

Ephesians 4:17-32

The first three chapters of Ephesians are all about our wealth in Christ, and how abundantly we have been blessed! And then from Chapter 4 right through to Chapter 6 and V 9, it's all about our walk in Christ.

That would be a natural progression, wouldn't it?

If we have been abundantly blessed, and if we are new creations in Christ Jesus, our life should show it.

But there's a problem, isn't there?

Not only do we have a new nature, but we also possess an old one.

Our old man, that sinful nature we inherited from Adam, is still with us.

Yes, we possess two natures, but God doesn't expect us to manifest two personalities.

We'll talk about that in a few minutes.

However, right now, let's take a look at Paul's admonition concerning our walk in Christ.

Ephesians 4:17 **"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk ---."**

Paul is addressing the believers in Ephesus, and he's warning them against living like their unsaved neighbours.

And as you will notice, he has prefaced his remarks with the word **"therefore."**

Someone has said whenever you come across a therefore in Scripture, you should ask yourself what it is there for.

In this case, I'm quite sure Paul is referring to their blessings in Christ that he has already enumerated in this epistle.

Therefore, or in view of the fact that "--- **he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world**" (Ephesians 1:4) and because He has "**predestinated us unto the adoption of children**" (Ephesians 1:5) and certainly because "**we have redemption through his blood**" (Ephesians 1:7) we should "**henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk.**"

No, we should not live like our neighbours, because we are not like our neighbours.

I don't mean we're any better than they are, for Romans 3:23 tells us "--- **all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**"

But we're living under completely different circumstances.

The fact is, we're someone else's possession.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 makes it quite clear that you are not your own.

**"For ye are bought with a price:
therefore glorify God in your body,
and in your spirit, which are God's."**

And certainly the believers in Ephesus couldn't glorify God in their body and in their spirit if they lived like their neighbours.

Secular history tells us Ephesus was one of the worst cesspools of inequity in the Roman world.

Listen to Paul's description of its citizens.

Ephesians 4:19 **"Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto**

lasciviousness (or lewdness), **to work all uncleanness with greediness.**"

And their sinful lifestyle was further encouraged by their goddess Diana and the many priestesses who served in her temple.

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Of course, that's not the case with most of us.

We don't live in such a debased society.

Our friends and neighbours, even if they're not Christians, might be quite moral, and even religious.

However, regardless of the society we live in, when it comes to the unsaved, certain basic principles apply.

Listen to Paul's description in verses 17 and 18.

"--- that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their

mind,

18: Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

The first thing we notice is what we commonly call mindset.

Concerning spiritual things, their understanding is darkened.

And even though this seems to be a problem of the mind, it has nothing to do with their IQ.

No, these people are as intelligent as anyone else.

However, their thinking has been clouded by

"the blindness of their heart."

And not only is their **"understanding darkened,"** but they are **"alienated from the life of God."**

Now that's not the way man was originally created.

God made him in His own image, and He created him for fellowship.

And during those wonderful days in the Garden of Eden, not only did God visit him on a regular basis, but I'm thoroughly convinced man was the dwelling place of His Holy Spirit.

However, with the entrance of sin, all that changed.

The Holy Spirit departed, and the human race became **"alienated from the life of God."**

And only Christ's wonderful salvation, which cleanses us from our sin, can make us the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit once again.

How do I know that?

Because 1 Corinthians 6:19 tells us a
Christian's **"body is the temple of
the Holy Ghost."**

So then, that's one of the fundamental
differences between the believer and
the unbeliever.

Through the indwelling presence of the Holy
Spirit, the Christian is alive to
spiritual things.

However, because of **"the blindness of their
heart,"** the mind of the unbeliever is
alive to man's empty philosophies.

Or, as Ephesians 4: 17-18 has put it, "---
**that ye henceforth walk not as other
Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their
mind,**

**18: Having the understanding
darkened, being alienated from the
life of God through the ignorance**

**that is in them, because of the
blindness of their heart."**

Now what exactly does this word vanity mean when it refers to the condition of the unbeliever's mind?

Unfortunately, the meaning of the word has changed over the years, so the King James Version, although correct at the time, now needs some explanation.

No, Paul wasn't talking about pride in their appearance, as the word *vanity* might suggest.

The word he used meant something like a mirage, an illusion, something imagined but not really true.

So what Paul was really saying was human wisdom, apart from divine revelation, is full of all kinds of illusions of the mind.

