

## Walking in Righteousness

### Ephesians 4:17-24

*17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 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; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 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, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in [the likeness of] God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

After telling the Ephesians of their high calling and glorious riches in Christ (chapters 1-3), the Apostle Paul opened chapter 4 of Ephesians by imploring the believers in Ephesus to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (4:1-6). In so doing Paul emphasizes the characteristics of that worthy walk. Paul then moved on in verses 7-16 to teach about God's plan for building the church. He highlighted God's gifts to the church and God's purposes for the church. Now in verse 17, Paul moves back to the idea of the believer's walk by exhorting the Ephesian believers not to walk as the Gentiles walk.

- ***What is the basis of authority for Paul's exhortation in verse 17?***

*Paul's exhortation is not simply based on his own tastes or preferences but it is together with the Lord's God's own standard. Notice the verse says, "This I say and affirm together with the Lord..." Paul's exhortation is based on what the Lord expects from those who follow Him.*

Paul insisted that the Ephesian believers must no longer live as the Gentiles do. However, many of the believers to whom Paul was writing in Ephesus were Gentiles by birth. It was their racial background.

- ***Because Paul was writing to many Gentiles, why did he say not to live as the Gentiles do?***

*Paul was stressing that the Ephesian believers must abandon what had been their former way of life, not living any longer as the other Gentiles around them who were not believers in Christ. Paul did not want the Ephesian believers to live as unbelievers. (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:5, which defines Gentiles as unbelievers)*

- *According to verses 17-19, how did the unbelieving Gentiles live?*

### 1-THEY LIVED IN INTELLECTUAL FUTILITY!

Verse 17- (*in the futility of their mind*).

Verse 18- (*being darkened in their understanding*).

### 2-THEY LIVED IN SEPARATION FROM GOD!

Verse 18- (*excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart*).

### 3-THEY LIVED IN SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEPRAVITY!

Verse 19- (*and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness*).

#### 1. They Lived in INTELLECTUAL Futility! (Verse 17-18a)

**Verse 17:** *in the futility of their mind*- "The term *futility* refers to that which fails to produce the desired result; that which never succeeds. It was therefore used as a synonym for empty, because it amounts to nothing. The spiritual thinking and resulting lifestyle of the ungodly is inevitably empty, vain, and void of substance. In other words the unregenerate person plans and resolves everything on the basis of his own thinking; thus he becomes the ultimate authority and he follows his own thinking to its ultimate outcome of futility, aimlessness, and meaninglessness—to the self-centered emptiness that characterizes our age." [MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians; p. 168]

**Verse 18a:** *being darkened in their understanding*-The term being darkened is a perfect passive participle, which indicates a continuing condition. In this case it is the condition of spiritual darkness, which is an absence of spiritual understanding. When one operates on the basis of their own thinking rather than on God's then they are void of any true spiritual understanding.

- *What do the following verses teach regarding unbelievers living in intellectual futility and spiritual darkness?*

Romans 1:21—*Because they did not honor God they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Romans 1:28—*Because they did not acknowledge God, He gave them over to a depraved mind.*

Romans 8:7—*Because their mind is set on the flesh, they are hostile toward God and are not able to subject themselves to God or His law.*

1 Corinthians 2:14—*The natural man (an unbeliever) is not capable of understanding the things of God, because they are foolishness to him.*

Titus 1:15—*The unbeliever's mind and conscience are defiled.*

We notice from these verses that failure to acknowledge and believe in the one true God results in futile speculations, a darkened heart, a depraved mind, an inability to accurately understand God, and even hostility toward God.

## 2. They lived in SEPARATION from God. (Verse 18b)

**Verse 18b:** *excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart*-As a result of their intellectual futility, unbelievers live a life excluded or separated from God. Remember Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:12 as to the previous state of the Ephesians when they were unbelieving Gentiles:

*"Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world.**"* The unbeliever lives a life separate from Christ, a life with no hope, and a life without God.

- ***Why do unbelievers live a life separate from God?***

1-because of the ignorance that is in them.

2-because of the hardness of their heart.

Really the root of their problems is the hardness of their hearts. They have a willful determination to remain in sin and to reject God (Cf. Romans 1:20-25). The ungodly are unresponsive to truth (Cf. Isaiah 44:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:5). The term *hardness* carries the idea of being rock hard or hard as stone. The term *hardness* was used by physicians to describe a calcification, which forms around broken bones and becomes harder than the bone itself. Clearly the heart of an individual who continually rejects God and continues in sin becomes hardened to spiritual truth. They have hearts, which have become petrified and are hard as stone. [see article in MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Ephesians]

## 3. They lived in spiritual and moral DEPRAVITY. (Verse 19)

- ***According to verse 19, What is the end result of living in intellectual futility and a life of separation from God?***

**Verse 19:** *and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.*

**Verse 19:** *having become callous*-Callous likely refers to the previous idea of hardening. It is the idea of spiritual and moral callousness. When people continue in sin and turn themselves away from God, they become apathetic and insensitive about moral and spiritual things. They reject the standards of righteousness and do not care about the consequences of their unrighteous thoughts and actions (Cf. 1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15). [MacArthur, p. 170]

**Verse 19:** *have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness*-The term here for *sensuality* refers to total licentiousness, the absence of all moral restraint, especially in the area of sexual sins. It carries the idea of unbridled self-indulgence and undisciplined obscenity.

"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 callous ways of life through the conscious choices of those who indulge in them." [MacArthur, p. 171]

- *According to verses 20-24, how does new life in Christ contrast to the former manner of life?*

-It is Christ centered vs. 20

-It knows God's truth vs. 21 and is based on truth, vs. 24

-It is delivered from the old manner of life, vs. 22

-It has a renewed mind, vs. 23

-It is a Christ like life, vs. 24

-It is a righteous and holy lifestyle, vs. 24

Note: to *lay aside the old self*-means to strip off as in the case of filthy clothes.

It is interesting to take note that the action of laying aside the old self and putting on the new self are in the aorist tense, which denote a once and for all, definite, concluding action. The stripping off of the old and putting on of the new is done at once and for good.

It is the transformation that takes place at salvation. The old corrupted nature is stripped off and a new Christ-like nature is put on. These are not commands as they do not appear here in an imperative form, but Paul is describing what had already taken place in the Ephesian believers lives. At the time of their salvation, the old self had been laid aside or stripped off and the new nature had been put on.

- *With this understanding of our new life in Christ, How should we respond? How should we live our lives having been stripped of our old nature and dressed with a new Christ-like nature?*
- *According to verses 25-32 what are the characteristics of the New Nature in Christ?*

(vs. 25)-*We should be speaking truthfully rather than in falsehood and lies.*

(vs. 26-27)-*We should not be involved in sinful anger.*

(vs. 28)-*We should work for a living and share the fruit of our labor rather than stealing.*

(vs. 29)-*We should be edifying in our speech rather than unwholesome.*

(vs. 30)-*We should not be grieving the Holy Spirit.*

(vs. 31)-*We should not be bitter, wrathful or slanderous toward others.*

(vs. 32)-*We should be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving of one another.*

### **SMALL GROUPS:**

- *How should you respond, knowing that you have been stripped of your old nature and given a new nature in Christ?*
- *What steps can you take to live in accordance with your new nature in Christ?*