

**Valley Bible Church**  
**Sermon Notes for November 11, 2018**

**No Turning Back**  
**Ephesians 4:17-19**

I. The command (4:17)

*17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*

- The power of the command
  - “Now this I say and testify in the Lord”
    - Last time we saw a statement like this was from Ephesians 4:1
      - Ephesians 4:1 “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”
    - After three chapters of describing the believer’s position in Christ and the equal access to God that the Ephesians shared with one another, Paul called the Ephesians to walk worthy
      - Paul’s explanation of walking worthy for the last 16 verses has been horizontal in nature
      - Paul’s explanation of walking worthy has discussed the way in which the Ephesian believers were to relate to one another so that unity might result
    - Now, Paul shifts to emphasize how the believer’s position in Christ should have an impact vertically as well
      - Paul stresses the fact that the believer’s position in Christ should impact their pursuit of holiness and sanctification before God
    - To begin this discussion about the believer’s need to grow in sanctification, Paul reminds the Ephesians that his command comes from one who “is in the Lord”
      - This is no suggestion to consider holiness
      - This is a command to no longer walk in sin
      - This is a command to be transformed
  - “That you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do”
    - First, notice that Paul identifies the practices of the Gentiles as unacceptable
      - This is a prohibition against walking or living like the Gentiles

- Paul is identifying that there are patterns and lifestyles that define the world or the Gentiles
- Paul is clearly stating that those worldly patterns and lifestyles are unacceptable
- But do not think that our time this morning is solely meant for us to assess and condemn the world from our moral high ground
- Why not?
  - Look at how Paul delivers this prohibition
- Second, he states that the Ephesian church must “no longer walk as the Gentiles do”
  - What else does the phrase “no longer” mean except that the Ephesians were still practicing the sinful ways of the world?
  - And this problem was not unique to the Ephesian church
  - This is a problem for every church and every believer in Christ
  - Of course as believers we know that we are saved by Christ alone
  - However, this does not mean that we won’t tend toward and be drawn back to old sinful habits
    - Paul recognized that though the Ephesians were saved by faith in Christ, they still had much opposition
    - They faced the opposition of their old sinful habits, the schemes of Satan and his demons, as well as the countless temptations to sin found in the world
  - As believers, we face these same opponents
  - We too must heed this command from Paul to “no longer walk as the Gentiles do” or according to the ways of the world
  - God is calling you to a life of sanctification and holiness this morning
  - If you are in Christ, there is no other option
  - This is what believers do, they repent of their old, sinful, worldly habits
  - You do not get to hold onto the promise of Christ and eternal life on the one hand while leaving room for sinful practices on the other hand
  - 1 John 3:6 “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”
  - Romans 6:1-2 “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

- Thus, God is calling you to be sanctified and holy, separating yourself from sinful habits
  - Why?
- Paul states the clear purpose of the command in a summary fashion at the end of verse 17
- Paul states that the Gentiles walk, “In the futility of their minds”
  - Paul does not call the Ephesians to turn away from the ways of the world only because God said so
  - Paul calls the Ephesians to turn away from the ways of the world because the lifestyle of the world is futile
    - In other words, Paul is saying that the Gentiles are living empty and meaningless lives as they pursue their sinfulness
    - There is no profit or value found in the lifestyle of the world
  - Paul makes it clear that the mindset and ways of the world are empty and meaningless for the one who has received a new position in Christ
    - The words of Solomon from the book of Ecclesiastes are an appropriate example of this emptiness
    - Ecclesiastes 1:2 “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
    - Ecclesiastes 1:14 “I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.”
  - Similarly, Paul is saying that the walk of the Gentiles is also empty and meaningless
  - In fact, Paul will describe in more vivid detail that the ways of the Gentiles are not just meaningless, but they are opposed to God
    - Romans 8:7-8 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
  - Paul goes on to describe three aspects of worldliness

