Walking Differently

Believers are to live a life that is different from those who reject Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

MEMORY VERSES: EPHESIANS 4:23-24

READ Ephesians 4:17-32, First Thoughts (p. 94), and Understand the Context (p. 94). As you read, think of times in your life when you wanted to distinguish yourself from others or make a good impression.

STUDY Ephesians 4:17-32, using Explore the Text on pages 95–99. As you study, make a note of the contrasts between what was and what should be. Consider how the contrast points to the power of Christ. For more study helps, consult the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.

PLAN group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 100–101), More Ideas (p. 102), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Add variety to your plans for your group in this session by using at least one idea from More Ideas. Consider how to implement the Suggested Music Idea (p. 102).

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; and For More Ideas (p. 102): □ Note cards or stationery and a church directory, if available. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Ephesians). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
FIRST THOUGHTS

When going to a job interview, we carefully select what to wear. We want to make a statement in some way. We may choose something that makes us feel more confident or that makes us look like we fit the part. Most of us know that showing up in a tie for an entry-level construction job is not required. We may choose a color that matches the company logo or a sport team we believe the owner supports. Setting ourselves apart from other applicants is the goal.

(In PSG, p. 82) What might a person do to set themselves apart from others applying for a job?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

In chapter four of Ephesians, Paul began to show how theology affects life and behavior. A correct theology of the gospel would lead to unity in the church (Eph. 4:1-10). It would produce leaders in the church who would build it up and help it stand against those who were teaching false doctrines and false practices (Eph. 4:11-16). Finally, he believed that a correct theology of the gospel would help them live a new way of life (Eph. 4:17-32).

The contrast between the way Christians lived and the way pagan unbelievers in Ephesus lived could not have been more pronounced. The standards of morality were drastically different. Paul often had to deal with immorality issues in the church. (See 1 Cor. 5:1; 2 Cor. 12:21; 1 Thess. 4:3-7.) Such behaviors were expressions of unfaithfulness to God. Gentiles may have brazenly practiced such things, but Paul knew salvation brought change in a person’s ethics and behavior.

Jesus criticized the prayer practices of the Gentiles who babbled many words and thought that because of their volume they would be heard (Matt. 6:7). He also noted their vain pursuit of material things (Matt. 6:32). Luke noted their role in the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 18:32). Paul emphasized that the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:24). He encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica not to embrace the sexual ethic of the Gentiles but to live by a different ethic (1 Thess. 4:5). Peter described the Gentiles’ behavior as “carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry” (1 Pet. 4:3). As seen from this brief survey, life in the culture to which Paul brought the gospel was much different than life in Christ. This included both actions and worship practices. Should a Christian convert from the Gentile culture change his behavior, or should his behavior continue as it was before he came to Christ? This was the question Paul addressed in Ephesians 4:17-32.

KEY DOCTRINE

Justification

Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God (Rom. 5:1).

BIBLE SKILL

Compare passages that include the same phrases.

Compare Ephesians 4:17-32 with Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:5-10; 1 Corinthians 2:14; and Galatians 5:19-23. Write down some notes about what each passage adds to your understanding of the old and new man. How can the old man still be a problem if he was crucified with Christ on the cross (Gal. 2:20)? Why is the battle between the old man and the new man such an important concept for daily living?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE OLD (EPH. 4:17-19)

VERSE 17
Paul emphasized the importance of his words with the note, I say this and testify in the Lord. This is a warning in the strongest possible terms. His calling out of Christians from their former way of life was not his own idea of purity but was from the Lord.

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to no longer live as the Gentiles live. By referring to Gentiles, Paul was not making a derogatory ethnic statement. He was using the term in a moral sense. Paul knew Jesus’ teaching concerning His desire to save the Gentiles (Luke 2:32), and the apostle taught the same thing (Rom. 1:5). He was not condemning the Gentile people but the Gentile moral ethic that was in direct opposition to the Christian moral ethic. A change to loyalty to Christ would be noted by a change in one’s behavior.

The first description of the Gentile moral ethic is that they lived in the futility of their thoughts. The idea of futility was uselessness or emptiness. It was the same word used in the Greek Old Testament to describe life outside the fear of God (Eccl. 1:2,14). For the writer of Ecclesiastes, life apart from the fear of God was empty and meaningless. Paul believed that life apart from Christ was the same.

VERSE 18
The result of futile thinking in the unbeliever is that they are darkened in their understanding. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). In turn, God has revealed light and wisdom to those who have turned to Him (Ps. 118:27). The Gentile moral ethic is not merely empty, it is darkened. Their thinking is not only empty but it is also evil. Who would ever think to invent all the sinful ways of the world? Only a person whose thinking is empty and evil can envision all the many ways to offend God. Paul described this condition in Romans 1:21, “their senseless hearts were darkened.” The old way of life should be a stark contrast to the life that is in Christ.

