

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:16

^{4:17} So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. ²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. ^{5:1} Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. ³ But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not be partakers with them; ⁸ for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; ¹² for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. ¹⁴ For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Temple Language in Ephesians:* In Eph.2:13 – 22, Christ’s individual body took the place of the Temple. Christ, as the New Temple, took down ‘the dividing wall of hostility’ separating humanity from God and Jews from Gentiles. So in Eph.3:14 – 21, Paul prayed for believers to receive strength from the Spirit to be the dwelling place (i.e. temple) of God. Further, in Eph.4:8, when discussing Jesus *giving* gifts to his people, Paul referred to God *receiving* gifts when King David brought the ark to Jerusalem and the coming Temple (he inverts Psalm 68:18, which refers to 2 Sam.5 – 6). Here in 5:7 – 14, Paul calls the believing community ‘light’ which probably refers to the image of light in the Temple.

Questions for 4:17 – 24

1. From a first glance at this passage, what kind of culture did the Ephesian Christians live in?
2. What does this passage suggest about how internal choices become manifested in outward actions? From heart to mind to body:
 - a. mind: ^{4:17} in the futility of their *mind*, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, (because of what?)
 - b. heart: ^{4:18} because of the hardness of their *heart*; (this is the root cause – their hearts are hard)
 - c. body: ^{4:19} and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.
3. What does it mean to have a hard heart?
 - a. The heart in biblical terms is the center of your will. To have a hardened heart means to not be open to God, not open to His voice. It's easy to develop. The first person that was described this way in Scripture is Pharaoh in Egypt. When Moses confronted him with the words of God, Pharaoh hardened his heart. And just as hardened arteries cause death physically, a hardened heart causes death spiritually, and then it continues to have implications. Jesus said that out of the heart come evil things. So Paul is basically repeating what Jesus said. Jesus is not concerned with just changing our behavior, and if you want proof of that in Scripture, this is one of the clearest passages. Jesus is all about radically changing us from the core and then allowing that change to work out through the rest of our lives.
4. How does a hardened heart affect the way we think?
 - a. A heart that is closed and rigid and hardened against the one true God and dead set against Him affects the way you think. That's why Paul says the Gentiles live 'in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding.' How does this happen in the world around us? People think in a self-centered way. For example, a lot of people just 'want to be happy.' And they think that they can get happy putting themselves first. But they don't realize that that's impossible. If the most important thing in life is you, then you'll always be disappointed; you'll always be upset with other people; you'll always be hurt. Because no one will ever be as committed to you as you are. In order to actually be happy, you have to give your life to something much greater than yourself; that's the only way you'll actually be happy. You should tell that to your friends. It's so logical.
 - b. People either think thoughts of fear and worry, or about domination and power, or something along those lines. It's like the little shrines that we see in Asian restaurants along with all the superstitions about dragons and devils. People lived in a world in which they were exposed to powers they recognized as being greater than themselves, but in which there was no consistency – and never any love. They could beg for mercy, and try to influence them through burning incense or whatever. But there was no sense of belonging to God. People never thought of a god as loving them; pagans never thought of loving a god.
5. And then how does that affect the body and our senses?
 - a. So when people don't have a rich inner spiritual life, they usually just want to have a good physical life. 'Well, if the soul isn't important, then I'll just enjoy my body.' We become ruled by our bodies. Part of growing up, I think, is learning how to temper your body. For instance, when I was growing up I was able to eat three Big Macs. I was able to eat a dozen donuts by myself. I loved the smell of gasoline. Those are extremes. I think that's a natural part of growing up, but in other ways, we start to want more and more sensations. When I was a teenager, I was a competitive swimmer, and I thought about taking performance enhancing drugs because I wanted the sensation of having lots of power. I pressured a girlfriend for sex because those were the sensations that I most wanted. I also wanted a lot of money; I really liked ties at that time, because I thought ties were powerful symbols for a man. Maybe your friends say they feel most alive when they're playing video games because it gets your adrenaline going, or high on something, or making a lot of money. That's when they feel most alive. They really start to like indulging themselves. And even though there was always a let down, and those things that promised so much delivered so little, still they jump right back in there. If they're apart from God, they just live for themselves, if all we live for is to gratify some desire of our bodies.
 - b. That's why Paul says we become 'calloused.' A callous appears on your finger because you use a pencil and it rubs there. And what happens to a callous? It becomes tough. You can't feel things

