

Notes for home study – week beginning 6th December 2015, Advent 2

Instructions for Christian living in the light of eternity

Feel free to use as much or as little as you wish.

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 Paul has just urged his hearers/readers to attain unity and maturity in Christ; that none of us can be complete in ourselves or grow in isolation. This passage is the 'Therefore...' - the result of being part of the body of Christ.

Verses 17-19 These seem to be the inevitable consequences of not accepting Christ. 'Gentiles' = unbelievers. Do you accept this harsh view of human nature? What evidence do you see for its truth? How does it make you feel towards non-Christians?

Verses 22-24 Put off the old, put on the new. Compare with Romans 1-2. In what areas do you need to be transformed? We are all different. Notice the verb in verse 23 – can you do anything about the situation? What is the relationship between the active ('put off', 'put on') and the passive ('be made new')? *Why not have some short prayer times during the study. Take a bit of time to realign your will with God's, and allow him to do whatever changing is necessary. Finish with short prayers of thanksgiving.*

Verses 25 – 27 Get practical here. All churches need to hear this frequently. Any tips to pass on to others which have helped you? Have you ever been caught up in half truths (maybe for the best of motives)? How do you deal with anger especially against other Christians? We are all different and have different 'touch stones' and thresholds; there's no room for condemnation of others or feeling smug!

Verse 28 Why work? (Paul's 'so that'). What of those who cannot? What of laziness? How can the state help or hinder? What of fit punishment or rehabilitation for thieves?

Verse 29 Why watch what we say? ('So that' again). To be nice to others? To bring God's grace? (NIV doesn't bring this out very well – 'benefit' is 'bring grace'). To change ourselves? Any thoughts about use of the tongue?

Verses 30-32 The 'seal' is the official stamp on a package or document, marking it out for a particular use or occasion. Who it belongs to, and what it is for. Do you recognise your own weaknesses? Are you able to point your finger at yourself as readily as pointing at others? *Spend a bit more time in prayer here – probably mostly quiet. Don't wallow in guilt but acknowledge your personality (God given) and the character you have built on that, and see where God wants you to go next.*

Tom Wright in 'Paul for everyone' writes: "People who are enslaved to anger and malice may think they are 'free' to 'be themselves', but they are in bondage. If we are marked out by the Spirit's personal presence living in us, think how sad it makes that Spirit if we behave in ways which don't reflect the life and love of God."

But to change behaviour first involves having our *minds* changed – see verse 23 again. Our wills start off the whole process of being transformed. *Prayer* can change your will!