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THE OLD AND NEW MAN IN EPHESIANS 4:17-24

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INTRODUCTION

“We have to *choose* to live from the new heart, and our old nature doesn’t go down without a fight.” John Eldredge explains in his book, *Waking the Dead*, that, based on Paul’s writings, believers are given a new heart. They “have been transformed, and [they] are *being* transformed.”¹ The question is how to reconcile a one-time event of transformation and a continual process of transformation.

In Eph. 4:17-24, Paul contrasts true believers with Gentiles, those who have been excluded from God. He describes the unbelievers’ state of mind and emphasizes that the true believers in Ephesus did not learn Christ in this way nor should they act like it. While describing the content of the teaching of Christ, Paul reminds them that they have put off the old man, their minds are being continually renewed, and they have put on the new man. The old man’s habits are best explained by the Gentile description. There appears to be a tension between the one-time event of putting off the old man and putting on the new man and the continuous renewal of the spirit of the mind. This paper will attempt to explain what Paul meant by these two instructions found in the content of the teaching of Christ. There is a transferal of the old to the new man in the life of a believer but in order to live out that new life, there must be a continual renewal by the Holy Spirit. True believers should not reflect the old man, described by the futile actions of the unbelieving Gentiles. Just as Eldredge says, the old man will not give up without a fight.

In order to pursue this question, this paper will primarily look at the literary aspects of the text of Eph. 4:17-24, noting sentence structure, word meanings, and syntactical features that help shape Paul’s argument. This passage will also be studied in light of the surrounding context of the paraenetic section of Ephesians as well as in light of the entire letter. Furthermore, the paper will briefly examine Romans 6-8 and Colossians 3 in order to establish further Paul’s theology of the old and new nature. Examining these Pauline concepts and taking into account

the literary features of the Ephesians passage will result in a proper exegesis and application of Eph. 4:17-24 as an exhortation for believers to become who they were made to be.

EXEGESIS AND COMMENTARY

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLD MAN

The first section deals with the characteristics of the old man. This describes what the recipients of the letter are to avoid. Verse 17 begins with the inferential conjunction, οὖν. Some may consider this transitional or resumptive,² but looking at the surrounding context, it makes more sense to understand it as deduction of what precedes it. In order to understand this, one must examine the passage in its proper context.

As many have noted, chapters 1 through 3 focus on the theological aspect of the letter written to the Ephesians. In 1:1-14, Paul emphasized the spiritual blessings from God through Christ Jesus. He then vocalizes his prayer for the saints at Ephesus that they would know the hope of their heavenly calling in Christ Jesus in 1:15-23. Paul contrasts the former spiritual state of death with the new life in Christ for the believer in 2:1-10 before expounding on the unity of Jews and Gentiles under the grace of Christ in 2:11-22. He elaborates on this unity in 3:1-13 by describing it as a mystery which has been revealed in the person of Christ. In 3:14-21, Paul vocalizes his prayers on behalf of the ethnic Gentiles at Ephesus that they would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and would know the love of Christ. Verses 20 and 21 have some semblance to the benediction of a letter with a doxology and a closing ἀμήν.

Chapter 4 is somewhat transitional into the more paraenetic section that continues until the close of the letter. In light of all that has been said in chapters 1 through 3, Paul exhorts the believers to live up to their name. They are to act in accordance with their spiritual calling that has previously been described. He then goes into a subpoint of unity in the Spirit in 4:4-16, describing how Jesus through the Holy Spirit gave gifts to believers. Included in this subpoint is the discussion of Christ’s ascent and descent as well as the gifts themselves. These gifts were given to strengthen the body of Christ.

Because some take 4:4-16 as a tangent, getting away from Paul’s original thought in 4:1-2, they see verse 17 as a transition.³ Despite what may appear as a tangent, his discussion on unity in the body of Christ is on point with what he has spoken about in the unity of Jews and Gentiles in chapters 2 and 3. This unity is a reflection of living according to the believers’ original heavenly calling described in chapters 1 and 2. This is where he picks up in verse 17. The οὖν is an inference from all that has been said in the letter about the heavenly calling of believers, the dynamic transformation of the believer from death to life, the unity of Jew and Gentile under the grace of Jesus Christ, and the unity of the body of Christ.

Following the inferential conjunction, Paul writes that he is saying and bearing witness in the Lord. Τοῦτο refers to what he says in the remainder of the passage. The present tense of the two verbs, “saying” and “bearing witness,” emphasizes a progressive aspect in that Paul is doing this at the present time. He is stressing what he is currently writing to the Ephesians. Some translate this as emphatic: “I solemnly declare.”⁴ The phrase, “in the Lord,” indicates that Paul is writing with apostolic authority in the power of Jesus Christ.

