. Such is Christ...

#### 4:22-24

To continue the analogy of learning to swim, one does not go swimming with weights tied around his wrists and ankles. At least not more than once. So right from the beginning, we need to unload those things... we “take them off.” We ‘put off’ the *old man*...our old self, and all the conduct and attributes that go with him. While

that happens positionally upon rebirth, we still have to “learn Christ” and “unlearn” the “old man” that was our life before.

We must realize that “old man” not only is corrupt, but grows more corrupt every day we feed him! Sin is deceitful. It makes us think that it will give us freedom and fulfillment, but it is a liar! Invariably it brings us instead a life of bondage and emptiness! Once we are reborn, we are awakened and enlightened. We are from that point forward without excuse. To live in darkness now is to do so by choice!

We must be “renewed” and such must begin in the “spirit of your mind.” We have to decide to *follow* Christ...we have to decide to *be committed to Him*. This renewal is actually a lifetime pursuit and a lifetime event. How does this ‘renewal’ practically take place? Through the saturation of the Word of God and His teaching. Through church, fellowship, reading books, worshipping, serving, etc.

We cannot ignore the mind in the redemption experience. Many would like to relegate salvation to a heart issue alone. But without the mind, the ‘heart’ is led merely by the emotions. And rarely do purely emotional decisions last. God calls upon us to *know Him*, not *feel Him*. There are many whose faith is ruled only by passions and emotions, and they...like children, are “blown about...to and fro” and are subject to the deceit of wicked men and there is therefore no consistency or peace in their daily lives. They flitter to this church, to that church, this event, and that event...looking for something *more*.

When we are “renewed in the spirit of our minds,” Romans 12:2 tells us that we will then “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Not through living in emotions and feelings...for that is the life of a child. Our maturation happens through our minds, which works together with the passions of our heart...the control center for the inner man.

The first thing one has to do is ‘put off the old.’ While I would never want to overplay man’s human responsibility in relationship to God’s supernatural work via the Holy Spirit, we cannot ignore the careful language we find here. The passage says “*put off* the old man” directly pointing to each of us, and then goes on to say “*put on* the new man”...again, seeming to lay the responsibility for this choice, if not the very action, clearly in the lap of each of us.

As we discussed last week, when a man makes contact with God, he **changes**. There is no doubt about that! You cannot have contact with God and fail to be affected and changed. That is an absolute fact. If there is no change, then one must truly consider whether he or she has really had any contact with the true and living God, but instead is simply going through religious motions.

Paul speaks more concerning this subject in **Romans 6:6** - “...*knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*” So the ‘old man’ ...the *old life*, is dead if we have been reborn, according to the scriptures and according to the cross. But we must take careful note here... it doesn’t **start** with just ‘putting on a new man.’

Oh, plenty of folks try that. They come to church and try to add Christ like a condiment. It must start like this; you decide you’re no longer going to walk like those who are involved in sin. So you lay down your old life...you get rid of the ‘old man.’

**1Co 13:11** *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

The practical playing out of this process involves a “putting away” and then a “putting on.” I must often “put away” my old acquaintances, but I must also go on and “put on” new ones. If there is problems with alcohol, it is not just a matter of staying out of the bars, but actually now going on to a new life, and new pursuits! This cannot happen on your couch in front of the TV. It takes a real passionate pursuit of the “new life” for such to be realized in our lives. We must find a fellowship...a spiritual community for which to belong and to participate. We sit down old reading material and pick up new. We “put down” old use of time, and pick up new pursuits...a new way of living. There must be...as the text points out...a “renewing of the mind.”

What happens when you ‘take off’ or kill the “old man” and fail to put on the new? Matt 12:43-45 says “*When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*” Boy have I seen this occur in people!

Salvation is not the reformation or renovation of the old man; that is not rebirth, it’s ‘rehab.’ Christ is not interested in “fixing you up” ...you are not merely a cheap bondo job in a back-alley garage. He is not interested in making you look pretty, and socially acceptable, just to prepare you for hell. True salvation is the new birth and results in a new creation!

