

The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Put Off the Old, Put On the New

Ephesians 4:17–32

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson moves from the believer's identity to the believer's daily conduct, and its doctrinal substance is the nature of sanctification. Paul teaches that real change is not mere behavior management but a genuine transformation: putting off the old self, being renewed in the mind, and putting on the new self created after the likeness of God (vv. 22–24). The teacher should help the class see that the gospel produces actual moral change, beginning in the renewed mind and working out into honesty, controlled anger, honest labor, wholesome speech, and forgiveness. Christianity is not a set of rules imposed from outside but a new self formed within and expressed without.

A significant doctrinal note arises at verse 30: do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Two truths sit side by side. The believer is sealed by the Spirit, which gives real assurance, and the believer is warned not to grieve that Spirit, which gives real responsibility. The teacher should hold these together. The seal is not a license to sin freely with no consequence, as though a saved person could live in unrepentant sin and remain unaffected. The same letter that assures us also commands us, and the New Testament consistently warns Christians against falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4). Salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, not by a presumption that, once saved, conduct no longer matters.

Formationally, this is one of the most practical passages in the letter. Paul refuses to leave holiness vague; he names tempers, tongues, and habits. The aim is to lead each student to honest self-examination and concrete change in a specific area, and finally to forgiveness, since Paul climaxes the chapter by grounding our forgiveness of others in God's forgiveness of us in Christ. Teach for transformation that can be named, measured, and begun this week.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 17 through 19 Paul describes the old way of life as marked by a futile mind, darkened understanding, and hardness of heart. According to Paul, where does a corrupt manner of life actually begin, and why does he trace it to the mind and the heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul describes the old life in a chain that begins in the mind: they walk in the futility of their minds, are darkened in their understanding, and are alienated from the life of God because of

the ignorance in them, due to the hardness of their heart (vv. 17–18). The downward path starts in the thinking and the heart, not first in the behavior.

This is an important diagnosis. We tend to treat sin as primarily a behavior problem, to be fixed by trying harder. Paul traces corrupt living back to corrupt thinking and a hardened heart. Wrong actions grow from wrong beliefs and a heart that has grown callous toward God.

Notice the progression to hardness of heart and then to sensuality and greed (v. 19). When the heart hardens against God, the conscience grows numb, and sin loses its restraint. The problem is not merely outward; it is a darkened mind and a calloused heart.

Help the class see why this matters for change. If sin begins in the mind and heart, then transformation must begin there too, which is exactly where Paul goes next with the renewal of the mind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Corrupt living rooted in a darkened mind and hardened heart
- Sin as more than a behavior problem
- The progression from hardness of heart to numbed conscience
- Why transformation must begin in the mind and heart

Discussion Prompts

- Where does Paul say a corrupt manner of life begins?
- Why do we so often treat sin only as a behavior problem?
- How does a hardened heart lead to a numbed conscience?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says the world's thinking is darkened and futile. In what area has your own thinking been quietly shaped more by the world around you than by Christ, and how would you know?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to examine where the world has disciplined them without their noticing. We absorb the assumptions of our culture through constant exposure, often without realizing our thinking has drifted from Christ.

Help them probe specific areas: attitudes toward money, success, sex, self, comfort, revenge, or worth. The world preaches a steady sermon on these, and believers can quietly adopt its views while keeping Christian language.

The test Paul implies is whether our thinking matches the truth as it is in Jesus. Encourage students to hold a particular attitude up against Scripture and ask honestly whether it came from Christ or from the culture.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Being disciplined by the culture without realizing it
- Common areas of worldly thinking: money, sex, success, self, revenge
- Christian language masking worldly assumptions
- Testing our thinking against the truth in Jesus

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your thinking been shaped more by the world than by Christ?
- How would you even recognize such a drift?
- What attitude could you hold up against Scripture this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 20 and 21 Paul says, that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus. What does it mean to learn Christ, and how is that different from simply learning facts or rules?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul writes, that is not the way you learned Christ (v. 20). The phrase is unusual; we speak of learning a subject, but Paul speaks of learning a Person. To become a Christian is to enter the school of Christ, to learn Him.

Learning Christ is more than acquiring information about Him. It is being taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus (v. 21), a transforming apprenticeship in which we come to know Him, love Him, and be shaped into His likeness. A person can know many facts about Christ and never have learned Christ in this sense.

This frames the whole Christian life as discipleship. We are lifelong students of Jesus, and the curriculum is not merely doctrine but a new way of living, thinking, and loving, modeled on Him.