Just as the τοῦτο is in the emphatic position to point to what follows, the adverbial μηκέτι is also emphatic, indicating that the believers once did walk as the Gentiles, but they are to no longer do so. As B. F. Westcott put it, “No longer should it so be that there is no difference between your life and theirs.”⁵ The pronoun comes next in order, stressing the difference of the addressees from the Gentiles. Περιπατεῖν is a present infinitive so an understanding of “you are” must be supplied in the translation. This present tense denotes a customary aspect in that the addressees are to no longer make that type of walking or acting a habit.⁶ This infinitive is the content of what Paul is saying and bearing witness in the Lord.⁷ This type of use will appear again in the content of the teaching in verses 21–24.

The comparative conjunction construction, καθὼς καί, indicates a direct comparison with the way Gentiles walk. The Gentiles of verse 17 do not necessarily denote primarily an ethnic understanding although the Greek appears as such (τὰ ἔθνη). The reason for this is that while Paul has discussed the ethnic Jews and Gentiles in chapter 2, he has also described the Gentile believers as being welcomed into the body of Christ (3:6). To describe all ethnic Gentiles here in 4:17–19 would contradict this. Instead, the Gentiles in 4:17 are to be understood as unbelievers, those who have not been welcomed into the body of Christ, but could be specifically aimed at the ethnic Gentile unbelievers as opposed to the ethnic Gentile believers.

The Gentile unbelievers are described as walking “in the futility of their minds.” The word, ματαιότητι, is used in Rom. 8:20 and 2 Pet. 2:18. In the former, it speaks of creation being subjected to futility while in the latter, it speaks of those who speak arrogant words of futility or vanity. The same word is used in the LXX in Eccl. 1:2, 2:1, and elsewhere to describe all as vanity.⁸ With the idea of emptiness or void, the translation of futility is better for the modern reader since vanity seems to conjure up images of pride. The prepositional phrase points to the sphere in which they walk. This defines their entire attitude and actions. This sphere is contrasted with the walk Paul exhorts in 5:1 where they are to walk in the love of Christ. This futility serves as an adjectival function or attributive sense, modifying τοῦ νοός. “Except at Lk. 24:45; Rev. 13:18; 17:9, the term occurs in the NT only in Paul (21 times).” In each reference, the word is used to describe moral consciousness or comprehension.⁹ This would indicate that the minds of the unbelieving Gentiles were devoid of moral truth. This word will appear again in 4:23 where the believers are urged in the renewing of the spirit of their mind, a definite contrast to this description. The first finite verb phrase to describe the Gentiles paints a picture of them walking in an aimless stupor, not guided by

truth or any sense of morality. This describes the habits of the old man that true believers should have put behind them.

The next series of participles, beginning in verse 18, is the subject for much scholarly debate. Are they parallel¹⁰ or should they be subordinated to one another, each one depending on the previous participle?¹¹ Mack Roark indicates that the entire section is a result of free-flowing thought rather than conscious organization, resulting in structural difficulties.¹² While this may be an attractive escape from its complexity, Paul’s letters are rarely absent of logical flow. While some see a sense of a downward spiral here, subordinating ἀπῆλλοτριωμένοι τοῖς ἐσκοτωμένοι, the structure seems better fitted to subordinate both participles under the finite verb, περιπατεῖ. Before discussing their syntactical roles, the issue of ὄντες needs to be addressed. Hoehner provides a good description of the three basic options for taking it with the preceding participle, with the following participle, or with both. With him, it is best rendered as joined with the preceding participle, emphasizing the present state of darkness.¹³ It would appear that despite the usual use of a finite verb with a participle, these two participles function to present an emphatic perfect periphrastic construction.¹⁴

The two perfect participles are subordinate to περιπατεῖ, indicating a temporal understanding. If the ὄντες was connected to the following participle, it would have shown a stair step, making the alienation a cause for their darkness. Instead, while walking in futility, these participles further describe their state. They stand in darkness in their understanding, and they have been alienated from the life of God. In reference to our thesis, is this something from which the believers have separated themselves at conversion or something that should continually be a struggle? The first perfect participle, ἐσκοτωμένοι, comes from σκοτώω, and is used only here and in Rev. 9:2; 16:10. The latter references point to a physical darkness whereas the current reference points to a voided understanding.¹⁵ Paul tells the believers in Eph. 5:8–11 that they were once like this but they are now light and should not participate with the works of darkness. The use of the perfect tense in this participle points out the fact that the state began in the past but continues now in the present. This is where the present tense, ὄντες, further puts emphasis on the intensive or present state aspect of the perfect. Since Paul mentions in 5:8 that even the believers were like this, the perfect tense must signify that the darkness began at birth, which would coincide with Paul’s theology elsewhere concerning the sin nature.

