

10.

**B. WALK NOT LIKE THE REST OF THE GENTILES, BUT LIKE CHRIST  
EPHESIANS 4:17-24**

Paul's second challenge to the Ephesian believers about how to walk worthy of the high calling of Jesus Christ was to not walk like the rest of the Gentiles, but like Christ. The majority of the members of the Ephesian church were Gentiles. Formerly they had lived Gentile lifestyles, which were sinful, selfish, violent, and immoral. Paul had taught them a new higher way of living. In this passage of his letter, he stressed the importance of living the new lifestyle. They were not to return again to copy after the Gentiles who still lived worldly lives. Instead, they were to model their lives after the way Jesus lived. When they did, they would give a small demonstration of the harmony that Jesus will give to all the cosmos in the End.

- B. *There, I say and charge you in the Lord* (4:17-19)
1. *No longer to walk like the rest of the Gentiles walk* (4:17-18)
    - a. *In depravity of their understanding* (4:17b-18),
      - (1) *Darkened in mind* (4:18a),
      - (2) *Excluded from the life of God* (4:18b-18d)
        - (a) *Through the ignorance that is in them* (4:18c)
        - (b) *And through the hardness of their heart* (4:18d),
    - b. *Who having become calloused* (4:19)
      - (1) *Gave themselves up to lust* (4:19b)
      - (2) *To practice every impurity with greediness* (4:19c).

Paul called on the Ephesians to no longer walk like the other Gentiles. He recognized that they had walked through their lives in that manner, but Christ had changed their hearts and taught them a whole new way of living and acting. They were not to go back to what they had been before.

**Verses 17-18. In depravity of their understanding.** Paul gave two descriptions of the old Gentile way of life. The first was "depravity of their understanding." The word translated "depravity" means "perverse," "deviant," "corrupt" or "twisted." Every part of them was bent out of shape from the way God created people to people. Paul especially emphasized that their understanding was twisted, because their way of thinking controlled everything else they did. The twisting of human minds began in the Garden of Eden when Eve and Adam first sinned, but people in all the ages since had developed even more and greater twisted ways of thinking about life and about the world. The Greeks were noted for their intellect, especially their philosophy. Their views of philosophy continue to influence the world until today. People still have much to learn from them,

but their views cannot be accepted at face value. Like much of the rest of human knowledge and wisdom, it contains much that is true but also much that is false. The great understanding that the Greeks had had not made them good, and it absolutely had not enabled them to know God. Paul warned the Ephesians against the warped understanding of the Gentiles. They need to accept the wisdom revealed by God. Then they would know the truth.

Paul said their mind was darkened, They could not see a true perspective on the world, because their twisted ideas blinded them to the truth. Therefore, they were wandering around in darkness, groping for truth. They had felt their way into some good ideas, but much greater truths were totally unknown to them because they had not found them in the darkness..

The reason the Gentiles were wandering in the darkness with a distorted view of the world was they were excluded from the life that God gives. True life is a gift of God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus gives life, He opens peoples eyes and

they can see a whole world of true and righteousness that always was near them but they could not see. The Gentiles did not have that advantage, because they did not know Jesus and the life He gives.

Since Gentiles did not have the life of God, their behavior was guided by the ignorance that was in them and also by their hard hearts. With a mind ignorant of the truth about the world and with hearts hardened to guidance and instruction, they did not have a chance of finding peace in the world; and certainly they had no way to discover righteousness and live in it.

Paul urged the Ephesians to turn completely away from that Gentile way of life. Previously they knew nothing else, and they had lived that way. Now Jesus had been introduced to them, and they needed to give up the life they had formerly known and live a new way.

**Verse 19. Gave themselves up to lust.** Paul's second description of the Gentile way of life was "having become calloused, they gave themselves up to lust." The word so translated means "calloused" means "devoid of feeling." Living a self-centered life leads a person to be unconcerned and unfeeling toward others. It especially robs a person of feelings of compassion and empathy toward hurting and grieving people. The person who lives his life only for his own wants

and pleasures, becomes so unconcerned about other that he does not care if they hurt. In fact, he is willing to cause them to hurt if he can gain something for himself. He becomes too calloused to care, and therefore he abandons himself to all kinds of harsh and hurtful deeds as long as what he gain a few minutes of pleasure for himself.

