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EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Last week we saw Paul entreating the Ephesians believers to walk in a manner that is worthy of their calling. And we saw that Paul listed all the reasons and ways they should walk this worthy walk.

Paul spoke of the unity they have with other believers and he listed those things that unite them. He spoke of a few of the gifts the Lord Jesus had given to the early church and Paul said that the end result of a united worthy walk would be growth and maturity of the body of believers known as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And today Paul continues this same teaching. And what Paul is saying is:
"I've told you what Christ has done for you.
Now, in the light of this, here is what we ought to do for Christ."

We are to walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling...**but do we?**

How many of us have a consistently worthy walk! Well, I believe we could all say that sometimes our walk falls far short of worthiness. We simply don't do what God's Word tells us to do...but we need to remember that we are to be doers of the Word and not just hearers of the Word.

So, let's look today at some very specific areas that Paul addresses...

First of all Paul gives a very strong admonition...

1) Paul's Admonition

Verses 17-19...

Paul says, "Walk not as the Gentiles walk..." (NAS) "...as other Gentiles walk..." (KJV)

The church at Ephesus was made up mostly of Gentiles, but of course, what Paul is saying is **"Don't walk as the heathen Gentiles walk..."**

And Paul emphasizes that the Christian is to think differently. Look at the different words Paul uses for the thought process... **"mind", "understanding", "ignorance."**

Salvation begins with repentance and repentance is a change of mind that brings about a change of direction. The whole outlook of a person changes when he trusts the Lord Jesus Christ.

What's wrong with the mind of the heathen?

Well, for one thing Paul says it's **futile** (NAS) – **vanity** (KJV). What is futility and vanity? It's **empty...useless**. Paul also says not only are their minds empty and useless, but their understanding is darkened.

And all we need do to see this is to look at some of the different beliefs that abound in our world today...

For instance,

The Mormons believe they can become gods.

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Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in the Trinity...they don't believe in a literal hell and they believe they are the ones who will make up the 144,000 we read about in the book of **Revelation**.

Hindus believe that, depending on how they behave in this life, they will come back as a cow, or a horse or a bird, or something else, maybe even a person!

Christian Scientists believe that death is not real and that pain is a misconception folks make by negative thinking.

The scientific community for the most part embraces the theory of evolution.

The humanist thinks that man is essentially good and quite able to cope with moral problems as man sees fit...the humanist certainly doesn't need God telling him about sin.

The minds of lost people are darkened in their understanding.

Paul also says they are excluded from the life of God. Man was created to be inhabited by God, but the fall of man ruined that. Because of the fall, man is born alienated from God...and they are darkened in their understanding.

Then, Paul says unsaved man is ignorant because their hearts are hard. The hard heart becomes the calloused heart and the calloused heart becomes the sensual heart. He is "past feeling" because he has so given himself over to sin that sin absolutely controls him.

Do you see the way the heathen walks? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the walk of the heathen leads to destruction. **He doesn't begin his walk on a lower plane and eventually reach a higher plane. He begins his walk on a lower plane and it gets lower and lower and lower.**

Warren Wiersbe puts it this way:

"The lost move **from darkness to darkness in darkness!**"

It always amazes me to see these panel of "theologians" sitting around in a circle discussing the Bible. They explain **away** more than they explain. The ungodly may be **"always learning but they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."**

And have you heard about the new "gender neutral" NIV? What makes men (even some who may be Christian men) think they can improve on the Word of God? Don't they know that when they make one change it opens the door a little bit to another change that opens the door a little bit more to more changes?

No wonder Paul admonishes the believer in Ephesus:

"Don't walk like these folks! Don't look at these folks and long to be like them! Don't copy their beliefs and thought patterns and convictions and codes of conduct! Even the most brilliant of them are blind leaders of the blind!"

So, that's Paul's strong admonition. "Don't walk like the heathen."

Now, then, let's see why we shouldn't!

2) Paul's Argument

Verses 20-24...

"But you did not learn Christ in this way..."

Paul didn't say "learned *about* Christ." WHY? Because it's possible to learn *about* Christ and never be saved, isn't it?

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To “learn Christ” means to have a personal relationship to Christ so that you get to know Him better each day.

