

# Fight and Flight

Ephesians 4:17-5:18

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## How can this study help me?

Fight or flight? These options are often presented in a counselling situation. Flight **and** fight may well summarise this section of Ephesians. For instance, when Timothy is in Ephesus struggling to bring unity to the church, Paul says “**flee** from all this ... **Fight** the good **fight** of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:11, 12).

So Paul says to the Ephesians flee from the old attitude, “futility in their thinking” (4:17) and fight to adopt a new “attitude” (4:23) in keeping with their faith. There is nothing to suggest that this idea of flight and fight was a one-off decision (cf., Paul’s own attitude in 1 Cor 9:27). In other words, fight **and** flight are part of daily Christian living.

An illustration might help. Life as a Christian has some similarities to having diabetes. A diabetic needs a daily insulin injection and must be self disciplined in watching very carefully what they eat. So a Christian needs daily filling by the Spirit and self-disciplined living that says no to some things and yes to others.

## What is going on in this section?

### The old way of life (4:17-19)

- Can you see a downward spiral that begins with “hardness of heart” and ends with reckless living? Why is life always an expression of the condition of the heart?
- What sort of behaviour does Paul consider evidence of hanging on to the old way of living? (4:4:25, 26, 28, 29, 31; 5:3, 5:4) Can you explain how these behaviours begin with hardness of heart or an attitude to God?
- Can you think of a contemporary example from the news illustrating this downward spiral?

### The new way of life (4:20-30)

- What sort of interpersonal acts/attitudes does Paul say are consistent with possession of the Spirit? (4:25, 26, 28, 29, 32).
- Assuming the Ephesians are already Christian, why do you think Paul would have to go through these most basic behaviours?
- How might this apply to today when people are becoming Christians right out of paganism?

### **Being imitators of God the Father and Jesus (5:1-15)**

- Look carefully through this section and separate out attitudes and behaviours that are to be “put off” and what is to be “put on.”
- How do you understand immorality, impurity and greed as idolatry? (5:5)
- Paul finishes with a summary statement describing all that he has said as “wisdom” (5:15). Jesus finishes his Sermon on the Mount the same way, saying that the wise person, who listened to his words, was like someone who built their house on the rock (Matt 7:24-27). How is Paul following in the footsteps of Jesus’ teaching?

### **What about us here and now?**

- How do you avoid exhorting people to change from old attitudes to new ones without descending into moralism (= avoiding wrong and doing right without reference to Jesus)?
- Paul is not saying anything new in this section. Jesus is just as vivid when he calls for radical change in Matt. 5:29-30? What might be the problem with someone who makes no strenuous effort to change?
- How does someone who is grieving behave? How then do you understand the description of wounding words causing grief to the Holy Spirit?

### **So what do I do now?**

- What do you need to decide in order to put off a habit and put on something new?
- Interestingly, on this occasion Paul doesn’t mention praying about putting off old habits. What part does prayer play in becoming imitators of God?