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Main Idea: We must carefully and passionately listen to our Lord's instructions so we live in and for Him and not in the ways of the world lest we think like people who love to sin. If we are of the world--thinking as people who are "ok" with sin--dark thoughts will be ours. Dark thoughts become dark behaviors. This way of life leads only to chaos, lives upset, and regret with all the consequences. This is life apart from God. This is life away from God. People who think and act in darkness have hardened their hearts; they are convicted. They do not seek God as their eyes are turned only on "pleasures" and desires; they become filled with things like greed and immorality, and they lose real compassion and kindness. This is not how and why our Lord came to set us free! Christ, Our Savior, did not die and rise so that we would just sin more! We have been given a gift that transforms our lives; let us act like it with His Truth and not the world's wicked ways. We can, by His empowerment, remove our old lives of sin and replace our mindset and actions with His principles that give us a better, more fulfilling life. This is akin to removing filthy rotten rags and putting on the finest clothes. Wearing our finest clothes, wearing the love and gratitude we have for Christ, creates better attitudes and character. This demonstrates to others who we are in Christ--holy people created and called by Holy God. This holy life strives to be and is free from dysfunction, deceit, and depression. In this, we can treat others with respect and practice our faith with fruitfulness and character. We can control our thoughts, words, and behaviors so we do not let our anger get out of control or fester. We can keep ourselves from lying, stealing, fighting, irritation, being mean or bitter, all that we would be useful and productive for the Kingdom, and not bow to the devil. The Church must share and help one another, work as a community in love, so we do not hurt the Holy Spirit. We can forgive and move on and be the people we are called to be, as we are sealed by Christ's redemption!

Contexts and Background:

The culture of the day was inundated with sins like homosexuality, premarital sex, wild parties, and idolatry, as people treated each other with contempt and wickedness. This passage contrasts the opposites of moral thinking and the resulting outcomes to hit home the importance of these exhortations. Paul also uses terms that both Jews and non-Jews would clearly understand and could be convicted from. This passage is also paralleled in Colossians 3 (Lev. 18:3:24-30; 20:23-24; Deut. 26:16-19; Col. 3:1-11).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Insist on it in the Lord.* A call to place Christ first and make a practical connection to the principles. Our trust leads to our obedience that will produce holy living as a result of Christ working in us. We respond to God because of His work of redemption and favor for us (Col. 2:6, 11-13, 20 to 3:3, 9-10; 3:14).
- *Live as the Gentiles.* Wild, purposeless, dysfunctional, uncaring, very selfish, the opposites of Christ's example and call. The application is that bad thoughts and actions lead to bad lives, so we are called to purposefully focus ourselves on Christ, His precepts, and His presence. When we focus on Christ, our attention is off other things and distractions--even sin! God's values will translate into humanity's values when we are centered on Christ, allowing His work in and through us (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 8:5; Phil. 1:23; 4:8; 1 John 2:15-17).
- *Life of God.* Our redemption also gives us an understanding, to think, and to have a desire for real Truth. We are to think about Christ and consider what we have in Him to experience our new lives. We can sin and live as we please, but what will that get us? Paul emphatically fights this heinous notion. We have no right to sin deliberately thinking, *I am already forgiven so it is OK to sin* (Col. 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2)!