The goal of Christianity is not to make bad people better but to make dead people alive.

Paul also described the Gentile moral ethic as being excluded from the life of God. Previously, Paul had described the Ephesians before their coming to Christ as “dead in … trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Though their lives reflected many evil and immoral ways, their most dire need was life. Their sins were an expression of their deadness to the life of God. Though some philosophies, such as Stoicism, taught that a person could adjust his or her thinking to conform to a higher moral ethic, Paul did not teach such possibilities. Non-Christians were separated from the life-giving power of God. The goal of Christianity is not to make bad people better but to make dead people alive. Before coming to Christ, we were dead and had no access to the life of God.

VERSES 17-18
17 Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts.
18 They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR
The reasons for this deadness were the ignorance in them and their own hardness of heart. The Greek word used for ignorance has been adapted in English to form the word agnostic. Their ignorance was not mere stupidity or lack of knowledge about things. It was a lack of knowing God. The problem of Gentile thinking didn't stem from lack of knowledge about right and wrong but the lack of knowing God. In turn, this produced a callousing effect on the heart that rendered them incapable of sensitivity toward God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44).

VERSE 19
19 They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.

VERSE 19
The hardness of their hearts (v. 18) caused those outside of Christ to become callous. A person who is calloused cannot feel pain and loses sensitivity to touch. Before coming to Christ, a person is not only dead to God but deadened in their pain. They are insensitive to the ways and movements of God. As a result, people outside of Christ gave themselves over to promiscuity. Romans 1 teaches that those outside of a relationship with God are given over by God to an immoral life (Rom. 1:24,26,28), but here the emphasis is that they gave themselves over to immorality. No conflict exists between these two statements, but rather they are complementary.

Promiscuity referred to all types of self-indulgent living. It involved a lack of moral restraint and included every kind of impurity. This would include sexual immorality (2 Pet. 2:2), drinking and partying, and elements of false worship. This pursuit was not a one-time occurrence—they had a desire for more and more. This describes the continual downward spiral of the moral ethic in those who do not follow Christ.

Why does life outside of Christ usually spiral downward morally?

THE CHANGE (EPH. 4:20-24)

VERSES 20-21
20 But that is not how you came to know Christ, assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus,
they had truly come to Christ and were following Him instead of the false teachers. He was not hedging on the permanency of salvation or the ability of God to finish His work in a believer. He was questioning the supposed profession of those who claimed to follow Christ but continued to live like those outside of Christ. Paul reminded them that the truth is in Jesus. Jesus had declared Himself as the Truth (John 14:6), and those in relationship with Him should grow in their faith to continue reflecting that truth in the way they live.

**VERSES 22-23**

In addition to describing new life in Christ as a school, Paul described it as changing clothes. Like an old, dirty garment, the Christian will desire to take off the old way of life that was empty and without God (Eph. 4:17-18). This former way of life is the old self that is corrupted by evil desires. Coming to Christ enables believers to shed the old way of life like shedding a pair of dirty clothes. However, it must still be possible for a Christian to continue wearing some of those old garments, hence the command to take off this old self. In Christ, the old nature can be taken off like an unwanted piece of clothing.

**The battle for one’s behavior is really a battle for one’s mind.**

What the person outside of a relationship with Christ needs is to be renewed. The renewal of old, corrupted nature takes place in the spirit of one’s mind. Paul taught the Romans to present themselves to God as living sacrifices, and he promised that the Lord would renew their minds (Rom. 12:1-2). In Colossians, Paul said that believers had put on the new self and were being renewed in knowledge according to the image of their Creator (Col. 3:10). He spoke of this in terms of an ongoing process, not an instantaneous discovery. The process of renewal was day by day. As the believer continued to die to the old way of life, God continued to renew the person into the person He had made them to be. This change in behavior had to start with a change in their minds. The battle for one’s behavior is really a battle for one’s mind.

**Why do you think the battle for behavior is really a battle for the mind?**

**VERSE 24**

Taking off the old man and having the mind renewed opened the way to put on the new self. Old ways must be replaced with new ways. This involved a new identity given to the believer at the time of conversion (Col. 3:10). This is a growing and daily recognition of who the believer is in Christ. Paul described this person as the one created according to God’s likeness. Humans were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). This image was not

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completely lost by the fall, which is the reason murder is an offense to God (Gen. 9:6). However, that image was tarnished and will one day be completely restored (1 Cor. 15:49). The process of restoration began at conversion and continues as one takes off the old self and puts on the new self. The desire of God for His children is righteousness and purity of the truth.

