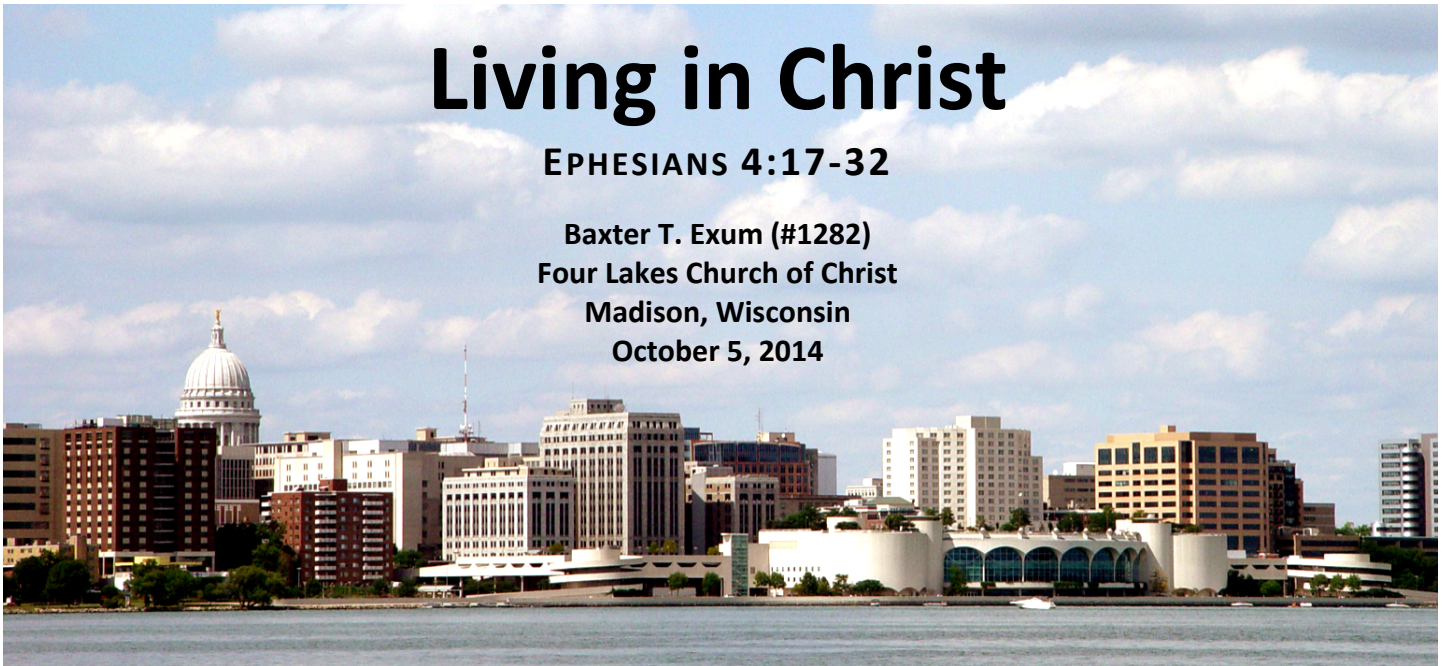


Living in Christ

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

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It is that time of year! I hope that all of you were able to see the little blizzard we had yesterday morning! I should let you know that once again I have won the contest in our family where we guess the date of the first snowflake every year. My date was October 26, and since that was the earliest date to be guessed in our family this year, yesterday morning's snowflakes have officially fallen closer to my date than any other in our family.

Now that we are officially in the fall of the year and headed toward winter around here, there is a certain sense of urgency concerning certain things that need to be done around the house. At our house, we still need to harvest the carrots. We usually do this around the end of October. We still need to put down one more application of fertilizer on the lawn. We still need to do some more mowing before we winterize the mower and bring out the snowblower. And among other things, we still need to do some painting on some trim around the garage door. Most of our house is covered in plastic or vinyl, but there are a few pieces of wood here and there – we have some wood trim around the front door, we have a wooden post on the front porch, and we have that pesky trim around the garage door. This is on my to-do list this week. As we look at this little project that is looming out there in my very near future, I would ask a question for us to think about this morning: Would it be alright if I just popped open a can of paint and started painting? Can I go home this afternoon and just whip out a paintbrush, or is there something I need to do first? What might happen if I were to go home and put a coat of paint on this? If you have ever done any painting, then you know that preparation is one of the most time consuming parts of any project. If you have ever done any painting, then you know that the first thing I need to do is to scrape off all of that old, flaking paint. And there is a reason for this: If I paint over paint that is flaking, the new paint will not stick. It will not be very long until that bond is broken, and I will probably need to do it all over again next spring.