- *Hardening of their hearts/blindness.* This refers to callousness and a refusal to be convicted or care about the truth, about others, or about what is right in general. They rejected God, because sin is more pleasurable and takes them over (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 8:15-32; 9:23; Rom. 1:24-32).
- *Sensuality debauchery/lasciviousness.* The pursuit of the physical like sexual pleasure that takes over lives. There is no reason or necessary function for an authentic Christian to be drawn to sexual sin, greed, rage, dirty language, gossip, slander, malicious behaviors, or idolatry ruling our hearts and minds. These things only cause us a life of dysfunction, loneliness, despair and hurt; they also hurt others. Do not let sin to be our direction in life (1 Thess. 4:7)!
- *Impurity/sexual immorality/fornication/covetousness.* In context, *anger, rage, malice, blasphemy/slander, filthy language, and lies*, uncontrolled lust, evil desires and greed were possibly the specific sins this church was having trouble with.
- *Heard about Christ.* This is a reminder of our position in Christ, a result of our redemption that should be exhibited in our new life in Christ. In Christ, our old nature has died and now we are clothed in His new nature and life. We also become more Christ-like in character and attitude as we grow and mature in Him. Therefore, we can understand God's truths and apply them to our lives without excuse (Rom. 6:1-14; 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Gal. 2:20-21; Eph. 1:3; Phil. 3:10-20; 2:1-101 John 3:2).
- *Truth that is in Jesus.* God has rescued us from death and given us understanding. When we become Christians, our old lives die to Him so now we can live for Him and have access to His blessings and gifting (John 10:28; Rom. 6:1-11; 8:19, 31-39; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 1:13-15; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 3:2).
- *Former way of life.* When we are in Christ, there should be a radical transformation from how we were before becoming a Christian to how we are living in Him. If not, we must ask "why not (Rom. 12)?"
- *Put off/rid yourselves.* This is the language of taking off the most disgusting thing for a Jew, grave clothes, and putting on shiny new armor for battle. The illustration is to put off sin and embrace righteousness, as we are to be clothed in the Holy Spirit, not in the world or in our desires. Also, this is a baptismal image as it was common practice to disrobe for the baptism and then put on new garments afterward if available. This is accomplished by focusing on Christ, right thinking, and faith (Mark 1:5; Acts 7:58; Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:24-25; 1 Pet. 2:1)!
- *Old self old man.* This is a metaphor for sin from Adam, who represented all of humanity. His fall begets our sinful nature and separation from God, because all of humanity would have made the same choice to sin (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 5:12-14; 6:6; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22).
- *Corrupted.* This means that sin that will cause us to fail, fall or to suffer. One's passions and desires can easily become unhinged from thoughts and virtue and cause one to be temporally insane and do wicked things. Since Christ lifted Himself to the cross and thus lifted us out of sin's penalty, how will we lift Him up in our lives (John 6:51-58; 10:29; Rom. 1:26; 8:1, 31-39; Gal. 2:20; 5:19; Col. 2:3)?
- *Put on/clothe yourselves.* This means to emulate the character of our Lord Jesus Christ on how He acted and reacted as He walked this earth. cThis is a call to take on the character of Jesus and put it on us. cWe do not do this on our own. He imparts to us the power and ability to do so through His and the Holy Spirit's work; it happens naturally as we learn and grow in Christ. His character envelopes us, wraps around us as we take on the new identity of a person not only saved by grace but empowered and shaped by Him (Gen. 35:2; Job. 29:14; Psalm 109:18; Isa. 61:3;-10; Rom. 12:1-3; 13:14; Gal. 3:27; 5:19-23; Col. 1:15; 2:3; 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:5)!