## II. The condition (4:18a)

*18 They are darkened in their understanding,*

- First, Paul tells the Ephesians that the Gentiles are “darkened in their understanding”
  - The phrase “darkened in their understanding” is a fitting phrase that accurately describes the condition of the world and unbelievers
    - On the one hand, the world has some understanding about God and morality
      - Passages like Romans 1:20 and Romans 2:14-15 support a basic understanding of God’s existence and morality
      - This is described as general revelation that all mankind possesses

- On the other hand, the world has severe limitations in their understanding of God and His righteous requirements
  - These limitations are connected to the fact that they do not have the Holy Spirit
  - 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
  - Thus, the world’s lack of the Holy Spirit and decision to follow after the sin of Adam and Eve have left them “darkened”
  - Romans 1:21 “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
- Therefore, Paul tells the Ephesians to “no longer” return to that “darkened” way of thinking and living

### III. The circumstance (4:18b)

*alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

- We see not just the world’s condition of darkness but also the world’s circumstance of separation
- First, Paul clearly states that the Gentiles are separated from God in stating that they are, “Alienated from the life of God”
  - Paul tells the Ephesians that the Gentiles were separated from God
    - Ephesians 2:12 “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”
  - This is the condition of every unbeliever
    - Colossians 1:21 “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds”
  - Notice that the separation is not just from God but from “the life of God”
    - Thus the Gentiles in their separation from God are also separated from the life that is connected to God
    - The Gentiles have no current relationship with God
    - The Gentiles have no future hope of eternal life with God
    - The Gentiles have no access to the way, the truth and the life
    - The Gentiles have no access to Christ
  - Paul does not only describe the world’s separation from God but also the causes for the world’s separation from God
- The first cause for the world’s separation from God is ignorance

- Paul states that the Gentiles are alienated “Because of the ignorance that is in them”
  - Paul simply states elsewhere that the Gentiles do not know God
    - 1 Thessalonians 4:5 “not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God”
  - On one level, this ignorance flows from the lack of knowledge and understanding of the gospel
    - Romans 10:14 “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”
    - Romans 10:17 “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
  - If this was all that Scripture stated about the matter of the world’s ignorance, then we would conclude that they are poor, helpless, and innocent in their ignorance
  - However, Paul explains the cause for their ignorance
- The second cause of their ignorance and separation from God is a calloused heart
  - Paul states that the separation and ignorance of the Gentiles is “Due to their hardness of heart”
    - The world does suffer from ignorance, but it is a willful ignorance
    - Two other examples of hardened hearts
      - Mark 3:5 “And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.”
      - Romans 11:25 “Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”
  - It might be helpful to reverse the phrasing of verse 18 in order to understand this aspect of the world
  - They have calloused hearts, causing them to be ignorant, which causes them to be alienated and separated from God

#### IV. The craving (4:19)

*19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*

- We have seen the world’s condition of darkness and the world’s circumstance of separation
- Now, Paul describes the world’s craving for sin

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- First, Paul restates that the hardening of their own hearts is the cause for their separation and alienation from God
- However, this is not the full extent of the world's depravity
- Paul takes it yet another step further in stating that they, "have given themselves up to sensuality"
- Their craving is for sin
  - What does the unbeliever desire?
  - What does one who is darkened in their understanding seek after?
  - What does one who is separated from God crave?
  - Righteousness? Holiness? Purity?
  - Paul says "sensuality"
  - The description of the Gentiles and their lifestyle just keeps getting worse!
  - They are not helpless and innocent souls
  - They are calloused sinners giving themselves over to sensuality!
  - What a surprise! Sinners crave sin!
- Their sinful craving is multifaceted
  - "Greedy to practice every kind of impurity"
  - Galatians 5:19 "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,"
  - Romans 1:29-31 "They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless."
- Their multifaceted sinful craving is greedy
  - "Greedy to practice every kind of impurity"
  - Their sin is addictive and endless
  - There is no satisfying the lusts and sinful impulses that dominate the unbeliever's heart