This morning, I would like for us to return to our study of the New Testament book of Ephesians by emphasizing (as Paul does) that when we obey the gospel, there are certain things that need to be removed before we can truly put on the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have been with us over the past several weeks, then you might remember that the book of Ephesians is pretty much split in half. In Chapters 1-3, the apostle Paul, over and over again, emphasizes the amazing blessing of being *“in Christ.”* In the first three chapters, Paul doesn't really tell us to DO anything. Instead, he drives home what it means to be in the Lord. In Jesus, we have forgiveness. In Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God. In Jesus, we have access to the

Father. In Chapter 3, Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus. He wants them to truly be able to understand the love of God. And then in Chapter 4, we have a shift. As we learned last Lord's Day morning, Chapter 4 starts with an emphasis on unity, and the focus is now on what we need to be doing. In Chapter 4:1, he starts out with the word **"Therefore."** In other words, because of all of those blessings in Chapters 1-3, this is what we now need to do. We need to be humble, and gentle, and patient. We need to put up with each other in the church. We need to make every effort to maintain the unity of the congregation.

All of this brings us to Ephesians 4:17-32 as Paul continues to emphasize what it means to live in Christ. Yes, we are **"in Christ,"** but this is now what it means for us in very practical terms. This is what we actually need to do. And in Ephesians 4:17-32, we will see a very clear contrast: There are some behaviors in our lives that need to be scraped away like an old layer of peeling paint, and then there are some other behaviors that need to be added. We need to do some scraping and sanding, and we also need to do some painting. Let us all please look together at the second half of Ephesians 4 – Ephesians 4:17-32,

¹⁷ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² 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, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸ He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

In this passage, then, Paul is saying: This is what it really means to live **"in Christ."** We think of what Paul said over in Romans 6:4 concerning baptism. We are buried with Christ in baptism, and then we are raised up, so that **"we too might walk in newness of life."** He is saying here in Ephesians 4: This is what that **"newness of life"** actually looks like. This is what we need to be doing. And so he makes a clear distinction between the old and the new. Throughout the course of our study this morning, we will be going back and forth, then, between the old and the new, back and forth between those things that need to be scraped away and then over to those qualities that need to be added.

1. **Notice, please, first of all, how Paul starts out in verse 17 – he starts by emphasizing that the Christians in Ephesus are not to walk as the Gentiles walk, “IN THE FUTILITY OF THEIR MINDS.”**

The word translated here as *“futility”* is sometimes translated as *“emptiness.”* Those outside of Christ, therefore, are in the habit of filling their minds with nothing, nothing of real importance, *“futility,”* or even *“vanity,”* as some translations put it. If we are not careful, it is easy to fill our minds with a whole lot of nothing, things that do not really matter. We think of going to a place like Disneyworld and going on all of those rides – rides that really go nowhere, fake trains on fake mountains going through fake caves next to fake rivers – and when you get off the ride, you are right back where you started, but an hour of your life is missing. Yes, it might have been fun for a little bit, but in the end, the experience is rather empty. The same thing happens at the movies or even with our favorite TV shows – fake people acting out fake scenarios in front of fake backgrounds, but the time we have wasted is very real. Or for that matter, we think of just about anything else that takes up our time. What do most people in the world spend time on? Making money to purchase homes and cars that rust and fall apart in a few years. This is a picture of life without Christ, walking in emptiness, filling our minds and lives with nothing of true importance. As we turn to God, though, we start to understand what is truly important in this life. We still need cars, we still need a place to live, but these concerns no longer dominate our thinking. That’s not all there is in this life.

2. **The second picture Paul paints for us comes in verse 18 as he describes those on the outside as being “DARKENED IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING.”**

We have the idea of ignorance, the idea that our thinking is obscured. We think of coming down the Beltline and hitting a thick fog over the Yahara River. All of a sudden, our understanding of what is coming has been darkened or obscured, the opposite of clear thinking, the opposite of clear vision. Spiritual blindness is so much more dangerous than physical blindness, though. Spiritually, many people today have no idea how God wants them to live. They dive in to relationships or various behaviors having no idea that what they are doing is actually offensive to God, all the while they are feeling quite good about what they are doing. They are driving in a spiritual fog. The brake lights are no longer visible. Their understanding is *“darkened,”* their spiritual vision has been obscured. And the longer we spend in sin, less clear our situation becomes. We tend to get comfortable over time. This darkness, though, is scraped away when we start turning to the Lord. We read, we study, and the veil is lifted.