For instance, in the field of religion, unregenerate man has come up with many strange and harmful beliefs, even corrupting what they call Christianity.

Christian Science teaches that death is not real, and pain is an error of the mortal mind.

Mormons believe they can become gods.

Hindus believe, depending on their performance, they will be reincarnated as a cow or a bird or a cockroach, etc.

And even men of science, with their keen intellect and so-called higher learning, have come up with some of the most bizarre theories.

For instance, totally rejecting God's Word, which says **"God created the heaven and**

the earth," they have substituted the theory of evolution.

Armed with some very fragmented evidence, and a few billion years, they are quite prepared to believe creation simply created itself.

And when you consider the magnitude and sheer perfection of God's creation, which is continually being revealed due to their increased powers of investigation, such a conclusion can only be explained as the product of darkened minds.

As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "---
the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

And most of our great thinkers categorically deny the existence of a supreme being: Einstein never wanted to believe in God. Marx was an atheist.

Darwin jettisoned the faith of his youth, and Freud hated Christianity.

Yes, regardless of the field of endeavour, unregenerate men have always walked **"in the vanity of their mind, 18: Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."** Ephesians 4:17-18.

The original word that is translated **"blindness"** in our text is more in the sense of hardness.

It indicates a dulling of the senses, as one who is under the influence of an anaesthetic.

No wonder such a heart produces a darkening
of the understanding.

And as unregenerate man continues to accept
and practice the world's morality and
philosophies, his sin increases,
undetected by a conscience that has
been rendered insensible.

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I'm sure you are familiar with the awful
mutilation of fingers and toes, etc.,
that is the most evident manifestation
of that dreaded disease of leprosy.

And yet these disfigurements are not a
direct result of the disease.

The fact is, the leper has lost his ability
to feel pain.

With this warning system eliminated,
injuries can occur undetected and
progress untreated.

And so it is--as mankind immerses himself in man's godless inventions--his conscience becomes **"seared with a hot iron."**

And with this God-given warning system put out of commission, wrong becomes right and right becomes wrong.

Such was the case with the residents of Ephesus.

Ephesians 4:19 **"Who being past feeling**
(the warning system was gone) **have given themselves over unto lasciviousness** (or lewdness) **to work all uncleanness with greediness."**

Their great temple to the goddess Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and yet, in the name of religion, this invention of darkened minds had led them down the path to gross immorality.

And that's *where* the believers in Ephesus lived.

And no doubt before their conversion, that's *how* some of them lived.

But now they were *different*.

They were new creations in Christ Jesus.

They must **"henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."**

They must not govern their lives by the beliefs, thought patterns, and codes of conduct that dominated their neighbours' lives.

As Paul reminded them in V20, you **"have not so learned Christ."**

And isn't that the case with every Christian?

Certainly our faith involves certain doctrines and codes of conduct, but the bottom line is Christ.

He is the Head, and we are His body.

Yes, Christianity is Christ.

As Paul put it to the Ephesian believers in
V21, "**If so be that ye have heard him,
and have been taught by him,** (and
through Paul's ministry they certainly
had) **as the truth is in Jesus**" --- and
isn't He the very embodiment of truth?

Yes, Jesus is the *truth* that reveals the
lie.

He is the *light* that dispels darkness.

These Ephesian believers only had to look at
Jesus to get a true perspective.

Oh, I know, Scripture doesn't cover every
situation.

There's nothing in the Bible about smoking
or taking drugs.

But in every situation, we only need to ask
ourselves this question: Is that how
I "**learned Christ**"?

So why do Christians get involved in worldly things, and why were some of these Ephesian believers, as we will discover in a moment, having a problem making a clean break?

Why?

Because they still possessed an old nature with all its evil appetites.

And that's why Paul makes the connection in Ephesians 4:21-22, **"If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."**

And that's a problem we all struggle with, isn't it?

We still possess the old nature we inherited
from Adam, and it is still **"corrupt
according to the deceitful lusts."**

And it always will be.

It can't be changed.

It must be put away, or it will drag us
down.

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In Romans 6:3-6, Paul describes the power to
put the old man away.

We covered that in our lessons on Romans,
so I won't get into great detail here.
Basically, our power to put off the old man
comes with our identification with
Christ in His death and resurrection.
Simply counting on the fact **"---- that our
old man is crucified with him, that
the body of sin might be destroyed,
that henceforth we should not serve
sin."** Romans 6:6

So, the first thing we must do is "--- **put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.**"

That's step one.

