

Text: Eph 4:17-24

Title: Fundamentals of the Believer's Walk

Intro: This is the last great division in the letter to the Ephesians. What Paul begins in 4:17 continues to the end of the letter.

- Chapters 1-3: Paul laid down the doctrine of what God has accomplished in saving sinners
- God's purpose in saving sinners was not simply to deliver individuals from Hell, but to demonstrate to the universe through the church the wisdom and power of God (3:9-10, 21).
- 4:1—"Therefore..."—we are to 'walk' in a manner worthy of our high calling—striving to maintain unity in the body
- Chapters 4-6: Paul develops the doctrine of the church—how the church is to function
 - 4:7-16—Paul reveals that Christ, the Head of the Church, when he ascended on High, has granted spiritual gifts and gifted people
 - 4:11—Christ has appointed leaders for the establishing and continuing of His Church—so that the church is taught/equipped to do the work of ministry (4:12-13)
 - And, as the church functions as a body—there's growth, maturity, and stability (4:14-16).

Thus, we cannot see ourselves in an individualistic sense, but as vital parts of the whole—with the ambition of growing up into Christ who is the Head.

- 4:17—introduces the practical outworking of all that has been taught thus far.
- The question that Paul answers is: How are we to grow up into Christ in all things???
- How does the local fellowship become more and more like Christ—a 'mature man...to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ (4:13)???
- How do we move from 'infancy' to 'maturity'???

We haven't 'arrived'—we are in the process of becoming what we are already declared to be in Christ—a New Creation created in Christ Jesus—2 Cor 5:17—"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

- The new nature is not added to the old but completely replaces it.
- JM: "It is not simply that he receives something new but that he *becomes* someone new."¹
- The result is a new man in the old man's body. Sin still resides in the flesh so that the believer is hindered in giving full expression to his new nature.
- A Christian doesn't possess 'two natures'—he has one new nature in Christ—the old man has 'died' and the new man 'lives'
- What hangs around is not the old nature, but the 'old man's clothes'—the 'old man's habits'
- A Christian is a new man created in righteousness and holiness of the Truth who eagerly awaits the full and final redemption of his body.
- JM: "The Christian is a single new person, a totally new creation, not a spiritual schizophrenic. It is the filthy coat of remaining humanness in which the new creation dwells

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Ephesians*](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 164.

that continues to hinder and contaminate his living. The believer as a total person is transformed but not yet wholly perfect. He has residing sin but no longer reigning sin.”²

Phil 1:6—“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

- A genuine believer cannot ultimately fall away from Christ—we are secure in the completed work of Christ
- Yet, we are not complete but are pressing forward
- Phil 3:12-14—“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”—the believer has not yet reached his goal of Christlikeness
- Paul uses the analogy of a runner to describe a believer’s spiritual growth/maturity
- Christlikeness is the goal of every believer
- The believer in Christ is no longer ‘the old man corrupted but is now the new man created in righteousness and holiness, awaiting full salvation’
- Col 3:1-3—“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- The old man has died, and you have a new way of life—a new inward pull towards righteousness.

Rom 6:11—“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We are called to live according to our new humanity, not the old.

Prop: In 4:17-24, the Apostle Paul begins to show us how it is (specifically) that we are to live the new life in Christ—how we are to deal with the old man’s attitudes and ways, and how we live the new life in Christ. Paul contrasts the old man’s life with the new man’s life that is in Christ Jesus—those in Christ with those outside the body of Christ.

1. The futility of a life without Christ. Eph 4:17-19—“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk...”

- Paul exhorts the Ephesians to ‘no longer live as the Gentiles’
- ‘You can no longer behave like Gentiles because in Christ you no longer are a Gentile’
- Based upon what Christ has done and who we are in Him, we are to be distinctly different from the world—who does not know or follow Him.
- Walking in ways different from the world goes all the way back to the OT Law—Lev 18:1-5—“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not

² John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Ephesians*](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 164.

walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. So, you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.”

- The world’s standards are wrong, its motives are wrong, its behaviors are wrong—its ways are sinful, deceitful, corrupt, empty, and destructive.
- 1 John 2:15-17—“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

The Point: ‘You cannot profess faith in Christ and continue to live like an unbeliever’—Why? Because by nature, a Gentile is alienated from God and is hardened against God.

