

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XCV : LIVING OUT OUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST IN OUR CHURCHES (4:17-5:2)

## *Ephesians 4:17 ~ 5:2*

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 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: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. (KJV)*

*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. 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. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. 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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (NIV)*

*This, then, I say, and I testify in the Lord; ye are no more to walk, as also the other nations walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in the understanding, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart, who, having ceased to feel, themselves did give up to the lasciviousness, for the working of all uncleanness in greediness; and ye did not so learn the Christ, if so be ye did hear him, and in him were taught, as truth is in Jesus; ye are to put off concerning the former behaviour the old man, that is corrupt according to the desires of the deceit, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man, which, according to God, was created in righteousness and kindness of the truth. Wherefore, putting away the lying, speak truth each with his neighbour, because we are members one of another; be angry and do not sin; let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil; whoso is stealing let him no more steal, but rather let him labour, working the thing that is good with the hands, that he may have to impart to him having need. Let no corrupt word out of your mouth go forth, but what is good unto the needful building up, that it may give grace to the hearers; and make not sorrowful the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye were sealed to a day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and become one to another kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, according as also God in Christ did forgive you. Become, then, followers of God, as children beloved, and walk in love, as also the Christ did love us, and did give himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell, (Young's Literal Translation)*

**'DO NOT RETURN TO YOUR OLD LIFE'** — "During Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, spanning the years AD 52 - 55, a significant number of Jews and a great number of Gentiles turned to Christ. According to Luke, so many Gentiles turned to Christ that it had a negative economic impact on the number of silver idolatrous images of Artemis Ephesia that

were sold (Acts 19:23–27). Now that seven or eight years have passed, most likely many more Gentiles have turned their backs to idolatry and become members of the Christian community. So many have given their lives to Christ that Paul can only say that he has ‘heard’ of their faith and love (Eph 1:15). Although Ephesians is written to both Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesus and its environs, there was probably a much greater proportion of Gentile believers. It is to this cross-section of the church, and probably to the newer believers, that Paul now addresses his remarks in this section. In essence, Paul calls them to live out their new identity in Christ.” [Arnold, 291]

**PAUL IS SPEAKING TO BELIEVERS WITHIN THE CHURCHES** — It should be noted that Paul began this chapter with life within our churches, and this is continued in these verses as is evident in v. 25: ‘Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.’ “Because God has created the church to be a community of believers growing together to maturity, the development of social virtues is of paramount importance. Therefore, Paul exhorts believers to rid themselves of vices that are detrimental to community life and to cultivate virtues that build up the community. The most important and summarizing virtue is love — defined by the Father’s love in giving his Son and by Christ’s love in sacrificing himself.” [Arnold, 296]

**SYNOPSIS OF 4:17 ~ 19 – THE DEPRAVITY OF THE LOST** — “The way non-Christians think is fully corrupt, which leads them to engage in impure conduct and results in their separation from the life-giving God. Paul places an overt emphasis on the life of the mind in this section and contrasts the thinking of unbelievers with believers (see the references to νοῦς [nous, ‘mind’] in 4:17 and 4:23). He uses a litany of descriptive terms to characterize the mind-set of unbelievers: their thoughts are meaningless (v. 17b), their minds are darkened (v. 18a), they are ignorant (v. 18c), they have become callous in their thinking (v. 19a), their hearts have become hard (v. 18d), they are oriented to self-indulgence (v. 19a), they are driven by greed (v. 19b), and their minds are deceived (v. 22b). The picture Paul paints is dark and hopeless, but not completely since many Gentiles have been saved from this plight. The best way to summarize the minds of unbelieving Gentiles is that they are thoroughly corrupt or depraved (v. 22b). This corrupt thinking leads to actions, behaviors, and lifestyles that are impure (v. 19b).” [Arnold, 291]

**SYNOPSIS OF 4:20 ~ 24 – NEW LIFE IN CHRIST** — “The theme of identity formation reaches a high point in this section of the letter as Paul prepares to deliver a series of moral exhortations. His point here is that change comes only as a result of bringing one’s life into conformity with their new identity in Christ. Paul brings out the fact that each member of the Godhead is profoundly involved in this work. God is the one who gives life (v. 18b) and exerts his power to form the new creation (v. 24b). The Holy Spirit is the active agent in renewing the minds of believers (v. 23). And Christ is the one whom God has sent to perform the work of redemption (including his death, resurrection, and ascension), to create a body of believers over whom he serves as head, and then to empower them through his grace. This is all part of the apostolic teaching that the readers have heard, have been taught, and have learned (vv. 20-21). The message about Jesus, as well as the oral accounts of his earthly ministry and teaching, is entirely true (v. 21b).” [Arnold, 292]

