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Changing The Way We Walk

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

Introduction

1. If there is something you could change about this world in which you and I live, what would it be?
2. If there is something you could change about yourself, what might that be?
3. I believe that you would agree with me that all is not right in the world.
4. We are constantly reminded of this by the wars, conflict, crime and moral decline we witness on a daily basis that this world is not what it was meant to be.
5. It was the wise man Solomon who once wrote, in Ecclesiastes 1:14, “I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (NIV84).
6. The truth, as Solomon acknowledged, is that if we try to remove God from the picture, all of life is truly meaningless.
7. You and I are restless until we rest in God.
8. We will not find lasting joy apart from Him.
9. In our text today, the apostle Paul calls upon us as Christians to live a new lifestyle with a new mindset shaped by Christ.
10. Let’s look at what conversion is to look like in our lives and how you and I are to live as new creations of God.

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I. The Way We Once Walked

“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,” (Ephesians 4:17, NASB95).

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A. IN THE FUTILITY OF OUR MINDS

“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; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” (Ephesians 4:18–19, NASB95)

1. **Everything we do in life starts with our mind.**
 - a. **Jesus said** “the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34).
 - b. **He added in** Matthew 12:35, “The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil” (Matthew 12:35, NASB95).
2. **Prior to our obedience to Christ, we walked** “in the futility of [our] mind” (Ephesians 4:17).
3. **To put it another way, our minds are focused on things which are ultimately meaningless, useless, worthless or empty.**
4. **When you reach the end of your life, will your choices have moved you closer to heaven or further away?**
5. **Jesus once asked two questions that we each would do well to consider:**
 - a. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36, NASB95)
 - b. “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:37, NASB95)
6. **In verse 18, Paul identifies for us the digression which led to their predicament.**

7. He begins by telling us that they suffered from hard (v. 18) and calloused (v. 19) hearts.
 - a. The heart is the source of all loyalties.
 - b. A heart that is hard and calloused prevents all loyalty to God.
8. Second, their hardness of heart led to a willful ignorance of God in which they chose not to know Him.
9. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, he wrote of those men "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18, ESV) and added in verse 21 that "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."
10. Here, in Ephesus, the same thing has happened — there are those whose ignorance of God has caused them to become "darkened in their understanding."
11. This, in turn, has resulted in their being "excluded (alienated) from the life of God" (v. 18).

Slide 4**B. THE BEHAVIOR THAT RESULTED**

"... and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Ephesians 4:19, NASB95).

1. In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he wrote, three times, of God having given people over to the consequences of their choices:
 - a. "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them." (Romans 1:24, NASB95)

- b. “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,”
(Romans 1:26, NASB95)
 - c. “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,”
(Romans 1:28, NASB95)
2. These individuals of whom Paul wrote developed an insatiable desire for the practice of every kind of impurity — they indulged in the gratification of their own desires without regard for God or others.
 3. There you have it — when we are insensitive to the things of God, we give ourselves over to the sensuality of the world — what John called “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life,” which he also said, “is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15).
 4. If the root problem is a corrupt mind, the solution can only be a renewing of the mind.

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II. We Now Walk As Those Renewed In The Spirit Of Our Minds

A. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM CHRIST

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“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, 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, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Ephesians 4:20–24, NASB95)

1. Look at what Paul said to the Christians in Ephesus “But you did not learn Christ in this way” (v. 20).
2. They know better than to live the life which he has just described.
3. Through the Holy Spirit and Paul, Jesus has been their teacher, the subject of their lessons and the sphere in which they have studied.
4. Truth is to be found in Him.
 - a. When you and I find Jesus, we find truth.
 - b. When we find truth, we find Jesus.
 - c. Truth does not exist apart from Him.
5. Here, Paul tells us that what we learn from Christ is that . . .
 - a. **We must first** “lay aside [put off] the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (v. 22).
 - 1) **Why must we** “put off the old self?” **Because of its corruption.**
 - 2) **You and I began this process with our baptism.**
 - 3) **In Romans 6:6 where Paul tells us that in our baptism** “our old self was crucified with Him [Christ], in order that our body of sin might be done away, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.”
 - 4) **Now, we continue to put away from us those old sinful desires which still seek to draw us away from Christ.**
 - b. **Then we must** “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness and truth” (v. 24).
6. **Now, we put on “the new self” which, as Paul says,** “has been created in righteousness and holiness and truth” **that we begin to** “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [we] have been called” (Ephesians 4:1).
 - a. **We** “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1, NASB95).

b. We “set [our] mind(s) on the things above, not on the things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2, NASB95).

7. But, what is different about our new walk?

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B. IDENTIFYING OUR NEW WALK

1. “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25, NASB95)
 - a. Those of us who have been guilty of lying to others must put this sin away.
 - b. Putting on the new self calls for us to speak truth with our brothers and sisters in Christ because “we are members of one another”.

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2. “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (v. 26,27).
 - a. We are right to be angry when our anger is rightly directed at sin.
 - b. However, we must “keep short accounts” by dealing with our anger before the sun goes down.
 - c. Otherwise, we give the devil an opportunity to intensify our anger and cause it to become sin in itself.

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3. “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.” (Ephesians 4:28, NASB95)
 - a. A thief takes from others for his own benefit.
 - b. As Christians, putting on the new self means we do not steal.
 - c. Instead, we must do honest work with our own hands, so that we will have something to share with anyone who might be in need.

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4. “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:29-30, NASB95)
 - a. The word “unwholesome” means “rotten”.
 - 1) It can refer to foul language, cursing which serves no wholesome purpose.
 - 2) It can also refer to destructive, derogatory language designed to tear another person down.
 - b. Neither is befitting of any of us who wear the name of Christ. It grieves the Holy Spirit who is given to us as “the pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14).
 - c. Instead, we now speak words which meet the need of the moment and build others up.

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5. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:31–32, NASB95)
 - a. Are you a person who is bitter? You harbor animosity toward others? Put it away.
 - b. Perhaps you are person known for your “wrath,” you intense anger and sudden outbursts of rage. Again, get rid of it.
 - c. Maybe you are just a person who is always angry? You don’t explode, but your angry personality holds others at bay. Lay it aside.
 - d. Are you known as someone who is quick to get into a shouting match with another? You scream at them in order to make your point or get your way? As a bearer of Christ’s image, your old image must go.

- e. Do you slander others? Do you speak about them in a way that will bring harm or injury to another's reputation? If so, stop. Such behavior has no place in the kingdom of our Lord.
- f. If you harbor hateful feelings toward someone, possibly to the point of doing them harm, put it away from you.
- g. Replace all of these sinful attitudes and behaviors with kindness, a tender heart and the willingness to forgive.
- h. Do it in the same way that God in Christ has forgiven you.
- i. If we do this, we are actively putting the new self on each and every day.

Conclusion

1. Throughout this passage, the apostle Paul has been talking to us about conversion, about putting off our old self and putting on the new?
2. Let me ask you a question: Is this possible? Can you and I actually do this?
3. When we ask this, we are asking if Christianity is true, because it argues that we can change.
4. Before you come to a conclusion, realize this. If you or I say that it is impossible for a person to change then we are declaring our faith in Christ as meaningless.
5. It is meaningless because no matter how good its teachings it does not deal with our core problem, the problem of sin.
6. Conversion is the process by which God removes your sin through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ and then restructures your thinking through the Holy Spirit.
7. Only then can you become what God calls you to be: His special people.