




THE COMMUNITY

A New Country | LIVING AS MEMBERS OF THE KINGDOM

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Moving and becoming a citizen of a new country involves at least three major transitions. First, one needs to understand the distinct world-view of that country. Second, one needs to adopt the practices of that country. Third, one needs to learn a new language.

In Colossians 1:13, it says that we have been “rescued from the kingdom of darkness” and are now in the kingdom of light. In Ephesians 4:17-5:7, Paul contrasts the world view, conduct, and speech of our old residence, the kingdom of darkness, with the kingdom of light, urging the Ephesians to act in a manner that is appropriate to their new residence—God’s kingdom.

New World View

In 4:17-18, Paul describes the mind apart from Christ as futile (aimless) in its thinking, and ignorant and darkened in its understanding. Without knowledge of God, even the most intelligent people will come to theories, ideas, and beliefs that just don’t make any sense.

Sometimes I just marvel at the lies people believe. When I hear the notion that the world can be explained by an atheistic, evolutionary process, I just want to say, “Are you kidding me?” For five seconds just look around and think about that. Life from non-life makes no sense; we learned that in fifth grade thanks to Louis Pasteur. And yet to the darkened mind, it seems plausible. In almost every field of thought, from science to history to literature, most current intellectual theories could best be described as darkened, to some degree, in their understanding.

Paul clarifies in 4:18 that the core of the problem is not an intellectual one. He states that this thinking is a natural overflow of a heart that’s been hardened to God. With this information, it becomes clear why debate on many of these issues with unbelievers is often fruitless. The point of variance is at a heart and moral level, not the intellectual level. Ultimately, the best way to shed light on the futility of a person’s thinking is to lead them to Christ. The same is true in our lives as well. We don’t just need more knowledge, we need to surrender more and more of our lives to Jesus so His truth can correct the lies we also believe.

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What’s the Big Idea?

Because in Christ we are members of a new kingdom we no longer have to live in the old way like before we were believers. As we apply the truth of the gospel, primarily through the renewing of our minds, our life will grow into more Christlikeness. This will be made evident in what we believe, how we behave, and how we speak.

What’s the Problem?

Even as believers we can revert back to our former way of life, in which a hardened heart led to futile thinking and impure living.

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Paul describes the futility of godless thinking as a deteriorating condition that spirals progressively downward. In contrast, our thinking is to be renewed, continually spiraling upward with greater wisdom and understanding. This is what Paul means when he says that we are to be “renewed in the attitude of our minds.” is ample ground to create unity among Christians from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Scripture is the major tool God uses to transform our thinking. He also uses mature Christians who can share their experience in reading the Scriptures and walking with God. Last, God teaches us lessons in wisdom experientially by simply walking daily with Him. one cautionary note: It needs to be said that our experience must be informed by Scripture, or our thoughts may be led astray. It's also important to realize that it is not simply the Scriptures themselves that change our thinking. As we reading the Scriptures, the Lord meets with us and teaches us. Academic study of the Bible apart from a vital relationship with God won't renew our minds.

New Conduct

Last, there is a new conduct to be learned. Paul instructs us to rid ourselves of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. To think of such change all at once can be overwhelming. In 4:30 Paul says not to “grieve the Holy Spirit.” the Holy Spirit changes our lives progressively. A strong sense of conviction and sadness over a particular sin is often a good indicator that the Spirit is prompting change in a specific area. His sadness, and yours, actually helps fuel the change. This is part of what it means when it says in Philippians 2:13 that “God works in you to will and act according to his good purposes.”

But, while God is working within us, we ourselves must participate. Holiness is kneaded into our lives in a variety of ways. Often, the process of change looks something like this: we experience sadness and remorse over an area of sin as the Spirit convicts us, we pray about the sin, confess it to both God and others, make small good choices, and experience partial victories (like stopping in the middle of the act), followed by bigger and more consistent choices. In this way we increasingly live as members of the kingdom of light.