Step two is found in Ephesians 4:23 **"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."**

A better rendering of this verse is **"Being renewed in the spirit of your mind."**

The Christian's textbook is the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit is his teacher.

And truancy really isn't an option.

Yes, just as our physical frame needs food every day, so you need to be **"renewed in the spirit of your mind"** on a daily basis.

And while we're talking about the mind, there's another reason why we should put away the old man.

Satan is very aware of the importance of the mind, and he will use every opportunity to fill the minds of the unsaved with his lies.

And through our old nature, he can also exert his evil influence.

So if we want to keep him away, we must put *it* away.

Yes, it's a battle for the mind.

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And then in Ephesians 4:24, Paul takes the next step --- **"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."**

As our old man naturally gravitates toward deceitful lusts, our new nature naturally produces righteousness and true holiness.

It's just the way God created the new nature.

So then, if our new nature is in charge,
then a Christian's life will be
characterized by **"righteousness and
true holiness."**

In this case, I believe the word
"righteousness" refers to the manner
in which a Christian deals with his
fellow man.

Yes, Christianity should be synonymous with
honesty and fair dealings.

Unfortunately, that's not always the case.

A humorous, although sad story, is told of a
Christian who got up in a meeting and
said, *"I am standing in Christ on
redemption ground."*

A voice was heard from the back of the room
--- *"Don't you believe him. He's
standing in a pair of shoes I sold him
a month ago, and he hasn't paid for
them yet."*

Well, we laugh, but it really isn't funny.
A Christian should be known for his
righteous dealings.

Anything else is a reproach to the name of
Christ.

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The other characteristic that accompanies
the new nature is true holiness.

That describes our attitude towards God.
It's our inner life, the holiness of our
thoughts.

It's a heart *separated* in accordance to His
Holy Word.

Actually, "**righteousness and true holiness**"
is nothing more, and nothing less,
than real Christianity.

And those are the characteristics of the new
man.

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So then, we're to *put off* the one and *put on* the other.

It's kind of like having two suits of clothes.

And we mustn't try to put our new clothes on over top of the old ones.

We must put off **"the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts"** before we **"put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."**

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And then, as far as the Ephesian believers were concerned, Paul gets very specific about their old clothes.

Ephesians 4:25 **"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."**

Did I hear right?

Was Paul actually telling them to stop
lying?

I'm afraid he was.

And I'm afraid I've met Christians, who
under certain circumstances, would
lie.

For some of you, that must be a shock!
Like myself, even before we were Christians,
our parents strictly taught us we
should never lie.

Obviously that wasn't the case with the
Ephesian believers.

And considering the society they grew up in,
that's not too surprising.

What is surprising, and quite disappointing,
is the fact that they were not living
up to their new situation.

As Paul put it "--- **ye have not so learned
Christ.**"

And doesn't that put it in a nutshell?

They knew Christ always spoke the truth even
when it was dangerous to do so.

And not only did He speak the truth, but He
was the truth.

His whole life was truth.

And here's where we all need to make a
reality check.

Even though we might not have the same
problem some of these Ephesian
believers had, are we *living* the
truth?

Anything else is hypocrisy.

And we all know Jesus hated hypocrisy.

Matthew 23:13 **"But woe unto you, scribes
and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut
up the kingdom of heaven against men:
for ye neither go in yourselves,
neither suffer ye them that are
entering to go in."**

He hated hypocrisy because it was
responsible for leading so many
astray.

And that's exactly why we must live the
truth we profess.

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And then in verses 26-27, Paul says **"Be ye
angry, and sin not: let not the sun go
down upon your wrath:
27: Neither give place to the devil."**

Can we be angry and sin not?

Indeed, we can.

In fact, there are situations under which we
would be sinning if we weren't angry.

Yes, there is such a thing as righteous
anger, and Jesus was angry on more
than one occasion.

For instance, there was the time in the
synagogue when He healed the man with
the withered hand.

We can read about it in Mark 3:1-6 "And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

2: And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

3: And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

4: And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

5: And when he had looked round about on them with anger, (yes, anger) being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

6: And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him."

Why was Jesus angry?

Because of the hardness of their hearts.

He had tried to reason with them, to strike some chord of compassion in their hearts, but they wouldn't discuss it.

So He healed the man anyway.

Actually, we see both kinds of anger in this passage.

Jesus' righteous anger because of the hardness of their hearts, and their unrighteous anger because Jesus had done good on the Sabbath.

We must exercise the one but not the other.

