

Ephesians 4:17-32
December 18, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What do you think it means to live as “children of Light?” I know this is a fancy Christianese phrase we hear from time to time, but what does it really mean? [Let people engage]

Transition: Paul is going to share with the newer Gentile believers what it means to live as “children of light” by first contrasting what it looks like to be UNSAVED. We all have either family members or friends who live in darkness because they have not professed their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I have shared numerous times in our class that one of my favorite mantras is “Lost people act like lost people.” We need to quit being surprised by that. And Paul wants to make sure that these new believers who are now “children of light” NO LONGER act like those who live in darkness. You will see shortly that he will highlight the “do’s and don’ts” for those who are Christ followers. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Living as Children of Light

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, with a continual lust for more.

²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin” (Ps 4:4): Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ 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.

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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The Christian cannot pattern himself after the unsaved person, because the Christian has experienced a miracle of being raised from the dead. His life is not futile, but purposeful. His mind is filled with the light of God's Word, and his heart with the fullness of God's life. He gives his body to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13), and not to sin for the satisfaction of his own selfish lusts. In every way, the believer is different from the unbeliever, and therefore the admonition: "Walk not."

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 39-43). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Admonition (Eph. 4:17–19)

There are some negatives in the Christian life, and here is one of them: “Walk not as other Gentiles walk.” The Christian is not to imitate the life of the unsaved people around him. They are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), while he has been raised from the dead and been given eternal life in Christ. Paul explains the differences between the saved and the unsaved.

To begin with, Christians *think* differently from unsaved people. Note the emphasis here on thinking: mind (Eph. 4:17, 23), understanding (Eph. 4:18), ignorance (Eph. 4:18), “learned Christ” (Eph. 4:20). Salvation begins with repentance, which is a change of mind. The whole outlook of a person changes when he trusts Christ, including his values, goals, and interpretation of life. What is wrong with the mind of the unsaved person? For one thing, his thinking is “vain” (futile). It leads to no substantial purpose. Since he does not know God, he cannot truly understand the world around him, nor can he understand himself. The sad story is told in Romans 1:21–25. Our world today possesses a great deal of knowledge, but very little wisdom. Thoreau put it beautifully when he said that we have “improved means to unimproved ends.”

The unsaved man's thinking is futile because it is darkened. He thinks he is enlightened because he rejects the Bible and believes the latest philosophies, when in reality he is in the dark. “Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools” (Rom. 1:22). But they think they are wise. Satan has blinded the minds of the unsaved (2 Cor. 4:3–6) because he does not want them to see the truth in Jesus Christ. It is not simply that their eyes are blinded so they cannot see, but that their minds are darkened so that they cannot think straight about spiritual matters.

Of course, the unsaved man is dead because of this spiritual ignorance. The truth and the life go together. If you believe God's truth, then you receive God's life. But you would think that the unbeliever would do his utmost to get out of his terrible spiritual plight. Alas, the hardness of his heart enslaves him. He is “past feeling” because he has so given himself over to sin that sin controls him. Read Romans 1:18–32 for a vivid expansion of these three brief verses.

The Christian cannot pattern himself after the unsaved person, because the Christian has experienced a miracle of being raised from the dead. His life is not futile, but purposeful. His mind is filled with the light of God's Word, and his heart with the fullness of God's life. He gives his body to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13), and not to sin for the satisfaction of his own selfish lusts. In every way, the believer is different from the unbeliever, and therefore the admonition: “Walk not.”

The Argument (Eph. 4:20–24)

Paul reinforced his admonition with an argument from the spiritual experience of his readers. Again, the emphasis is on the mind, or the outlook, of the believer. “But ye have not so learned Christ” (Eph. 4:20). He did not say “learned about Christ,” because it is possible to learn about Christ and never be saved. To “learn Christ” means to have a personal relationship to Christ so that you get to know Him better each day. I can learn about Sir Winston Churchill because I own many of his books and can secure books about his life. But I can never learn him because he is dead. Jesus Christ is alive! Therefore, I can “learn Christ” through a personal fellowship with Him.

