**A NEW LIFE IN PLACE OF THE OLD**

***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,*** ***and they are full of greed.***

***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.***

Ephesians 4:17-24 (NIV)

Paul continues to describe the new standards expected of God’s new society, what the life worthy of God’s call looks like. Called to be ‘one’ people, he has argued, we must cultivate unity. Called to be a ‘holy’ people, he goes on to argue now, we must also cultivate purity. Purity is as indispensable a characteristic of the people of God as unity.

‘*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’* (4:17). There must be a complete abandonment of the old way of living and the working out of the new way of living in each person’s personal life and in each level of human relationships. Though the old life had been renounced by most, the Christians were still living surrounded by those who still ‘*live’* (literally: walk, as in 2:2) in the darkness of their godlessness. Paul expresses a warning in the strongest terms: ‘*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord’* (4:17). He is writing as one who lives ‘*in the Lord’* but is writing to those who while by race are Gentiles, have been transformed by the grace of Christ.

The meaning of that old life is now described in a series of phrases similar to the expressions used in Romans 1:18-31. There was a mental, moral and spiritual decadence in the ancient world of Greece and Rome in which Paul lived. The prevalent way of peoples’ thinking was ‘futile,’ (‘*in the futility of their thinking’*) meaning it was void of any real outcomes, empty of any results. Without the knowledge of God there was no sense of valid purpose. *‘They are darkened in their understanding’* (4:18). There was knowledge (1 Corinthians 1:18-25) but no light of wisdom in the mind. Because the true knowledge of God involves fellowship with Him, ignorance of Him puts that person in a place where their whole life is ‘*separated from the life of God’* (4:18). From one standpoint and in common with all people, they had sinned against the light they had (Romans 1:18-23; 2:12-15). There was a ‘*hardening of their hearts’* (4:18). The word translated ‘*hardening’* (Greek: *porosis*) comes from a verb that means to petrify, and so figuratively to become hard or insensitive. This verbal-noun and its verbal form are used eight times in the New Testament and in some of those instances (e.g. Mark 3:5; 8:17) involves culpability. Poros was a kind of marble or in medical writers a ‘callus’ or a ‘bony formation on the joints.’ The verb ‘poroun’ was used of something becoming hard and so insensible and, when applied to sight, becoming blind.

‘*Having lost all sensitivity’* (4:19). They have no desire for the truth of God and no feeling of shame in the face of evil. Paul is describing a heart that is insensitive to God and righteousness. Immorality has inevitably followed. ‘*They have given themselves over to sensuality’* (4:19). The word for ‘*sensuality’* means absence of restraint, excessive indecency, wantonness, vice that throws off all restraint and flaunts itself. Shamelessly, they ‘*indulge in every kind of impurity’* (4:19). The word for ‘*indulge’* can mean business or the gains from business (Acts 16:16,19; 19:24) and so the thought here is making a trade or business of impurity. ‘*And they are full of greed’* (4:19). They want far more than what is rightly theirs, without regard for the rights of others. In the New Testament this word is closely linked with the sins of the flesh (5:3,5; Colossians 3:5). Sometimes it is used for the desire for money (Luke 12:15; 2 Corinthians 9:5) and sometimes for sexual passion at others’ expense (Hebrews 13:4,5).

Putting Paul’s expressions together, he is depicting the downward spiral into evil that begins with an obstinate rejection of God’s known truth. First comes ‘*the hardening of their hearts’* (4:18), then their ‘*ignorance’* (4:18); consequently, they are ‘*separated from the life of God’* (4:18) because He turns away from them, until finally *‘having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed’* (4:19). Hardness of heart leads first to darkness of mind, then to deadness of soul under the judgement of God, and finally to recklessness of life. Having lost all sensitivity, people lose all control.

‘*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’* (4:20,21). Over against heathen hardness, darkness and recklessness, Paul sets a contrasting process of moral re-education. He uses three parallel expressions centering on three verbs, all aorist, meaning to learn, to hear and to be taught, with a final reference to ‘*the truth that is in Jesus*.’ First, you came ‘*to know* *Christ’* (4:20). Secondly, ‘*you heard of Him’* (4:21) and thirdly, ‘*you …* *were taught … the truth that is in* *Jesus’* (4:21).

To the first: you came ‘*to know Christ’* (4:20). Christ is Himself the substance of Christian teaching. Just as evangelists ‘*preach Christ’* (2 Corinthians 4:5), so hearers ‘*receive Christ’* (Colossians 2:6) and come ‘*to know Christ.*’ He is the Word made flesh, the unique God-man, who died, rose and reigns. The implication of the context in Ephesians is that ‘*to know Christ’* means to know His lordship, His kingdom rule of righteousness and the moral demands of the new life. The Christ the Ephesian Christians had come to know was calling them to standards and values totally different to those of their former life.

Secondly, Christ is not just the substance of the teaching but He is also the teacher. While the NIV translation says ‘*you heard of Him’* (4:21), there is no preposition (‘of’) in Paul’s wording: ‘you heard him.’ Paul assumes that through the voice of their Christian teachers, they had actually heard Christ’s voice.