there. But our soul and our thinking and our feelings can become calloused, too, because of the way we use our bodies. If you take drugs, you start to lose feeling and your body becomes toughened. Then you need more and more drugs to get the same feeling. If you get hooked on pornography, you start to lose feeling. Then you need more and more pornography to get the same feeling. If you want to just shop, you start to lose feeling, and you need more and more things to get the same feeling. That's why Paul throughout 4:24 – 5:7 talks about people wanting sex and greed. Those are the things that affect us most. Here in v.19, he says they 'have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.' When people don't have a rich inner spiritual life, they just want to have a good physical life. But nothing ever satisfies. They just keep going back for hit after hit and it becomes very frustrating for them.

- c. Many of you, for instance, probably don't struggle with alcohol or drugs, you may not even struggle with pornography, but you do want to be rich. You want to pamper your body. For that reason, you really don't love other people that well.
 - d. Illus: For example, my wife Ming is on the board of an organization called TXV, an outreach to at-risk Vietnamese youth. She was asked to lead a Bible study for the staff. One of the five staff is not a Christian. So when Ming covered a passage about how Christians are supposed to share their wealth with others, this young man said, 'That's why I'm not a Christian. I don't see anyone doing that.' Christians can be just as greedy and selfish as everyone else. We need to leave those old ways behind. We cannot be like everyone else.
 - e. If you're a Christian, your body is still important. All the basic things of life like food and sleep and sex are important, but they have a place set by God. There's a flow to how our lives go. Our spirit rules our body, not the other way around.
6. How does Jesus transform us? v.22 – 24
- a. you lay aside the *old self*, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
 - b. ²³ and that you be renewed in the *spirit of your mind*,
 - c. ²⁴ and put on the *new self*, which in God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.
 - d. Illus: This is what happened to you. It's like if you take your junky old car and take out the engine and replace it with the engine of a Porsche. Then you shut the hood. The car looks the same, but it drives totally differently. Do you drive it the same as you always did? No, because now your car has a high performance engine, and it actually needs to drive at a higher speed in order for the engine to get a good workout. The same thing happened to you. Jesus took out your old engine, and he replaced it with himself. You look the same on the outside, but on the inside, you're totally different, and you need to live at a higher level.
 - e. You may not have felt all of that happen. But if you truly came to Jesus, that's what happened. What did Jesus teach? He taught that if we come to him, we must take up our cross and lose our lives in order to find it in him, fresh and new. That is the same thing as laying aside the old self, being renewed by the Spirit of Jesus as he affects our minds, and putting on the new self. That is the deep spiritual reality that baptism gives us a physical picture for. In baptism, you go down into the water, and that symbolically means that the old self has died. But you don't stay there. You come up! And that symbolically means that the new self has risen. You're new, because all who truly come to believe in Jesus die with him on the cross and rise with him at his resurrection. Somehow by his Spirit, Jesus is able to share that experience with us even if we didn't know what was going on in that moment. From that point on, whenever it is for each of us, we became a new person.
 - f. First, you now have a new perspective. Your mind is now informed by the Spirit of Jesus living in you. And that Spirit tells you that the other powerful, alluring voices that are trying to get your attention are simply 'lusts of deceit.' That's all they are. They are deceitful; they're lying to you. And you need to get that straight that in your mind.
 - g. Second, your new self is 'in God.' Most Bible translations say 'in the likeness of God' but the phrase 'the likeness of' is an inference. Literally, Paul says, 'the new self, which in God.' It's the opposite of being 'separated from the life of God' in v.18. What does it mean to be 'in God'? We were separated from Him for so long. But now the core of who we are is swimming in God. We live out of a vital, living connection with the one God of all the universe.