- The old man always acts in accord with the old man’s nature.
- Lit ‘This I say, therefore...’ (KJV and NKJV)—the ‘therefore’ resumes the thought of verses 1-3—that believers ought to walk in a manner consistent with their high calling in Christ.
 - Living as an unbeliever is not consistent with one’s calling—it is not a ‘worthy walk’
- Notice: Paul’s exhortation is connected with the Lord—‘I affirm together with the Lord’—in other wds, ‘this is not a mere suggestion...this comes with divine authority—the authority of Christ’
- Lit ‘This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord’—this is a solemn and significant urging

‘that you no longer walk’—‘no longer’—indicates a need to ‘break from previous sinful behaviors and the wrong thinking and attitudes behind them’

- The present tense indicates that this must become our ongoing practice—to continually avoid the old ways of thinking and behaving

“...just as the Gentiles also walk...”—Paul is addressing Gentiles who once lived as Gentiles and still yet live in a Gentile world—and he says, ‘you are totally transformed by the saving power of Christ so you must walk differently now’

- Can I remind you that the Lord never calls us to something that He Himself doesn’t provide sufficient grace and resources to accomplish?
- Moreover, God knows where your starting point is and He is never surprised by your weaknesses.
- Regardless of where your life in Christ began, you must abandon the old man’s way of life and the old man’s way of thinking...there’s nothing salvageable with the old man.
- The old man’s ways are empty—spiritual, morally, and ethically bankrupt.

“...in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding...”—Paul paints the old man’s life in the darkest of colors—and just as in Romans 1:18-32, he begins with depraved thinking and then traces that error to depraved behaviors.

- Lit ‘in the emptiness of their mind’—the wd refers to ‘vanity, purposelessness, futility, worthlessness’—‘that which fails to produce the desired result’—thus, the wd became a synonym for ‘empty’ because it amounts to nothing
- Used in 2 Peter 2:18 of the ‘arrogant words of vanity’ that false teachers speak—they boast but their words are empty

- Used in Rom 8:20—of creation being subjected to futility because of the curse of sin. In other wds, the earth, because of the curse of sin, doesn't produce what God originally intended
- The adjective is used in 1 Cor 15:17 to indicate that if Christ has not been raised then faith is worthless.
- The spiritual thinking and subsequent lifestyle of the old man is void of substance.
- The mind and life of an unbeliever is saturated with selfish goals that amount to nothing of eternal substance or value.
- He's consumed with the temporary and looks for satisfaction in things that are deceptive and ultimately disappoint.
- He becomes his own authority, and everything revolves around his own point of view—and the pursuit of his self-centered thinking leads to emptiness.
- The original purpose of the mind was to grasp God's revelation and respond accordingly—the old man's mind cannot do that.
- The Fall corrupted the mind of mankind
 - Titus 1:15—"To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."
 - The nature of the unbelieving mind prevents it from the goal of right moral decisions necessary for life.
- Not only does an unbelieving mind have worthless moral attitudes—it has a 'darkened reasoning system'

"...being darkened in their understanding"—this is 'culpable ignorance of God and His Word'

- A 'clouded-over mind' instead of an 'illuminated mind'
- Paul's point is that 'ignorance of Truth and sin are inseparable'—the ungodly may ever be learning but never able to come to the 'knowledge of the truth' (2 Tim 3:7).
- The only things that are ultimately worth knowing are the things of God—and yet fallen man has an innate inability to comprehend the things of God.
- Rom 1:21—"For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."
- The old man's thinking is darkened so that they are blinded to the truth. As one writer says, "the light of their understanding had gone out so that they were now in a state of being incapable of grasping the truth of God and his gospel."³
- When the light of truth goes out, darkness is all that's left.
- 'being darkened'—(perfect tense participle) implying this as a 'fixed state' of existence
- Because of the gospel and faith in Christ, those Gentile Ephesians who once walked in darkness were now 'enlightened believers'—the enabling power of the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation' had been given to them (1:17-18).

"...excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;"—Gentiles who do not belong to Christ are 'dead' through their 'trespasses and sins' and have no relationship with the living God (2:12).

³ Peter Thomas O'Brien, [*The Letter to the Ephesians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 320–321.

- The cause for their alienation is ‘ignorance’—a ‘lack of perception’
- A wd used in the LXX of sin that is committed ‘unwittingly...unknowingly’
- Used in Acts 3:17—“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.”
- Knowing God implies a close, personal relationship with Him.
- You cannot know God intellectually—knowing God consists of obedience to His Person and gratefulness. To not know God is to ignore Him, to say ‘no’ to His character and demands. And, such ignorance is culpable.
- Notice: the ‘ignorance that is in them’—the responsibility falls upon them—an unbeliever willfully rejects the Truth

Notice: “...because of the hardness of their heart;”—this is willful, obstinate rejection of the Truth—the wd refers to ‘stubbornness’ in the NT—and when you reject the moral light afforded to you, you begin down a terrible and self-destructive, downward path of evil.