Thirdly, they ‘*were taught … the truth that is in Jesus’* (4:21). Jesus Christ was not just the teaching, and not just the teacher, but was the centre of the very worldview of the church, the way they now saw their world. Paul could confidently say ‘*the truth … is in Jesus*.’ The change from His title ‘Christ’ to His human name ‘Jesus’ seems intentional. The historical Jesus is Himself the embodiment of truth, as He claimed (John 14:6).

If heathen darkness leads to reckless uncleanness, what is the truth which sets Christians free and leads them to righteousness? ‘*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’* (4:22-24). To *‘know Christ’* (4:20) is to understand the new creation He has brought into being and the new life that results from it. We experience that new life by putting off the old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on, like clean clothing, the new humanity recreated in God’s image.

The Ephesian Christians had been taught that becoming a Christian involved a radical change, a conversion (the term for the human side of the experience), a re-creation (the divine side). It involved the renouncing of the former self, the fallen humanity, and the recognition that in Christ we are a new self, a re-created humanity. Each of these two Paul calls the ‘*old self*,’ which is ‘*put off,*’ and the ‘*new self,*’ which is ‘*put on*.’ The old self was personified as an old man, decrepit, deformed and tending to corruption. The new self was seen as a new man, fresh, clean and like God Himself. We are called to put off our corrupt nature as a ragged and filthy garment and put on our new nature as a garment of light.

The old self, the person we were before conversion, was ‘*being corrupted by its deceitful desires’* (4:20). ‘*Corrupted’* can mean ‘perishing’ (Romans 8:21; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Galatians 6:8) or ‘rotten’ and ‘polluted’ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Both meanings apply here. The ‘*desires*,’ the self-centred desires that belonged to that old way of life, are ‘*deceitful*.’ They promise satisfaction but can’t ever fulfil the promise.

Between Paul’s reminder that they were taught to ‘put off’ the old and ‘put on’ the new, Paul writes that his readers were to be ‘*renewed’* (4:23). There are two Greek words for ‘renew’: *kainos* which means new in the sense of fresh and different, and *neos*, which means new in the sense of young. 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Colossians 3:10 use a variant of *kainos* because the context is the new creation replacing the old with a new kind of life that was not known before. But here in 4:23 we have a variant of *neos*. Paul is emphasising that this renewal is not just to make us ‘fresh and different’ (kainos) but ‘new and young.’

In 4:22 and 24 the verbs were aorist, pointing to a past complete action ‘*You were taught … to put off your old self, and … to put on the new self’* but the renewal spoken of in 4:23 is present tense, indicating a continuing *‘made new in the attitude of your minds*.’ If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds. This renewal of the mind (cf. Romans 12:2) is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit. New thinking leads to a new life.

‘*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life … to put on the new self,* *created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’* (4:22,24). In place of the old nature, characterised as it was by selfishness and sin and bound by evil and its consequences, there is a ‘*new self’* which is God’s creation (2:10,15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Colossians 3:10; Titus 3:5). The aorist verb again implies a decisive act, putting on this God-created, God-given life, as it has already implied the putting off of the old. The ‘*new self’*, the new nature, is *‘created to be like God.’* In Colossians 3:10 this new nature is said to be ‘*being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*’ Humanity was made in God’s image in the beginning (Genesis 1:27) and though that image has been marred by sin and fellowship with God lost, in Christ there is a new creation, a restoration to the divine image. Above all, the image of God is shown ‘*in true righteousness and holiness.’* If these qualities don’t exist, there is no evidence of God’s work of re-creation. In a broad sense, ‘*righteousness’* is used of fulfilling our duty to people while ‘*holiness’* is fulfilling our duty to God. The NIV makes ‘*true’* an adjective *(‘in true righteousness and* *holiness*’) but it probably should be the more literal ‘of the truth’ – ‘in righteousness and holiness of the truth.’ Paul is contrasting what has been said already (4:22) of the fruit of deceit with the righteousness and holiness that come into the character when the truth in Christ is embraced and followed.

In Paul’s thinking, God’s part and our part are clear. This is what the Ephesian and other Asian churches had been taught. They had been thoroughly grounded in the new nature and consequences of the new creation and the new life. It was part of the ‘truth in Jesus’ which they had learnt. They had not only been taught to ‘put off’ the old and ‘put on’ the new, they had done it. The reality took place at their conversion. Paul is reminding them of what they had learnt and done.

At conversion God birthed His new nature in us. This was a single, unrepeatable act. This new nature created in us a new mind, a new way of thinking, but a way of thinking that needs to be constantly renewed. Only from this new mind can we understand the new nature. Because the new creation is in God’s image, it has involved for us the total putting away of our fallenness and the putting on of our new humanity in Christ. Failing to understand either the reality of our new nature, or failing to embrace the implication of our need to put off the old and put on the new will drag us back into fleshly behaviour rather than Spirit-controlled behaviour.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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