

Ephesians 4:17-24

Out with the old, in with the new!

Ephesians 4:17–24 (ESV) — 17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Introduction:

Mickey Cohen was a notorious gangster in Los Angeles during the 1950s. After hearing Billy Graham speak at a Los Angeles crusade, he proclaimed that he had become a Christian. He claimed that he put his “faith” in Jesus. He claimed that he had prayed the sinner’s prayer. However, his life changed very little.

When confronted about his ongoing life of crime and vice, he said, "There are Christian football players, Christian cowboys, and Christian politicians; why can't there be a Christian gangster?"

Sadly, many of you have probably met people like Mickey Cohen. In other words, you have met people who claim to be Christians, but they continue to live just like the world. Maybe you are a Mickey Cohen? You claim to be a Christian, but you live just like the world. Apparently, there were some Mickey Cohen’s at the church in Ephesus.

Paul specifically addresses them in Ephesians 4:17-24. In one sense the message of these verses is very simple. On the other hand, it is very profound. Paul tells the Ephesians, and he tells us, that **we must no longer live like the Gentiles**. In other words, we must no longer live like non-Christians.

Ephesians 4:17 (ESV) — 17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

Paul insists on this because he knows that when one becomes a Christian several miraculous events transpire. God regenerates us, God forgives us, God fills us with his Spirit, and God breaks the power of sin in us. If God has done these amazing and supernatural things, we will live differently. This is as inevitable as the sun rising tomorrow morning.

I wonder, has your life changed since becoming a Christian? If not, something is drastically wrong.

We will look at our passage under two headings

Living like Gentiles (17-19)

Living like Christians (20-24)

First, living like Gentiles!

Ephesians 4:17 (ESV) — 17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

When Paul writes, “Now I say and testify in the Lord” he is saying, “Look, I really, really, really insist on this... and it is not just me, I’m saying this on behalf of the risen Christ.” In other words, this is really serious business.

Then he writes, “you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” In other words, you must stop living like non-Christians.

This raises a question; how do non-Christians live? Paul describes the Gentile life in verses 18-19.

Gentiles are hardened!

Ephesians 4:17–18 (ESV) — 17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

Gentiles hearts are hard to the things of God. This is the result of a vicious cycle described in Romans 1. The more they sin the more their hearts are hardened. The more their hearts are hardened the more they sinned. This cycle repeated itself over and over again and lead to ever increasing hardness of heart. After a while their consciences stopped working.

Illustration:

Howard Carter story... what boggles my mind was the utter hypocrisy... how could this happen? Small compromises lead to larger compromises, which lead to even larger compromises, which lead to a very hardened heart. Was he a Christian? I doubt it, but only God knows. One thing is for sure, his heart was very hard due to lots of sin.

Gentiles are hardened! In addition...

Gentiles are alienated!

Ephesians 4:18 (ESV) — 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

Before conversion our hardness of heart lead to sin, which lead to guilt. Our guilt lead to alienation from the life of God. This is the worst possible thing that could ever happen to anyone in this life or the life to come. When our sin alienates us from God, we are alienated from the one thing in this life that can provide us with true joy, peace, satisfaction and pleasure.

*Gentiles are hardened!
Gentiles are alienated! In addition...*

Gentiles are greedy!

Ephesians 4:19 (ESV) — 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Why does Paul use the word greedy? Because sin never ever satisfies. It leaves us hungry, wanting more. Before conversion to Christ, we could never make enough money, buy enough things, get enough power, get enough respect, or have enough sex to be truly fulfilled. Yet, we were always greedy for more.

The more we indulged the more we were unsatisfied. The more we were unsatisfied, the more we indulged. It is a vicious cycle.

Illustration:

On July 30, 1945, a US Navy cruiser called the USS Indianapolis was heading home across the Pacific Ocean after a crucial mission to end the war. Unfortunately, a Japanese torpedo kept the ship from reaching its destination.

Within the first twelve minutes of being struck, 300 sailors died. More than 900 men ended up in the saltwater without shelter from the sun, protection from the sharks, or fresh water to drink. After four days in the open sea only 316 men remained alive.

Captain Lewis Haynes, the chief medical officer, survived. He described what happened. Right away, he warned the men not to drink the saltwater, but when the hot sun came out the men were so thirsty that they lost all self-control and started to drink the saltwater. Captain Haynes warned them and warned them, but they did not listen. He even struck some of the men with boards to get them to stop drinking the deadly saltwater, but they refused to listen. Eventually died of thirst.