When our wrath seeks revenge for some personal wrong, it becomes sinful, disruptive, even devilish.

That's why Paul admonished the Ephesian believers to --- **"let not the sun go down upon your wrath:**

Neither give place to the devil."

When anger is allowed to fester in our hearts, it becomes a platform from which the devil can do his evil work.

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For most of us, I think Paul's third admonition would be as shocking as the first.

V 28 --- **"Let him that stole steal no more."**

No, most of us don't have a problem with shoplifting or some other form of robbery.

However, even though we don't steal in the plain sense, we might have grown accustomed to some other forms of robbery.

For instance, what about calling in sick
when you're well?

That's stealing your employer's money.

And then there are those small items we use
at work.

They belong to our employer, not us.

And, are we completely honest when we file
our income tax?

Or do we pay in cash to get around the sales
tax?

Oh, I know, we can't always agree with the
way our government spends our taxes,
but that's no excuse for dishonesty.

I'm sure Jesus didn't agree with the way the
Roman government operated, but He
still told the people to **"Render
therefore unto Caesar the things which
are Caesar's; and unto God the things
that are God's."**

And then there's the whole area of so-called
business ethics.

For a Christian, there's only Christian
ethics.

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And then Paul talks about the alternative to
stealing.

I realize there are many people who are very
willing to work but are unable to find
employment.

I'm very sympathetic with their plight, and
I've been there myself.

So let me hasten to say that Paul's remarks,
and my comments, have nothing to do
with unemployment.

Apparently that wasn't a big problem in
Ephesus.

No, the problem Paul was addressing was
dishonesty, and laziness.

Ephesians 4: 28 **"Let him that stole steal
no more: but rather let him labour,
working with his hands the thing which
is good, that he may have to give to
him that needeth."**

Certainly, some people don't need to hold
down a job:

the retired, the disabled, and, of
course, those who are independently
rich.

But for most of the population, there are
only two alternatives: You can work,
or you can steal.

One way or another, your basic needs have to
be met,

and, of course, for a law-abiding
citizen, stealing isn't an option.

But can we be dishonest, even if we're
gainfully employed?

I believe you can, and I think that's the inference behind Colossians 3:22-23

"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

That's right, **"not with eyeservice."**

A Christian should do an honest day's work, and not just when the boss is *looking*.

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So then, now that we have established the fact that we must work, and we must be honest in our efforts, what kind of work should we be engaged in?

Does it really matter?

Well, yes, it does, and Paul was very specific about that when he said ----

"let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good."

It appears the Ephesian believers would be working with their hands.

Some of them might have been craftsmen, while others might have been engaged in manual labour.

And that's not really important, for there is honour in all labour.

Today, I think we give *undue* credit to white-collar and blue-collar workers.

However, even though all labour is honourable, we can't classify all work as "**good**," and that's where Paul makes the distinction.

A Christian needs to be engaged in that which benefits, not harms, his fellow man.

For instance, if a Christian in Ephesus was a silversmith, he would have to be very selective.

The real money was made by manufacturing silver shrines for Diana, but that was something he could not get involved in.

So, the bottom line for a Christian must be a good day's work spent in a good occupation.

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And then Paul takes it a step further.

Not only would honest labour keep you from being a burden to society, but you can help *others*.

As Paul puts it, "**that he may have to give to him that needeth.**"

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V 29 "**Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is**

good to the use of edifying, that it
may minister grace unto the hearers."

Jesus put His finger on it when He said "---
out of the abundance of the heart the
mouth speaketh."

So who's in charge of your heart?

Is it "**the old man, which is corrupt
according to the deceitful lusts**"?

Is your conversation marked by unkindness
and gossip, and even questionable
things?

And if you are a parent, what kind of an
effect does your conversation around
the dinner table have on your
children?

Or is it "**the new man**" who fills your mouth?
Then your words will edify those around you
and minister grace unto the hearers.

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V 30 **"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of
God, whereby ye are sealed unto the
day of redemption."**

That's the bottom line, isn't it?

Are you grieving the Holy Spirit whom Jesus
said will **"abide with you for ever"**?

He's trying to make you more like Christ.

He is grieved when the old man has his way.

So, **"put on the new man."**

And as Paul admonishes us in V 31 --- **" Let
all bitterness, and wrath, and anger,
and clamour, and evil speaking, be put
away from you, with all malice:**

**32: And be ye kind one to another,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
even as God for Christ's sake hath
forgiven you."**