**SINNERS NEED CHRIST!** — “This portrayal is not hyperbole. Paul is not depicting every unbeliever as an axe-murderer. He is simply making the theological statement that apart from a connection to Christ, all people are self-oriented, not God-oriented. Their lives are devoid of any meaning that really matters because the will of their Creator is intentionally left out of the picture. Furthermore, in his stress on the role of the thought life, Paul does not intend to imply that what is needed is just a change of thinking. He will go on to affirm that the basis for change lies in a new creation by God and a renewing work by the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the mind because it will play a vital role in the process of growth.” [Arnold, 291f]

**PAUL CONTINUES WHAT HE BEGAN IN 4:1-3** — Many Bible students believe Paul to be picking up what he began in the beginning of this chapter (vv. 1-3). A few even consider vv. 4-16 to be a digression but I agree with those who would not describe it in such a breaking manner. So Paul begins what some describe as the ‘*paraenetic*’ half of the letter in vv. 1-3 but turns to a discussion of the unity and diversity amongst our churches. But while a slight diversion from his exhortations, the chapter is linked since Paul described the importance of the apostolic teaching in the training of believers (vv. 11-16), then picks this up by reminding them of the Christian tradition they had been taught (vv. 20,21). ‘Attaining to the unity of the Son of God’ (v. 13) and ‘growing in Christ’ (v. 15) involve learning Christ and the truth in Jesus (vv. 20,21). “‘This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord.’ The οὖν [oun], ‘therefore,’ does not serve as an inferential conjunction but has a resumptive force resuming the thought of verses 1-3 that had been interrupted at verse 4. In verse 1 Paul had exhorted them to walk worthy of their calling and now in verse 17 he is telling them that they are no longer to walk as Gentiles walk because this is not worthy of their calling. The demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο [touto], ‘this,’ refers to the exhortation that follows. In effect Paul is saying, ‘In resuming my exhortation I say this.’” [Hoehner, 582; see also Eadie, 327] “[This ‘formerly – now’ contrast] comes as an exhortation and provides commentary on 4: 1 : ‘Live [walk] worthy of the calling you have received.’ Paul grounds his ethical concerns in his theology. The result is one of the most poignant descriptions of sinful humanity and of conversion. (Note the prominence given to words for the mind: ignorance, thinking, desiring, learning, truth, and sin.) Note the oppositions:

paraenesis — plural, <i>paraeneses</i> : an exhortatory composition; synonyms: advice, counsel
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former ‘Gentile’ life versus present life

futility versus truth

darkened and ignorance versus taught

putting off the old being versus putting on the new

deceit versus truth

corrupted versus new creation

impurity and lust versus righteousness and holiness

separated from the life of God versus created to be like God” [Snodgrass, 228]

**MOST COMMENTATORS CONSIDER 4:17~5:2 AS ONE COMPLETE SECTION** — While I have read some who make a break at the end of the chapter, most of the commentators consider 4:17 ~ 5:2 to be one continuous section. For those who break after 4:32 it is noted that 5:1 does begin with οὖν [oun], ‘therefore,’ which often does introduce new paragraphs. Plus 5:1,2 does not follow the same patterns as the earlier injunctions in 4:25-32 since 5:1 does not begin with a prohibition; therefore there is reason to break at 4:32. On the other hand 5:1 begins with γίνεσθε [ginesthe, ‘to become’] which is exactly how 4:32 begins, plus the conclusion of 4:32 leads suitably to the call to imitate God (5:1) and the emphasis on Christ’s love (5:2). This would form a climax if 4:32 continued into 5:1,2. It is also noted the content of 5:2b (‘as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.’) is similar to that of 4:32b (‘even as God in Christ forgave you’) but gives a more positively shaped Christian ending. Then finally, 5:3 begins with the stronger adversative δὲ [de, ‘but’] and introduces a new theme of sexual immorality. [Best, 443; see also Lincoln, 294]

