

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 8: Put Off the Old, Put On the New -- Ephesians 4:17-32

Imagine a man released from prison after many years. The gates open, the chains come off, and he walks out a free man. But here is the strange thing that often happens: he keeps living as though he were still inside. He hoards food. He flinches at authority. He cannot sleep without the old routines. The freedom is real, but his habits have not caught up with it. He is free, and he is still wearing the prison in his bones. Something has to change on the inside before the freedom shows on the outside.

That is the situation Paul addresses in the second half of Ephesians 4. He has told these believers who they now are in Christ: chosen, redeemed, raised, seated, one new humanity. Now he says, in effect, so stop dressing like your old self. You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding. That old way of life belonged to the people you used to be. You have learned Christ now. Take off the old clothing and put on the new.

Paul uses the picture of changing garments. Put off your old self, he says, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. Be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Real change works from the inside out, beginning with a renewed mind and showing itself in a transformed life. The old self is not merely restrained; it is taken off, and something new is put on.

And then Paul gets wonderfully specific. He does not leave transformation in the realm of theory. Stop lying and tell the truth. Be angry without sinning, and do not let the sun go down on your anger. Let the thief steal no longer but work and give. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth, but only what builds others up. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Put away bitterness and be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. This is what the new self looks like in the ordinary traffic of daily life, in our words, our tempers, our work, and our willingness to forgive.

Group Discussion: Paul says the new life is a matter of taking off an old self and putting on a new one, beginning with a renewed mind. Why do you think lasting change has to start in the mind and the heart rather than only in outward behavior, and where do we tend to settle for managing behavior instead of real transformation?

Personal Reflection: Paul names very specific areas: honesty, anger, work, speech, and forgiveness. As you read his list, which one pricks your conscience most, and why?

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. To learn Christ is to be discipled, 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:2, be transformed by the renewing of your mind; Colossians 3:5–14, put to death the old and put on the new, with compassion, kindness, and forgiveness; Galatians 5:19–25, the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit; 1 Thessalonians 5:19, do not quench the Spirit; Matthew 6:14–15, if you forgive others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.