THE NEW ( Eph. 4:25-32)

VERSE 25
Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.

VERSE 26-27
Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, and don’t give the devil an opportunity.

VERSE 28
Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.

Uncontrolled anger gives the devil an opportunity.

VERSE 26-27
The old way of life before Christ was to hold on to anger and harbor grudges and bitterness toward others. That is not the way of Christ. Paul encouraged the Christian to be angry and do not sin. The text does not say, do not be angry. Righteous indignation is holy anger against sin, and it is legitimate. Christians cannot be indifferent to injustice and evil. A righteous anger must exist toward displays of unrighteousness. Anger is an emotion and the response to its presence is more important than whether or not it exists.

In anger, Christians need to take guard in two ways. First, they should not let the sun go down on their anger. They need to keep short accounts and address anger as it occurs. The longer anger simmers the more destructive it can become. Second, they need to not give the devil an opportunity. Uncontrolled anger gives the devil an opportunity. Pride or hatred creates problems for the old self, but the new self deals with anger in constructive ways.

VERSE 28
Like his or her father, the devil, the unsaved person sees what he wants and tries to take it. This must be removed and replaced with a heart to do honest work. The old person takes from others in order to meet his or her own desires. The new person is able to share with others in order to meet their need. This is a huge contrast in one’s approach to life. The old person is consumed with the gratification of self; the new person is focused on the needs of others. Work was valued in the New Testament (1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Thess. 4:11), and even more so when it was done for the purpose of giving to others.
VERSES 29-30
The old person used **foul language.** The word used for **foul** could refer to rotten fruit (Matt. 7:17-18) and rotten fish (Matt. 13:48-49). It was not simply bad language but included any kind of talk that had intentions of harm or ill will toward others, such as gossip or slander. Instead, believers should use their speech for **building up someone in need.** This refers to a timely word delivered at the right moment to lift someone up. (See Prov. 15:23.) This kind of word gives **grace** to its hearers. Jesus has given grace to every believer (Eph. 4:7), and He desires that His children pass grace along to others as they need it. Corrupting talk not only affects those to which it is spoken; it also will **grieve God’s Holy Spirit.** It shows an insensitivity to God, as do any of the acts of the old self mentioned in this passage.

How can we use our words to give grace to others?

VERSES 31-32
Paul encouraged Christians to let go of the attitudes that harm relationships with others. These include attitudes of **bitterness, anger and wrath.** Seething bitterness leads to impassioned anger, which leads to outright opposition against others. These relationship hindrances could also lead to **shouting and slander,** and **malice.** The old self is contentious toward others.

The motive for Christians to forgive others is that God also forgave them in Christ.

The new self, on the other hand, is **kind and compassionate** and **forgiving** of one another. The first word describes a sweet disposition, while the second word emphasizes the feeling and emotion that empathizes with another person. At some point, every relationship will need to be marked by forgiveness. The motive for Christians to forgive others is that God also forgave them in Christ. If Jesus could forgive us for all of our sins, then surely those who have been forgiven can in turn forgive those who have wronged them.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, encourage them to scan the room. Call for everyone to close their eyes while you change something in the room. Invite them to open their eyes and point out what was changed (examples: placement of a chair, location of your name tag, arrangement of posters). Repeat until most have arrived.

ASK: How hard (or easy) was it to spot the change?

EXPLAIN: Some Christians have dramatic testimonies of a radical life change when they became Christians. Others have more “ordinary” testimonies of having grown up in church. Regardless, there ought to be a difference between how we were before we met Christ and how we are now. The section of Ephesians 4 we’re discussing today is all about that difference. Point to Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians) displayed in the room to highlight that today’s study is on “A New Self.”

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Before the Scripture passage is read, note that Paul used the word Gentiles to refer to unbelievers. While a volunteer reads aloud Ephesians 4:17-19, direct the group to listen for how Paul characterized unbelievers.

CHART: On the board or a sheet of paper, make two columns, labeled Ignorance and Sinfulness. Direct the group to identify which descriptions from verses 17-19 are related to a lack of understanding about God and which are related to a lack of obedience to God. Ask: In what way is life prior to knowing Christ “pointless”? (PSG, p. 84)

COMPARE/CONTRAST: Remark that Paul used very similar language in Romans. Direct every other person in the group to locate Romans 1:21-25, while the others reread Ephesians 4:17-19. Direct the group to work in pairs, looking for similarities and differences between the two passages. Note that the sin wasn’t ignorance. The sin was hard and calloused hearts.