See, Paul didn’t link Christian belief and behavior to a creed or a code. He linked Christian belief and behavior to Christ! He didn’t link them to a precept or a principle...he linked them to a Person!

Christianity is Christ!

All we have to do is place ungodly philosophers and practices alongside Christ and we can see how false and filthy they are. I mean, when we think of Christ we think of

the sermon on the Mount...

We think of the precious parables of Christ...

We think of the Lord’s Prayer...

We think of One who went about doing good, and was humble and holy, and loving and lowly, and patient and perfect.

Dr. John Phillips said: “The Lord Jesus clarifies our thoughts,
cleanses our life, indwells our heart,
quicken our conscience and stiffens
our resolve.”

The “if” in **verse 21** doesn’t mean “it may or may not be true”...it means “it is assumed to be a fact.”

Paul goes on to talk about their new self. Salvation is not a matter of improvement of what has previously existed. It is a total transformation! The **New Testament** speaks of believers having a **new mind**, a **new will**, a **new heart**, a **new inheritance**, a **new relationship**, **new power**, **new wisdom** and many other new things...all of which are summed up in newness of life!

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that at the new birth a person becomes **“a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.”**

As Christians we haven’t changed our minds, we’ve totally changed our citizenship. We don’t belong to this heathen world any longer. We belong to God!

Warren Wiersbe: **“Conversion is a crisis that leads to a process.”**

Well, what is the process? It’s called sanctification. The Word of God renews the mind as we surrender more and more of ourselves to Him. Jesus said in **John 17**, **“Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth.”**

Physically we are what we eat...but spiritually we are what we think. **“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”**

This is how we can lay aside the old self.
This is how we can be renewed in the spirit of our mind.
This is how we can put on the new self.

The old self is the Adamic nature we were all born with. The new self is the nature of Christ we received at salvation.

Peter says we became partakers of the divine nature. Peter says we already possess all that we need for life and godliness...so we really are without excuse, aren’t we?

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Having said that, let me say this...

We **are** new, but not yet **all** new.

We **are** righteous and holy, but not yet **perfectly** righteous and holy.

The remaining portions of this chapter and actually the rest of this epistle contains exhortations to us as to how we are to bring our body into obedience to the will of God!

This “laying aside” of our old self and the “putting on” of our new self brings to our minds a laying aside of dirty garments and the putting on of clean garments.

Many rescue missions have a delousing room, where derelicts who have not had a bath in months discard all their old clothes and are thoroughly bathed and disinfected. The old clothes are burned and new clothes are issued. The clean man is provided clean clothes.

That is a picture of salvation, except that in salvation the new believer is not simply given a bath but a completely new nature.

The continuing need of the Christian life is to keep discarding and burning the remnants of the old sinful self.

Christ-like Christians display the life and lowliness of the Lord Jesus.

Carnal Christians still wear the rags of the “old self.”

Well, now that Paul has given us his admonition and his argument, let’s look at

3) Paul’s Application

Paul says, “I’ve told you what **not** to do...**don’t walk like heathens walk.**

I’ve told you **why** you shouldn’t do that. Now, let me give you **some ways to apply this to your life.**”

Paul was never content to explain a principle and then leave it, was he? He always applied it to the different areas of our lives that need to feel its power.

And Paul names **five sins** that we contend with every day...

a) **lying...verse 25...**

Paul says we are to speak truth. Now, do you think it odd that Paul had to remind believers to speak truth? Well, unfortunately Christians need to be reminded not to lie.

A lie is a statement that is contrary to fact, spoken with the intent to deceive.

If I tell you it is noon and then discover that my watch is wrong, I didn’t tell a lie...I made a mistake.

But, if I give you the wrong time intentionally, so you would be late to a meeting and I would benefit from it, that **is** a lie.

I know some of you heard the pastor’s sermon several years ago at the seminary at Founders’ Days. Each year the different speakers are given a theme and that year the theme was The Ten Commandments. His commandment was “thou shalt not lie.”

Well, he said in his sermon that lying is the very first sin a person commits. He used the illustration of a baby crying and sounding like something horrible is wrong with it and when the mother or daddy rush into his room, there that baby is...nothing amiss...nothing wrong...he just

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wants to be picked up! That little baby deceived his mother and daddy into thinking something was dreadfully wrong!

