

Ephesians 4:17-24 "How To Walk Worthy In A Manner Worthy Of Your Call"

EPH 4:17-24 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. 20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

As we continue our study in Ephesians we will note that this portion begins to slowly move from the theological implications of our walk with Christ and begins to introduce some practical ways in which Paul's theology works itself out in real life.

This is always the case with the word of God. Theology and doctrine are essential to our understanding of who God is and what He desires of us, but it is never divorced from the world in which we live.

As Paul began this portion we call the 4th chapter of Ephesians, in verse 1 he begins with an exhortation to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." And he brings some practical aspects of this out when he says to approach this walk in "all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Vs. 2)

But in doing this he points out that the motivation for such a walk is found in the truth that of all the religions in the world, which claim to allow access to a god, are false and that there is only one true God, with one true message found in the one true Messiah. (Vss.4-6)

He then explains how this Messiah has given gifts to God's people in Christ and that these gifts are given with the express purpose of

"equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." (Vs. 12)

In this equipping process we begin to grow up in our faith and that as we grow we can effectively help one another grow so that the whole body of Christ can be 'fitted and held together by every joint, according to the proper working of each individual part, which causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love...' (Vss. 15-16)

What Paul is basically doing is expanding our perspective of how each of us are called by God to be used by Him and not just sit on the side-lines. But as he continues his exhortation he reminds these Ephesian believers that it's not enough to simply gain knowledge about theology and doctrine without doing something about our former lives and the way we used to live.

He's talking about choices. And this is why he continues in EPH 4:17 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking."

I think a better translation would be that of the NAS which says, "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind..."

"This I say therefore..." Whenever Paul wants to make a point about what he has previously said he will utilize similar language to what we see in the beginning of verse 17. Remember, whenever we see the word "therefore" it's important to understand what it's there for. In this case it's to encourage us to consider everything we've seen from verse one of chapter four to the present, and now to make an application.

Paul's application is this. If we think we can live in this world and serve God and bring Him glory while living just like the ones who rebel against the Lord then we've missed the point of how our salvation has called us out of the world's system which excludes God.

I couldn't help but notice this last week how the world has treated the death of Princess Diana as she was finally buried yesterday morning. And I would be the first to admit that it has been a very moving experience to see the love the entire world, especially Great Britain, has poured out in memory of this woman who stood out among the royalty in England.

As her horse drawn casket was carried through the streets lined with hundreds of thousands of people who cared for her and her sons, it was quite apparent that she was a woman who the people could identify with, unlike the rest of the monarchy. This woman was viewed to be the model of compassion and mercy and caring whom England lifted up in her death.

And yet this is the same woman who reciprocated her former husband's unfaithfulness by carrying on an adulteress affair while still married to him. After her divorce she was involved in a number of premarital relationships with men.

And though I certainly don't want to make light of her life by trying to air her dirty laundry after her death, the point is the role models of the world today are those whom the world have determined to be worthy of such adulation without taking into account what God deems to be worthy and righteous.

Her public life's journey ended at the church of West Minster Abby. Even in death it was the world that determined how religious this event would be. It was full of religious pomp and splendor and yet it all but excluded the God who sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for the penalty of our sins.

This is the world's approach to God. They do it on their terms as long as it's convenient and it doesn't cramp their style. They want it both ways. They want the security and peace of pleasing the "supreme being" but their theology paints a picture of Him as a God who looks the other way at the indiscretions of life. 'After all', they say, 'He understands we're only human.'

Yes, He does. But He didn't create us to be humans in rebellion to Himself, redefining what it is to be human. And what Paul wants us to understand is that as Christians our mind-set must be biblical in nature, not carnal as the world's.

We do not have the luxury to have it both ways, because God Himself has made it clear that we have been set apart for Him to bring Him glory as we demonstrate to the world what it truly means to be human. To be truly human means that we must be truly in communion with our God, through faith in Christ, who created us for that very purpose. Anything less is sub-human and worldly.

"This I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind..." (Vs. 17)

Paul understood that many of these Ephesian Christians were Gentiles who came to faith in Christ and that their former lives were pagan in nature. Anyone here who came to faith later in life, as I did, understands to some degree what problems that can create.