The saltwater did not satisfy them, it just made them thirstier. This is exactly what sin does to us. It never satisfies, and eventually it kills us.

Application:

Gentiles are hardened, alienated, and greedy for sin! Yet they are never satisfied.

Some of you are thinking, “Wow Paul!!! Before conversion to Christ, I was not that bad. I mean, it is not like I was an axe murder, a rapist, or nymphomaniac.”

I’m glad to hear that. But don’t miss Paul’s point.

Paul is describing life without Christ in general. Generally speaking, non-Christians have hard hearts, they are ruled by sin, and they are never satisfied.

This sad state helps explain abortion on demand, gender confusion, sexual dysfunction, an opioid crisis, unbridled greed, unbridled pride, and our cultures gigantic porn problem?

Fortunately, most of us were not drug addicts, prostitutes, or murderers before conversion to Christ, but we could have been under the right circumstances. Why? Because our hearts were hard, and our minds were deceived.

Make no mistake, Ephesians 4:17-19 describes all of us to one degree or another before conversion to Jesus Christ. If this is true, we should rejoice with every fiber of our being! God has saved us from a lifestyle of destruction, despair, and futility.

Here is Paul’s point! Christians should not and must not live like they used to.

When we become Christians, everything changes. How??? This brings us to the second point...

Living like Gentiles!

Second, living like Christians!

What does it mean to live like a Christian? These verses tell us. These verses are the heart and soul of the Christian life. They are the secret to sanctification. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of these verses. What do they teach about the Christian life? Several things...

Christians are taught to put off the old self!

Ephesians 4:20–21 (ESV) — 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

Paul says to the Ephesians Christians “you must live differently since you have learned about Jesus.” When you learned about Jesus, you were taught by Jesus. What were they taught by Jesus? Jesus taught us to do three things (three infinitives in the Greek). Starting with the call to put off our old self.

Ephesians 4:21–22 (ESV) — 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

Paul tells us that we have been taught to put off the old self. This raises a few crucial questions.

Who is the old self?

The old self describes who we were in our totality before conversion to Jesus Christ. In other parts of the Bible, the old self is referred to as the old man. This is who we were in Adam. Paul just described the old self in verses 18-19. The old self is the unregenerate person ruled by sin.

What does it mean to put off the old self?

This is where it gets complicated. It is complicated because Paul says in Romans 6:6 and Col. 3:9 that our old self was already put to death at conversion.

Romans 6:6 (ESV) — 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Colossians 3:9–10 (ESV) — 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Praise be to God, according to these verses, our old self was crucified with Christ. This has already happened. It was in the past. It happened the moment we believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If this is true, what is Paul saying in Ephesians 4:22? If the old self was crucified with Christ, why is Paul telling Christians to put off the old self? Didn't that already happen?

What does Paul mean? Our old self is dead and gone. It was murdered with Christ on the cross.

Before conversion you were enslaved to the power of sin. Your old self was your task master, you had no power to resist its charms. But, thanks be to God, this is no longer the case. Your old self was crucified with Christ, which means you are no longer enslaved to sin. You will not be sinless, but you never have to be enslaved to sin.

But, but, but... sadly, we don't always live out of this reality. As a result, Paul tells us to put off the old self. In other words, he tells us to live like the old self is dead, because the old self is dead!!!

Illustration:

After the American Civil War something strange and unexpected happened. Although the Southern states were defeated by the Northern states. And, although the institution of slavery was no longer illegal. And, although the president of the United States declared that all the slaves were now free men and women. Some of the slaves continued to live and act like slaves.

They kept forgetting that they had been freed. Their freedom was not just hearsay, it was not just a rumor, it was not too just wishful thinking, it was real freedom. It had been won through the blood, sweat, and tears of the Union Army and declared to be so by the president of the United States of America.

Why did some of the slaves continue to live like slaves? It was all they had ever known. They had been enslaved their whole lives. As a result, even though they were free, some continued to cower before their masters. Sadly, some lived like nothing had ever changed.

They needed to be reminded that they were completely free. They needed to be reminded that system of slavery had been crushed! They need to be told that the slave they used to be was no longer alive. He was dead. In its place was a free man!!!

This is what Paul is telling the Ephesians.

The old self was crucified with Christ. As a result, we are free. We don't have to live under sin's slavery. We can put off the old man, since he has already been crucified.

In Ephesians 4:22 (and Romans 6) Paul is telling us that we must live out of this reality.

To put it very simply, when Paul tells us to put off the old self, Paul is simply telling us to be who we are in Christ.