**FORM AND STRUCTURE** — One way of describing the new Christian life is to contrast it with the ways of pagans, and this is how Paul starts (vv. 17-19) before turning to direct instructions. A picture is drawn here of the heathen world of unsaved Gentiles, much from a Jewish viewpoint. Paul then identifies the new element that has entered the lives of his readers (vv. 20,21) and concludes by contrasting their previous nature with their present (vv. 22-24). These two parts can be further divided into two subsections, each containing one long sentence each (54 words in vv. 17-19 and 59 words in vv. 20-24):

*Do not live like the Gentiles, vv. 17-19*

*Paul expresses his exhortation with importance, urgency and authority (vv. 17a,b)*

*The negative picture of the unsaved thinking and conduct (vv. 17c-19)*

*But live as those belonging to the Lord Jesus, vv. 20-24*

*The lifestyle of the unsaved heathen is not how you were taught in Christ, vv. 20,21*

*That traditional teaching described by the removal of the old lifestyle that was replaced with the new, vv. 22-24*

The first subsection of Paul’s appeal that the readers no longer conduct themselves like the Gentiles in the surrounding culture contains an extended description of the Gentile lifestyle, organized around a series of three Greek perfect participles (a participle is a verbal adjective):

*‘the Gentiles are ...*

*darkened*

*excluded*

*callous’*

The second subsection begins with a ‘backwards conditional statement.’ If Paul would have stated this in the fashion to which we are familiar, he would have said, ‘If you heard and were taught ... then you did learn.’ As written however, Paul says, ‘But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus’. This is then followed by a series of three infinitives (an infinitive is typically written by ‘to’ + verb, allowing the verb to be used as a noun, adjective or adverb) of what they had been taught. Most commentators understand Paul to be explaining what they had been taught and therefore understand these to act as commands:

*‘You were taught (and have thus learned) ...*

*to take off the old self*

*to be renewed*

*to put on the new self’*

**“Here Paul continues to lay a foundation for explaining how it is possible to change by affirming the importance of gaining a clear understanding of the truth of their new identity in Jesus Christ, which necessitates a change in their conduct. He develops this in two long sentences of 54 words and 59 words respectively. In the first, he makes an appeal to think and live differently than the Gentiles, but then engages in a long description of their self-seeking and ungodly lifestyle. In the second sentence, Paul calls the Ephesians to remember the apostolic tradition that had been passed on to him — a tradition that included the teaching and example of Jesus himself. This teaching not only establishes their identity in Christ, but demands that they bring their lives into conformity with this new identity. The following sections of moral exhortation unpack the meaning of the ‘taking off’ and ‘putting on’ that Paul calls for here.”** [Arnold, 277; see also Best, 416; Lincoln, 270f; O’Brien, 318; Snodgrass, 229; Hodge, 178f]

## **Exhortation to Live According to the New Humanity Rather Than the Old (4:17-24)**

*this pericope contains two major exhortations — the first is a negative: do not live like the Gentiles (vv 17-19; first sentence)*

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

*negative depiction of Gentile living, organized around three perfect participles (a verbal adjective):*

<sup>18</sup> They are **darkened** in their understanding,

**alienated** from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

<sup>19</sup> They have become **callous** and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

*the second exhortation is a positive: but live according to Christ's commands (vv 20-24; second sentence)*

<sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ! — <sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

*three phrases describing the ethical conduct of Christian living, organized around three infinitives ('to' + verb, allowing the verb to be used as a noun, adjective or adverb):*

<sup>22</sup> **to put off** your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is being corrupted through lusts that come from deceit,

<sup>23</sup> and **to be renewed** in the spirit of your minds,

<sup>24</sup> and **to put on** the new self, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness that comes from the truth.

### **Practical Injunctions About the Old and New Life (4:25 – 5:2)**

*negatively ...*

*positively ...*

*motivational clause*

**lying** <sup>25</sup> Therefore, having put away falsehood, ...

... let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, ...

... for we are members one of another.

**anger** <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; ...

... do not let the sun go down on your anger, ...

<sup>27</sup> ... and give no opportunity to the devil.

**stealing** <sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, ...

... but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, ...

... so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

**evil talk** <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, ...

... but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, ...

... that it may give grace to those who hear.

*[possibly major motivation for all the preceding injunctions]*

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

*negative features associated with anger*

<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice...

<sup>32</sup> ... Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, ...

... as God in Christ forgave you.

*[positive exhortation]*

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

*[positive exhortation with motivational clause]*

<sup>2</sup> And walk in love, ...

... as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.