This fellowship is based on the Word of God. I can be taught “the truth” as it is in Jesus Christ. The better I understand the Word of God, the better I know the Son of God, for the whole Bible is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). The unsaved man is spiritually ignorant, while the Christian is intelligent in the things of the Word. And the unsaved man does not know Christ, while the believer grows in his personal knowledge of Christ day by day. We have believed the truth; we have received the life; therefore, we will walk “in the way” and not walk after the example of the unsaved world.

But this experience of salvation goes much deeper than this, for it has resulted in a whole new position before God. The old man (the former life) has been put away, and we can now walk in newness of life through Christ. Ephesians 4:22–24 is a summary of Romans 5–8, where Paul explained the believer’s identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. He also dealt with this in Ephesians 2:4–6, as well as in Colossians 3. As Christians, we have not simply changed our minds. We have totally changed our citizenship. We belong to God’s “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and therefore, the ideas and desires of the old creation no longer should control our lives.

The simplest illustration of this great truth is given in John 11, the resurrection of Lazarus. Our Lord’s friend, Lazarus, had been in the grave four days when Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, and even Martha admitted that, by now, the decaying body would smell (John 11:39). But Jesus spoke the word and Lazarus came forth alive, an illustration of John 5:24. Notice our Lord’s next words, “Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44). Take off the graveclothes! Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death, for he was now alive. Why go about wearing graveclothes? Take off the old and put on the new!

This was Paul’s argument—you no longer belong to the old corruption of sin; you belong to the new creation in Christ. Take off the graveclothes! How do we do this? “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:23). Conversion is a crisis that leads to a process. Through Christ, once and for all, we have been given a new position in His new creation, but day by day, we must by faith appropriate what He has given us. The Word of God renews the mind as we surrender our all to Him (Rom. 12:1–2). “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17). As the mind understands the truth of God’s Word, it is gradually transformed by the Spirit, and this renewal leads to a changed life. Physically, you are what you eat, but spiritually, you are what you think. “As he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). This is why it is important for us as Christians to spend time daily meditating on the Word, praying, and fellowshiping with Christ.

The Application (Eph. 4:25–32)

Paul was not content to explain a principle and then leave it. He always applied it to the different areas of life that need to feel its power. Paul even dared to name sins. Five different sins are named in this section, and Paul told us to avoid them and he explained why.

Lying (v. 25). A lie is a statement that is contrary to fact, spoken with the intent to deceive. If I tell you it is noon, and then discover that my watch is wrong, I did not tell a lie. But if I gave you the wrong time so you would be late to a meeting and I would benefit from it, that would be a lie. Satan is a liar (John 8:44); and he wants us to believe that God is a liar. “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1) Whenever we speak truth, the Spirit of God works, but whenever we tell a lie, Satan goes to work. We like to believe that we help people by lying to them, but such is not the case. We may not see the sad consequences immediately, but ultimately they will come. “Ye know that no lie is of the truth” (1 John 2:21). Hell is prepared for “whosoever loveth and

maketh a lie” (Rev. 22:15). This does not mean that anybody who ever told a lie will go to hell, but rather that those whose lives are controlled by lies—they love lies and they make lies—are lost forever. The Christian’s life is controlled by truth.

Note the reason Paul gave for telling the truth: We belong to each other in Christ. He urged us to build the body in love (Eph. 4:16) and he urged us to build the body in truth. “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). As “members one of another” we affect each other, and we cannot build each other apart from truth. The first sin that was judged in the early church was the sin of lying (Acts 5:1–11).

Anger (vv. 26–27). Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (Deut. 9:8, 20; Ps. 2:12). Several times in the Old Testament the phrase appears, “the anger of the Lord” (Num. 25:4; Jer. 4:8; 12:13). The holy anger of God is a part of His judgment against sin, as illustrated in our Lord’s anger when He cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12–13). The Bible often speaks of anger “being kindled” (Gen. 30:2; Deut. 6:15), as though anger can be compared to fire. Sometimes a man’s anger smolders, and this we would call *malice*; but this same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and this we would call *wrath*.

