

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians and the Ephesians

MEDITATE: *Ephesians 4:17-32*

Quiet your heart before the Lord. This does not necessarily mean that your environment needs to be silent, although this can be helpful. Set aside a time free from distractions to focus on the passage as you read and meditate on it.

These instructions may help you develop a method for meditating on our passage each week. You may want to incorporate all or some of these ideas, whatever is helpful.

- ❖ Read the passage, slowly and prayerfully asking the Lord to speak to you from his word. Take several minutes to mull over the passage.
- ❖ Read the passage aloud and again take several minutes to give careful thought to it.
- ❖ Listen to the passage being read aloud. You may want to have someone else read it to you, or use a Bible program such as biblegateway.com or YouVersion, a free Bible app.
- ❖ Read the passage in other translations.

Finally, consider the following questions:

What words or phrases stand out to me? Why?

MEDITATE

Write out a phrase from this week's passage that you would like to think about throughout the week:

What questions does the passage raise that I want to know more about?

DIG IN: *Read Ephesians 4:17-32.*

1. Because the Ephesians have been rescued from being "dead in their transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1), it seems obvious that they would no longer want to live the way they used to, "separated from the life of God" (v. 18) – but, like all of us, they are tempted by their familiarity with sinful ways.
 - a. How does Paul stress the importance of what he is about to say? (v. 17)
 - b. How does he describe the Gentiles' way of life? (vv. 17-19)

"The word *Gentiles* could also be translated 'nations'...Paul is not talking about [the] cultural distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but the spiritual distinction between those who are in Christ (you and I as Christians) and those who are outside of Christ."¹

2. Let's consider the focus of Paul's life-transforming teaching.
- First, skim Ephesians up to this passage to see what his focus has been.
 - Now fill in the blanks below to see how his focus remains the same as he addresses their "way of life" (v. 20).

"You heard _____ and were taught _____ in accordance
with the truth that is _____." (v. 21)

3. In verses 20-24, Paul makes the argument for why we should not live like the unbelievers. Why should the Ephesians (and we) discard the old way of living?

v. 22

vv. 23-24


Lk. 16:15

2 Cor. 7:1

1 Pet. 1:13-16

"Putting on the life of the new man, far from being an onerous sacrifice, is discovering life in its richest, most satisfying, and fulfilling dimensions. As a racehorse is fulfilled in running and a saxophone is made for jazz, we find our greatest glory when we do what we are designed to do. We discover the greatest potentials and joys of our humanity when we live most as God made us to be—like him."²

4. In the rest of this chapter, Paul gets practical in how our behavior should line up with our life in Christ. First, he exhorts us to "speak truthfully to [our] neighbor" (v. 25).
- a. I may be tempted to lie about where I've been, what I've done, who I've been with, how I've spent my time or money, how I achieved a particular result in work or school, how I've treated someone else, what my accomplishments are – and the list goes on and on. What are some of the reasons why we lie?
 - b. Why does Paul insist that instead of lying we speak truthfully? (v. 25; Eph. 2:22; 4:15-16)
5. Second, he addresses anger, an emotion we often justify. How can our anger be a danger, not just to the one we're angry with, but also to ourselves? (vv. 26-27)

6. Third is the issue of stealing. What creative remedy does Paul insist upon for those who steal? (v. 28;  * Phil. 2:1-5)

7. Fourth, Paul addresses unwholesome talk.
 - a. How do other versions of the Bible³ translate the phrase, "unwholesome talk" (v. 29)?

 - b. What alternatives to unwholesome talk does Paul insist upon? (v. 29)

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

"The apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks with wonderful intimacy about the nature of our God and his heart for us. Just as Christ can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15), his Spirit grieves over our failure to love as we should in the Christian community. There is some poignancy in the consideration that the Holy Spirit, the One who is our Comforter (John 14-16), is himself grieved by our sin. The thought is meant to arrest us and correct us. The same Spirit who convicts my heart of sin, generates in me love for God, gives me new birth, provides my apprehension of the beauty of grace in the world, and seals my redemption until the coming of my Lord— the same Spirit who loves me so intimately and perfectly, I can cause to grieve. Not wanting to hurt him is strong motivation for not intending the harm of his people or purpose."⁴

8. Finally, Paul rattles off a list of sins we often rationalize in one way or another -- "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (v. 31).
 - a. What does he insist that we do with them? (v. 31)

 - b. What should we replace them with? (v. 32)

9. Giving ourselves over to any of the negative attitudes, emotions, or behaviors listed in this week's passage steals our joy, grieves the Holy Spirit, hurts others, and undermines our testimony as followers of Jesus. Paul knows that the most powerful motivation for holiness is recognizing the mercy, sacrificial love, and undeserved kindness we ourselves have received from God in Jesus.

You may want to examine your life in light of this passage. Is there any area that is being brought to your attention where you are grieving God's Holy Spirit (v. 30)? If so, (1) remember that "you were sealed for the day of redemption" (v. 30) and Jesus will not forsake you in your struggle, and (2) talk to Jesus about it, because he wants you to "approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that [you] may receive mercy and find grace to help in [your] time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

If you need help in a specific area, find someone who can help you see your identity in Christ and encourage you as you seek "to put off your old self...; 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" (vv. 23-24).

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 4:17-32. Take time to interact with the Lord about the passage.

“Once we’ve meditated to focus, understand, and remember, we will normally find our hearts inclined to worship. So, we pause to lift our gaze to the excellencies of Christ, to bend our eyes off of the world, to express thanksgiving and adoration when we pray. Meditation leads to delight when the Holy Spirit inclines our hearts to see and savor how glorious God is.”⁵

- ❖ How do I respond to the beauty I see in God’s will, work, and ways in this passage?

- ❖ In what ways do I see Jesus more clearly through this passage?


- ❖ Is there a song or hymn that comes to mind that helps express my response to the passage?

REFLECT & PRAY

- ❖ How can I take what I’m learning from this passage and make it my own? Is there something specific to believe, do, not do, be grateful for, etc.?

- ❖ How does this passage help me see myself and others differently?

- ❖ Pray the passage: Use the passage as a basis to talk to God about the things you are learning, seeing, and longing for as well as ways the passage speaks to your current life experiences.

* Indicates passages for further study

¹ Stedman, Ray C., *Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer’s Inheritance in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1998), 236.

² Chapell, Bryan, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2001), 215.

³ Biblehub.com may be a helpful source.

⁴ Chapell, 230.

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>