Closely related to νοός, τῆ διανοία deals with a person’s understanding. However, the word is often interchangeable with καρδία, pointing not only to the mind but the entire disposition or whole being of a person. In Eph. 2:3, there is a description of indulging the desires of the flesh and τῶν διανοιῶν, further positing an evil inclination.¹⁶ The use of the dative in 4:18 is referencing or indicating the sphere in which the darkening is taking place: their entire disposition. The passive form of this participle denotes that the action is being done outside of themselves. The same passive understanding appears in Rom. 1:21. The sentiment expressed in the verse concerning the eyes of the heart being enlightened (Eph. 1:18) is the polar opposite of these unbelievers.¹⁷

Not only do they walk in futility while being darkened in their understanding, but they have also been alienated from the life of God. Because of the perfect passive participle, the action is understood as antecedent. While the present darkened state was doubly emphasized because of the ὄντες, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι should still be understood as an intensive perfect,¹⁸ stressing the present state, but does not have the added effect of ὄντες from the previous participle. The participle only appears in the New Testament as a perfect passive participle and occurs only in the Prison Epistles at Col. 1:21, Eph. 2:12, and here. “It denotes the state prior to reconciliation. The parallel expressions make it plain that in all three passages it applies only to this state.”¹⁹ In Col. 1:21, it describes the spiritual condition of the believers prior to salvation while in Eph. 2:12, it describes the state of the ethnic Gentiles as separate from Israel before the grace of God united them in Christ.

The genitives following the participle serve two opposite functions. The first explains the alienation itself as being from life. The second shows from whence life comes—God. In other words, they are walking in futility while being in a darkened state and finding themselves in a position of exclusion from a life in the now and the hereafter. They are dead men walking and their minds are so distorted that they do not even know it.

Now, Paul explains why this state of alienation has occurred. The two διὰ clauses are coordinate, equally explaining the culpability of the Gentiles. The first phrase shows the first cause as ignorance (τὴν ἄγνοιαν), from which agnostic is derived, meaning “without knowledge.” This ignorance is described as that which is in them. The τὴν οὐσίαν is substantival and refers to the ignorance as a present state in the unbeliever. “Thus, the blame of their ignorance falls on them and not on God or external factors.”²⁰ Surely alienation from God is a past state for believers since they have been drawn near (Rom. 5:10). Several scholars see the substantival phrase as proof that the next διὰ clause should be subordinate to this one.²¹ Westcott tends to be unclear, pointing to stylistic reasons for keeping them coordinate but giving credence to the substantival participle as joining what follows.²² Best is correct in viewing the two clauses as coordinating and not interpreting one another.²³ The structure of the passage has already paralleled the two participles in verse 18 and now parallels the two clauses for uniformity. In addition to ignorance, another cause for the state of alienation is hardness of heart. There has been some debate over whether πῶρωσις means “blindness” or “hardness.” In John 12:40, ἐπῶρωσεν is based on ἐπαχύνθη in Isa. 6:10. There is a sense of hardness here as well as in Mark 3:5 where the word points to Jesus’ grief at the leaders’ hardness of heart while He was attempting to heal the leper’s hand and in Rom. 11:25 where Paul speaks of a partial hardening of Israel.²⁴ Abbott points out that it is derived from a word meaning “tufa,” later called “callus,” a hardening of the skin.²⁵ Although there are a few variants, verse 19 indicates that some have become callous, which gives verse 18 more solid evidence for understanding it as hardening. As with other Scripture, this process of hardening is a combination of divine sovereignty and human responsibility (see the New Testament writers’ treatment of Isa. 6:9–10). Best points out that here the Gentiles are being accused of the same rebellion the Jews have committed throughout Scripture.²⁶

After describing the unspiritual state of the Gentiles in their walk of futility, Paul goes on to further specify this futility in verse 19 by describing their behavior in how they have given themselves over to sensuality. First, and emphatically presented, is the cause for this action. It is because they have become calloused. This instance is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament. While this participle does not subordinate itself under the διὰ τὴν πῶρωσις clause primarily because of the pronoun separating them, it does show a derivation from the hardness of heart described there for being the cause of their pursuing immoral behavior.

Like the causal participle, the accusative pronoun, which is the object of the main verb, παρέδωκαν, is given in an emphatic position to stress their culpability: “it is themselves that they gave over.” Compare this with Rom. 1:24 where God is the one who gave pagans over.²⁷ They gave themselves over to sensuality or “undisciplined behaviour especially, though not exclusively, of a sexual nature.”²⁸ The result or perhaps more to the point, the purpose, of their dive into sensuality is for every unclean work. This further description broadens the understanding of their sins from what could be taken as primarily sexual in nature to every aspect of impurity or immorality. The last dative phrase in verse 19 is ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ. It depends on the finite verb and shows the manner of their giving themselves over. It was done in a manner of greed for all things. In fact, most sinful desires, particularly sexual in nature, are driven by greed.