It is difficult for us to practice a truly holy anger or righteous indignation because our emotions are tainted by sin, and we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. The New Testament principle seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10).

It is possible to be angry and not sin, but if we do sin, we must settle the matter quickly and not let the sun go down on our wrath. “Agree with thine adversary quickly” (Matt. 5:25). “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15). The fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder (Matt. 5:21–26), because anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and Satan is a murderer (John 8:44). Satan hates God and God’s people, and when he finds a believer with the sparks of anger in his heart, he fans those sparks, adds fuel to the fire, and does a great deal of damage to God’s people and God’s church. Both lying and anger “give peace to the devil” (Eph. 4:27).

When I was living in Chicago, one out of every thirty-five deaths was a murder, and most of these murders involved relatives and friends. They are what the law calls “crimes of passion.” Two friends get into an argument (often while gambling), one of them gets angry, pulls a gun or knife, and kills his friend. Horace was right when he said, “Anger is momentary insanity.”

A woman tried to defend her bad temper by saying, “I explode and then it’s all over with.”

“Yes,” replied a friend, “just like a shotgun—but look at the damage that’s left behind.”

“Anyone can become angry,” wrote Aristotle. “But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.”

Solomon has a good solution: “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

Stealing (v. 28). “Thou shalt not steal” is one of the Ten Commandments, and when God gave that commandment, He instituted the right of private ownership of property. A man has the right to turn his strength into gain, and to keep that gain and use it as he sees fit. God gave numerous laws to the Jews for the protection of their property, and these principles have become a part of our law today. Stealing was particularly a sin of the slaves in Paul’s day. Usually they were not well cared for and were always in need, and the law gave them almost no protection.

When he wrote to Titus, Paul urged him to admonish the slaves not to “purloin” but to be faithful to their masters (Titus 2:10). But it was not only the slaves, but citizens in general, who were addicted to thievery, for Paul wrote to people in the Ephesian church who were gainfully employed (Eph. 4:28).

Just as Satan is a liar and a murderer, he is also a thief. “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). He turned Judas into a thief (John 12:6) and he would do the same to us if he could. When he tempted Eve, he led her to become a thief, for she took the fruit that was forbidden. And she, in turn, made Adam a thief. The first Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise, but the Last Adam, Christ, turned to a thief and said, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Paul added motive to the admonition. We should tell the truth because we are “members one of another.” We should control our anger lest we “give place to the devil.” We should work, and not steal, so that we might be able “to give to him that needeth.” You would expect Paul to have said, “Let him work that he might take care of himself and not be tempted to steal.” Instead, he lifted human labor to a much higher level. We work that we might be able to help others. If we steal, we hurt others; therefore, we should work that we might be able to help others. Even honest labor could become a selfish thing, and this Paul seeks to avoid. Of course, it was a fundamental rule in the early church that “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thes. 3:10). A lazy Christian robs himself, others, and God. Of course, Paul was not writing to believers who could not work because of handicaps, but with those who would not work.

Paul himself was an example of a hard worker, for while he was establishing local churches, he labored as a tentmaker. Every Jewish rabbi was taught a trade, for, said the rabbis, “If you do not teach your son a trade, you teach him to be a thief.” The men that God called in the Scriptures were busy working when their call came. Moses was caring for sheep; Gideon was threshing wheat; David was minding his father’s flock; and the first four disciples were either casting nets or mending them. Jesus Himself was a carpenter.

Corrupt speech (v. 29). The mouth and heart are connected. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). We expect a change in speech when a person becomes a Christian. It is interesting to trace the word *mouth* through the Book of Romans and see how Christ makes a difference in a man’s speech. The sinner’s mouth is “full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:14); but when he trusts Christ, he gladly confesses with his mouth “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Rom. 10:9–10, NIV). As a condemned sinner, his mouth is stopped before the throne of God (Rom. 3:19); but as a believer, his mouth is opened to praise God (Rom. 15:6). Change the heart and you change the speech. Paul certainly knew the difference, for when he was an unsaved rabbi, he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). But when he trusted Christ, a change took place: “Behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). From “preying” to “praying” in one step of faith!

