

Ephesians 4:22-32

Ephesians 4:22-32 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, (23) and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (24) and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (25) Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour,” for we are members of one another. (26) “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, (27) nor give place to the devil. (28) Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (29) Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (31) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Questions On The Text

What is Paul’s expectation of their Christian experience?

Verses 22-24: First, the Ephesians are to put off the old man which is the sinful nature inherited from Adam. This is no mere concept, but is related to their former conduct, their behaviour. Thus they are to turn their backs on sin in a practical way as symbolised by water baptism. The reason for putting off the sinful nature is that the old man is in a continuous process of corruption according to its deceitful lusts (passionate desires).

In contrast, they are to put on the new man, created (see 2 Corinthians 5:17) according to God. The phrase “according to God” literally means “in the image of God.” Instead of sinful lusts, the new man is characterised by righteousness and holiness. This being the case, believers are to be in a continuous state of renewal, primarily taking place in the mind.

Is it okay to lie?

Verse 25: Since lying is a sin that belongs to the old nature, Paul insists that it must no longer be practised. Quoting Zechariah 8:16, he says that we should speak the truth instead. The reason given for the need for truthfulness is that we are members of one another. This infers that lying sabotages the unity of the body of Christ as well as undermining relationships that should be founded on truth.

Is anger okay?

Verses 26-27: Given the numerous warnings in the Bible against anger (see Matthew 5:22; Proverbs 15:18; James 1:19-20; Galatians 5:20 for example), this verse should not be construed as encouraging anger. Instead, Paul is giving good advice on how to deal with it.

First, although you may experience the emotion of anger, do not let it become sin. This means that an angry person should strictly control their thoughts, speech and actions, for these are the areas where sin takes place. It should be recognised that although it is possible to experience righteous anger, most anger is selfish and sinful.

Second, we must exercise self-control by placing a time limit on our anger; it should not spill over into the next day. Failure to observe this instruction means that the anger is now sin, no matter how righteous we may feel our cause is.

What is God’s alternative to stealing?

Verse 28: Stealing is another of those activities that belongs to the old sin nature. Instead, Christians are encouraged to work, producing what is good with their own hands (through their own efforts), the goal of which is not only to provide for their own needs but to be generous towards others in need too.

What sort of speech does God expect of us?

Verse 29: The tongue, which is the most difficult member of the body to control (see James 3:1-12), must be strictly monitored so that no corrupt words proceed from it. The word “corrupt” means “rotten, decaying” and carries the sense of being unwholesome, evil, or worthless. Instead, our speech is to be the kind that edifies and imparts grace to others.

How are we to treat the Holy Spirit?

Verse 30: We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. (See also Isaiah 63:10.) The word “and” connects this verse to the previous one, showing us that the Holy Spirit is grieved specifically by corrupt speech. Also, the fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved and is therefore capable of emotion shows that He is a person and not merely God’s active force as taught by cults that do not believe in the Trinity.

What sorts of things does God want us to get rid of?

Verse 31: There are six things listed which have no place in the life of the new creation. Some are self-explanatory. In Greek, the words translated “wrath” and “anger” are different. Wrath is the initial outburst, whereas anger is a settled attitude of hostility. “Clamour” is the yelling that is motivated by anger. “Evil speaking” is a word from which we derive the English word “blasphemy.” It not only refers to speaking against God, but also people.

What sort of qualities does God want us to develop?

Verse 32: In contrast to the godless qualities of the previous verse, God desires us to be kind to each other, tenderhearted, and forgiving. The forgiveness we extend to others is to be according to the pattern of how Christ Himself forgave us – free and complete.

In comparing our forgiving others with how God forgave us, Paul highlights the fact that forgiving others is a truly divine quality. This ties in with the fact that Jesus encouraged us to be like the Father. See Matthew 5:48.

Further Questions For Discussion:

How do you put off the old man?

How does lying sabotage the unity of the body of Christ?

What’s the best way to control your anger?

In what way are you generous towards others?

What success are you having in controlling your tongue?

Why does corrupt speech grieve the Holy Spirit?