

Exegetical Notes – Ephesians 4:17-32

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Ephesians 4:17-32

Verses 17-21

¹⁷ *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.*

²⁰ *That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*

- This passage begins with the word “so” in English. The “so” is equivalent to “therefore.” This passage builds on what preceded it. Because ALL Christians form the body of Christ, they should seek to build each other up in love and work together in unity. That is the philosophical/doctrinal point upon which what follows stands. What follows is the practical working out of this great truth.
- “I tell you this, and insist upon it in the Lord” means that what follows is not optional. If one is “in Christ” and part of “the body of Christ,” **this is how he MUST act.** There is no other acceptable behavior for a Christian.
- “You must no longer live as the Gentiles do.” In other words, a Christian cannot live as do people who do not know Christ.
- People who do not know Jesus as Lord live in “the futility of their thinking.” They do what seems best to them and what seems to be in their own best interest. Because they do not know who Jesus is or name Him as Lord, their understanding of things is off. Because they do not know the love of God for them and how God sent His Son to save them, they do not understand the nature of love. They live for themselves and their own pleasure. Because of this they give themselves over into sensuality, impurity, and lust.
- Living this way is NOT how those who are in Christ live.

Verses 22-24

²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;* ²³ *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;* ²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- “You were taught.” Instead of living like those who do not know Christ, those who know Christ were taught to: 1. “Put off your old self.” The old self is that person who lived without Christ and did what those who do not know Christ do. For those who know Christ, the old self must be “put off.” The phrase means that the old way of life must be taken off like a piece of clothing. 2. “Made new in the attitude of your minds.” Those in Christ will think differently about how to live. Their attitudes and their desires will be different than those of the people in the world because they know Christ. 3. “Put on the new self.” When the followers of Jesus take off the old thing, they put on a new one. They literally change their clothing. The purpose of the new garment is to make them look like Christ. They will seek to be righteous before God in holiness. Holiness means to be separated. They will not be like the world. They will be like Christ!

Verses 25-32

²⁵ *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* ²⁶ *“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* ²⁷ *and do not give the devil a foothold.* ²⁸ *Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* ³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

- Once again, the word “therefore” appears in the text. Because of what was just said, what follows will happen in a Christian’s life.
- Christians will not allow their anger to lead them into sin. There is recognition that Christians will, from time to time, get angry. However, they

will not allow their anger to cause them to do things or say things that belie their relationship to Christ. They will not allow their anger to brew within them so to give Satan an opportunity to use it to cause them to behave in unchristian ways.

- Christians will not steal. Instead, they will work with their hands to provide for themselves and to give to others who are in need.
- Christians will not speak as the world speaks. They will not talk like the people of the world. They will use language which is wholesome to build others up and not to tear them down.
- Christians will not grieve the Holy Spirit by acting in ways of which the Holy Spirit disapproves. That means that Christians will rid themselves of: 1. bitterness, 2. rage and anger, 3. brawling, 4. slander, 5. and every form of malice. Instead of behaving in those ways, Christians will be; 1. kind, 2. compassionate, 3. forgiving. Because Christians remember how much Christ forgave them, they will act in completely different ways than do the people of the world. It is important to remember Paul's words in verse 17. This behavioral change is NOT optional. It is required!

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