

Not only have they chosen a life-style that is injurious to them in every aspect of their living, but they are greedy to get as much of the impurity as possible. Such a life of utter disregard for God and His glory is the direct opposite of what characterizes the lives of the children of God who are growing in holiness and in gratitude for the salvation procured for them at the great cost of Yeshua's own suffering and death.

If then, those who are born from above are likewise gathered together into the body of Messiah, how careful must we be to walk as children of light and thereby to love each other by helping each other mature in our faith that we might indeed be genuine lights for Yeshua in this dark world. This is the ultimate goal of the *ekklesia*, that Yeshua would receive the glory and honor He deserves.

20–21 But you did not learn Messiah in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Yeshua...

Here Paul is making a contrast between the unbeliever and the true child of God. As noted in the previous verses (vv 18–19), the unbelieving Gentile is described as having an understanding which is darkened, having no saving relationship with God because of willful ignorance, as someone who has a hardened heart, and whose life is therefore characterized by sin, i.e., “every kind of impurity.”

The contrast is made more emphatic in the Greek by putting the word “you” (ὁμεῖς, *humeis*) first in the clause followed by “not in this way” (οὐχ οὕτως, *oux outōs*), all coming before the verb “learn” (ἐμάθετε, *emathete*). Even though the Gentile believers to whom Paul writes and here addresses directly were at one time

...separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)

they are now contrasted with their unbelieving past since they have come to know the Messiah in truth and have exercised true saving faith in Him. What Paul is emphasizing here is that these Gentile believers he addresses were given the truth about Yeshua—about His person, His divine nature, His incarnation, His death and resurrection, and His fulfilling all that was necessary in the eternal plan of God to redeem the elect, that is, all who would be saved eternally by the full payment made for them through the infinite sacrifice of Yeshua on their behalf.

Because in the Greek the verb “learn” (ἐμάθετε, *emathete*) is in the

aorist aspect, which often denotes a completed, single action in the past, some have understood Paul's words here to refer to conversion, i.e., that point in time when a sinner comes to repentance and believes in Yeshua unto salvation. But relegating the aorist verbal aspect of only describing punctiliar action (pertaining to an unextended point of time in the past) is wrong. There is also a constative aorist aspect "which describes the action in summary fashion, without focusing on the beginning or end of the action specifically"¹ and this is clearly what Paul has in mind here. Not only were these Gentile believers given the gospel in truth, and truly received the truth resulting in repentance and exercising true faith in Yeshua, but they also continued to be taught the truth about Yeshua and were thereby strengthened and matured in their understanding of God's method of saving sinners.

This highlights a fundamental and important truth: the Gospel, which Paul describes as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16), must be proclaimed in its purity as God has given it and not as something reworked and modified by men in order to make it "more acceptable." A "false gospel" yields false promises and, for those who believe it, gives false assurance. Even as Yeshua taught:

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matt 7:22–23, quoting Ps 6:8)

What is more, the truth of the Scriptures, by which we know Yeshua as He truly is, must be taught in its purity and not be edited and changed to teach something contrary to its inspired message. By the words of Yeshua Himself, there will be many who are certain they have a true claim to eternal life when, in fact, they have believed a "gospel" which is not "good news" at all. As Carson notes regarding Yeshua's words in Matthew 7:23,

this verse presupposes an implicit christology of the highest order. Jesus Himself not only decides who enters the kingdom on the last day but also who will be banished from His presence. That He never knew these false claimants strikes a common biblical note, viz., how close to spiritual reality one

1 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 557.

may come while knowing nothing of it fundamental reality....¹

Paul characterizes the believer as “learning Messiah” which, while including “learning *about* Messiah” also emphasizes a learning that involves a relationship with Messiah. To “learn Messiah” (ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν, *emathete ton Xriston*), where “Messiah” is the object of the verb “learn,” pictures a one-to-one relationship in which the learning takes place. Paul has emphasized this already, for in 1:20 he describes our risen Savior as “seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places.” Then, in 2:6, he states that God has “seated us with Him in the heavenly places.” In 3:17 Paul teaches us that for believers, “Messiah dwells in your hearts through faith.” As Thielman notes regarding Paul’s description of the believers to which he writes:

When they first believed the gospel (1:13) and then continued to mature in their faith (4:13), they certainly learned about Christ and his teachings, but they have also developed a relationship with him as a living person.²

This is Paul’s point: we who are “in Messiah” will mature in our faith as we grow in our recognition that He is with us through His Spirit Who indwells us, and that therefore we seek His guidance and approval for every aspect of our lives, for our ultimate goal in life is to be a witness of His grace, power, and glory in all that we do.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1Cor 10:31)

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Col 3:17)

...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him – The English translation appears to suggest only a possibility, “if indeed you have heard Him....” But the Greek indicates a real condition, not a possible one, where the Greek εἰ (*ei*) introduces a “first-class” condition,

1 D. A. Carson, “Matthew” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Zondervan, 1984), p. 193.

2 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 300.

i.e., that which is assumed to be true for the sake of the argument.¹ The addition of the word “indeed” (γε, *ge*) further emphasizes the reality, i.e., that the believers to whom Paul addresses himself have, indeed, “heard Yeshua and have been taught by Him.” The NRSV translation has captured the sense of the Greek:

For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him,
as truth is in Jesus. (Eph 4:21, NRSV)

To “hear Him,” i.e., to “hear Yeshua” means to have come to know His own words and teaching as He gave them. This is possible only through the inspired Scriptures given by the Apostles of Yeshua as they were “carried along” (cf. 2Pet 1:21) by the Ruach HaKodesh. The attempts of modern liberalism to discount the accuracy of the Scriptures fades away under the light of the truth, for by God’s gracious providence, the Scriptures have been maintained with acute accuracy as evidenced by the wealth of manuscripts that have been preserved. Thus, we too may be confident that we have “heard Him,” i.e., Yeshua, as we have the testimony of those disciples who were used of God to write the Gospels.

Further to be “taught in Him” means not only to know His truth as He taught it and lived it out, but to become conformed to Him via the truth by applying the truth to our own lives and thus teaching us what it means to walk in His footsteps, i.e., to become like Him in our thoughts, words, and actions. This is the work of the Spirit in the life of every believer, setting us apart to Him and from the corruption of the world.

...*just as truth is in Yeshua* – This is the only place in Ephesians where the name “Yeshua” is used by itself. Everywhere else in the epistle, the name “Yeshua” is accompanied by “Lord” or “Christ.” It may well be that in using the name “Yeshua” alone, Paul is emphasizing the historical, incarnate appearance of Yeshua into our world.

This phrase, “just as truth is in Yeshua,” gives emphasis to the fact that Yeshua alone is the embodiment of the true Gospel, the true revelation of God’s standard of righteousness, and the only way by which sinful man could have right-standing and thus renewed relationship with Him. As Calvin notes regarding this phrase:

1 Blass-Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the NT* (Univ. of Chicago, 1961), §371, p. 188.

This contains a reproof of that superficial knowledge of the gospel, by which many are elated, who are wholly unacquainted with newness of life. They think that they are exceedingly wise, but the apostle pronounces it to be a false and mistaken opinion. There is a twofold knowledge of Christ, one, which is true and genuine, and another, which is counterfeit and spurious. Not that, strictly speaking, there are two kinds; but most men falsely imagine that they know Christ, while they know nothing but what is carnal. In another Epistle he says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (2Cor 5:17) So here he affirms that any knowledge of Christ, which is not accompanied by mortification of the flesh, is not true and sincere.¹

22–24 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, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The Greek of these verses, which conclude the sentence begun in v. 20, has warranted various interpretations, since they utilize three infinitives, namely ἀποθέσθαι (*apothesthai*) “to put off” or “lay aside,” ἀνανεοῦσθαι (*ananeousthai*) “to be renewed,” and ἐνδύσασθαι (*endusasthai*) “to wear, put on.” The issue is the tense of the infinitives. Since “to put off” and “to wear, put on” are both aorist imperatives, some hold the view that Paul is pointing to a one-time reality which took place at the time the person comes to faith in Yeshua. It was at conversion that the “old self” was discarded and the “new self” put on.

Others, however, consider the aorist infinitives as acting as imperatives or commands, taking the view that Paul is admonishing the believers to “lay aside the old self” and to “put on the new self,” and some would understand Paul to teach that this happens in a special experience of God’s grace subsequent to the time when a person comes to exercises saving faith in Yeshua.

So the simple question that is before us is this: does Paul teach his believing readers that the transformation of their lives has already happened or that it should happen?

In seeking to understand Paul’s admonition here, we must first define what he means by the expressions “the old self” (τὸν παλαιὸν

1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 294.

ἄνθρωπον, literally “the old man”) and “the new self” (τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, literally “the new man”). Clearly the “old self/man” refers to the sinful, fallen nature inherited from Adam, and thus the “new self/man” is that which, in contrast to the sinful nature, is characterized or known as pleasing God by living in obedience to Him.

It is instructive that, as noted above, the first infinitive, “to put off” and the third infinitive, “to put on” are both aorist infinitives, which could portray that which has taken place but can also carry the sense of that which is required to take place. But the second infinitive, “be renewed” is a present infinitive in contrast to the other two, and most likely carries the sense of ongoing action, that is, the renewing of the believer’s mind is something that is a regular, ongoing characteristic of the believer’s progress in sanctification, that is, becoming more and more like Messiah Yeshua.

My understanding of Paul’s words here, which summarize that which his believing readers were taught (v. 20), is simply this: that the “laying aside of the old self” as well as the “putting on of the new self” began when saving faith was first exercised. At this time, the believer obtained the promise of God, as sealed by the Ruach HaKodesh, that ultimately the “old self” would be forever banished with the “new self” being the eternal identity of the child of God. So while the success of final and total sanctification is guaranteed by the work of God, the believer in Yeshua has been enabled by the indwelling Spirit to make progress toward the ultimate goal when mortal will be clothed with immortality and sin will be no more. This is the very promise with which Paul begins Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love. (Eph 1:3–4)

The “old self” or “old man” is that which characterizes the life of an unbeliever before coming to faith, i.e. “the former manner of life.” That is, there is no compelling motivation to have one’s life glorify and honor God. Rather, in regard to acknowledging God, the unbeliever’s life is marked by indifference, ignorance, and rebellion toward Him.