- *New self/new man.* This literally means a new life created by God! The image is renewal and that we display Christ by our words and actions; we demonstrate His image by our representation. In Christ, we are declared "new" and sinless by Christ's work. However, we still have a sinful nature, and we are called to cast it away. The character of God clothes us to produce our good character and to share it with others (Psalm 51:10; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 45-49 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16).
- *Righteousness.* This is here to regulate your life to behave according to what you believe; it is to know Christ, live for Him, and pursue Christ further beyond our salvation. This is to abide in His strength and not ours. We are to be obedient and constant with our learning and growth in Christ, so it is the tradition of God empowers us, learning His precepts or living and relating to God, self, and others, not the traditions of men, who deceive us (Mark. 12:38; Rom. 6:4; 8:1; 13:13; 1 Cor. 7:1; 2 Cor. 5:7; 10:3; 12:18; Gal. 5:16-25; 6:16; Eph. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8-15; Phil. 3:10-18; Col. 2:6-10; 3:17; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1, 12; 2 Thess. 3:11; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:6; 2 John 6; 3 John 3-4).
- *Holiness.* God has declared you holy, set apart for Him for the pleasures and wondrous opportunities to be used by Him. We cannot earn nor do we deserve our grace or gifts from Him. Therefore, this a call to treat others as He has treated us (John 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; Gal. 2:20-21; Col. 1:2; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:9-19).
- *Anger.* Do not hold on to anger, or it festers and is unjust, all it does is bring us unpleasantness and bitterness. When this happens, we must seek to break the bonds that destroy others and us. Our beliefs must affect our behaviors; our language must affect and reflect our faith. If not, our faith and thinking are skewed or even absent (Psalm 4:4; Isa. 63:10; Hos. 7:6; Eph. 4:31; James 1:19-20; 3:9-10).
- *Grieve the Holy Spirit.* This is an offence to God, our rebellion and rejection of His goodness for our wickedness (Num. 20:10; Deut. 3:26; Psalm 106:33).
- *Kind and compassionate/tender mercies.* This is a Fruit of the Spirit that produces a readiness to respond with righteousness and thoughtful consideration beyond how people treat us or how they may or may not deserve it (Matt. 11:29-30; Rom. 2:1-4; 12:9-21; 2 Cor. 6:6; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:4; 1 John 3:16-23).
- *Kindness.* This is the caring, empathy of another person outside of basic selfish nature. It is to recognize, emotionally identify with, and interact with those who are hurting, and helping them by gathering with others with the abilities and resources to help them (Job 29:13; Isa. 40:11; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark 1:41; Luke 6:36; 10:25-37; 19:4; Rom. 12:1-2; James 5:11; 1 Peter 3:8).
- *God forgave you.* We are to extend the forgiveness to others, because Christ had forgiven us. (John 6:37, 44, 65; 13:1; 15:16; Rom. 5:1-8; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:21-22; 2:10; 3:1-14; 1 John 4:9-11)!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

How to I apply this passage? Realize that God loves you and accepts you more powerfully, passionately, purposefully, and deeply than you could ever fathom! You are secure. God "guarantees" you with a clear, powerful, loving, impacting, and lasting relationship with Him. When you are in Christ, God is pleased with you! You have no need to fear; you are a person of deep value and worth before our Lord! You are forgiven because of Christ and His righteousness that covers you, not because of your deeds or performance. You are unique and complete in Him; and because of this, you are a special person whom God loves and will use to further impact His kingdom. He does this for all of who are His.

How do we do this in a life of hardship, setbacks, busyness and uncertainty? Simply by allowing the Word--Christ's presence--to dwell in us, and learn His instruction, so the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts and minds and translate into our actions. It is all about our spiritual growth impacting us so it impacts those around us positively and in love. The key is to know that Christ is sufficient, so we can trust in Him--trust in Him alone (Read all of Eph. 4)!

Church Leadership Tip: As leaders in Christ's Body, we must be morally true. We must have a deep penetrating desire for real Truth and teach that Truth with passion and conviction, with clarity and love. We are to think and inspire others about Christ and consider what we have in Him to experience our new lives!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. If someone wrote a one-sentence summary of your life, what would it say?
2. What have you learned from Ephesians 4?
3. Take an inventory of your life, thinking, behaviors, then go through All of Ephesians 4, look at the key words, and ask:
 - a. What do I need to put off?
 - b. What do I need to put on?
 - c. How do I do that?
 - d. How do I fail in this area?
 - e. How can I do this better?
4. In prayer, for the next forty days, seek what you can do to put into practice the Christ-centered life?
5. What other ways can you do to put to death sin and your sinful ways, such as bad wants and needs?
6. How do the sins listed in this passage ignore grace and forgiveness, thereby hurting others and us?
7. What can you do to put your new life into more effectual action and not waste what God has done with you or the opportunities He has for you or how He wants you to be to others?