

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:19-24

Session 38: How to Put on the New Man

Satan has a plan for this world and the unsaved people in it. He also has a plan for the saved people in this world. In verses 17-19, Paul pulls back the curtain to reveal the very worst end of the unsaved, as Satan seeks to take them over completely through the lusts of their flesh.

We have been looking at vv. 17-19, where Paul admonishes the Ephesians Gentiles not to walk, or conduct themselves, like the unsaved Gentiles. We are destined for better things; eternal things. They, on the other hand, are destined for a life that may appear to be “free” and the enjoyment of anything that comes into their mind or heart, but in the end, it will destroy them.

In verses 17-19, Paul explains that sin has a natural progression for the unsaved man. It will take him in a downward spiral which will destroy the power of gratification, driving men to a life of frustration, unhappiness and emptiness.

We saw that the cause of their vanity of mind is two-fold: 1) their understanding is darkened, and 2) they are alienated from the life of God (vs. 18b). The reason their understanding is darkened is because of two issues: 1) their ignorance of God and His attributes, character and work on their behalf, and 2) the blindness of their heart (vs. 18c).

Today, we look at verse 19 which concerns the consequences of walking in the vanity of their mind.

Ephesians 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,¹⁸ Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:¹⁹ Who being **past feeling** have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

“Past feeling” has to do with the hardening of their heart which comes from refusing to put their trust in Christ as their all-sufficient Savior, and their refusal to believe the truth of God’s word. By repeated rejection of the truth, these people have become insensitive to their own conscience. They are in the advanced stages of unbelief.

Their conscience being seared with a hot iron, they have lost sense of sin and do not feel guilty or concerned with their conduct, but on the contrary they commit it with pleasure, boast of it, glory in it, plead for it, defend it publicly and openly declare it, and stand in no fear of future judgment which they ridicule and despise.

While we don’t often refer to the Greek, it is interesting that the word for “hardness” is porosis, which comes from the word poros, which means “a stone harder than marble.” We would call this a heart of stone. This hardness of heart describes their inability and unwillingness to respond to God’s truth. The more they suppress the truth, the less capable they become of discerning spiritual reality.

They have “given themselves over” which means they are doing this voluntarily and on purpose. They know what they are doing and they are choosing to do it, no matter what.

Therefore, they voluntarily have given themselves over to lasciviousness. What is lasciviousness? It is an incitement to lust and lewdness without any regard to self-control. They will over-indulge without any concern for the consequences of their actions toward others or themselves. Even if they think their actions might be self-destructive, they do not care; such is the result of their blindness.

Being alienated from the life of God puts them in a state that makes every evil act possible for them: sins which are hardly imaginable. This is the state which enables them to call “evil good and good evil” and to “put darkness for light and light for darkness.”

As a result of being driven by their own lusts, they “work all uncleanness with greediness.” Notice they “work” all uncleanness. It is not as though they have fallen into sin, but they have progressed to the place where they have made uncleanness their business. This is their life’s purpose.

Paul says they are engaging in “all uncleanness,” which means uncleanness of every kind, not just in one thing. These Gentiles are without control of any kind and their whole life is an expression of their greediness; their desire for more and more, as they can never be satisfied.

Ephesians 4:20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

This is the only time in the entire Bible that we have this phrase, “learned Christ.” What is Paul saying by this? He is saying that those of us who are regenerated in Christ are not as the unsaved, with minds that are empty and vain, but instead we are filled with 1) the knowledge of God and Christ, 2) with a love for them, and 3) with a spiritual knowledge of them.

And even though there may be a great deal of vanity and sinfulness in them, yet their walk and conversation is not according to this, neither are their understandings darkened. They have been enlightened to see their lost condition and the way of salvation through Christ. They have some light into the doctrines of the gospel of Christ and they are not alienated from the life of God. They have not seared their conscience, and through the Spirit which is within them, they will be taught to live differently from others; denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Ephesians 4:20 But ye have not so learned Christ; ²¹ **If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him**, as the truth is in Jesus: ²² That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; ²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

How will any member of the body of Christ today “hear Him” and be “taught by Christ?” This is not to say, “if you have personally heard Christ preach,” but rather, “if you have heard Christ preached.” This is not about the specific messenger, but the specific message. In other words, “if so be that you have heard Christ preached according to the revelation of the mystery as revealed in Paul’s epistles.”

And the “if...ye have heard” is not so much about hearing with our physical ears, but internally, with hearts which are open, understandings which are enlightened, and minds which perceive the truth which is in Jesus.

In verses 20-21, Paul uses three teaching terms to show us that 1) Jesus Christ is the subject we are learning, 2) He is the one instructing us, and 3) He is the very atmosphere of our learning.

First, let’s talk about Christ being the subject we are learning. This is indicated by the phrase “learned Christ.”

Ephesians 4:20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

When Paul talks about the Ephesians “learning Christ,” he is not just talking about knowledge about the living Christ. They learned Him – His life, His character, His wisdom. Christ is not only the subject of the ministry of the word, but it is to Him the Spirit directs our soul for righteousness and every supply of grace.

Ephesians 4:21 If so be that ye have **heard him, and have been taught by him**, as the truth is in Jesus:

As we hear those ministers which are teaching Paul’s doctrine and respond to it, it is all the same as if Christ Himself is teaching us, and personally instructing us. To “hear him,” is to receive the teaching in its truest sense.

Ephesians 4:21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as **the truth is in Jesus**:

Jesus is the very context or atmosphere for our instruction. And what is the result of the teaching whereby Christ is the subject, the instructor and the atmosphere of our instruction?