God wants His children to be truthful with each other. I believe it should be said that telling the truth does not require telling everything we know. Truthfulness does not demand our telling everything we know with no regard for its impact. That's why we stress that our prayer requests are confidential!

Listen, if a Christian sister or brother has told you something in confidence and you tell it...you can be certain if that sister or brother finds out you told that sister or brother won't be telling you anything else!

We must ask God to put a guard upon our tongues. We must speak the truth and speak it in love.

Next Paul addresses

a) **anger...verses 26-27...**

All anger is not sin...the Bible says even God gets angry.

Having said that, let me hasten to say that shouldn't be used as an excuse to get angry.

It's difficult for you and me to practice a holy anger or a righteous indignation because our emotions are tainted by sin and we don't have the perfect knowledge that God does in all matters.

James said we are to **be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.**

James goes on to say that **the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God!**

It is possible however to be angry and not sin...but if we **do** sin we must settle the matter quickly and not let the sun go down on our wrath.

b) **stealing...verse 28...**

If lying is the first sin we commit as can stealing be far behind?

I mean, we have to teach children at an early age not to take what doesn't belong to them, don't we?

My daughter-in-law and I took the baby to the Children's Museum when he was about 18 months old. Well, he was quite taken with the little grocery store...well, he was more taken with the little carts than the store. He decided he was going to take one of the little carts home with him, and it took both of us to keep him from stealing one!!

Now, did she teach him to do that? Did I? Did Papa? Did his daddy? No! He just came into the world knowing how to steal!

And as we get older we find there are so many ways that stealing is done...

Padding expense accounts, reporting more hours than were worked, failing to report income to the IRS, pocketing what a clerk overpays us in change...

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God says that stealing is sin!! And Paul says we are to labor...in order to share with the needy...not in order to get rich but to share with those less fortunate!

c) **corrupt speech...verse 29...**

The mouth and heart are connected. Jesus said **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh...” Matthew 12:34**

The word “corrupt” means “rotten”...Rotten words just should never come from the mouth of a Christian. Words have power...either for good or evil. Our words should minister grace and help and draw others to the Lord Jesus.

James tells us that no one can tame the tongue...

but we **can** yield it to the Holy Spirit.

We **can** pray that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable in God's sight.

We **can** think on those things that are *true* and *honorable* and *right* and *pure* and *lovely* and of *good repute*

and then our words will not tear down but will build up and edify according to the need of the moment and will give grace to those who hear.

Lastly Paul warns us against

d) **bitterness...verses 30-32...**

These verses warn us against several sins of the attitude and amplify what Paul wrote about anger...

Bitterness leads to wrath and anger. Wrath and anger often lead to clamor or slander...and Paul says to put these things along with all malice away!

WHY? Because it grieves the Holy Spirit...**verse 30...**

The word **“grieve”** is a love word. You cannot grieve someone who doesn't love you. Did you know that? You might annoy, upset, infuriate or disappoint him, but you cannot grieve him. You can only grieve someone who loves you.

We **can** grieve the Holy Spirit and we grieve Him by doing or saying things that are contrary to His character...by **doing** or **saying** things He has led us **not** to **do** and to **say**.

And when we think of His keeping us safe and secure until the day of redemption, it should make us long to please Him and do all we can to cooperate with Him as He seeks to sanctify us.

And Paul ends this chapter by saying, **“be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”**

Do you see what Paul is doing? He is teaching us step by step how to walk a worthy walk!

Paul is saying, “I want to encourage you to live the way God's children ought to live. First, live in unity with each other. Minister to others and let them minister to you. Secondly, live holy lives. Put behind you the sins of the past and live a moral and ethical lifestyle that

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will show forth the Lord Jesus Christ to others.”

I pray that our walk this coming week will be a walk that is worthy and will be according to these principles we've learned today.

If you don't know Christ you can't have a worthy walk. If you've never come to know Him, I beg you to give your heart and life to Him today. Just confess to Him that you're a sinner and you need a Savior.

Just turn from your sins. Just lay aside all the garbage that's been in your life for so long...and then the Holy Spirit will show you how to walk uprightly before the Lord!

You won't learn it all in one day...but the Holy Spirit will be faithful to teach you little by little...precept upon precept day by day.