

CONDUCT OF THE KINGDOM • HOLINESS



WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

While the beginning chapters of Ephesians dealt with our new identity: who we are in Christ, this study deals with the conduct and personal holiness that is appropriate given our new identity as children of God.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to Materials@ImpactMovement.com

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

READ EPHESIANS 4:17-5:7

Moving and becoming a citizen of a new country involves at least three major transitions. First, one needs to learn a new language. Second, one needs to understand the distinct world-view of that country: Asians, for example, view the world very differently than Europeans. Third, one would need to learn the distinct habits and practices of that country.

In Colossians 1:3, it says that we have been “rescued from the kingdom of darkness” and are now in the kingdom of light. In Ephesians 4:17-5:7, the Apostle Paul contrasts the speech, world view, and conduct of our old residence, the kingdom of darkness, with the kingdom of light, urging the Ephesians to act in a manner that is appropriate to their new residence—God’s kingdom.

New Speech

Paul lists several characteristics that compose the language of our old kingdom: slander, course joking, lying, unwholesome talk, obscenity, and foolish talk.

The word unwholesome means, “that which breaks down.” This is a broad category and would include all forms of speech that are used for the purpose of tearing down another or the community. Gossip, for example, tears down and erodes the fabric of a community. Cynicism would be another example of unwholesome language. Cynicism is a negative manner of speech that always draws attention to what is lacking or wrong with either a person or situation. Sarcasm and criticism are genres of speech that can be used constructively, but are often used in an unwholesome fashion— to tear down rather than build up.

In contrast, the Christian is to use all of the dialects of the new kingdom (kindness, encouragement, truth) with the guiding principle of speaking, “only what is helpful for building others up according to their need” (vs. 29).

Like learning any new language, it takes time, and we need to be patient with others as we detect accents of their old language as they are learning the new.

New World View

In 4:17-18, Paul describes the mind apart from Christ as futile (aimless) in its thinking, and ignorant and darkened in its understanding. Without knowledge of God,

even the most intelligent people will come to theories, ideas, and beliefs that would appropriately be called silly.

For example, without intending to make a statement about how God created the world, the current theories of evolution, apart from a divine and designing hand, are almost unintelligible. In almost every field of thought, from science to history to literature, most current intellectual theories could best be described as darkened, to some degree, in their understanding. Theories are equations, and if God is not factored into the equation, the sum will never be wholly accurate.

Paul clarifies in 4:18 that the core of the problem is not an intellectual one. He states that this thinking is a natural overflow of a heart that's been hardened to God. With this information, it becomes clear why debate on many of these issues with unbelievers is often fruitless. The point of variance is at a heart and moral level, not the intellectual level. Ultimately, the best way to shed light on the futility of a person's thinking is to lead them to Christ.

Paul describes the futility of godless thinking as a deteriorating condition that spirals progressively downward. In contrast, our thinking is to be renewed, continually spiraling upward with greater wisdom and understanding. This is what Paul means when he says that we are to be "renewed in the attitude of our minds."

Scripture is the major tool God uses to transform our thinking. Along with Scripture, God also uses mature Christians who can share their many years of experience in reading the Scriptures and walking with God. Last, God teaches us lessons in wisdom experientially by simply walking daily with Him. One cautionary note: It needs to be said that our experience must be informed by Scripture, or our thoughts may be led astray.

It's also important to realize that it is not simply the Scriptures themselves that change our thinking. There is a very real dynamic in which, in prayerfully reading the Scriptures, the Lord meets with us and teaches us. Academic study of the Scripture, apart from a vital relationship with God, can fail to renew our minds.

New Conduct

Last, there is a new conduct to be learned. Paul instructs us to rid ourselves of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice, greed, impurity, and sexual immorality.

To think of such change can be overwhelming. In 4:30 Paul says not to "grieve the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit changes our lives progressively. A strong sense of conviction and sadness over a particular sin is often a good indicator that the Spirit is prompting change in a specific area. His sadness, and yours, actually helps fuel the change. This is part of what it means when it says in Philippians 2:13 that "God works in you to will and act according to his good purposes."