Greed and uncleanness appear again in 5:3 where Paul names those things which should not be part of a believer’s life.²⁹ Ruth Paxson best summarizes the description of the Gentile unbelievers in 4:17–19 as a picture of spiritual death, mental darkness, moral degeneracy, and physical depravity.³⁰ These describe characteristics or lifestyles of what Paul will refer to as the “old man” in verse 22. Of course, he will go on to give more concrete examples in chapter 5. It is important to realize just what that old man is made of in order to examine whether, when, or how it is laid aside. Moule puts it best by indicating “[t]hat it is a world, a race, a mankind, which by the very fact of its *fall* bears witness to its having been made by a Blessed Creator for infinitely better things. True, it is lost, it is condemned, it is dead in trespasses and sins. It is ‘alienated from the life of God’; ‘ignorance is in it’; ‘blindness of heart.’ But those very terms imply that in its origin as a race, in the idea of its being, it was altogether otherwise.”³¹

THE TEACHING OF THE NEW MAN

Verse 20 is the contrastive verse (δέ) of the passage. While verses 17–19 described the unbelievers or those still living life from the “old man,” verses 20–24 show what true believers should be. The second plural pronoun as well as the οὐχ οὕτως are in an emphatic position, stressing the difference that these believers Paul is addressing should have from the group mentioned in verses 17–19. The aorist verb, ἐμάθετε, comes from μαθηθῶ, meaning “to learn” or “come to understand.” It is used throughout the New Testament, particularly in the context of Jesus’ teachings.³² The unique part of this phrase is that usually what is learned is a

concept rather than a person. Here, it is Christ. The temporal aspect of this learning process largely depends on what it means to learn Christ. While conversion could be the understanding here as Hoehner³³ and Best³⁴ point out, the following actions of “heard” and “taught” in verse 21 could broaden the scope a bit to their entire early discipleship process. To learn Christ is not only to learn His teachings but also to learn His Person as Hoehner says. At the same time, however, His Person is also wrapped up in His teachings.

The first-class condition in verse 21 shows Paul’s confidence that the recipients did hear and were taught in Christ.³⁵ The αὐτὸν and the ἐν αὐτῷ are both in the emphatic position, stressing the object and the sphere of the two constative aorists. While the Authorized Version translates the latter prepositional phrase instrumentally (“by Him”), it is difficult to see how Christ taught these believers directly. Instead, the teachings they received were in connection with Christ but done by other believers.³⁶ The constative understanding follows from the constative use of μάθετε in verse 20 with the verbs in verse 21 being understood as together making up that learning process. Additionally, Lincoln notes that “‘hearing’ draws attention primarily to the first stage of its transmission, while ‘being taught’ highlights the further stage of catechesis.”³⁷ Jerome highlights Paul’s point in this conditional clause: “Therefore if anyone has heard and learned Christ, he would not be living ‘in the futility of his mind’ nor ‘be[ing] darkened in understanding’ nor be[ing] ‘alienated from the life of God.’ He would already have practical knowledge, since his ignorance would have been dispelled, his darkness illuminated and every blindness lifted from the eyes of his heart.”³⁸

The comparative conjunction could be subordinated to both verbs but more likely, to ἐδιδάχθητε. Here, it functions to follow the train of thought from the teaching in Jesus to the statement that the truth is in Jesus. The truth is contrasted with the futility and ignorance of verses 17–18.³⁹

Three infinitives appear in the final verses of this passage, beginning in verse 21 (ἀποθέσθαι, ἀνανεοῦσθαι, ἐνδύσασθαι). The question now is how these infinitives function. Abbott argues that the ὑμᾶς would be superfluous if ἀποθέσθαι is subordinate to ἐδιδάχθητε. He also says that the finite verb is not suitable to ἀνανεοῦσθαι. Therefore, he takes ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς as the subject and uses ἀλήθεια as an adjective to contrast “true teaching” with “deceit.”⁴⁰ This has several problems. First, the pronoun would not be superfluous because it can serve to emphasize to whom the teaching was aimed. The pronoun does not need to be repeated in the next two verses. Second, there is no reason nor does Abbott give one for “teaching” not to be suitable to renewing the spirit of the mind. It is just as legitimate of a teaching as the stripping off and the putting on of the new man. Lastly, the adjectival function of “truth” is highly questionable, given the verb of being in verse 21. It is better to take all three infinitives as subordinate to ἐδιδάχθητε. They can be considered imperatival only in the sense that the believers are to adhere to the teaching they have received. The infinitives are not independent of ἐδιδάχθητε. Instead, they present the content of the teaching.⁴¹