Paul said the callousness of the Gentile way of life caused them to "give themselves up to lust." Lust is a strong urge for any kind of pleasure, but it especially means a craving for immoral and sensual pleasures. The calloused Gentile way of life just naturally led to sensuality, because sexual pleasures are some of the strongest urges known to man. In fact, it led the Greeks to abandon themselves to sensual pleasures so thoroughly that until today "Greek way of life" is a synonym for sexual license. The Greeks did not just dabble in a few immoral and lascivious deeds. They became obsessed with every kind of impurity and lecherous sin, and they proceeded to practice them voraciously. Paul said they did it "with greediness. Sex deviations became an addiction that crowded out more productive and satisfying aspects of their lives. As it always does, their "free living" enslaved them, and their "broad-mindedness" confined their lives to a few narrow perversions.

No wonder Paul warned the Ephesian believers not to return to the Gentile way of life!

2. *But you did not so learn Christ* (4:20-24),

- a. *Since for sure you heard Him and were taught by Him* (4:21a)
- b. *Even as the truth is in Jesus* (4:21b-24):
  - (1) *To put away from you the former behavior of the old man* (4:22)
    - (a) *The one corrupted* (4:22b)
    - (b) *According to the deceptive lusts* (4:22c),
  - (2) *And to be renewed in the spirit of your understanding* (4:23),
  - (3) *And to put on the new man* (4:24),
    - (a) *The one created by God* (4:24b),
    - (b) *In righteousness and in devotion to truth* (4:24c).

Paul commended to the Ephesians the only real alternative to the dead-end lifestyle of the Gentiles. That alternative is to live like Christ. It is worthy of note that Paul did not say the Ephesians should become like the Jews. In the beginning of his letter, he already had declared that the Jews

were no better than the Gentiles (Eph. 2:3). A few years earlier, he had written to believers in Rome, where he was when he wrote to the Ephesians, an even longer assertion that the Jews behaved the same way as the Gentiles (Rom. 2:1-29). Instead, of suggesting that the Ephesians live like the Jews,

Paul urged them to live like Christ. Christ needed to become the example they constantly needed to follow.

**Verses 20-21a.** For sure, you did not so learn Christ. Paul reminded them they knew what it was to live like Christ, because they had met Him for themselves. They had heard Him speaking to their minds and hearts. They had not just been taught about Christ. Christ Himself had taught them by speaking directly into their inner beings.

The KJV translates the first words of verse 21 as, *“If so be that ye have heard,”* and NASB translates them as *“if indeed you have heard,”* implying that the Ephesians might not have heard about Jesus. Those versions derive that implication from the words translated above as “since for sure.” The word translated “since” has no exact equivalent in English. It points to what has just been said and places emphasis on it. If the previous statement was doubtful, it can mean “if”; however, Paul’s previous statement had no doubt in it. If the previous statement was positive, it means “since.” The word translated “for sure” has a variety of uses and can mean “self” or “him.” Paul often used it in his writings to put added certainty to the preceding word. If the previous word indicates doubt, it makes that word more doubtful. If the previous word indicates surety, it makes that word more sure. If it is correct that the previous word means “since,” then this word means “absolutely” or “for sure.” Paul preceded those two words with the statement, *“But you did not so learn Christ.”* That statement is a clear affirmation that they had learned of Christ. So surely he did not contradict himself in the latter part of the same sentence. For that reason, modern versions begin the second part of the sentence with works like, *“Surely you heard”* (NIV), *“For surely you have heard”* (NRSV), *“assuming that you have heard”* (RSV), or *“assuming you heard”* (HCSB).

Paul knew the Ephesians had heard about Jesus, because he had spent three years with them telling them about Jesus. However, his words indicate even more. He said, *“Since for sure you heard Him and were taught by Him.”* They had heard Jesus speaking to them directly. They had heard Him speaking to their hearts. Because of a

personal experience with them, they had become his followers. Because He had continued to speak to their hearts after they were saved, they knew He expected them to live a new way of life. Therefore, they knew better than to continue living like the other Gentiles.

**Verses 21b-24.** You learned the truth as it is in Jesus. Paul said what they had been taught by Jesus was “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Jesus had taught them, so they knew what His truth was. Jesus said to His disciples, “I am the truth.” He is the One who defined truth. He is the One who revealed truth. He is the standard by which truth is measured. So, when the Ephesians had been taught by Jesus in their hearts, they knew the real truth. Therefore, they should live it.