The word *corrupt*, used in Matthew 7:17–18, refers to rotten fruit. It means “that which is worthless, bad, or rotten.” Our words do not have to be “dirty” to be worthless. Sometimes we go along with the crowd and try to impress people with the fact that we are not as puritanical as they think. Peter may have had this motive in mind when he was accused by the girl of being one of Christ’s disciples. “Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, ‘I know not the man’ ” (Matt. 26:74). The appetites of the old life sometimes show up when we permit “filthy communication” out of the mouth (Col. 3:8). Remember, before we were saved, we lived in spiritual death (Eph. 2:1–3) and, like Lazarus, our personal corruption produced an odor that was not pleasing to God. No wonder Paul wrote, “Their throat is an open sepulchre” (Rom. 3:13).

The remedy is to make sure the heart is full of blessing. So fill the heart with the love of Christ so that only truth and purity can come out of the mouth. Never have to say, “Now, take this with a grain of salt.” Paul told us to put the salt of God’s grace in everything we say. “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6). And keep in mind that your words have power, either for good or evil. Paul tells us to speak in such a way that what we say will build up our hearers, and not tear them down. Our words should minister grace and help to draw others closer to Christ. Satan, of course, encourages speech that will tear people down and destroy the work of Christ. If you need to be reminded of the power of the tongue, read the third chapter of James.

Bitterness (vv. 30–32). These verses warn us against several sins of the attitude and amplify what Paul wrote about anger. *Bitterness* refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man. Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill will against him. “Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them” (Col. 3:19). Bitterness leads to wrath, which is the explosion on the outside of the feelings on the inside. Wrath and anger often lead to brawling (clamor) or blasphemy (evil speaking). The first is fighting with fists, the second is fighting with words. It is difficult to believe that Christians would act this way, but they do, and this is why Paul warned us, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1).

A handsome elderly man stopped at my study one day and asked me if I would perform a wedding for him. I suggested that he bring the bride in so that we might chat together and get better acquainted, since I hesitate to marry strangers. “Before she comes in,” he said, “let me explain this wedding to you. Both of us have been married before—to each other! Over thirty years ago, we got into an argument, I got mad, and we separated. Then we did a stupid thing and got a divorce. I guess we were both too proud to apologize. Well, all these years we’ve lived alone, and now we see how foolish we’ve been. Our bitterness has robbed us of the joys of life, and now we want to remarry and see if the Lord won’t give us a few years of happiness before we die.” Bitterness and anger, usually over trivial things, make havoc of homes, churches, and friendships.

Paul gives three reasons why we must avoid bitterness. First, *it grieves the Holy Spirit*. He lives within the Christian, and when the heart is filled with bitterness and anger, the Spirit grieves. We parents know just a little of this feeling when our children at home fight with each other. The Holy Spirit is happiest in an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace, for these are the “fruit of the Spirit” that He produces in our lives as we obey Him. The Holy Spirit cannot leave us, because He has sealed us until that day when Christ returns to take us home. We do not lose our salvation because of our sinful attitudes, but we certainly lose the joy of our salvation and the fullness of the Spirit’s blessing.

Second, our sin *grieves God the Son*, who died for us. Third, *it grieves God the Father* who forgave us when we trusted Christ. Here Paul put his finger on the basic cause of a bitter attitude: We cannot forgive people. An unforgiving spirit is the devil’s playground, and before long it becomes the Christian’s battleground. If somebody hurts us, either deliberately or unintentionally, and we do not forgive him, then we begin to develop bitterness within, which hardens the heart. We should be tenderhearted and kind, but instead we are hardhearted and bitter. Actually, we are not hurting the person who hurt us; we are only hurting ourselves. Bitterness in the heart makes us treat others the way Satan treats them, when we should treat others the way God has treated us. In His gracious kindness, God has forgiven us, and we should forgive others. We do not forgive for *our* sake (though we do get a blessing from it) or even for

their sake, but for *Jesus*' sake. Learning how to forgive and forget is one of the secrets of a happy Christian life.