The infinitive of verse 22 is ἀποθέσθαι, which can have the meaning of “to put away,” referring to putting someone in prison (Matt. 14:3), “to lay aside” or

“get rid of” (Rom. 13:12; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1), or “to take off” (Acts 7:58).⁴² There is some connection in this passage with the “lay aside” and the “take off” renderings. Lincoln compares the “lay aside” passages and says that “here it is not just particular vices that are to be put off but the whole old person who was leading a life dominated by sin.”⁴³ The closest parallel is in Col. 3:8 where putting on the new man is in close proximity (3:10). Col. 3:9 uses ἀπεκδυόμενοι to describe the putting off of the old man as opposed to ἀποθέσθαι.

The infinitive here is in the aorist tense, denoting a one-time act. The object of the infinitive is τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον. “The old man” is only used in Rom. 6:6, Col. 3:9, and here. In each context, it refers to the sinful nature inherited from Adam’s sin.⁴⁴ The context of Colossians 3 indicates that the believer has been “raised up with Christ” (3:1). Their lives are said to be “hidden with Christ in God.” This type of language would point to a representative interpretation because of the identification with Christ. The context of Romans 5 and 6 develops this thought even more. Romans 5:17 contrasts the sin and death of one man that spread to all with the grace and life of the one man, Jesus. This representation continues in verses 18–21. Further identification with Christ is evident in 6:3–5, speaking of baptism with him. Romans 6:6 paints a picture of the old man as crucified with Christ. Because of the surrounding context of identity with Adam and then with Christ, it appears that the understanding here is that Adam is the “old man” and Christ is the “new man,” representing the entire human race. This identification with Adam as the “old man” must not be separated from an individual’s entire being or sinful humanity as a whole. While it is true that there is an identity with Adam and Christ, the emphasis in Eph. 4:22 is an individualistic one, stressing that the individual must align himself no longer with the “old man” but with the “new man.”⁴⁵

Eph. 4:22 indicates that this “old man” is in accordance with the former way of life. The κατά denotes standard and is in an emphatic position, stressing the fact that this is an old way of life that should not be lived anymore. Believers should not be living according to the old, crucified (Rom. 6:6) standard. Furthermore, the “old man” is described by the use of a substantival participle that it is being corrupted. This description of τὸν φθειρόμενον is used to mean “destroy” (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10), “harm” (2 Cor. 7:2), and “corrupt” or “deprave” (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:22; Rev. 19:2).⁴⁶ The present tense of this participle denotes an ongoing process of the corruption of the “old man.” This corruption, according to Pauline theology presented elsewhere, dates back to Adam and spread to all (Romans 5). Therefore, Westcott was correct in saying, “This was not only corrupt, but ever growing more and more corrupt.”⁴⁷

The next κατά clause modifies the participle rather than the “old man.” This denotes standard as well and shows a standard of τὰς ἐπιθυμίας. This can be understood as “desire” or “lust.” It is used in Eph. 2:3 to describe the preconversion condition of the believers as indulging the lusts of the flesh. In 4:22, it could speak specifically to sexual desire but is probably broader just as is described in 4:19. The genitive, τῆς ἀπάτης, shows a lust that comes from deceit as contrasted with the “holiness from truth” in 4:24.

Verse 23 comprises the second of the three infinitival phrases that make up the content of ἐδιδάχθητε from verse 21. This one is unique compared to the surrounding infinitives in that it does not mention the “old” or “new” man and because it is in the present tense as opposed to the aorist tense. This denotes a continuous process as opposed to a one-time event. The conjunction, δέ, is contrastive, separating the negative actions of the “old man” with the positive actions of renewal and (καί) putting on the “new man.” The word, ἀνανεοῦσθαι, is only used here in the New Testament.

The thought expressed by ἀνακαινοῦσθαι in the parallel passage, Col. 3:10 (cf. ἀνακαίνωσις in Rom. 12:2), is given by the ἀνανεοῦσθαι of Eph. 4:23, a nuance which characterizes the connection with verse 22 and verse 24, namely, that through the operation of Christ upon him the Christian is constantly rejuvenated and begins afresh, free from the old being and free for the new.⁴⁸

This renewal process takes place in “the spirit of the mind.” Other than in 2:2 where the spirit is used in conjunction with the sons of disobedience, every other mention of “spirit” in Ephesians refers to the Spirit of God. However, it would be difficult to refer to the Holy Spirit with the following genitive, τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν. Instead, it must be referring to the human spirit since it is associated with the human mind. It is better to take “spirit” as the human spirit, indicating where the renewal is taking place. The passive form of the infinitive allows for the Holy Spirit to be the one performing the action on the spirit of the mind. The spirit is part of the mind or located within the mind. As has been noted earlier, the mind is the central location of moral consciousness and is often used in conjunction with the heart, denoting the whole person. Even though there should not be a radical separation of spirit and mind, Barth puts it well when he says, “Since spirit and mind exert a dominating and steering function, a renewed ‘spirit and mind’ mean no less than a total change of the total man.”⁴⁹