But, while God is working within us, we ourselves must participate. Holiness is kneaded into our lives in a variety of ways. Often, the process of change looks something like this: increased sadness and guilt over an area of sin, increased prayer concerning the sin, increased confession both to God and others about this sin, small good choices and partial victories (stopping in the middle of the act), and bigger and more consistent choices. Ultimately, godly behavior becomes habitual.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

The question on whether sarcasm is an example of unwholesome speech might generate some difference of opinion. Sarcasm and criticism are often seen in their most negative and biting forms. But criticism can be constructive, if done out of love, and sarcasm, too, can be used to communicate care. In fact, God, at different places in Scripture, uses sarcasm. It's best to see criticism and sarcasm as speech genres that can be used to build up or break down.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

The major application of the study is to begin pursuing holiness in the areas of speech and conduct, and to help you become familiar with how God changes you so that you will begin to be more sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 4:24 "... Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Speech, customs, beliefs, conduct.
2. Slander, course joking, lying, unwholesome talk, obscenity, and foolish talk.
3. Biting sarcasm, criticism, cynicism, gossip.
4. For sarcasm, see "What If There's a Problem." Cynicism is always unwholesome.
- 5-6. Jot down your answers.
7. Some examples are evolution or homosexuality.
8. Give an example you recently heard.
9. Debate on many of these issues is often fruitless. The point of variance is at a heart and moral level, not the intellectual level.
10. Ultimately, the best way to shed light on the futility of a person's thinking is to lead them to Christ.
11. Primarily through Scripture, but see "What Do I Need to Know."
12. Take time to fill out the chart.
13. Reflect on your answer.
14. Regularly confessing to God and sharing the issue with someone else. Taking small steps even if they are only partial victories.

CONDUCT OF THE KINGDOM • EPHESIANS 4:17-5:7

1. In Colossians 1:3, it says that we have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and are now in the kingdom of light. If you were to move to a new country, what are some of the things you would need to learn in order to fit in?

New language

2. Read Ephesians 4:25-5:7. List some of the examples Paul gives of our old language.
3. In verse 29, it says to “get rid of any unwholesome talk.” Unwholesome means types of speech that are negative or “tear down” another person. What would be some examples?
4. Do you think sarcasm, and or, cynicism is “unwholesome?” Why or why not?
5. When learning any new language, we often speak with an accent from our old language. If you haven’t been careful with your speech, what sort of accent would people hear?
6. In what areas have you seen God begin to change how you speak?

New World View

7. Read 4:17-24. In talking to someone from Asia or Europe, you would notice they view the world very differently than Americans. How have you begun to see your viewpoints on different subjects change since becoming a Christian?

8. Can you think of an example of something you heard recently, perhaps in a class or lyrics to a song, you thought was futile (pointless or aimless), or darkened thinking?

9. In verse 18, Paul traces futile thinking and darkened understanding to its source—a “hardened heart.” What does this tell you about debating issues with non-believers? What has been the result when you’ve tried to debate issues with a non-Christian?

10. How do you best affect change in another person’s thinking?

11. Paul describes the futility of godless thinking as a condition that progressively spirals downward. In contrast, spiraling upward with greater wisdom and understanding, we are “made new in the attitudes of our minds.” How does this occur?

New Conduct

12. Read 4:25-5:3. There are 10 characteristics of the conduct of the old kingdom and three characteristics of the new. Go down the list and rate yourself with either: not an issue, kind of an issue, big issue.

Must steal no longer

Getting rid of sexual immorality

Getting rid of all bitterness

Getting rid of greed

Getting rid of rage

Getting rid of impurity

Getting rid of anger

Being kind

Getting rid of brawling

Being compassionate

Getting rid of slander

Being forgiving

Stopping stealing

In 4:30, Paul says not to “grieve the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit changes our lives progressively. A strong sense of conviction and sadness over a particular sin is often a good indicator that the Spirit is prompting you in this area. His sadness, and yours, actually helps fuel the change.

13. Is there any area of speech or conduct you have been feeling saddened over recently?

14. Besides sadness, what are some other ways you might cultivate change in this area?

Memory verse

Ephesians 4:24 “ ... Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

HEAD OF THE HOUSE

One evening I invited Jesus Christ to live with me. It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but something very real happened at the center of my life. He came in, turned on the light, built a fire in the hearth, and filled the emptiness with His personal presence. Because I wanted to experience more even of this relationship I said, "Lord, I want you to feel perfectly at home in every area of my life. Let me show you around."