Application-

Even though the old self is dead and gone, we still feel its effects, don't we? We lived out of the flesh for so long, that it is hard to break some old habits.

When we are tempted to live like we used to, we must remind ourselves of our new identity in Jesus Christ. We must remind ourselves that the power of sin has been broken decisively through the cross of Jesus Christ.

We must remind ourselves that we are free.

We must remind ourselves that the old self was crucified in Christ, as a result we can put him off!!!

Putting off the old self often involves intense mental work, doesn't it? It involves thinking. It involves talking to ourselves about the truths of the gospel, which brings us to the next verse.

Christians are taught to put off the old self! In addition...

Christians are taught to renew their minds!

Ephesians 4:22–23 (ESV) — 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

It is nearly impossible for us to put off our old self unless our thinking is constantly being renewed by the Scriptures. The Scriptures remind us of what Christ has done for us. And the Scriptures remind us of our new identity in Christ.

To be renewed is in the present tense, which means this is supposed to be an ongoing action. In other words, we need to constantly have our minds renewed by the Scriptures.

We see a similar exhortation in Romans 12:1-2.

Romans 12:2 (ESV) — 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

When we expose ourselves to God's word on a regular basis, praying for the Spirit's illumination, we are reminded of what Christ has done to our old self. When this happens, we can live out of our new identity. In other words, we can put off the old self.

But it is not enough to put off the old self... this brings us to the next verse.

Christians are taught to put off the old self.

Christians are taught to renew their minds.

Christians are taught to put on the new self!

Ephesians 4:22–24 (ESV) — 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

When we became Christians, the old self was crucified with Christ, and the new self supernaturally came to life in us by the power of the HS (2 Cor. 5:17).

In one sense, putting on the new self has already happened. It happened at conversion.

So, what does it mean to put on the new self?

Putting on the new self means that we constantly remember our new identity in Christ. Doing this leads to action. Why? Because we remember that the new self was created for righteousness and holiness.

A racehorse is made for running.

A saxophone is made for Jazz.

Airplanes are made to soar high above the clouds.

Russell Wilson was made to play a quarterback.

According to Ephesians 4:24 the new self was made to be holy!!!

When we remember this glorious reality, it leads to action. What kind of action? **It leads us to put off the ways of the old self and put on the ways of the new self.**

According to 4:22-24, this is like taking clothes off and putting clothes on.

Illustration:

Imagine going to the club and working out real hard. I'm real hard. You play basketball for two hours, but that is not enough, you want more. So, you lift weights for another hour.

After three hours of working out your clothes are stuck to your body. They are smelly, salty, and drenched in sweat. Nobody wants to get within six feet of you. Covid-19 is the least of their concerns.

You go home and try to pull your clothes off, but it is hard because they are stuck to your body. Eventually, with great effort, you get them off and throw them in the hamper.

After taking a long hot shower you dry off and figure out what to wear. Since you can't find anything suitable in your closet, you go back to the hamper and grab your dirty, sweaty, smelly gym clothes and put them back on.

Would any of you do this? Of course not! It is disgusting.

Instead, we put on fresh clean clothes.

But notice that we do both, we take off the old clothes and put on the new clothes.

Application:

In Ephesians 5:25-32, Paul tells the Ephesians to do the same things. He tells us to...

Put off lying and to put on speaking the truth.

Put off stealing and to put on generosity.

Put off corrupt speech and to put on edifying speech.

Put off bitterness, anger, and wrath, and to put on kindness and forgiveness.

We will cover these verses next week. The important thing to note here is that we not only must put off the ways of the old self, we also must put on the ways of the new self.

This is only made possible by the fact that the old self was crucified with Christ and the new self was made alive by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, this is only possible for Christians. This bring us back to the main theme of the passage.

Conclusion:

In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul wants us to see a dramatic contrast between Gentiles and Christians.

Paul is not saying that Christians are better than Gentiles.

Furthermore, Paul is not saying that Gentiles become Christians by doing certain things.

Gentiles don't become Christians by putting to death the old self and bringing to live the new self.

These things are done for them supernaturally when they become Christians.

The moment we repent of our sins and put our trust in Jesus Christ our old self is put to death and new self is brought to life.

A murder happens and a miracle happens. This is entirely the work of God!!!

When this happens, Christians no longer live like Gentiles. It is inevitable! Here is the good news, God has given you everything you need to live a righteous life.

He has crucified your old self and he has created your new self in Christ Jesus. Our job is to remind ourselves of these glorious realities and live accordingly. Let's pray...

Communion connection- gospel reminds us that our old self was crucified in Christ!