

SESSION 17
EPHESIANS 4: 17 – 21

This short passage of Scripture exemplifies Paul's writing style – his Holy Spirit-inspired thoughts pour out in a torrent of words that sometimes defy punctuation, much of which was added later by translators. I began my study with the NIV translation, and then found it helpful to read several others.

Verse 17: This passage is a strong admonition – “you must no longer live as ...” - and Paul makes it clear Who is the source of these words. Also, there is a new definition of “Gentile” that goes beyond “not being a Jew” – how do you think Paul is defining “Gentile”?

Verses 17 & 18: As we all lived as Gentiles for a period of time in our lives, are there any translations that resonate with you most powerfully as you remember that time?

What is the underlying cause of the futility in the life of every Gentile?

How do these verses give you a deeper understanding of how to relate to the Gentiles in your life?

Verse 19: How would you define “sensitivity” and how is it different from “sensuality”?

How would you define “lust” and “greediness”?

(Oswald Chambers: “Lust” means wanting something immediately, whether that something is good or evil, physical or emotional or spiritual.)

Verse 20 & 21: Notice the “but ...” and “however ...” language.

Why can the Lord admonish Paul's readers, including you and me, to “no longer live as the Gentiles do”?

How would you complete this sentence: “Truth is ...”

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EPHESIANS 4: 17 – 21

King James (1607 or 1611)

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.

The Living Bible (1971)

17,18 Let me say this, then, speaking for the Lord: Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are blinded and confused. Their closed hearts are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds against him, and they cannot understand his ways. 19 They don't care anymore about right and wrong and have given themselves over to impure ways. They stop at nothing, being driven by their evil minds and reckless lusts. 20 But that isn't the way Christ taught you! 21 If you have really heard his voice and learned from him the truths concerning himself,

New International Version (1984)

Living as Children of Light

17 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, with a continual lust for more. 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.

New International Version (2011)

Instructions for Christian Living

17 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 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

New Living Translation (2013)

Living as Children of Light

17 With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,