- h. Third, it has been ‘created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.’ We don’t create righteousness or holiness. It is an expression of God’s love for us. You can say that those things exist in God in the sense that God is characterized by righteousness and holiness. We simply put it on by being in Him.
- i. Illus: ‘I used to tell them about a friend of mine who went up to Basel to study music when I went there to study theology with Karl Barth. In those years before the war, there were two of the world’s greatest musicians in Basel, Adolf Busch and Rudolf Serkin – it was with the latter that my friend Edgar wanted to take piano lessons. Serkin looked at his hands and asked how old he was. When he said that he was twenty seven, Serkin shook his head and told him that he was too old for him to take on, and declined to enroll him. But Edgar hung about and when Serkin found that he has an unusually keen ‘understanding for music,’ he sent him to a friend in Salzburg who gave him exercises for six months on end, until the muscular functioning of his hands was transformed. I recall his talking to me afterwards about the drawn-out pain and agony of that experience. But it had been worth it, for when the muscles in his hands had been sufficiently restructured, Serkin at last took him on – and in due course Edgar became a distinguished musician, and indeed a composer, himself.’ (T.F. Torrance, *Atonement* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009) p.442 – 3)
- j. Illus: C.S. Lewis tells a beautiful story about this kind of transformation in one of the Narnia stories, *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*. Here’s the episode in the third book when a boy named Eustace tells his story of being transformed by someone who is like Jesus.

‘Well, anyway, I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly towards me. And one queer thing was that there was no moon last night, but there was moonlight where the lion was. So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn’t that kind of fear. I wasn’t afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of it--if you can understand. Well, it came closer up to me and looked straight into my eyes. And I shut my eyes tight. But that wasn’t any good because it told me to follow it.’

‘You mean it spoke?’

‘I don’t know. Now that you mention it, I don’t think it did. But it told me all the same. And I knew I’d have to do what it told me, so I got up and followed it. And it led me a long way into the mountains. And there was always this moonlight over and round the lion wherever we went. So at last we came to the top of a mountain I’d never seen before and on top of this mountain there was a garden--trees and fruit and everything. In the middle of it there was a well.

‘I knew it was a well because you could see the water bubbling up from the bottom of it: but it was a lot bigger than most wells--like a very big, round bath with marble steps going down into it. The water was as clear as anything and I thought if I could get in there and bathe it would ease the pain in my leg. But the lion told me I must undress first. Mind you, I don’t know if he said any words out loud or not.

‘I was just going to say that I couldn’t undress because I hadn’t had any clothes on when I suddenly thought that dragons are snaky sort of things and snakes can cast their skins. Oh, of course, thought I, that’s what the lion means. So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana. In a minute or two I just stepped out of it. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bath.

‘But just as I was going to put my foot into the water I looked down and saw that it was all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly just as it had been before. Oh, that’s all right, said I, it only means I had another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I’ll have to get out of it too. So I scratched and tore again and this under skin peeled off beautifully and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one and went down to the well for my bath.

‘Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water I knew it had been no good.

‘Then the lion said--but I don’t know if it spoke--You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

'The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know--if you've ever picked the scab of a sore place. It hurts like billy-oh but it is such fun to see it coming away.'

'I know exactly what you mean,' said Edmund.

'Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off--just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt--and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly looking than the others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me--I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on--and threw me into the water. I smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again. You'd think me simply phoney if I told you how I felt about my own arms. I know they've no muscle and are pretty mouldy compared with Caspian's but I was so glad to see them.

'After a bit the lion took me out and dressed me--'

'Dressed you. With his paws?'

'Well, I don't exactly remember that bit. But he did somehow or other: in new clothes--the same I've got on now, as a matter of fact. And then suddenly I was back here. Which is what makes me think it must have been a dream.'

'No. It wasn't a dream,' said Edmund.

'Why not?'

'Well, there are the clothes, for one thing. And you have been--well, un-dragoned, for another.'

'What do you think it was, then?' asked Eustace.

'I think you've seen Aslan,' said Edmund.

'Aslan!' said Eustace. 'I've heard that name mentioned several times since we joined the Dawn Treader. And I felt--I don't know what--I hated it. But I was hating everything then. And by the way, I'd like to apologize. I'm afraid I've been pretty beastly.'

It turns out that Aslan the lion is Jesus in another form. He transforms Eustace from this spoiled brat to a boy who cares for others and can put others before himself.