ASK: Why does the “desire for more and more” apart from God always result in futility and emptiness?

DISCUSS: Why would Paul take so much time describing the sinfulness of those without Christ? Ask from the PSG (p. 85): Why is it important for believers to remember what life apart from Christ was like?

EMPHASIZE: Believers need to remember what life apart from Christ was like so that we don’t lose compassion for those who don’t yet know Jesus.

DISCUSS: Before the Scripture is read, say: Think about an important lesson or skill you have learned. How did you learn it? Who did you learn it from?

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 4:20-24. Direct the group to pay attention to what Paul said about how people come to know Christ.

LEAD: Use the information under verses 20-21 (PSG, p. 86) to lead the group to discuss how we learn and grow as believers.
DISCUSS: In what way is growing in your understanding of something as much about “unlearning” as it is about learning? What examples can you give from your life?

EMPHASIZE: Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) to anyone who doesn’t have one. Point out that Ephesians 4:23-24 is the memory verse for this session. Lead the group to say the verse aloud together.

ASK: How is salvation like putting on a new set of clothes?

TRANSITION: In the next set of verses, Paul got very specific about what it looks like to put on Christ. He moved from talking about what is true to what we’re to do in response to that truth.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:25-32. As the Scripture is read, encourage the group to identify which directive may be the most challenging for them.

ASK: Where is your “growing edge” related to these attitudes? Do any of them come easier for you? Give group members an opportunity to affirm positive traits from the list that they see in others in the group. Be prepared with some of your own affirmations for each person.

HIGHLIGHT: Point out the Key Doctrine (Justification) on page 87 of the PSG. Note that we are justified because of what Christ did for us on the cross. Emphasize that Christlike attitudes identified by Paul, while desirable, are not what justify us.

DISCUSS: We’ve talked about which of these are the most challenging for us. But now, let’s talk about which of these, if we get them right, will have the greatest impact on our community for the gospel.

ASK: Of the practices listed by Paul, which one creates the greatest impact for the cause of Christ? (PSG, p. 89) Remind group members of the main point of today’s session—that we who belong to Christ are to live in a noticeably different way from those who reject Christ.

AFFIRM: A few moments ago, we were encouraged to call out the positive characteristics we saw in others. Did you notice that in doing so, we were actually being obedient to Ephesians 4:29? What are some ways we can build up and encourage those outside our group?

HIGHLIGHT: Summarize the paragraph explaining verses 31-32 (PSG, p. 89). Emphasize that the attitudes of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness we are to show to one another are the attitudes that Jesus has toward us.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Lead the group to identify one thing from today’s session that will help them grow in Christlikeness.

CHALLENGE: Call attention to the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 90): Identify a neighbor or coworker who is lost. How can you use these passages to explain salvation to the person you identified?

PRAY: Lead in prayer, thanking God for how He has forgiven you, and asking for His power to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to others.
PRACTICE

• Email the group during the week and encourage them to take a personal inventory of their actions and attitudes this week. Challenge them to evaluate their actions and attitudes based on Ephesians 4:25-32.

• Look for personal opportunities to share the gospel with someone this week. Be prepared to tell your story next week.

• Encourage the group to find tangible ways to encourage each other this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
To replace the Focus Attention activity, invite group members to pull out their smartphones and scroll through their social media feeds. Ask: What makes you know that someone’s values, attitudes, beliefs, or lifestyles are different from the other people in your feed? What differences would someone see on your own time line? Then discuss what it means to express a different attitude or belief system in real life and not just online.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To further illustrate Paul’s “put off/put on” imagery in Ephesians 4:20-24, invite people to share times in their lives when they knew it was time to update their wardrobe. Maybe it was when they started a new career. Maybe they realized that their own clothes were out of date or no longer fit. Encourage them to identify styles or fads that were popular in high school that they would never think of wearing today. Introduce the topic of actions and attitudes that are appropriate or inappropriate for believers, comparing them to fashion they would not wear today.

• To add to your study of Ephesians 4:25-32, provide note cards or stationery, along with a list of homebound members of your church (or anyone else you feel may need encouragement). Guide the group to write notes of encouragement to individuals. Provide a church directory so you can address the notes. During this time, use the Suggested Music Ideas below.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Lead the group to write out their testimonies of their lives before Christ, how they met Christ, and how their lives have been different since meeting Christ. Over the next several group meetings, explain that volunteers will have an opportunity to share their story.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Play the song “Different,” by Micah Taylor, either as part of your closing prayer or as everyone is writing encouraging notes. (See above.) For a more traditional alternative, play the hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” by Robert Robinson.