Most of our friends were people who were worldly and probably not a godly influence. Some of the things in which we were involved may have taken some time to break away from simply because we were in the habit of doing such things. The way we thought about life was 180 degrees different from what God's word tells us, and now we begin our walk out of the mire and the mud as we hold tight to our Savior who desires to conform us into His image as we let go of the world.

The problem Paul addresses is that sometimes Christians don't want to let go of the world. And in his explanation of what the world is he explains that the only thing they have to offer is futility. The word futility means that which is devoid of truth and appropriateness, but it also carries the idea of perverseness and depravity.

The KJV uses the word vanity. In other words, for all that the world deems good and right and appropriate, the ultimate outcome, which is devoid of truth, is death. And Paul has already made this point in EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

You can dress up a pig in the latest fashions from New York, and cover it with French perfume as you adorn it with diamonds from South Africa. But you know what? It's still a pig.

Human beings devoid of the truth can do the same. But you know what? They're still human beings who are lost in the futility of their minds. And yet ironically, the Church has often run to the world for solutions to life, as though somehow they've come up with the answer. Paul says, don't walk as the Gentiles walk. And then he gives a further description of these people of the world.

EPH 4:18-19 "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

Is this what we want to pattern our lives after? Now, Paul does not speak of specific sins here as he does in Galatians chapter 5, for example. Rather, he demonstrates the inner workings in a human being which leads to those types of sin.

We see this in our text: (Vs. 18) Futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, ignorance that is in them, due to the hardening of their hearts, continual lust and so forth.

This by the way, does not exclude the idea that these people are devoid of any understanding about God. Remember when Paul wrote to the Romans he brought this out.

ROM 1:21-24, 28-29 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity."

Man has been given an innate understanding that there is a God. And this is why "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."
(Rom.1:18-19)

Notice in verse 18 of our text that Paul essentially says the same thing he does in Rom.1:21. "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

The world in their sin has hardened their hearts before God and because of this God will often finish the process as He hardens

their hearts further simply giving men what they want. It is because of men's hardness of heart that they choose to remain darkened in their understanding of God.

Have you ever tried to witness to someone who doesn't want to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? It's weird. It's like, 'don't tell me anything or inform my mind with the truth because what I don't know I'm not responsible for.' Or, 'don't tell me anything spiritual because I then might have to make a choice.'

It's like that proverbial picture of the three chimps: hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. Except when it comes to the gospel it's hear no truth, see no truth, speak no truth. As long as they don't have to be confronted with the truth life is good. 'Just let me be and live in my fantasy world.'

Paul is saying to the Christian, we have no business being a part of that fantasy world. It's a world which can never contribute to our growth in Christ. And the reason is because it's a world which has "lost all sensitivity, [as] they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." (Eph.4:19)

It's not a good thing, Paul say's. If this is the spiritual state of the world, why then, as if they have something to offer, do we run to it on occasion? Now, keep in mind, that when the Scriptures speak of separating ourselves from the world it does not mean that we separate ourselves from people who are in the world, to the degree that we have no contact with them under any circumstance.

Jesus Christ never separated Himself from the people who were sinners in the sense that He excluded them from access to the love and the truth of His gift to them. He spoke to tax gatherers and prostitutes and sinners of all types.

And yet we know that He was sinless. He never succumbed to any temptation. His objective in being available to the world was not to become like them or to borrow wisdom from them. Rather, His objective was to snatch some from the fire by telling them the truth of God's kingdom.

He said to them, if you want to be part of this kingdom you must repent. You must cease trying to go the world's way for salvation and look to the Messiah who's moving in the opposite direction. You must turn around and follow Him by faith.

And so, for the Ephesian Christians they were being instructed not to repent of their walk with Christ. They were being instructed not to go in the opposite direction of the Messiah they were now following by faith. And yet the world is always enticing us to follow them.

I hate doing this because I'm probably as guilty as anyone. But, when we compare the amount of time we spend in front of the tube or some other form of entertainment, to the time we spend in prayer or in the word, it's embarrassingly lop-sided.

I know, we all need a diversion from the busyness of life. We all need time to unwind. We all need time to veg. out. And yet the refreshment we need is really no further away than drawing close to our Lord who's given us real life and hope.

And it's not just using our time to veg. out. When we're not using the means of grace to grow and mature then we will never be the servants with the gifts God has given us. That's Paul's point. How do we become useful in the kingdom of God when we're too busy reclining in the kingdom of this world?

