

## 06–15–2020 Ephesians 4.17–24 Bible Study

Read Ephesians 4:17–24 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

17 So I say this, and insist in the Lord, that you no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. 19 Because they are callous, they have given themselves over to indecency for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn about Christ like this, 21 if indeed you heard about him and were taught in him, just as the truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and to put on the new man who has been created in God’s image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.

### COMMENTS:

Up to this point in the epistle there have been only occasional references to the ethical life of the Christian (2:10; 4:1–3, 15). In 4:1 it appeared that the apostle was preparing a lengthy description of the new life in Christ, but this led, instead, into a further exposition of the unifying elements of the church (4:4–16).

At 4:17, however there is a clear break from the theological aspects of unity to an emphasis upon the ethics of unity and how that unity can be maintained within the church. This large section begins by admonishing the readers not to walk—that is, to live—ethically like the heathen and continues with a description of the new standards that are to govern their life.

In contrast to Colossians, there does not appear to be any moral crisis that necessitated these exhortations; rather, they form an integral part of the author’s overall theme of unity. The large ethical section of 4:17–5:21 may be broken up into several smaller parts.

First, 4:17–24 forms a general appeal for the readers to abandon their former way of life, on the principle that their new life in Christ has meant a radical change in their behavior. Second, 4:25–5:2 includes a selected list of vices and virtues essential for maintaining unity within the body.

Third, the ethical life of the old and new life is contrasted by the imagery of light and darkness (5:3–14). Fourth, there is another appeal to the Christian’s “walk” in 5:15–21, including some exhortations within the context of Christian worship. We will study these sections this week.

In v. 17 Paul says he insists in the Lord. His clear call is listen to God for guidance. Don’t go the way your desires ask you to go or how you lived before God came into your life. Our human thinking can only see what is happening to us and those around us. God sees the needs of every person and God doesn’t believe his responsibility is to please us. It is to do what is necessary.

We look at many issues on the basis of our desires being met. God is also working to bring many to repentance for their failures to love one another and to bear one another’s burdens. Our natural reaction is, “I take care of myself and my family. Why don’t you?” The Bible describes this as “hardness of heart.”

For some, thank God not all, self–gratification is their guide for life. A sample we are seeing in our communities today is the resistance to wearing masks to limit the spread of Covid–19. Some who refuse say they are protecting their first amendment rights as citizens of America. I also do not enjoy wearing a mask.

I wear a mask to protect my neighbors, my enemies, my family, and the Woodlands family. I do know there are some who medically may find it impossible to wear a mask because of breathing problems, etc. I do not fault them. I personally believe we should continue doing so until we have a vaccine or an approved treatment medication or program which protects those infected.

In v. 20 learning about Christ calls us to care for the weaker brother or sister. If you think I am a looney person for encouraging people to wear masks, I urge you to read and pray through First Corinthians 8:4–13 (especially v. 13). The needs of others guides our behavior, not our personal preferences or desires.

We are to turn from our old man (living without God) to the new man created by God in us. Vs. 23–24 tells us about the change God makes. Our mind is renewed by the spirit and the new man which is created in God's image. This produces a life which is righteous and holy based on the truth Jesus gave us: "Love one another just as I love you" (John 13:34).

**REFLECTION QUESTION:** We need to remember the radical nature of the call of Jesus about how we live with one another. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke against retaliation and then urged us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:38–48). That is why we need the love of Christ in us. Such behavior is not natural to us until the love of Christ controls us (2 Cor. 5:14–15).