4:25  
Take a look at the first of this practical list of “old man” issues that we are to “put away”; #1—lying! Because we are ‘members one of another,’ we are not to lie **about** or **to** each other! It is a remarkably large issue within the greater church. It is simply amazing how confessing believers will lie about or to others! This is the work of the “old man” and his presence simply clarifies that he is not dead in that life and in fact he is still very much alive and well, and truthfully, he is still in control! Proverbs 6 tells us of six things that God literally ‘hates.’ One thing on that list is: *A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.*

4:26-27  
This verse is not prohibiting anger, but rather instruction in what way that anger is vented. The fact is, sin **should** make us angry! If we want to prohibit that, then we will have to condemn our Creator also. For God hates sin and He displays His righteous wrath against it.

**Romans 1:18** says: “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*”

When we are angry, we must seek resolution. Matthew 18:15 “*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*” It is crucial that you attempt to deal with this emotion head on. Because if you do not, usually it just ends up consuming the one angry while the focus of that anger may not even know such exists! There is no guarantee that the other person will sit down with you to address the issue, but we must make the attempt just the same. We must seek resolution and be ready to forgive!

The danger with anger is that we inevitably move to the next step which is overt sin against another! I have often remarked that anger trumps all other emotion. If I am feeling guilty, remorseful, hurt, confused, etc, all of that will get buried underneath anger.

Again, there **is** a time to be angry. Henry Ward Beecher says: “*A man that does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good. Now and then a man should be shaken to the core with indignation over things evil.*”

The point Paul is making is not that we are never to be angry, but what we DO with that anger separates the child from the man!

4:28

The next “old man” attribute to rid ourselves of is stealing. We might think such goes without saying, but self-convinced “righteous theft” is still an issue in the world of spiritual children! It affects our taxes, our workplace, our view by the unredeemed world, as well as our character.

Let us take note of the rest of the verse: “*let him labor, working with his hands what is good...*” Part of being a spiritual man or woman is working. We can find a great number of excuses to exclude ourselves from this if we try, but yet the directive remains! This not only provides for our own needs and that of our family, but so we can financially back our church and the social mission of a believer.

**2 Thess 3:10**— “*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*”

4:29

Jon Courson: “*Warming himself by the fire outside the house of Caiaphas, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. But a servant girl knew otherwise because his accent gave him away (Mark 14:70). You can always tell which kingdom a person is from by his speech. The language of the kingdom of darkness and death is that of complaining and murmuring, fault-finding and cynicism, cursing and corrupt communication. A person living in the kingdom of light and life, on the other hand, speaks graciously and kindly, using words of hope and thanksgiving.*”

Corrupt speech comes from a corrupt heart, and pure speech comes from a pure heart. What comes out of our mouths give away what is truly inside a man. We can wear the Jesus shirt and put the fish on the back of our car. But if what comes out our mouths is foul and rotten, then you can be sure that such is the heart and mind of that man.

This does not mean our words are never tough or correcting. Jesus loved us with a perfect love and much of what He said was tough and correcting. But He always did so with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and for the “edifying”...the “building up and blessing” of the hearer. That should always be our goal too. We must seek to know when and how to “speak up” and when and how to “shut up.”

4:30

In the context of the verse, we can gather that doing the opposite of what is prescribed in this passage “grieves the Holy Spirit.” When we choose rather to be as children...to let the “old man” rule our lives instead of the ‘new man’, we “grieve” the Spirit of God. To continue to practice that which Christ has died to free us from, can only cause grieving in Him. Continuing in such only expresses our lack of love of Christ and the understanding of the cross and its cost.

4:31-32

If we fail to deal with these things according to the Holy Spirit’s leading, our lives will simply look ...and effectively *be* ...just like the world. (Note: This word “anger” here is different than verse 26, and speaks of a “*temper...that which affects our character. An agitation of the soul, a violent emotion. That which is exhibited in punishment...*”) When we let these things find place in us, they begin to work like a cancer.

The bottom line is that Christ seeks for us to emulate His behavior which is within reach as the Holy Spirit comes to live with us. The failure in all of this has brought shame upon the greater kingdom of God and have

frankly tainted the hearts of many against believers. We say that we are different. Paul says “*if you are, act like it...*” Remember how Christ has dealt with you, and go and deal with others the same way. This is how we know we are a “new man” and how at least others know you are not...