The final of the three parallel infinitives is ἐνδύσασθαι, “to put on,” appearing in verse 24. Throughout the New Testament, the word is used for putting on articles of clothing, articles of armor (as in Eph. 6:11, 14), and spiritual qualities. Even in the last type of use, the understanding is like that of putting on clothes. The same can be said of Eph. 4:24 where the believer is said to have put on the “new man” in a one-time act just as he put off the “old man” as described by the aorist tense. This “new man” is associated with Jesus Christ as explained earlier. This thought is made obvious by Paul in Rom. 13:14 where he commands the Romans to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” while not giving in to the lusts of the flesh. There is not only a connection with this verse in what is to be put on but also the contrast with the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 4:19, 22).

In many ways, verse 22 and verse 24 form a contrast. The “old man” is contrasted with the “new man.” The “old man” is put off while the “new man” is put on. Another contrast is that while the “old man” is being corrupted, the “new man” has been created in God’s likeness. The participle, τὸν κτισθέντα, is

substantival and describes the action as a whole. While the “old man” is being corrupted according to the lust of deceit, the “new man” has been created according to God in righteousness and holiness of truth. Hoehner’s insight here is worth mentioning: “It is interesting to notice that the word ‘creation’ is not used in connection with the ‘old person.’”⁵⁰

The creation according to the standard or image of God echoes Gen 1:26 and is also brought out in Col. 3:10. This “new man” is a restoration of the original creation of man in God’s image that was corrupted by the Fall and continues to be corrupted (Eph. 4:22). The creation of the new image has taken place in the spheres of righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) is a word used throughout Scripture to describe a quality of God, right standing before God, personal righteousness, or righteous actions. Hoehner indicates that it is used 92 times in the New Testament with 58 of those times by Paul. Three of these Pauline uses appear in Ephesians.⁵¹ The first is here in 4:24. In 5:9, it is used as a description of the sphere or even an example of the fruit of light. In that context, the believers are commanded to walk as light rather than darkness. This shows a similar function as 4:24 in that the believers are to put on the “new man” which has been created in righteousness. The third use of the word in Ephesians appears in 6:14, showing that the believer should stand firm having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Holiness (ὁσιότητα) is used for showing piety toward gods or parents. It appears 9 times in the LXX, referring to holiness before God, God’s holiness, and divine law. There are only two occurrences in the New Testament. Other than the present verse, the other appearance is in Luke 1:75 where holiness and righteousness are “used to denote service to God with an attitude of personal piety and righteousness.”⁵² In similar fashion, this was man’s original purpose and creation state and it is to that state that it is to return by the “putting on of the new man.” The truth in this verse is the source for the righteousness and holiness⁵³ as contrasted with verse 22 where deceit is the source of lust.

THEOLOGICAL COHERENCE AND IMPLICATIONS

By way of exegetical work, this paper has shown that the believers are no longer to walk according to the ways of the “old man,” described in 4:17–19. Instead, they are to adhere to the teaching of Christ that indicates that they 1) have put off the “old man”; 2) are continually being renewed in the spirit of their mind; 3) have put on the “new man.” While the aorist and present tenses of these teachings have been touched upon briefly in the exegetical portion, further explanation has been reserved for this section where other Pauline teachings can be brought in to assist in comprehension.

ROMANS 6–8

A proper understanding of this change in the life of the believer is difficult without looking at Paul's most in-depth discussion on the topic in Romans. While it is impossible to cover every aspect of these verses, a few significant points will be highlighted. As has been noted previously, chapter 5 shows a cosmic contrast between the one man (Adam) and the one man (Jesus Christ) which both affected humanity. One was characterized by sin and resulted in death while the other was characterized by grace and resulted in life. In Romans 6, Paul addresses the question of whether one should sin since grace covers sin and with increased sin comes increased grace (6:1). Instead of agreeing with this proposal, he strongly opposes by indicating that the believer has died to sin and should not live in it any longer (6:2). He emphasizes the identification with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. In this way, he shows that the believer has been baptized into Christ. Along with this identification, Paul notes that the "old man" has been crucified with Christ, thus freeing the believer from slavery in sin (6:6–7). In the same way that Christ died to sin once for all, the believer should consider himself dead to sin but alive to God in his identification with Christ (6:10–11).