3. **Paul also says in verse 17 that we are no longer to walk like the Gentiles walk, because they have been “EXCLUDED FROM THE LIFE OF GOD.”**

The word *“excluded”* here refers to being *“alienated.”* The word refers to “not belonging,” being cut off or kept on the outside, separated, not included. Those outside of Christ are non-participants in the life of God.

4. **Paul goes on to say that being excluded from the life of God can be traced back in part to people’s IGNORANCE.**

The word Paul uses here is a word that literally means *“no knowledge.”* A lack of instruction, a lack of study in spiritual things leads to a lack of knowledge concerning God. This ignorance means that we are *“excluded from the life of God.”*

5. **Paul also says that this exclusion from the life of God can also be traced back to the HARDNESS OF PEOPLES' HEARTS.**

The word "*hardness*" here refers to a callous, to something that has been hardened or petrified, turned to stone. Having a hard heart, having a heart that just doesn't care anymore, can certainly lead to someone being excluded from the life of God. The Bible tells us that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Paul warned us that even religious leaders would become seared in their conscience as with a branding iron (1 Timothy 4:2). As we turn to God, as we study his word, our hearts are softened. The more we read and study, the more we accept. The word of God is to be written on our hearts. The longer we resist, the harder our hearts become. This hardness, therefore, needs to be scraped away.

6. **In verse 19, Paul refers to those who have become "CALLOUS."**

This is the only time this word is ever used in the New Testament. It literally refers to being "*without feeling*." It is similar to having a hard heart, but the emphasis here is on having no feeling, as if a person's conscience was under anesthesia. I've told you before about a friend of mine who now preaches in Missouri. We took a speech class together in college, and in that class he gave a demonstration speech on how to remove a fishhook. Step #1 was to insert the fishhook! He put that hook through a callous. But you know, I do remember that speech. In fact, his speech is the only thing any of us remember from that class! I don't even remember what I demonstrated that day, but all of us remember the fishhook. All of us know what to do if we ever get a fishhook stuck in our hand. But that is the word here, "*callous*," without feeling. As we study God's word, we want the feeling to return. If we are living in sin, we want to feel it, we want to do something about it.

7. **Paul goes on to mention "SENSUALITY."**

We will look at this in a little more detail next Lord's Day morning. But over and over again, this word is included throughout the New Testament in those lists of sins that will keep a person out of God's kingdom. Sensuality is a work of the flesh that is to be scraped away as we turn to God in repentance.

8. **We also read here about "IMPURITY."**

The word refers to those things that are not clean. All around us, we see situations that are not clean. This world is polluted with sin, and when we see that spiritual uncleanness in our own lives, we need to be willing to scrape it away.

9. **Paul goes on to refer to "GREEDINESS."**

Impurity with greediness, the idea that just being unclean is never enough. Once we fall into sin, the temptation is to just keep on going, to just keep on wanting more and more. This greediness is one of those characteristics that also needs to be scraped away. Otherwise, the thirst for sin only increases and gets worse and worse over time.

10. **Skipping down to the middle of verse 22, we see a reference to the old self which is being "CORRUPTED."**

The word seems to refer to something that is ruined or destroyed because it is spoiled. This past Thursday night, the kids and I cleaned out the refrigerator while Keola was in school. Let's just say we found a few things in there that had been "*corrupted.*" We found three partly used containers of sour cream, one of which expired sometime back in August. It was not pretty. But that is the picture Paul paints for us here. Without Christ, the old self is "*corrupted.*"

11. **And then, also in verse 22, Paul refers to this corruption happening "IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LUSTS OF DECEIT."**

The word "*lust*" is not necessarily bad. In fact, the word itself is used with reference to Jesus and how he "*earnestly desired*" to eat the Passover meal with his disciples. It is okay to "*earnestly desire*" something. But do we see the problem in verse 22? Before Christ, we have people earnestly desiring "*deceit,*" just living for and looking forward to twisting the truth.

These things, then, are qualities that are to be scraped away in that process of turning to the Lord.

By way of transition in this passage, though, I want us to notice what makes the difference. In verses 20-21, Paul says, "*But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.*" I would summarize what makes the transition possible here as being TAUGHT. In verses 20-21, there is learning, there is hearing, there is teaching, there is truth. Learning the truth about these things makes all the difference. Learning the truth allows us to put these things aside. As Paul says in Romans 10:17, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*" And so, instead of relying on our own empty-headed, darkened understanding, ignorant, hard-hearted thinking, we turn to God and allow the word of God to point our lives in the right direction. This is why it is so important that we as a congregation study the word of God.