Help the class feel the relational warmth of this. We are not merely studying a religion; we are learning a Person who is Himself the truth, and being changed by Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Learning Christ as learning a Person, not just facts
- Discipleship as a transforming apprenticeship

- The difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Him
- The whole Christian life as lifelong learning of Jesus

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to learn Christ rather than just learn about Him?
- How is this different from learning facts or rules?
- What does it look like to be in the school of Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

To learn Christ is to be disciplined, to be shaped by Him as a student is shaped by a master. In what area of life are you actively learning Christ right now, and where have you stopped being teachable?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes discipleship personal and current. To learn Christ is ongoing, so the question is where each student is actively being taught by Him now, and where they have stopped being teachable.

Help them locate a live area of learning, perhaps patience, generosity, purity, or trust, where they sense Christ currently teaching and stretching them. Growth tends to happen where we remain teachable.

Then name the danger of areas where we have closed the classroom door, where we have decided we already know, or where we resist Christ's correction. Often these are the very areas most in need of change.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Ongoing, current discipleship
- Remaining teachable as the condition of growth
- Areas where we have stopped learning Christ
- Resistance to Christ's correction

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you actively learning Christ right now?
- Where have you stopped being teachable?
- What might it take to reopen that area to His teaching?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verses 22 through 24 describe putting off the old self, being renewed in the spirit of your minds, and putting on the new self, created after the likeness of God. What is the three-part pattern of change Paul describes here, and why does renewal of the mind sit at the center of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 22 through 24 give the pattern of Christian change in three movements: put off your old self, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Picture changing clothes: take off the filthy garment, and put on the clean one, with the renewing of the mind as the hinge between them.

The old self is the person we were in Adam, corrupt through deceitful desires. The new self is the person we are becoming in Christ, created after God's likeness. Notice that the new self is created by God; we do not manufacture it, but we do actively put it on.

Renewal of the mind sits at the center because, as verses 17 through 19 showed, conduct flows from thinking. We cannot consistently put on new behavior while keeping the old mindset. As the mind is renewed by truth, the new self is increasingly put on in practice.

Help the class see the balance of grace and effort. God creates the new self; we are responsible to put off, be renewed, and put on. Transformation is neither passive waiting nor mere self-improvement, but cooperation with what God is doing in us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The three-part pattern: put off, be renewed, put on
- The old self in Adam and the new self in Christ
- Renewal of the mind as the hinge of change
- Grace and effort together in transformation

Discussion Prompts

- What are the three movements of change in verses 22 through 24?
- Why does the renewal of the mind sit at the center?
- How does this pattern balance God's work and our effort?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul speaks of taking off the old self like worn-out clothing. What is one garment of the old self, a habit, attitude, or pattern, that you are still wearing, and what would it mean to take it off?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the put-off image into a specific habit. Paul assumes there are still old garments to remove; becoming a Christian does not instantly strip away every old pattern. Some must be deliberately taken off.

Invite students to name one garment of the old self still being worn, perhaps a recurring sin, a sour attitude, a coping mechanism, a relational pattern that belongs to the former life. Naming it specifically is the first step to taking it off.

Encourage a concrete act of putting off, paired with putting on its replacement, as the next verses model. We do not merely stop a behavior; we replace it. Removing the old without putting on the new leaves an empty space that the old will reclaim.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Old patterns that must be deliberately removed
- Naming a specific garment of the old self
- Replacing, not merely removing, sinful patterns
- The danger of leaving an empty space

Discussion Prompts

- What garment of the old self are you still wearing?
- What would it mean, practically, to take it off?
- What new self pattern could you put on in its place?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 25 through 29 Paul gives concrete commands about honesty, anger, stealing and work, and speech. Why does Paul get so specific, and what pattern do you notice in the way he pairs putting off a sin with putting on its replacement?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

From verse 25 Paul becomes wonderfully concrete. He addresses falsehood (speak the truth), anger (be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath), stealing (let the thief work and give instead), and speech (no corrupting talk, but words that build up). He refuses to leave holiness abstract.

Notice the consistent pattern: he never merely forbids; he replaces. Put off lying, put on truth-telling. Put off stealing, put on honest work and generosity. Put off corrupting talk, put on speech that builds up. The new life is not a vacuum of don'ts but a wardrobe of positive virtues.

Paul gets specific because real transformation is specific. Vague intentions to be better change little; named commands in concrete areas can actually be obeyed. The Christian life is lived in exactly these ordinary places: our words, our tempers, our work.

Note too the social dimension. Almost every command concerns how we treat others, truth-telling with our neighbor, resolving anger, working so we can give, speaking to build others up. Holiness here is not private piety but love in action.

Help the class appreciate that God cares about the details of daily conduct, and that the gospel reaches all the way down into our tempers and our tongues.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holiness made concrete in speech, anger, work, and honesty
- The put-off and put-on pattern in each command
- The new life as positive virtue, not merely prohibition
- The social dimension of holiness as love for others

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul get so specific instead of speaking only in generalities?
- What pattern do you see in how he pairs each sin with its replacement?
- How is holiness here aimed at love for others, not just private purity?