While it may appear that this death to sin would result in a sin-free life, the exhortations in the following verses indicate that the believer can still choose to obey the "old man" even though he is a slave to him no longer (6:12–23). Why is it that believers choose to use their freedom to sin? Thomas Schreiner indicates that the full inheritance of the resurrection with Christ lies in the future. The power of Christ's resurrection has invaded the present, enabling believers to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). However, just because believers are set free from slavery to sin does not mean that it is impossible for them to sin. "The indicative does not eliminate the need for the imperative, for believers must consciously resist desires for sin that arise within them. . . . Evil desires do not shrivel up and depart after conversion."⁵⁴ James Dunn points out that the "old man" may have been crucified but not totally destroyed.⁵⁵ In other words, the control of the old man has been neutralized but the possibility of the believer choosing to place himself under the guise of that "old man" still remains.

There is much debate over whether Rom. 7:7–25 describes Paul's preconversion life or his struggle as a believer. The language of 7:7–13 speaks in past tense while 7:14–25 speaks in present tense. This points to a shift in perspective where in the former verses, Paul describes the preconversion life, while in the latter verses, he describes the Christian struggle.⁵⁶ Dunn refers to this as the "divided 'I.'" The present tense of 7:25b emphasizes this as "an ongoing state." The believer is living in the "overlap of the ages." While the believer is not a slave of sin because the "old man" has been crucified (6:6), it is still causing problems in the life of the believer because the salvation process, which has begun with blessed assurance of completion, still waits for consummation.⁵⁷ Anthony Hoekema likens this struggle to a country where a king has already decisively won the battle, but rebel forces continue to harass, engaging in guerilla warfare. They are defeated and will never be able to dethrone the king, but they still cause problems.⁵⁸

This already-not-yet tension is further evidenced in Romans 8 where Paul speaks of the believer, along with all of creation, "groaning" for the time of consummation where the body will be redeemed (8:22–23). There is no obligation to live according to the flesh for the believer (8:12). Nevertheless, the believer is described as "putting to death" the deeds of the body (8:13). This describes a continual process because of the present tense. The implication is that there is still a struggle with these deeds. As Dunn says, "[If] the Spirit-flesh antithesis were a thing of the past for the believer (as 8.2–9 might be taken to imply), then what meaning would there be in Paul advising his readers that they were 'under no obligation to live in accordance with the flesh' (8.12)?"⁵⁹ Clearly, the implications of Romans 6–8 indicate a struggle still exists between the "old man" and the "new man."

COL. 3:1–10

This passage has already been referenced in the paper, but since it is a further explanation of the conflict between the "old" and "new man" and provides the closest parallel with Eph. 4:17–24, it should be revisited. The implication of Col. 2:20 is that the believer has died with Christ to the "elementary principles of the world." While the context speaks more to man-made rituals in questioning why the Colossians were still adhering to them, 3:1–2 shows that this can also be applied to the ways of the "old man." In 3:5, Paul tells them to consider these things in which they once walked (3:7) as "dead."

The believers are encouraged to "put aside" the characteristics of this "old man" because the "old man" itself has been "put aside" (3:8–9). The same word of 3:8 is used in Eph. 4:22 while Col. 3:9 uses a related word, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι. In all three instances, the verb is in the aorist tense, focusing on a one-time act. Colossians 3:8 uses an aorist imperative, indicating a command to the believer to "put aside" the qualities of the "old man," whereas Col. 3:9 uses an aorist participle, indicating that the "old man" himself has been laid aside. This is also emphasized in Col. 2:11f.⁶⁰ The implication here is that while the "old man" has been laid aside, the believer must make a decisive act also to lay aside the characteristics that go along with that crucified "old man" (Rom. 6:6).

On the other hand, the believers have "put on the new man" (3:10). Again, the aorist participle points to a decisive action in the past. This "new man" is being renewed (present tense) to true knowledge according to the standard of the God who created him. As pointed out previously, this continual renewal corresponds to the continual renewal of the spirit of the mind in Eph. 4:23. This passage in Colossians points to the fact that the believer has laid aside the "old man" and put on the "new man" which is constantly being renewed. This renewal process is the power from the Holy Spirit enabling the believer to fulfill the command of 3:8 to put aside the characteristics of that "old man."