12. **So now, at this point, upon being taught, we start to see a "RENEWED SPIRIT" (verse 23).**

Literally, the word "*renewed*" refers to becoming new again. Most of you know by now that I love watching This Old House on PBS. There have obviously been many other shows to pop up over the years, but This Old House is the classic. This Old House is the show where they do it right. They take a house, they tear it apart, and they make it new again. That is what God does for us when we obey the gospel. We are "*renewed in the spirit of our mind.*" We are made new. We are born again.

13. **Along with this, we "PUT ON THE NEW SELF WHICH IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD HAS BEEN CREATED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS OF THE TRUTH."**

Again, it seems we have a reference here to the new birth. We put on Christ in baptism and take on His righteousness and His holiness as we begin the Christian life.

14. **In verse 25, we now move back to another negative as Paul tells us to lay aside "FALSEHOOD."**

We stop lying to people. We think of what King Solomon said back in Proverbs 27:6, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*" In other words, it is better to hear the painful truth from a friend than to be lied to and flattered by an enemy.

15. **And for this reason, Paul goes on to tell us that we are to “SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE OF YOU WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, FOR WE ARE MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER.”**

Friends tell the truth. Enemies lie. So, we are to put aside falsehood and we are to start speaking the truth, especially when it comes to how we interact with each other in the church. Of all the people in this world, we as Christians need to be able to trust each other to tell us the truth. If I am living in sin, I do not want you ignore that, I do not want you to make me feel good about it, but I want you to tell me the truth.

16. **In verse 26, we have another positive as Paul tells us to “BE ANGRY.”**

Yes, we can be angry! We might think there is some kind of a translation problem here, but there is not. The Bible does tell us to be angry. The word *“anger,”* by the way, is found in the Bible at least 450 times, and many of those references are to the anger of God. If we want to imitate God, then we also will get angry from time to time. God gets angry with sin. God gets angry when people whine and complain.

16. **On the other hand, though, Paul tells us that we are NOT TO SIN IN OUR ANGER.**

In other words, we are not to be hot-tempered. We are to direct our anger appropriately.

17. **There is also a warning in verses 26-27 that OUR ANGER IS NOT TO BE LONG TERM.**

We are not to let the sun go down on our anger, we are not to hold a grudge, because if we do, we give the devil an opportunity. If we continually harbor anger in our hearts, we are basically holding the door open for the devil. Instead, our anger is to be controlled and harnessed.

18. **In verse 28, Paul addresses the thieves who are reading this letter: “HE WHO STEALS MUST STEAL NO LONGER.”**

And to be clear: There are more ways to steal than walking in a bank with a gun: Borrowing money we don't pay back, not paying our bills, taking supplies home from work, getting to work late, leaving early, wasting time online while we're supposed to be working, taking extra long breaks at work. There are many ways to steal, and Paul puts this in the category of behaviors from the previous life that need to come to an end.

19. **And instead of stealing, notice what Paul puts in its place: The former thief “MUST LABOR, PERFORMING WITH HIS OWN HANDS WHAT IS GOOD, SO THAT HE WILL HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH ONE WHO HAS NEED.”**

And this goes for all of us: The goal of work is not to just splurge on our own needs, always getting the nicest of everything we can afford (and even getting more than we can afford), but for a Christian, the goal of work is to share. Instead of taking, our goal is to be giving.

20. **In verse 28, Paul goes back to one of those things we need to scrape away again as he says, “LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH.”**

“Unwholesome,” here, is another word for *“rotten,”* similar to the word *“corrupt”* we studied earlier. In the ancient world, the word was used to refer to rotting fish or fruit that was no longer useful as food. We know when we examine food in the fridge, there is a point where that food crosses the line. And the idea is: Not

only are our words useless sometimes, but sometimes our words are worse than useless. Sometimes our words are **“rotten.”** Sometimes our words are like that 3-month old sour cream. Paul is saying: Do not speak like that anymore.

21. But instead, Paul says, our words are to be EDIFYING and GRACEFUL.

The word **“edification”** refers to the act of building. When we speak, therefore, our words are to build people up. Not only, then, are we not to speak words that are rotten, but the words we speak are to be helpful. Our words are to be spoken **“according to the need of the moment, so that [those words] will give grace to those who hear.”** It is very easy to think that our words are not really important, but that is not what the Bible teaches. Personally, I can think of a number of situations where just one or two words might have prevented someone from falling away from the Lord altogether, just a quick phone call on a Sunday afternoon is all it would have taken to let someone know they were loved. Just a few words can sometimes make all the difference in the world. Our words are to be edifying and graceful.

22. In verse 30, we come to a negative, something we are told not to do as Paul warns that WE ARE NOT TO GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD.