The Study

The first place we explored was my study - the room of my mind. It was quite small and had very thick walls. He entered and looked around at the books on the shelves, the magazines on the table, and the pictures on the walls. I became a little uncomfortable. Strangely, I had never felt self conscious about this stuff before, but now that He was there looking at it all, I felt embarrassed. Some of it seemed completely out of place in His presence. And I realized for the first time that I had no business looking or reading much of what stood before me. Blushing, I turned to Him and said, "I know that this room needs cleaning, but I don't really know where to start. Will you help me?" Since then, I have discovered that when my mind is centered upon Christ, His purity and power begin to take the place of my own impure thoughts. I have found that even my desire to think thoughts that are not pleasing to Him has decreased. While I still have quite a way to go, I can honestly say that my thinking has gradually been brought under His control.

The Dining Room

After the study, we stepped into the dining room - the room of my appetites and desires. I had spent a lot of time and energy there. Proudly I said, "This is one of my favorite rooms. I believe you will be happy with what is served up here!" He seated Himself at the table with me and asked, "So, what's on the menu for dinner? What do you usually eat?" "Well," I said, "I'd like you to taste a few of my favorite meals." I set before Him all of my academic and athletic accomplishments and ambitions, as well as my career dreams.

When the "food" was placed before Him, He said nothing, and did not eat. I asked, "Master, don't you like the meal? Is there a problem?"

He answered, "Do you honestly find this diet satisfies your hunger? If you want to be truly filled, feed on Me and set your heart on doing the will of God alone. I happen to know that all you have been preparing for yourself will ultimately leave you feeling empty."

That was difficult for me to hear. I had convinced myself that one day, I would finally manage to cook up just the right meal that would satisfy my hunger. I sat there stunned, trying to take in His words. Sensing my anxiety, He reached over and put a small piece of bread in my hand. I ate it. That was the first taste of pure joy I had ever tasted. The flavor was so rich - just a small bite gave me more energy and contentment than all of the empty calories I had been consuming for years. I found myself at once both full and wanting more. I have never had anything remotely like it in the world.

The Living Room

From there we walked into the living room. It was casual, intimate, and comfortable. I loved this room! There was a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a big sofa, and a huge entertainment center.

Jesus said, "This is a great little spot. We can come here often and just 'hang-out' and talk together." I was thrilled. I couldn't think of anything I would rather do than have uninterrupted time with Jesus. He promised, "I will be here every morning. Meet me here, and we will start each day together." So morning after morning I would come downstairs to the living room and find Him waiting. He'd pull out a book of the Bible, open it, and we would read together. He began to unfold the amazing depth of His love and of His desires for my life. They were the most intimate and insightful times of my life.

Little by little, however, under the pressure of more urgent things, the time began to get crowded out, more hurried and less intimate. I began to miss days now and then. The appointments with Him that I had committed to, sometimes slipped my mind. I remember one morning rushing downstairs, choking down breakfast, on my way to do something critically important (I forget exactly what). I rushed past the living room and noticed the door was open. Curious, I looked in, and saw Jesus sitting there, praying for me by the fire. I felt a stinging-guilt flood through me. "I invited Him to live here with me," I thought. "He has been my greatest friend, and here I have been ignoring Him." I stopped, turned, and hesitantly went in. Hanging my head, I said, "Lord, forgive me. Have you been waiting here every morning?"

"Yes," He said. "I want you to remember that I am constantly with you. But, I thought we agreed to meet here each morning. Our fellowship together is very important if you are going to walk in My love and follow the directions that I give you. I desire the best for your life, and, believe it or not, I value our relationship—I love spending time with you."

The truth that Jesus really desired my companionship has done more to transform my devotional times with God than any other single fact. Mornings aren't always the best time of day - sometimes I've had to ask if we could meet at night. But I have made it a point to carve out daily time with Him in His Word and prayer.

The Workroom

Before long, He asked, "Do you have a workroom around here?" Out in the garage I had a small workbench and a few tools I had picked up here and there, but I wasn't doing much with any of it. Once in awhile I'd play around out there, but I never really produced anything substantial. I took Him out to look it over. "Well, this is quite well furnished. What are you producing with your life for the kingdom of God?" He pointed to a couple little toys I had thrown on the bench and held one up to me. "Is this the sort of thing you've been working on?"