The process for us as Christians is that we 'have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.' Jesus is the absolute benchmark for truth, he is the person of truth and the place of truth. When we come to him, we come into him, and so we start to soak ourselves in truth. That's what really drives our transformation.

Questions for 4:25 – 32

1. For this section, Paul gives practical commands. There is a don't, a do, and a why. Identify them:

Don't	Do	Why
Speak falsehood	Speak truth	We are members of one another (4:25)
Sin	Be angry, resolve quickly	To not give the devil a foothold (4:26 – 27)
Steal from others	Labor on your own	So you can give (4:28)
Speak unwholesome words	Speak grace	To not grieve the Holy Spirit (4:29 – 30)
Be verbally bitter	Be kind, forgive	God in Christ forgave you (4:31 – 32)

1. This section, 4:25 – 32, is all about *manifesting* Jesus in our relationships. Since 4:20 – 24 was about putting on the new self, the new identity Jesus perfected for us and offers to us, we need to be reminded about the specifics of how that will be for us.
2. How do we see Jesus in our restrained anger? Our giving? Our truth-speaking?
 - a. Anger: We see Jesus angry in the Temple in John 2:12 – 25, when he clears it, or when he calls the Pharisees hypocrites for their bad treatment of 'sinners and tax collectors.'

- b. Giving: We see Jesus generous with himself, his energy, his time, his resources.
 - a. Truth-speaking: We see Jesus speaking truth all the time. Speak truthfully
 - i. What truth? The truth about what I think about you? I don't think so. The truth of our oneness in Christ.
 - 1. 1:13 In him you also, when you had heard **the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;
 - 2. 4:15 But speaking **the truth** in love [in contrast to false teaching that blows us this way and that], we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ
 - 3. 4:21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as **truth** is in Jesus.
3. Why does Paul say anger is okay in 4:26, and then anger is not okay in 4:31?
- a. The emotion of anger is okay to feel in 4:26. Jesus himself displayed anger, primarily at human death and its underlying cause, the corruption in human nature, for example at the grave of Lazarus (Jn.11:1 – 44). But he was also probably showing anger when he cleansed the Temple (Jn.2:12 – 25), when he rebuked the disciples when they wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans (Lk.9:51 – 56) or when they wanted Jesus to not go to the cross (Mt.16:23).
 - b. Angry speech, along with bitterness and wrath and clamor and slander is not okay in 4:31. Notice that the governing thought is about speech from 4:29 – 32. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification... Again, Jesus handled anger appropriately, by loving people truthfully and speaking firmly.
 - c. The reference to grieving the Holy Spirit is also connected to speech. That is true in Luke – Acts and here in Ephesians. In Luke – Acts, every time the Holy Spirit falls on someone, they speak. The kernel of the main idea is in Luke 6:39: 'Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.' The Spirit wants to overflow from the heart through the mouth. It is also true in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul says to be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to one another with spiritual songs, etc.

Questions for 5:1 – 17

1. How do we imitate God in 5:1? By punishing someone else? By sending someone else to suffer? It's easier to understand how to be like Christ in 5:2. But how do we imitate God?
 - a. Paul is already connecting God and Christ as a Trinity, one in being. So imitating God means extending yourself personally into the realm of darkness.
 - b. Paul understands the sacrifice and fragrant offering as bearing sin away. The scapegoat and other offerings were to bear the sin away from yourself and the community, and into God who sends it away from us.
 - c. So this is tied to the commission to be light in darkness in 5:1 – 7.
 - d. Illus: my friend who was in a frat house, came to Christ, and decided to let Jesus change his life. Among other things, he changed his language. He stopped speaking of women badly. And he stopped swearing. The other brothers in the frat house took notice.
2. What does it mean to expose the darkness?
 - a. It's probably a gradation of things. First and foremost, it means that you yourself allow Jesus to shine in your life. That by itself will have an impact just by the contrast. You are sending the sin away from within yourself.
 - b. Second, it probably has to do with having a constructive conversation with a person, to point out something that needs to be pointed out.
 - c. Third, it probably has to do with having some degree of transparency about what's going on. In the Catholic sex abuse scandals, we need to have an appropriate level of exposure. Trying to hide things doesn't work. Sunlight might hurt but it also heals; it's the best disinfectant.