Now, I know how that steps on all of our toes, because we're all guilty to one degree or another. But, you know what, so were the Ephesians. But the answer is not to hide our heads in the sand and hope no one brings this problem to light. The answer is what Paul writes here in our text. He continues.

EPH 4:20-24 "You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Here we see this putting off and putting on concept. Paul makes the point that when it comes to growing in Christ we do not use the world as our standard. We did not come to know Christ that way. In fact, when it comes to knowing Christ it was through the Spirit.

We have been born from above. John writes in JOH 1:12-13 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

This is a spiritual birth and therefore a spiritual life. How could we ever expect to grow in this new life if we're not any different in our approach to life than those who are darkened in their understanding in the futility of their mind? That's all that Paul is saying.

And he continues by saying that we take stock of this life eternal in Christ and consider how our Lord wants us to live in this world even though we were born into this world with a sin nature that carry we'll contend with until the end. And though that nature has been defeated in Christ, it still hangs on until this flesh goes to the grave.

That's the struggle even Paul contended with.

ROM 7:23-24 "but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

If we were to stop there one might think that Paul, like the rest of the world, was without hope and yet he contrasts that seeming hopelessness with verse 25 of Rom. 7. And by the way, Paul does not say, 'what a wretched man I was', as though that were part of his past outside of Christ.

I once had a man insist that that is what the scriptures said, 'what a wretched man I was'. And I told him that you need to go and read it for yourself. It's black and white. Paul had a sin nature like ours and it followed him to the grave as it does with all of us.

But, Paul was not bound to this sin nature as though there was no hope. And this is why he continued in ROM 7:25 – 8:1 "Thanks be to God -through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ..."

But simply because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus does not mean we can play with sin and the world without getting burned.

ROM 6:8-12 "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Here again, we see Paul introducing the concept of putting off and putting on. We have died to that which would kill us. We have died to the one thing which would separate us from Christ. We have died to sin in the sense that when Christ died to sin the penalty was paid in full.

Why then, if our penalty was paid to allow us access to God as His children, would we continue to turn back to sin?, is Paul's point. But, he doesn't merely leave us with this identification with death because Christ over-came the grave.

And so, now we are also identified with His resurrection life. And that's precisely why Paul told the Romans, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." (Rom.6:11-12)

He could just as easily have said, "walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;..." (Eph.4:17-18)

The message is the same. In fact, it's a theme which runs all throughout the Scriptures, from Abraham being called out from the people of Ur of the Chaldees, to Israel who was called to come out from among the pagans who lived in the land around them.

Paul even uses the O.T. Scriptures to make the point that nothing has changed for the N.T. believer when it comes to the world and its influence and God's attitude towards it.

2CO 6:16-18 "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27) 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41) 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Samuel 7:14; 7:8)

Again, how can we love and serve God if we're entertaining sin and the ways of the world? This is why we start with putting off

the old self or the old nature. In other words, we recognize what that old nature is, as defined by the word of God. And we admit that, to what ever extent it is still being allowed to operate in our lives.

That's called confession before God. It's taking inventory of how we're living before our Lord and Savior. And that's a good thing to do periodically. I know in business once a year, a day or two or more is spent taking inventory of what's in the store. They want to know, 'what do we possess?' And if it's old inventory the objective is to get rid of it.

When we look at our lives in the light of God's word we need to be willing to identify the old baggage of the old man and be willing to get rid of it by the grace and strength which God supplies specifically for that purpose.

It's when we identify the baggage and we're not willing to get rid of it that it begins to burden us down and it takes center stage instead of the freedom and joy we should have in Christ which is found in the way we love and serve Christ with the gifts He has given us.

Paul put it well in verse 22. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;..."

But putting off is not enough. Something is going to fill that vacuum once the garbage has been taken out. What Paul want us to replace it with is what we already possess, knowing what the new outcome will be.

EPH 4:23-24 "to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

I want to talk more of this next week. But, it's so important to realize that our minds and our spirits are tied together in this world. And God does not want us checking our minds at the door. But, this is part of the process of sanctification of "putting on the new self which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

This is the goal of every believer. And if it's not then it's time to start putting off those things that continue to make us not only think like the world but invariably then make us start acting like the world. How you think will affect how you act.

How do we think about our Savior? This will ultimately show us how we walk with our Savior. Let me close with an encouragement Paul gave to the Colossians which is meant for us today as well.

COL 1:10-14 "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."