

Ephesians 4:19—and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Unbelievers (the depraved) pay an exorbitant price for their disobedience. They are blinded by Satan (2Corinthians 4:4) and eventually “*become callous*” (Ephesians 4:19) to the things of God. (Why would Satan be required to blind the depraved to the truth should they be born spiritual corpses? He wouldn’t, negating the Reformed view of depravity—that the depraved cannot repent and believe due to an inability to understand truth. Our *God’s Heart* series addresses this subject in great depth.)

“*Callous*” (Ephesians 4:19) can be interpreted “to become insensible” or “to cease to care.” When a person ceases caring about God and others, he eventually stops caring about himself and how he is perceived by mankind in general. In this state, he openly commits sins that he once tried to conceal.

Desensitized individuals wallow in “*sensuality*” (Ephesians 4:19), a life surrendered to an unrestrained self. They “*practice...every kind of impurity with greediness*” (Ephesians 4:19) because habitual sin yields a greedy lifestyle. They elevate self for the sake of personal gain, a problem birthed in the Garden (Genesis 3).

Ephesians 4:20—But you did not learn Christ in this way,

Because the New Testament believer becomes a new creation at the point of salvation/justification (2Corinthians 5:17), his “want to” undergoes a radical transformation. In other words, if you took a hog (pig), removed its nature and replaced it with the nature of a cat, the resulting animal would use a litter pan. In fact, should it fall in a mud hole it would lick itself clean! Why? A cat now lives in the body that once housed a hog, even though the body’s appearance remains that of a hog. (This same illustration is covered in greater depth in our *Romans 1-8* study.) Considering that Paul has just addressed the sinful routine of unbelievers (Ephesians 4:17-19), he reminds his readers of the behavioral transformation that accompanies new birth (Ephesians 4:20). Christ’s followers exchange their old way of living for a lifestyle that detests sin (Romans 6:1-2). Hence, individuals who profess to know Jesus, yet enjoy basking in blatant, habitual sin, need to get on their knees, repent, and submit to Christ (James 4:4; 1John 2:15).

Due to “*learn*” being in the aorist tense, most scholars view Paul as referencing salvation while writing, “*But you did not learn Christ in this way*” (Ephesians 4:20). Whatever the case, what we “*learn*” regarding Jesus, either at salvation or subsequently, will confirm that believers are to be separate from the world (Luke 6:26; 2Corinthians 2:14-15; 1John 2:15-16)—Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:20.

Ephesians 4:21—if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

New Testament believers are taught “*in Jesus*” because they live in Jesus (1Corinthians 12:13; 2Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:6). No wonder Paul wrote, “*if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him*” (Ephesians 4:21). What Paul’s readers had “*heard*” from Jesus and had been “*taught in Him*” was correct because “*truth is in Jesus*” (Ephesians 4:21; John 14:6) alone. Believers today are “*taught*” in Jesus as well.

Ephesians 4:22—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,

that, in reference to your former manner of life, (4:22a)

When a person is taught truth in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21) relating to a lifestyle of righteousness and holiness, he normally views his “*former manner of life*” (Ephesians 4:22) as “*futile*” (1Peter 1:18)—something of which to be “*ashamed*” (Romans 6:21). Yet, our mistakes as unbelievers can be included in our testimonies for the good of others, for even Paul mentioned his “*former manner of life*” in Galatians 1:13-14. He also spoke of his pre-Christ days in Acts 22:3-5 and Acts 26:4-14 to better relate to his audience. We must never use our past mistakes, however, as an opportunity to glorify the flesh.

you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, (4:22b)

For proper understanding of this passage, we must realize that the “*old self*” is synonymous with the sin nature, Adamic nature, old man, or dead spirit. The “*old self*” was inherited from Adam due to our genes having been in his gene pool when he sinned.

If we fail to exercise caution we might perceive Ephesians 4:22b as teaching that the old self is still alive in the New Testament believer—that the saint is to “*lay aside the old self*” on a daily basis. This error stems from a misunderstanding of the aorist infinitive “*lay aside*” (Greek infinitives are sometimes difficult to translate). However, should Ephesians 4:22b teach that the “*old self*” remains alive (but wounded) after spiritual regeneration/salvation (as is communicated in many Christian circles), it contradicts Romans 6:6 and Colossians 3:9:

knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; (Romans 6:6)

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, (Colossians 3:9)

These passages clearly teach that the “*old self*” has been crucified and eradicated in all church saints. As I sought to reconcile this truth with Paul’s words of Ephesians 4:22b, I discovered that John Murray believed that both the grammar allowed and the exegesis demanded that the infinitive “*lay aside*” is an infinitive of result. He went on to say that the “*past tense*” is indicated here. Combining verses 21 and 22, his final translation read:

 | You were taught in Christ with regard to the fact that your old man was laid aside.
 | (Ephesians 4:21-22)¹

Thus, Ephesians 4:22, Romans 6:6, and Colossians 3:9 are in agreement, confirming that our old self was eradicated at the point of salvation/justification. This means that our enemy is not the old self (sin nature), but something else. We will next address the “*something else*.”

One fact is clear: A battle rages inside every New Testament saint. But who are the participants in the battle? It can’t be the old self warring against the new self (2Corinthians 5:17), because the “*old self*” has been eradicated (Ephesians 4:22; Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9). Romans 7:23 provides the answer, placing the battle between the new self and the power of sin—the power that lives in the body of every believer:

but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:23)

Paul, describing the battle that raged within him as a believer, reveals that the new man (new self) sins when the New Testament believer sins—the New Testament believer being the new man. This new man

is “*holy*” (Ephesians 1:4) and “*perfect*” (Hebrews 10:14) in his person (soul and spirit) but needs his behavior to increasingly agree with who God made him into at the point of salvation/justification. Our *Romans 1-8* course provides a more detailed explanation of this subject matter.

Paul makes an intriguing statement regarding the old self in the last phrase of verse 22. He writes, “*which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit*” (Ephesians 4:22). Because “*being corrupted*” is a present passive participle, Paul proves that the old self is progressively “*corrupted*” as it controls the unbeliever. No wonder we witness an exacerbated depravity within the society of our day. Yet, the depraved aren’t void of all moral restraint, for the number of ethical, upstanding humanitarians proves otherwise. Nevertheless Paul, in Romans 2:1-16, confirms their condemned state.

The “*old self*” becomes increasingly corrupt through “*the lusts of deceit*” (Ephesians 4:22). “*Lusts*” points to “a craving, a passionate desire, good or evil, depending upon the context.” The context here is evil. Therefore, the old self becomes progressively corrupt due to the evil cravings of “*deceit*,” “*deceit*” meaning “deception.” Satan, the master of deception who possesses no truth (2John 1:7; John 8:44), is the source behind this progressive corruption.

Paul proves once again that the depraved are not born spiritual corpses. How could they be when they are progressively corrupted through an increased involvement with sin?

¹ Murray, John. (1957). *Principles Of Conduct, Aspects Of Biblical Ethics*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI. www.eerdmans.com. Used by permission.