

The New Man in Christ:

Embracing Righteousness and Holiness

This I say unto you therefore, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.

Don't live like the world

The Christian isn't to imitate the life of the unsaved, the ungodly, the unregenerate. Paul is saying that there is no way we can accomplish Christ's glorious work by continuing to live the way that the world lives. He's about to describe the difference between being saved and being unsaved.

To begin with, Christians think differently from unsaved people. According to our text, unsaved people walk in the futility of their minds. Therefore, Paul concludes, there should be a distinction between the two groups. They should act differently, walk differently, and talk differently.

Salvation begins with repentance, which is a change of mind. A person's whole outlook changes when they put their faith in Jesus Christ. When you accept the Lord as your personal savior, all things become new from the attic to the basement, including your values, goals, ambitions, and how you view life in general. When Jesus comes into your heart, you gain a new, glorious perspective- God's.

Futility of Mind

What's wrong with the mind of the unsaved person? For one thing, his thinking is vain. It's futile. The last part of verse 17 says that an unsaved person walks "*in the futility of their mind.*" Since he doesn't know God, he can't truly understand the world around him, nor can he even understand himself. You will never get to know who you are until you get to know who God is.

The unregenerate plans and resolves everything based on his own thinking. He becomes his own ultimate authority and follows his own ideas to a futile outcome, meaningless to the self-centered emptiness that characterizes our world today.

This world possesses a great deal of knowledge but very little wisdom. Henry David Thoreau put it best when he said we have "improved means to unimproved ends." After a life of experiencing every worldly advantage and pleasure, Solomon, the wisest man

who has ever lived, concluded that the worldly life is nothing more than vanity and a mere chasing after the wind.

Chasing the wind is a waste of your time unless you're sailing a boat or flying a kite. So chasing after the wind's not all bad, but when you make that the focus of your life and God's not in the equation, nothing more than a waste of time. The unsaved man's thinking is futile because it's darkened and spiritually uninformed.

Ignorance of the Truth

The Bible says:

having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; (v 18)

For many people, to be called ignorant is far more degrading and insulting than to be called sinful. But Paul's point is that ignorance and sin are inseparable. According to 2 Timothy 3:7, the ungodly man may be "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Fallen humanity has a built-in inability to know and comprehend the things of God. It takes the spirit of a living God to know and understand the things of God, so you have to have a personal relationship with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your heart for the light to come on.

Modern man thinks he's enlightened because he rejects the Bible and believes the latest philosophies, but, in reality, the Bible says that he is in the dark.

Romans 1:22 says:

Professing to be wise, they became fools,

It's not simply that their eyes are blinded so they cannot see, but that their minds are darkened, so they can't think straight about spiritual matters. They just don't get it. They can't get it. You can't get it until you get God.

The unsaved man is dead because of this spiritual ignorance. You see, the truth and the life go together. If you believe God's truth, then you receive God's life, and that's glorious.

The cause of the unsaved person's darkness, ignorance, and separation from God is the hardness of their heart. It says blindness in the New King James, but the word also translates to hardness, the willful determination to remain in sin and continue in spiritual

darkness. It's a choice they willingly make. They sin against a flood of light. The ungodly are unresponsive to the truth, no matter how hard you hit them with it.

Satan plays a part in the blindness of those who refuse to believe.

Second Corinthians 4:4 says

whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

So the devil not only sells people a lie, and once they start to buy into it, he amens that lie over and over again. He's the father of lies. He couldn't tell the truth if he had to. Lying is his native language.

Hardened hearts

When men choose to harden their hearts by constantly rejecting the light, they become darkened in their understanding. When someone makes himself his own god, that's the unspeakable tragedy of unbelief. The hardness of his heart enslaves him, and he reaches a point where he is just at the stage where he ceases even to care. He has given himself over to sin, and sin controls him. His whole life revolves around it.

The Christian cannot pattern himself after the ungodly. You know, it's funny that Paul is even addressing this issue. Ephesus was a cesspool of wickedness and many of these new converts that Paul addressed here engaged in all those things. Paul's telling them. "That's who you were. But that's not who you are now. What you used to do, you don't do now."