"Well," I said, "Lord, I know it isn't much, but I don't have the time or skills to do much more."

"Would you like to do better?" He asked.

"Certainly," I replied.

"All right, let Me have your hands. Now relax with Me and let my Spirit work through you. If He controls your hands and your heart, you can accomplish any assignment I give you." Stepping around behind me and putting His strong hands under mine, He began to work with me. The more I relaxed and trusted Him, the more He was able to do through me.

The Rec. Room

He asked if I had a place where I got together with my friends. I was hoping He wouldn't ask me about that. There were certain associations and activities that I wanted to keep to myself. One evening when I was on my way out with some buddies, He caught my eye and asked, "Are you going out?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Great," He said. "I'd love to go with you."

"Well," I answered awkwardly, "I don't think you'd really enjoy where we are going. Let's go out together (just you and me) tomorrow night. Maybe to a Bible study or church or something, but tonight I have other plans."

"I'm sorry," He said. "I thought that when I came into your home, we were going to do everything together. I just want you to know that I am willing to go with you."

"Well," I mumbled, slipping out the door, "let's go someplace together tomorrow night."

That whole evening I was basically miserable. "What was I thinking? I had deliberately left Jesus out of my social life. Didn't I trust Him around my friends? Couldn't He do for them what he had done for me?"

When I returned, He was waiting for me. I decided to talk the situation over with Him. "Lord" I said, "I've learned my lesson. All my best times have been with you. From now on, I want us to do everything together." He led me back to the Rec. room and pulled out His plans for remodeling. Before long, He was comfortably hanging out with my friends. A few of them even invited Him into their homes. He also introduced me to new friends and we had some exciting and meaningful conversations. Powerful music has been ringing throughout the house ever since.

The Crawl Space

One day I found Him waiting for me at the door. An arresting look was in His eye. As I entered, He said, "I've noticed a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here. I think it's coming from under the crawl space under the rug." I immediately knew what He was talking about. There was a crawl space under the floor where I stored several personal things I didn't want anyone to know about. I knew they were dead and rotting leftovers from my former lifestyle. I kept them hidden and figured nobody would ever suspect anything. Occasionally, I'd mess around with a couple of those old habits or nurse some old grudge. I was afraid to admit to anybody that I still dabbled in these things. I tried to make excuses, telling myself that I only visited the crawl space when I had a particularly bad day.

Reluctantly, I went with Him and pulled back the rug to reveal the trap door in the floor. I felt angry. That's the only way I can put it. This was private! I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the living room, the workroom, and the Rec. room, and now He was asking for entrance into this little out of the way crawl space that wasn't hurting anybody as far as I could tell. I said to myself, "This is too much. I am not going to give Him the key."

"Well," He said, reading my thoughts, "if you think I'm going to stay around here with this stench, you are mistaken. I'll be on the porch if you want Me." When one comes to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense Him withdrawing His fellowship. I had to give in. "Wait! I'll give You the key," I said sadly. "But I doubt you'll be able to clean up that mess. I've made a number of futile attempts before. I never had the strength to do a very thorough job and it's so dark and musty in there that the stuff grows too fast."

"Just give Me the key," He said. "Trust Me to take care of the crawl space and I will." With trembling fingers I passed the key to Him. He unlocked the door and started cleaning. The process was often uncomfortable. I hated admitting that I had involved Jesus in this filthy, tedious project. He finally finished and applied a fresh coat of paint.

Title Transfer

A thought came to me. "Lord, is there any chance that you would take over the management of this whole house and operate it for me as You did that crawl space? Would You take responsibility to make my life what it ought to be?" His face lit up as He replied, "I'd love to! I've longed to fill and freely move through every part of your life. But," He added slowly, "to do that, I must have not only full control of your house, but complete ownership as well."

Dropping to my knees, I said, "Lord, I have been treating You like a guest and I have been a poor host. From now on I will be Your servant. Please do with this place whatever You find best - I trust you." I ran over to the strongbox and took out the title deed describing all the assets and liabilities of the property. I eagerly signed it over to Him. "Here it is, all that I am and have, forever. Now, You are in charge. I will submit to You as both Your servant and friend."