The word **“grieve”** refers to the highest level of distress or pain. If we turn back to any of these things from the past, if we try to just paint over that old peeling surface without taking care of the underlying problem, we bring distress to the Lord’s Spirit.

23. In verse 31, Paul tells us to put away all “BITTERNESS.”

If we are not careful, bitterness has a way of sneaking in over time. The word itself refers to something that is sharp, a sharp feeling deep in the heart. And so, maybe we feel somebody has mistreated us. Maybe we think somebody should have given us more attention. For whatever reason, we build up this sharp resentment over time, and it can destroy us (along with the congregation) from the inside. Bitterness has been described as a resentful spirit that refuses reconciliation. It is the attitude, “I don’t want to make this better!” Paul says: Put this bitterness away.

24. Paul also tells us in verse 31 that we are to put away all “WRATH.”

The word refers to **“passion”** or **“rage.”** We covered **“anger”** earlier. Anger can be good or bad, but the reference here seems to be to anger that is out of control, an outburst.

25. Paul goes on to refer to “CLAMOR.”

“Clamor” isn’t a word we use very often, but it refers to an **“outcry, a scream, or a shout.”** It refers to crying out about something. Combined with **“anger”** and **“wrath,”** I think we understand what Paul is saying here. As Christians, we are not to be people who fly off the handle. We are not to be the kind of people who yell at each other in anger.

26. And then we have the word “SLANDER.”

Literally, the word means, **“to speak against.”** In Greek, the word is the origin of our English word **“blasphemy.”** We usually think of blasphemy as something we do against God, but literally, the word means to

speak against. We blaspheme others by speaking against them, especially when we say things that are not true to damage their reputation, or maybe when we tell a story that's a little bit true, but we put just a little twist on it to put someone in a bad light.

27. The final negative in this passage is the word "MALICE."

"Malice" is simply a deep hatred that really wants bad things to happen to somebody. *"Malice"* is anger or bitterness focused on a person to the point where you really want some kind of trouble to come into that other person's life. *"Malice"* is one of those thoughts that needs to be scraped away.

28. And then, here at the end, we have three more good qualities, starting with the instruction to "BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER."

I found it interesting to learn that the word translated as *"kind"* here literally means *"serviceable,"* and it comes from a root word meaning *"useful."* And to me, that makes sense. As Christians, we are to make ourselves *"useful"* to each other. To be kind is to do something practical for somebody. Being kind might mean mowing a lawn or shoveling a driveway. Being kind might mean writing a reference letter for a young person getting ready to go to college. Being kind might mean bringing vegetables from your garden and bringing them to church to share. Being kind means being useful to somebody. Sometimes my mom would say, "Make yourself useful!" When moms say that kind of thing, we know what they mean. We are to do something practical that we know we need to be doing. That is the meaning of the word.

29. In verse 32, Paul then says that we are to be "TENDER-HEARTED" toward each other.

Some translations might use the word *"compassionate."* The idea here is that your feelings, what you're feeling in your heart right now, your feelings need to become my feelings. As we briefly thought about last Sunday: If we only had some idea of what other people are going through, it might cause us to be a lot more compassionate. Yesterday I was thinking: If we really knew the burdens some people in this room are bearing right now, we might just get together and cry for an hour or two every week. We are to be aware. We are to be *"tender-hearted."*

30. And then finally, we see in this passage that we are to FORGIVE EACH OTHER, JUST AS GOD IN CHRIST HAS ALSO FORGIVEN YOU.

I love the reminder here: In light of what God has forgiven us, how could we NOT forgive each other? It seems that the opposite of forgiveness is holding a grudge. I don't want God to hold a grudge against me, so the lesson here is: I had better not be holding any grudges against others. Instead, we are to forgive each other, just as God has forgiven us.

Conclusion:

And with that, we come to the end with a reminder that God has forgiven us. Every Lord's Day morning, we pass along God's invitation to obey the gospel. Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised up. We obey the gospel by doing the same thing we die to sin, we turn away from sin – and this is what we have been looking at this morning. This is what repentance really looks like – turning away from sin and turning our lives toward God. Repentance is the change of mind resulting in a change in the way we live. Repentance is a process. Once we have made the decision to turn away from sin and back to God, we are ready to make an

appeal to God for a clean conscience. According to 1 Peter 3:21, we make that appeal to God through baptism. Immersion in water is our appeal to God. In baptism, our sins are forgiven, and we are then raised up out of the water to start living the Christian life, this new life of righteousness and truth and compassion that we've been looking at this morning. If you have any questions, if we can be of some assistance on your spiritual journey, or if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com