Paul cited three aspects of the truth that is in Jesus, which he called on them to live. (1) The first was *“to put away from you the former behavior of the old man.”* The first thing they had to do to practice Jesus’ truth was to put away their old way of living. Living for Jesus requires recognizing that one’s old life was evil. It was corrupted from the way God created it to be. It was corrupted “according to the deceptive lusts.” We like to emphasize that humans were corrupted by sin that entered into the world through the actions of Eve and Adam, and that teaching is a true tragic reality. Paul emphasized here that we corrupt ourselves by giving in to the deceptive lusts that are in us. Our selfish desires deceive us, and we follow those desires instead of the teachings of God. Paul called on the Ephesians to recognize that their old selves were evil, but he went further. He also called on them to reject those selfish desires and live by them no longer. He challenged them to put away their old way of life and practice it no more.

(2) The second aspect of the truth in Jesus was *“to be renewed in the spirit of your understanding.”* Paul told the Ephesians that, after renouncing the old life, they had to be renewed within. Their spirit, attitude, and desires, had to change. Along with that change, their understanding of the meaning of life and righteousness would change. Paul urged the Ephesians to be renewed in their inner selves. At this point, Paul did not tell them how to be renewed

within. However, they already knew they could not make that change in their own strength. They knew they could not change themselves, so Paul expected them to draw on the knowledge they already had and let Jesus make their spirits and minds new in His likeness.

(34) The third aspect of the truth in Jesus was “*to put on the new man.*” After they had a new spirit within, they would be able to be a new person on the outside. The change would show in their lives. They had to take the first two steps, and then they would be able to take the third step and practice a new way of life that everyone could see. They would not just struggle to practice a new way. They would find it natural to practice a new way, because they themselves would be new. The inner change that would take place in them would make them want to practice a new way of living on the outside. It also would make them able to live that new way.

Paul cited two distinctives by which the new man can be recognized. (1) The first distinctive of the new man is that he will be created by Jesus. At this point, Paul did explain how to become renewed within. He said it is “*created by God.*” Jesus’ creative power changes a person into a new person he was totally incapable of being formerly. No one can live a new righteous life by making resolutions or by working hard at it. He has to become a different person. He becomes new because Jesus makes him a new creation. He becomes a new man, so he lives in a new way.

It still must be noted that Paul called on the Ephesians to “put on” the new man. Those words mean that a believer is responsible to practice that new way of living by his own effort. Jesus does not just automatically cause a believer practice righteousness without any effort on his own part. The new creation Jesus brings into being is the believer’s new spirit and soul. His body is not recreated when he is saved, as anyone can see by looking at him. His body still looks the same, and a new believer quickly realizes that his body also still has the habits and inclinations he taught it, perhaps over a period of years. The recreation of his body when it will be totally free of all tainting by sin and temptation, will come at the Day of Resurrection. In the meantime, the believer is responsible for

retraining and redirecting his outward self to follow the desires of his new inner self. He is able to be a new man outwardly, because his new spirit desires it and Jesus living in Him empowers him to do it.

A person becomes a new recreated person within at the moment he is saved, but he must work at training his body to respond to and obey that new person within and practice the new life his new heart desires.

(2) The second distinctive of the new man is that he will practice *righteousness and devotion to truth*. That statement identifies two practices the new man will cultivate. The first is righteousness. The person Jesus made new no longer loves sin. Within his inner being, he gains a strong attraction to righteousness, and the attractiveness of sin fades away. His bodily passions and desires may still be inclined toward worldly ways, but inwardly he will not want to yield to those bodily inclinations. Sometimes he will be weak and will give in to a bodily desire, especially before he has had time to fully restrain his body’s habits and inclinations. When he does fall, he will regret his failure because he no longer loves that way of life. He will ask for forgiveness and will try not to repeat his failure. As he continues to practice the new way, he will become comfortable with it. It will become more a more a natural way of life for him. Thus, he will demonstrate righteousness and grow in righteousness.

The second characteristic practice of the new man is devotion to truth. Truth will become important to him, and he will seek to understand as much of it as possible. He will recognize that the only completely dependable truth is revealed by Jesus. He still will seek to learn from people’s reasoning and experimentation, and he will use his own reason and experience to discover aspects of truth. However, he will test and discipline all human knowledge by the truth Jesus reveals in His Word. He will have much to learn, and he will never learn it all in this life; but he will be able to recognize the difference between truth and error. He constantly will seek to know more about how to reject falsehood and understand truth. Not only will he seek to understand it. He also will strive to share it with others.

**Conclusion:** If the Ephesians would follow Paul's advice and walk not like the other Gentiles but like Christ, they would have harmony among themselves. They also would have a foretaste of the great harmony Jesus will give to all the cosmos at the End. Not practicing the twisted Gentile way of life but seeking to live like Jesus would demonstrate Jesus' power to lead men into harmony with each other and also become a prophecy of the perfect harmony Jesus eventually will give to the whole cosmos.