There are things you did before you met Christ that you don't do once you start walking with him. There are just some places where God won't let you go anymore. When you know the Lord and walk with God, He sets boundaries for you. Remember when people held personal convictions that would not allow them to go, do, be, or think a certain way anymore because God controlled their lives?

We don't pattern our lives, ministries, or worship after the ungodly because the Christian has experienced a miracle of being raised spiritually from the dead. We were once dead, but now we're alive in the spirit. Life isn't futile. It's purposeful and productive. God's light fills His mind, and God's word fills his heart. Everything is new, and he's not the same person. He gives his body to God as a living sacrifice, an instrument of righteousness, not the satisfaction of his selfish lusts.

Spiritual and Moral Callousness

How does an ungodly person get to the point of not caring and feeling hard as a rock? Verse 19.

who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Being past feelings also translates to becoming callous. Those who become callous continue in sin and turn themselves away from the life of God. They become apathetic and insensitive about moral and spiritual issues. They reject all standards of righteousness and don't care about the consequences of their ways. They're not interested because they've got their own agenda, and it does not include the things of God.

We live in a world that wants little to do with God. The Church of America is in serious decline right now. People aren't lining up at the doors to find Christ. It's the spirit of the age.

According to an ancient Greek story, a young Spartan boy who stole a fox and then inadvertently came upon the man from whom he had stolen it. He stuck the fox inside his clothes to keep from being found out. Then, as he looked at this man, he stood motionless while that little frightened fox tore out his vital organs.

Even at the cost of his own painful death, he couldn't bring himself to confess his wrong. He would rather die. He was too proud to admit that he had committed a crime. All sin is a crime against God's law, but more than that, it is a crime against God's love. Our sin doesn't just break God's law, but it breaks His heart.

God tells you not to sin because he's got something better for you. He wants you to succeed, and sin will never help you to do that. We can say the same thing about society today. Like that Spartan boy, our culture is so determined not to have its evil discovered that it stands unflinching as sin rips its very life and vitality out. We cling to our sins, filth, and corruption. We won't humble ourselves before God. We won't confess it before the Lord. If we confess, he'll forgive.

There's a whole world in rebellion right now against God, and as you head toward the end of the Book of Revelation, it only gets worse. Our world has become callous to the reality and the consequences of sin. Those who are dying are desensitized to what is killing them because they choose to live their lives that way. They're dying inside and might notice something's wrong, but they won't search for answers in a God they don't want.

What do futility, self-centered thinking, ignorance of the truth, and spiritual and moral callousness all lead to? Verse 19 says they lead to lewdness and uncleanness with greediness.

Lewdness is the total absence of all moral restraints, especially in sexual sins. Sexual sin is a big industry today, and greed drives all of that. Having rejected all divine guidelines and protection, they become depraved in their minds and give themselves over to sensuality. Such a person cares nothing about what other people think, not to mention what God might say, but only about what gratifies the cravings of their own warped mind. In Romans chapter one, verse 20, Paul refers to that mind as depraved. They've turned their backs on God and hardened their hearts. There comes a point where God says, "If that's the direction you want to go, go."

This depraved mind can't reason or think clearly. It can't recognize or understand God's truth and loses contact with spiritual reality. A working definition of insanity is to lose touch with reality. When you lose contact with reality, it will drive you insane. And let me tell you, you know this as well as I do. We are living in a world gone mad.

Societal and individual choices

How often have you listened to something on the evening news that makes you sit back in your chair and realize, "Hey, this ain't Leave it to Beaver's world anymore." Things have declined so quickly in just a handful of years.

Where are we heading? You know, there's a path that seems right to man, but the Bible says the end thereof is destruction. He thinks he's just doing his own thing, and then he slams into a wall because he's trying to satisfy and please himself. And that will cause problems every time.

When indecency becomes a way of life, every aspect is corrupted and distorted, eventually destroying your life. Man is made for God and designed according to his standards.

So when you reject God and his principles, you destroy yourself. When you put your neck in the noose and hang yourself, some people will look at that man, or society, dangling and say, Why would God allow that? God didn't allow that. That was a choice that mankind has made.

God has done everything to save, redeem, and set free. But it comes down to the issue of your free will and a choice you must make to serve God. You have to make that

decision yourself. There's a big difference between being godly and ungodly, walking the way of the world, or walking with Christ.