CONCLUSION

After looking at the passages in Romans and Colossians that deal with the “old man” and the “new man,” one must make a decision on the impact of these concepts in Eph. 4:17–24. The “putting off” and “putting on” were apparently accomplished through the redemption from Jesus Christ on the cross and applied at the moment of conversion. In other words, “God has already done His part.”⁶¹ The injunction of the teaching to “put off” and “put on” is not to repeat the event that was accomplished at conversion but to “continue to live out its significance by giving up on that old person that they no longer are.”⁶² At the same time, while the cultural conviction is that “clothes make the man,” this can not be true unless the spirit of the mind is changed.⁶³

Paul has described the mindset and actions of the Gentile unbelievers in 4:17–19, constituting the life of the “old man” (4:22). He contrasts this with what the believers were taught in Christ (4:20–24). The content of that teaching was that they “have put off the old man,” “are continually being renewed in the spirit of their mind,” and “have put on the new man.” It was important for Paul to describe the “old man” in the former set of verses so that the believers would know how they should be different. In fact, he goes on in chapter 5 to further specify those actions and contrasts them with walking as imitators of God. Although the “old man” has been put aside (4:22), even crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6), and the “new man” has been put on (4:24), there is a tendency to try to put the “old man” back on. In order to avoid this, they are continually renewed in the spirit of their mind (4:23). In other words, they once wore dirtied clothes but were given a cleansing bath by the Holy Spirit and given new clothes to put on. Only by the continuing renewal of the mind will believers not resort to putting back on the filthy clothes. Only then will they not stoop to wearing the funeral garb of a dead man. This continual renewal sustains the believer until the time of consummation where the “old man” is not only taken out of the driver’s seat but is also completely destroyed. Only at that time will the process be complete, and the struggle will end.

NOTES

¹John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville: Nelson, 2003), 76, 79.

²Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 582; Ernest E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 416.

³Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, Anchor Bible, vol. 34a (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 499; T. K. Abbot, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 127.

⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 276.

⁵B. F. Westcott, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), 65.

⁶Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 521–22).

⁷*Ibid.*, 603–4.

⁸O. Bauernfeind, “μάταιος,” 519–24 in vol. 4 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

⁹J. Behm, “νοῦς,” 948–80 in vol. 4 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

¹⁰Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 277.

¹¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 588–89.

¹²C. Mack Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians 4–6: God’s People in a Walk Worthy of His Calling,” *SWJT* 19.1 (Fall 1996): 35.

¹³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 585.

¹⁴Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 647–49; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 320–21.

¹⁵Hans Conzelman, “σκοτώ,” 422–44 in vol. 7 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

¹⁶J. Behm, “διδασκαλία,” 948–80 in vol. 4 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

¹⁷Barth, *Ephesians*, 544.

¹⁸Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 574–76.

¹⁹F. Büchsel, “ἀπαλλοτριόω,” 264–67 in vol. 1 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

²⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 587.

²¹Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians 4–6,” 35; Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 131; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 587; J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Clark, 1909), 189; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 322.

²²Westcott, *Ephesians*, 66.

²³Best, *Ephesians*, 420.

²⁴K. L. and M. A. Schmidt, “πύρωσις,” 1022–31 in vol. 5 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

²⁵Abbott, *Ephesians*, 131.

²⁶Best, *Ephesians*, 421.

²⁷Abbott, *Ephesians*, 132.

²⁸Best, *Ephesians*, 422.

²⁹Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians 4–6,” 36.

³⁰Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian* (New York: Revell, 1939), 105.

³¹Handley C. G. Moule, *Ephesians Studies: Expository Readings in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900), 217.

³²Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “μανθάνω,” 390–461 in vol. 4 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

³³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 594.

³⁴Best, *Ephesians*, 426.

³⁵Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 690–94.

³⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 595.

³⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 280.

³⁸Mark J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures of the New Testament, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 163.

³⁹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 597–98.

⁴⁰Abbott, *Ephesians*, 135.

⁴¹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 598–602; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 284.

⁴²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 603.

⁴³Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 284.

⁴⁴Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian*, 107.

⁴⁵Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 285.

⁴⁶G. Harder, “φθείρω,” 93–106 in vol. 9 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

⁴⁷Westcott, *Ephesians*, 68; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 606.

⁴⁸J. Behm, “ἀνανεόω,” 896–901 in vol. 4 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed.). Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

⁴⁹Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 509.

⁵⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 611.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 611.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 612.

⁵³As with Robinson, *Ephesians*, 191; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 613; Best, *Ephesians*, 438; Abbott, *Ephesians*, 138; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 288.

⁵⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 258–59.

⁵⁵James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 471.

⁵⁶While a detailed discussion on why Rom. 7:14–25 should be interpreted as a post-conversion description is outside the scope of this paper, see a good scholarly treatment in the following sources: Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 423–67; Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 163–72.

⁵⁷Dunn, *Paul*, 474–76.

⁵⁸Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Struggle Between Old and New Natures in the Converted Man,” *JETS* 5.2 (Spring 1962): 47.

⁵⁹Dunn, *Paul*, 480.

⁶⁰F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 272.

⁶¹Paxson, “The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian,” 107.

⁶²Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 285.

⁶³Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 540; Roark, “Interpreting Ephesians 4–6,” 36.