- The heart of a person that continually chooses to sin, becomes hardened and insensitive to the things of God.

“and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”—the ungodly are unresponsive to the truth—thus, the downward spiral into further sin

- ‘becoming callous’ means you lose sensitivity—there’s no shame or embarrassment which leads to greater loss of self-control/self-restraint
- Even the conscience becomes scarred so that there’s no sensitivity to wrong
- When there’s no restraint and no moral compass, the door eventually throws open to unlimited kinds of immorality.

“...have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

- One writer: “Sensuality does not satisfy but only creates a greater appetite” (R. Kent Hughes). There’s an insatiable desire to participate in more forms of immorality. A vicious cycle because new perversions must be sought to replace old ones.
- JM: “When indecency becomes a way of life, every aspect of life is corrupted, distorted, and eventually destroyed...Man is made for God and designed according to His standards. When he rejects God and His standards, he destroys himself in the process. The corruptions of our present society are not the result of psychological or sociological circumstances, but the result of personal choices based on principles that are specifically and purposely against God and His way. Homosexuality, sexual perversion, abortion, lying, cheating, stealing, murder, and every other type of moral degeneration have become unabashed and calloused ways of life through the conscious choices of those who indulge in them.”⁴
- According to Romans 1, God issues divine retribution by delivering one over to the full pursuit of sinful desires—to unnatural vices because he/she has rejected the revelation of God.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Ephesians*](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 171.

- In other wds, God gives men/women over to debauched lifestyles as a form of His righteous judgment.

“...have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”—‘greediness’ is tied to ‘sensuality’

- ‘greediness’—is ‘uninhibited lust for that which is wanted’ (JM).
- An unbeliever evaluates life only in material terms (Luke 12:15), and uses people to his/her own advantage (1 Thess 2:5).
- It is idolatry—Col 3:5—“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

When a person chooses to think his own way, to do things his own way, and to pursue his own destiny, he cuts himself off from God and His Word and becomes blind and without a moral compass. That is how the Bible describes every unbeliever.

- Without God’s standard of morality, immorality becomes a way of life.
- As that is continued, it destroys the mind’s ability to distinguish good/evil, truth/falsehood, and reality/pure fantasy.
- 2 Tim 3:13—“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”—while some people are a little further ahead than others, it simply will not get better over time but worse.
- The only reason some people don’t reach the extremes that Paul mentions is because of God’s common grace to help restrain sin’s spread—the church (Matt 5:13) and His Spirit—
- Job 34:14-15—“If He should determine to do so, If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.”

The only real hope and help comes from God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. The new man in Christ Jesus. The divine exception—the divine ‘180’—4:20-21—“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,”—Lit ‘you now not this way learned the Christ’

- The new walk in Christ is the exact opposite of the old walk of the flesh.
- The ways of God and the ways of the world are completely incompatible—Ill—like trying to load a Windows software program on a Mac computer.
- One of the first things a Christian must realize is that he CANNOT trust his own thinking or rely on his own way.
- 2 Cor 5:15—“and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”
- At conversion, the believer is given the ‘mind of Christ’ through the ministry of God’s Word.
- 1 Cor 2:16—“For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.”—Christ’s mind and thoughts is the only one that is trustworthy and reliable.
- Gal 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

'You did not learn Christ in this way'—'learning Christ' means submitting to Him—to His teaching—submitting to His rule over your life.

- There's no such thing as receiving Christ as 'Savior' and not 'Lord' over your life.
- 'learn...heard...taught'—in the proclamation of the gospel, they 'learned' of Christ—while 'heard' and 'taught' imply that gospel preaching was reinforced with ongoing instruction

The discarding of the old life and walking in the new life.

4:22—"that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,"

- The old man is 'not serviceable'
- The old man can only further ungodliness—it's the old way that is always destructive to the new life.
- Moreover, you should never ignore the pains and wreckage of the old man's ways—they are reminders that we CANNOT pursue that life any longer.
- The old life is filled with deceit and corruption.
- The old life offers all kinds of pleasures and benefits—but they are lies—they never satisfy, they never benefit, they only further ungodliness, unfruitfulness, and decay.
- Sin always deceives and leads to hardening of the heart if that path is pursued.

You don't want to ignore the path of truth and become a 'hardened sinner' that needs severe consequences to get your attention (Psalm 32).