That's what this whole "hiking humanity" is all about. It's about deciding who you will follow and who you will pattern your life after. Will you go after the world, or will you follow after Christ? Because those two roads don't intersect. One way is broad, and the other way is narrow. You've got to make a decision. You've got to fall in one line or the other. But it's a choice that only the individual can make.

As we come to the next little portion of Scripture, Paul shifts gears and encourages his audience. Remember, they're living in a sin-infested city. In verses 22-24, Paul tells them to

put off the old man, which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man, the new man, which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

See, God designed you to be righteous, holy and set apart unto God. He's jealous over us. He loves us and longs for us.

The new walk in Christ is the exact opposite of the old walk of the flesh. Now Paul begins to say, Okay, see how that was over there? Do you see the ungodly? See how they think and act? See how they behave? The old life is self-centered and futile, while the new is Christ-centered and purposeful. The old is ignorant of God's truth, but when Christ comes in to dwell, the new life knows and understands the things of God because the Holy Spirit dwells inside of Him. The light bulb comes on.

Jesus is the light. So when he comes in, he'll light you up. You don't have to worry about being a witness. You will be a lighthouse. You will be blazing because Jesus is inside you, trying to get out, sharing his love through you.

You watch TV commercials. They are always talking about the new you. Let's put some makeup on it. Let's put some Botox in it. Let's take those wrinkles out. They're always working on the outside. But Jesus comes along and says, I want to make you new, not on the outside, but on the inside. When you're new on the inside, it will light you up. It will set you free. In contrast, the old morality and spirituality were calloused and shameless.

We don't know how to blush anymore. Nothing embarrasses or disturbs us anymore. Sin is commonplace. You begin to say, Well, that's just how it is, but that's not how it's supposed to be, according to God's plans.

The new life is sensitive to sins of every sort. This new man or woman that you become when Jesus comes into your heart understands the conviction of the Holy Spirit. It understands why lights go off, and bells ring when I've gone the wrong way, taken a detour, lost sight of Christ for a moment, and people are losing sight of Christ in me.

The Holy Spirit says, Wait a minute. I'm not going to allow you to get away with that. We will fix this right here and right now, or you won't take another step in your pursuit of God. Aren't you thankful for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit?

Paul says the word of God renews the new mind. It's cleansing your mind in the scriptures, getting alone with the word, and just allowing it to bathe you and cleanse you from all the filth and pollution we unintentionally encounter daily.

Paul says in verse 20:

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.

Notice he didn't say learned about Christ because it's possible to learn about Christ and never be saved. Some people know much about Jesus but don't know Jesus. There are probably people sitting in churches this morning who could probably beat you if there was a Bible quiz. Their knowledge of the Scripture is absolute, but the wisdom to apply that in their lives and to accept Jesus as their savior has never happened.

It would be a terrible thing. You're at church, the rapture occurs, and everybody else is gone. You're still sitting there. Not good. But some people think everything is fine between them and God when it's not because they rest in facts.

To learn Christ means to have a personal relationship with the Lord and to get to know him better every day. You're growing in your relationship with God. The better I understand the Word of God, the better I know the Son of God, for the whole Bible is a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, "We have believed the truth. Not only that, we have received the life. Listen to me, Ephesians, we walk in the newness of that life. And we do not walk after the examples of the world."

After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, he and Lazarus came out of the grave. Imagine You've been dead for four days. You're in there all wrapped up. It's dark. You hear a voice calling you by name. All of a sudden, the stones move, and you're alive.

Yeah, but Jesus called him out, and once he came out, Jesus said, "Loose him. Let him go."

In other words, take off the grave clothes, Lazarus. You no longer belong to the Old Dominion of Death. Why go around wearing grave clothes if you're not dead?

In the next little section, Paul will give you five sins to shed like a cheap suit. They're nothing more than grave clothes. You've found life in Christ. He has delivered you, and you're heading to heaven. You're saved, and yet you're still in your grave clothes. It's time to shed the deeds of the flesh. Let's cast those grave clothes off because they identify us as what we were. But that's not who we are. Your past can't haunt you.

We're not going to change the world by being like the world. We're not going to change the world by catering to the world, by giving the world what we think they want. No, that's not what our mission is. Our mission is to please the Lord and to serve God too. Give Him 100% of who we are so He can make us into what he ordained us to be.