Review once again the motives for “walking in purity”: We are members one of another; Satan wants to get a foothold in our lives; we ought to share with others; we ought to build one another up; and we ought not to grieve God. And, after all, we have been raised from the dead—so why wear the graveclothes? Jesus says of us as He said of Lazarus: “Loose him, and let him go!”

Hoehner, H. W. (1985). *Ephesians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 636-637) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

B. Walking in holiness (4:17–32)

Believers are to walk in holiness as well as unity. Paul first showed negatively how a believer should not walk; then he gave the positive aspects of Christian conduct.

1. PRESENTATION OF THE OLD MAN (4:17–19)

a. His nature (4:17–18).

4:17–18. The Ephesian believers who were Gentiles (2:1–2, 11–12) were not to walk **as the Gentiles do**, or as implied, as they had once walked. Gentiles walked **in the futility of their thinking**. The word for “futility” (*mataiotēti*; cf. Rom. 1:21) suggests being void of useful aim or goal. (This noun is used only here and in Rom. 8:20 [of Creation] and 2 Peter 2:18 [of words]. The verb *mataioō* is used in Rom. 1:21, “their thinking became futile.”) Unbelieving Gentiles failed to attain the true purpose of the mind, namely, to receive God’s revelation which would guide them in their conduct. Since their minds could not receive God’s revelation, **their understanding was darkened** (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4), being **separated** (lit., “alienated”; cf. Eph. 2:12) **from the life of** (that comes from) **God**. Their alienation is **because of their ignorance** of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:14); and this is because of **the hardening of their hearts**, their being insensitive to God and His ways.

b. His practice (4:19).

4:19. Because of their lack of **sensitivity** these Gentiles gave **themselves over** (“abandoned themselves”; cf. Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) **to sensuality** (*aselgeia*, “licentiousness”; cf. Mark 7:22; Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:2, 7, 18; Jude 4), a life without concern for personal standards or social sanctions. Their purpose (*eis*) was to practice **every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more** (lit., “in greed”), indulging in self-gratification without regard for others. This is a horrible picture of sinful people’s selfish and perverted ways.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE NEW MAN (4:20–32)

a. His position (4:20–24).

4:20–24. In contrast (*de*) with the “old man” (vv. 17–19) believers **did not come to know** (lit., “learn”) **Christ that way**. Their minds are no longer darkened; their lives are no longer alienated from God; their hearts are no longer hardened and impure. Christ is the Subject (**you heard of Him**) and the Sphere (**you were taught in Him**) of a believer’s learning. This teaching and learning is **in accordance with the truth**, because He is the Truth (John 14:6). The content of this learning is twofold: (1) A believer has **put off the old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires** (cf. Eph. 4:17–19). Self-centered lusts are deceitful because they promise joy but fail to provide it. (2) He has **put on the new self** which has been **created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness**, which is based on truth (v. 24). This truth contrasts with the deceitfulness of lustful living (cf. vv. 14–15). Believers have been **made new in the attitude of their minds**; they are no longer futile in their thinking, darkened in their understanding, and ignorant (vv. 18–19). These are not commands, for the construction here (and in the parallel passage in Col. 3:9–10) is not imperative. They are facts that believers have learned, as is also seen in Romans 6:2–10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. Believers are new people in Christ, and hence they can no longer live as Gentiles live, as the next exhortations state.

b. His practice (4:25–32)

Each of the following five exhortations about a believer’s conduct has three parts: (1) a negative command, (2) a positive command, and (3) the reason for the positive command.

4:25. Having **put away falsehood**, believers are to tell the truth (cf. v. 15). Truth is conforming one’s words to reality. The reason for this exhortation is that believers **are all members of one** another in Christ’s **body**, the church (cf. vv. 4, 16).

4:26–27. While believers may at times be legitimately angry (with righteous **anger** against sin; cf. John 2:13–16), they are **not to sin**. The way to prevent such sin is to “keep short accounts,” dealing with the anger before **the sun goes down**. The reason is that **the devil** would like to intensify a Christian’s righteous anger against sin, causing it to become sin itself. This then gives the devil **a foothold** (lit., “a place”), an opportunity for leading that Christian into further sin. Then anger begins to control the believer rather than the believer controlling his anger.