New Language

Paul lists several characteristics of the language of our old kingdom: slander, course joking, lying, unwholesome talk, obscenity, and foolish talk. The word unwholesome means, “that which breaks down.” This is a broad category and would include all forms of speech that are used for the purpose of tearing down another or the community. Gossip, for example, tears down and erodes the fabric of a community. Cynicism, is another example. Cynicism is a negative manner of speech that always draws attention to what is lacking or wrong with either a person or situation. Sarcasm and criticism are genres of speech that can be used constructively, but are often used in an unwholesome fashion – to tear down rather than build up. In contrast, the Christian is to use all of the dialects of the new kingdom (kindness, encouragement, truth) with the guiding principle of speaking, “only what is helpful for building others up according to their need” (v. 29). Like learning any new language, it takes time, and we need to be patient with others as we detect accents of their old language as they are learning the new.

Dearly Loved

As always, be sure to observe that the power source for all of these changes is a personal experience with the love of Jesus as we are reminded in 5:1-2. He is the one who has moved us from one kingdom to another at the cost of His life. He is the model, the motivation, and the means by which our new citizenship takes effect.

What's Our Response?

The major application of the study is to replace futile thinking with the truths of the gospel that lead to a Christ like life, specifically in areas of conduct and speech.

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What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 4:1-16

Launch

In Colossians 1:3, it says that we have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and are now in the kingdom of light. If you were to move to a new country, what are some of the things you would need to learn in order to fit in?

Explore

Read 4:17-24. New World View

1. If you spoke to someone from another country, you'd notice they view the world differently than Americans. How have you begun to see your viewpoints change since becoming a Christian?

2. Can you think of an example of something you heard recently you thought was futile or darkened thinking?

3. In verse 18, Paul traces futile thinking and darkened understanding to its source—a “hardened heart.” What does this tell you about debating issues with non-believers? What has been the result when you've tried to debate issues with a non-Christian?

4. How do you best effect change in another person's thinking?

5. Paul describes the futility of godless thinking as progressively spiraling downward. In contrast, we are to be “made new in the attitudes of our minds.” What role does learning have in your spiritual growth?

Read 4:25-5:2 New Conduct

6. What do all the negative things Paul wants them to abandon have in common?

7. How would you describe the vision of Christian community that Paul presents here?

Read 4:29. New Language

8. Read Ephesians 4:25-5:7. List some of the examples Paul gives of our old language.

9. In verse 29, it says to “get rid of any unwholesome talk.” Unwholesome means types of speech that are negative or “tear down” another person. What would be some examples?

10. Do you think sarcasm, and/or, cynicism is “unwholesome?” Why or why not?

Apply

In 4:30, Paul says not to, “grieve the Holy Spirit.” the Spirit changes our lives progressively. A sense of sadness over a particular sin is one indicator that the Spirit is prompting you in this area. His sadness, and yours, actually helps fuel the change.

11. Is there any area of worldview, conduct, or speech you have been feeling saddened over recently?

12. Besides sadness, what are some other ways you might cultivate change in this area?

13. Where are the places where you are tempted to embrace the “darkened understanding” of the world? Where do you look for life apart from God?

14. Read 4:25-32. There are seven characteristics of conduct from the old kingdom and three from the new. Go down the list and rate yourself with either: not an issue, kind of an issue, big issue.

15. In what areas have you seen God begin to change how you speak?

16. When learning any new language, we often speak with an accent from our old language. If you aren't careful with your speech, what accent do people hear?

17. What does this passage help us understand about how we grow and change? What role does the love and sacrifice of Christ play in this?

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What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the group to discuss.
2. You might begin with an example you've recently heard.
3. Debate on many of these issues is often fruitless. The point of variance is at a heart and moral level, not the intellectual level.
4. Ultimately, the best way to shed light on the futility of a person's thinking is to help them begin a relationship with Christ.
5. Paul points out believers have 'learned Christ'. We don't normally 'learn' a person...but in this case we know Christ personally and continue to grow in our knowledge and experience of Him through His Spirit and His word.
6. Lying, anger and theft all represent forms of self-centeredness.
7. Notice the balance of "truth" and "love."
8. Slander, coarse joking, lying, unwholesome talk, obscenity, and foolish talk.
9. Biting sarcasm, criticism, cynicism, gossip.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Regularly confessing to God and sharing the issue with someone else. Taking small steps even if they are only partial victories.
- 13.-16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"

Memorize

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.

Ephesians 4:22-24



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