Ephesians 4:21 ...**ye...have been taught by him...** 22 **That ye put off** concerning the former conversation **the old man**, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

First (verses 21-22) that they were instructed to put off the old man, which pertains to our old manner of life which is corrupt through deceitful lusts.

Ephesians 4:21 ...ye...have been taught by him... 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

Second (verses 21 and 23) that they were instructed to be renewed in the spirit of their mind.

Ephesians 4:21 ...ye...have been taught by him... 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Third (verses 21 and 24) that they were instructed to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Ephesians 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;²⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

There are two schools of thought about these verses:

- 1) Ephesians 4:21-24 is simply a declaration of what happened to us when we trusted Christ. We put off the old man (our identity in Adam) and put on the new man (our new identity in Christ).

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

When we trusted Christ:

- Our old man was crucified (put off)

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

- We put on Christ

This provided for our new identity in Christ; our justified position before God as forgiven, righteous and at peace with God.

Not only were we given a positional status in Christ in connection with our justification, but also with our sanctification, wherein we were made to be dead to sin, alive unto God, and given the adoption. This is our positional status in connection with our sanctification. In view of that status before God, we can now “put off the old man (old conversation)” and “put on the new man” in the details of our lives. This is the second way of looking at the verses, that Paul is describing the practical application of our position in Christ whereby we are able to produce functional righteousness as we live for God.

- 2) That it is referring to our conduct in our daily lives whereby we are to put off the old man (stop living like we did when we were unsaved) and put on the new man (by allowing the life of Christ to be lived in us) on a daily basis.

In other words, one view says that Ephesians 4:21-24 is about our position in Christ, while the other view says that these verses are about our daily walk.

While it is true that *positionally*, we have put off the old man and put on the new man when we trusted Christ as our Savior, in the context of Ephesians 4, I see these verses as pertaining to our daily walk (conduct and behavior), and not to that which is ours positionally as set forth back in Romans 6.

Why do I see it this way? I see this as something we are to do daily (and not something that has already been done for us) because of two reasons:

1. Firstly, the entire context is about the “walk” (vs. 17) of unsaved and saved Gentiles. It is about what they are doing (giving themselves over to lasciviousness, working all uncleanness with greediness), as opposed to their position in Adam or in Christ. Notice the word “conversation” which has to do with behavior (vs. 22), and not standing.
2. Secondly, the verbs are all present tense and not past tense. If this was about what has already happened, then these would be in the past tense. For example:

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

This is something that took place in the past and the verb “were” is in agreement with that. But a few verses later, when Paul is not talking about that which already taken place, but about something we need to do in the present, the verbs change to match.

Romans 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

This is not past tense, but present tense.

In like manner, Eph. 4:22-24 does not say, “that ye have put off the old man,” or “ye have been renewed in the spirit of your mind,” or “ye have put on the new man,” as though any of these have already taken place, but rather it exhorts us to do these things right now, “...put off the old man...be renewed in the spirit of our mind...put on the new man.” These are things for us to do right now which pertain to our godly living.

But, let me be quick to point out that the only reason we can hope to do these things is because God has already put our “old man to death” and raised us to walk in newness of life. This is the groundwork which makes our godly living possible. These are part of the “mercies of God.”

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ **were baptized into his death?**⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his resurrection:*⁶ Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.**

This all took place when we trusted Christ. Ephesians doctrine is built upon the foundational doctrine of Romans, which means that now that our “old man” has been put to death, we can “put off the old man,” in our daily conduct, we can “be renewed in the spirit of our mind,” by God’s word, and we can “put on the new man” as we believe the truth and choose to act on it.

Though the Ephesians had their old man put to death when they trusted Christ as Savior, Paul is challenging them to “put off” the deeds which accompanied their old man. Just because the old identity in Adam has been done away with does not mean those old deceitful lusts do not still work to tempt us, they do. But how can we overcome our “former conversation?”

Paul is not asking us to overcome our old way of life by sheer act of our will. He is not asking us to try really hard to live for God. The key is found in vs. 23.

Ephesians 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

We cannot effectively put off the old man or put on the new man unless our thinking is altered; renewed. This calls to mind Romans 12:2, does it not?

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

How is our mind renewed? By reading, praying, studying (understanding), meditating, and memorizing the word of God.

When you bathe your mind with constant reading of the word of God, thinking about what you are reading, praying in the sense of talking to your Father about the form of doctrine you are reading – understanding what it is and what it is designed to do, studying by looking at the context and running references and paying attention to the vocabulary used to describe it, meditating constantly on the verse or verses by going over and over them, thinking about them, and finally by memorizing the word which pertains to a particular form of doctrine as you think about every word in the verse and what it means...as you do these things you are renewing the spirit of your mind, which is reversing your “old man disease” and laying the groundwork for putting on the new man’s spiritual health. Renewing you mind is the soul’s nitric oxide. It helps clear out the bad and provide for the good.

Is there an area of your life in which you are not thinking the way God is thinking? Then this is an area to go to work on.

The third step in the process is to put on the new man. We received a new identity in Christ when we trust Him as Savior. We don't create the new man we just "put him on." And how do we put him on? By integrating into our daily living, through prayer and by love, those forms of doctrine which we are learning and studying.

Keep in mind that we do not put on the new man simply by putting off the old man or by renewing our mind. But both of those are necessary prior steps to integrating the doctrine into our everyday living. And yes, there is a physical parallel to that too, but this lesson is about the things going on in our spirit that affect our outward conduct.