4:28. Christians are not to **steal**, but are to **work** in order to give to the needy. A thief takes from others for his own benefit, whereas a believer is to work, **doing something useful** (*agathon*, “beneficial”; cf. v. 29) **with his own hands** for the purpose of sharing **with those in need**. This is true Christian charity. Work has many benefits: it provides for a person’s material needs, it gives him something useful to do (something that is beneficial to himself and others), and it enables him to help others materially.

4:29–30. Believers are **not** to speak **unwholesome** (*sapros*, “rotten”) words (cf. 5:4), but **helpful** (*agathos*, “good, beneficial”; cf. 4:28) words for the purpose of edification. Good words **benefit** (lit., “give grace” or enablement to) the hearers. One’s words are to be true and pure and also are to contribute to benefiting others. Besides one’s conscience, **the Holy Spirit** also helps guard a believer’s speech. The fact that the Holy Spirit may be grieved points to His personality. His seal of a believer remains until **the day of redemption**, the time that a believer receives his new body (cf. 1:14; Phil. 3:20–21).

4:31–32. Believers are to **get rid of** the six vices of **bitterness, rage** (*thymos*, “outbursts of anger”), **anger** (*orgē*, “settled feeling of anger”), **brawling** (*kraugē*, “shouting or clamor”), **slander** (*blasphēmia*), and **malice** (*kakia*, “ill will, wickedness”). Several of these vices are also listed in Colossians 3:8. The positive commands are three: (1) **be kind** (*chrēstoi*, lit., “what is

suitable or fitting to a need”); (2) be **compassionate** (*eusplanchnoi*; used elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Peter 3:8; cf. *splanchnoi*, “inner emotions of affection,” in 2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Phil. 1:8; 2:1; Col. 3:12; Phile. 7, 12, 20; 1 John 3:17); (3) be **forgiving** (lit., “being gracious,” *charizomenoi*, the participle from the verb *charizomai*, “to give freely” or “to give graciously as a favor”). The reason for these positive commands is that **in Christ God** is kind (Eph. 2:7), compassionate (Mark 1:41), and gracious (Rom. 8:32) to believers.

Dockery, D. S. (1998). *The Pauline Letters*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 580). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

HOLY LIVING (4:17–4:32)

In this very practical and challenging section Paul focused on holy living. Believers are to walk in purity as well as unity. The apostle first showed negatively how believers should not walk. Then he provided positive aspects of Christian conduct.

Paul distinguished between those characterized by rebellion, obstinacy, and darkened understanding and those who respond to Jesus Christ as both subject and teacher. The first group is called the “old self” or unregenerate self. The second group is called the “new self.” Paul exhorted believers to live out the reality of their new position with an inward renunciation and restoration.

The conclusion of chapter 4 includes ethical exhortations grounded in theological truth. Believers are to rid themselves of vices like “bitterness,” “anger,” and “slander” and instead imitate the compassionate kindness of Christ.

Fields, W. C. (1972). *Ephesians*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (p. 747). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Christian Attitudes and Actions (Eph. 4:1–6:24)

The lofty concepts of the earlier chapters are now translated into practical duties for the believer. These are some guidelines for Christian thought and behavior. The Christian must “walk worthy” (4:1).

First, Paul stresses the need for unity (vv. 1–16). God’s calling requires special attitudes in response, attitudes of consideration for others. He lists seven unifying factors among believers (vv. 4–6). Even the diversity of abilities should be integrated into the central purpose of the church (vv. 7–16). Each member is endowed with some capacity for service. There are no exceptions.

Right attitudes are important, but they are sterile without right actions. The new life in Christ is contrasted with the old life (vv. 17–29). A difference in character will mean a difference in conduct. The Holy Spirit is an active agent in this new quality of daily life (vv. 30–32).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Ephesians 4:17-32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.