Question 8

Student Question:

Choose one of Paul's specific commands, about your words, your anger, your honesty, or your work. Where do you most need to put off the old pattern and put on the new, and what would that look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks for a specific application of Paul's specific commands. Resist letting students stay general; press for one named area, words, anger, honesty, or work, where they need to change.

For each, the put-off and put-on can be made concrete. For anger, it may mean addressing a conflict before the day ends rather than nursing resentment. For speech, it may mean replacing criticism with encouragement. For work, it may mean diligence and generosity in place of cutting corners.

Encourage one practical step this week, small enough to actually do and specific enough to measure. Transformation grows through obedience in particular moments, not through good intentions in general.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Specific application in one named area
- Concrete put-off and put-on steps
- Resolving anger, building up speech, working honestly
- Obedience in particular moments

Discussion Prompts

- Which of Paul's commands do you most need to obey right now?
- What old pattern must you put off, and what new one must you put on?
- What is one concrete step you could take this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verse 30 says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit can be grieved, and what does it mean that you are sealed by Him? How do these truths hold together both the security of the believer and the real responsibility not to live in sin, against the idea that a saved person can live however they please?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal center of the lesson, and it deserves careful, balanced treatment. Paul writes, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (v. 30). Two profound truths stand together in one sentence, and the teacher should let neither swallow the other.

First, the Holy Spirit can be grieved. The Spirit is not an impersonal force but a divine Person who dwells in the believer and is genuinely pained by our sin, especially the sins of the tongue and temper that surround this verse. This is a tender motive for holiness: our sin does not merely break a rule; it wounds the One who lives in us and loves us. The Christian life is relational, and grieving the Spirit is like grieving a friend.

Second, by this same Spirit you were sealed for the day of redemption. The seal speaks of ownership and security; the Spirit is God's mark on us and His pledge that He will keep us to the end. This gives real assurance. The believer belongs to God and is being kept for the day of final redemption.

Now hold the two together, because here is the doctrinal payoff. The seal is not a license to sin freely. Paul places the assurance of the seal in the very same breath as a command not to grieve the Spirit. The idea that a saved person is now free to live however they please, that conduct no longer matters because they can never be lost, is foreign to this text and to the New Testament

as a whole. Scripture warns genuine believers against falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:26–31), against being severed from Christ (Galatians 5:4), and against returning to sin (2 Peter 2:20–22). Salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, not presumption.

Yet equally, the warning is not meant to rob believers of assurance or to make them live in dread. The same Spirit who can be grieved is the Spirit who seals and secures. The right posture is neither careless presumption nor anxious terror, but a loving, reverent walk: secure in God's keeping, and tender toward the Spirit who dwells in us, eager not to grieve Him. Teach the class to hold security and responsibility together, exactly as Paul does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Holy Spirit as a Person who can be grieved by our sin
- Grieving the Spirit as wounding the One who dwells in us
- The seal of the Spirit as ownership, security, and God's pledge
- The seal as no license to sin (against once saved, always saved)
- New Testament warnings against falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4)
- Salvation preserved through ongoing faith and obedience
- A walk that is neither careless presumption nor anxious dread

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Holy Spirit can be grieved?
- How does the seal of the Spirit give assurance without giving license to sin?
- How can we hold security and responsibility together in the Christian life?

Question 10

Student Question:

Verses 31 and 32 call us to put away bitterness and to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave us. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one person you sense God is calling you to forgive.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone rests on verses 31 and 32: put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Paul ends the chapter where the gospel always leads, to forgiveness.

Note the ground of our forgiving: as God in Christ forgave you. We forgive not because the offense was small or because the offender deserves it, but because we have been forgiven an immeasurable debt at the cross. The forgiven become forgivers; the alternative is to hold against others what God has released in us.

Paul lists the cluster of sins that grow from an unforgiving heart: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice. An unforgiving spirit does not stay contained; it sours the whole person. Putting on kindness and tenderheartedness is the new self's answer.

Press for a personal response. Ask each student to name one way this passage is forming them, and then, gently, one person God may be calling them to forgive. Forgiveness is hard and often a process, but it is the unmistakable fruit of having been forgiven by God in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness grounded in God's forgiveness of us in Christ
- The forgiven called to become forgivers
- Bitterness and malice as the fruit of an unforgiving heart
- Kindness and tenderheartedness as the new self's response

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage most needs to shape your heart this week?
- On what basis does Paul call us to forgive others?
- Who is one person God may be calling you to forgive?