This is further expressed by the phrase “being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.” The present tense of the participle “[those] being corrupted” (τὸν φθειρόμενον, *ton phtheiromenon*) stresses

the continual downward demise of the unbeliever who is controlled by the sinful nature without any power or desire to overcome it. Paul uses this same verb (φθείρω, *phtheirō*) five times in his epistles to the Corinthians,¹ and generally refers to the moral corruption of people because of deceitful and erroneous teaching.

Such “corruption” is characterized as “in accordance with the lusts of deceit.” Ignorance of the truth, and willful rebellion against the truth, is fueled by the “lusts of deceit.” Even as the serpent offered something that attracted the ego, so the deceit of sin gains its power through deceit, the promise of self-greatness.

False ideas made persuasive by the promise of pleasure lead to destructive behavior.²

...and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, – Like the participle “being corrupted” (φθειρόμενον), the infinitive “be renewed” (ἀνανεοῦσθαι, *ananeousthai*) is a present tense verb and thus emphasizes the ongoing nature of the “renewal” in respect to our outlook on life, that is, our whole thought process. The word “spirit” relates to the human spirit, that aspect of our lives by which we think, desire, hope, and constantly make decisions. The “spirit of your mind” might be illustrated, however, along the lines of bodily coordination. In order to play a musical instrument, one must train oneself to accomplish that which is required in order to play spontaneously that which the mind directs. This may be a fitting picture of what Paul enjoins upon us in terms of being “renewed in the spirit” of one’s mind, that is, in the attitude or trained patterns of thinking and thus doing. Though using different vocabulary, Paul speaks to this same idea in Rom 12:1–2.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1–2)

Here, as in our Ephesians text, the work of sanctification is a cooperation between the born again believer and the Spirit of God. “Putting off the old self” means refusing to be “conformed to this world.” And

1 1Cor 3:17 (2x); 15:33; 2Cor 7:2; 11:3.

2 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 305.

being “renewed in the spirit of your mind” is to be “transformed” in order to make what God desires one’s highest purpose and goal. This requires the believer to be disciplined in the means of grace, that is, the study and application of the Scriptures, prayer, regular fellowship with other believers, and a commitment to serving others.

...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. – As noted above, the putting on of “the new self” is the very life of the believer in submission to and reliance upon the Ruach HaKodesh. This is the progressive aspect of our sanctification. Paul has characterized the “old self” as “being corrupted because it lusts after that which is deceit.” In this verse, he characterizes the “new self” as in the “likeness of God.” The Greek literally has “according to God” (τὸν κατὰ θεὸν) which is properly understood by the English translations as “in the likeness of God.” Thus, our attention is immediately drawn to the opening chapters of the Bible in which we read:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen 1:26–27)

Note as well Col 3:9–10.

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.... (Col 3:9–10)

Mankind was created by God not only to bear His image but also to be the supreme witnesses of His power and righteousness. Mankind, male and female, were created “in righteousness and holiness of the truth,” for Adam and Chavah were created by God to be His standard bearers. It was sin that entered the world and corrupted mankind, undermining the very purpose of mankind as God’s image bearers.

What Paul is teaching us here in our Ephesians text is that through the redemption secured in Yeshua, all who are truly His are “putting on the new self” by which the original purpose of God in creating mankind is being and will be fully realized in the world to come. This

“new self” is seen as recovering the “righteousness and holiness” in which the first man and woman were created. It is thus through the redemptive work of God in Messiah, received by faith and applied by the Ruach HaKodesh to all those who are eternally saved, that the very purpose of God in creating mankind is to be accomplished.

Thus, both the physical creation of the world and mankind as well as the fact that all who come to faith in Messiah Yeshua are viewed as having been recreated to a new life—both may well be in view as Paul writes these inspired words admonishing us to “put off the old” and to “put on the new.” As Calvin notes:

What is added about the creation, may refer either to the first creation of man, or to the second creation, which is effected by the grace of Christ. Both expositions will be true. Adam was at first created after the image of God, and reflected, as in a mirror, the Divine righteousness; but that image, having been defaced by sin, must now be restored in Christ.¹

As Paul writes in his second epistle to the Corinthians:

Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2Cor 5:17)

...*righteousness and holiness of the truth*. – The image of God created in mankind has been marred or distorted by the sin nature, the “old self.” Those who come to saving faith in Yeshua are blessed of God and by His grace “recreated” and given both the ability and desire to “put off the old self” and to “put on the new.” This progressive victory over the sinful nature in the lives of all who are born from above is evidenced by an increasing growth in righteousness and holiness. But note carefully that Paul identifies that which defines “righteousness and holiness” as that which is “of the truth.” There are no variable standards of righteousness and holiness as God defines them. The standard is God Himself as He has revealed Himself in the creation, in Yeshua, and in the Scriptures. Once again we come back to *sola scriptura*, that the Bible and the Bible alone is the final and only infallible rule of faith and how we are to live out our faith in Yeshua.

¹ Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 296.