



## **Lesson 8: You're Not Who You Used to Be – Walk Different**

### **Teacher's Edition**

**Overview:** Paul transitions from the corporate (group) dimension of change to the individual level. God is seeking to bring himself glory through the church, but the church is made up of individuals who need to change to be more like Christ. Paul shows how change takes place: by changing our thinking and consequently our actions as God changes our hearts.

**Purpose:** Believers should see the importance of changing the way they think and behave. They should show how their new calling in Christ teaches them a new way to live.

**Passage:** Ephesians 4:17-32

**Introduction:** What do horses mooing, ducks barking, and Christians sinning all have in common? All three are living inconsistently with their nature. God's calling in Christ (his salvation and all that comes with it) means that we ought to live a life different life than those who haven't, or as Paul put it to Christians who were living sinfully – "That is not the way you learned Christ!"

We have been emphasizing the corporate (group) nature of God's plan. God is bringing himself glory, not just through the individual lives of believers, but through what he is doing in the church – his believers gathered together. But this emphasis doesn't mean individual believers

don't matter, if anything it highlights the need of each believer to grow even more.

In verse 16, Paul had emphasized the importance of every part of Christ's body working properly so that the body could grow. In the remainder of the book, he shows what it looks like for each part to be working properly. Spiritual growth of Christ's body doesn't exclude personal holiness, it actually depends on it. We can never be what God wants us to be as a church if we are not first striving to be what God wants us to be as individuals. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and a church likewise is hurt by the failures of every member, not just the "elite" ones.

***How would you respond to someone saying, "It doesn't matter if I***

- ***don't go to church. . .***
- ***am bitter towards \_\_\_\_\_ . . .***
- ***move in with my girlfriend/boyfriend. . .***

***because I'm only hurting myself."***

So if our individual growth is crucial to the success of the church, how do we grow individually? This is the topic Paul addresses in the second half of chapter 4.

#### **I. What we looked like before salvation (vv 17-19).**

Paul continues the theme of walking that he started in 4:1 and continues throughout the rest of the book (5:2, 8, 15). Our walk, that is, our entire lifestyle, should be different from the Gentiles.

##### **A. Our minds were foolish.**

Ironically, Paul goes from talking about walking to talking about thinking. While this might seem odd, that is exactly the point. Unbelievers (and for that matter believers) do what they do because they think what they think. Whenever you evaluate someone's actions, you begin with their thoughts.

- **"Vanity of their minds"**

The Greek word for "vain" is used in the Old Testament to describe those who make idols their hope (Isaiah 44:9; Jeremiah 28:18) and the emptiness of life (Ecclesiastes 1:2,

12:8, throughout the book). It describes something that is purposeless or empty. Paul uses this word to describe the thinking of those who do not know Christ.

Because unbelievers have rejected God, their entire mindset is skewed and cannot function properly when it comes to making right moral choices. Sometimes those wrong choices seem so obviously wrong we wonder how people could make them. “Why would you bow down and worship an idol made of wood and covered in gold? Why would you burn your child to appease the wrath of a deity you made up? Why would you cheat on your spouse? Or go to drinking parties only to wake up empty and with a nasty hangover?” God describes people who continue to live the way they do, not realizing the emptiness of their lifestyle, as empty-headed.

- **“Darkened in their understanding”**

Not only are people foolish, they are darkened in their understanding. Scripture pictures spiritual insight as light and spiritual ignorance as blindness (Romans 1:21; 11:10). We use similar expressions when we say that someone is “in the dark” about something. In Romans 1:21, Paul ties together these same two ideas of “foolish thinking” and “darkened in understanding.”

- **“Ignorance that is in them”**

As we have seen elsewhere, Paul enjoys heaping up synonymous phrases and words to emphasize his point. He does the same thing here when describes the wrong thinking of the world. The point is that those who disobey God do so because they are ignorant, foolish, and empty-headed. Paul wants to make absolutely certain we get the point: wrong acts are coming from a twisted mind.

**(Illustration)** How often have you ever heard someone say to someone else (usually quite young), “Use your brain!” That was an expression I heard a lot growing up. Whether it was cutting a

vacuum cleaner cord with pruning shears, leaning against a gas stovetop until my shirt caught on fire, or any other number of dumb things, there were a lot of times growing up I made dumb decisions and would have a bewildered adult ask me, “What were you thinking?”<sup>1</sup> We understand that people do what they do because they thought what they thought. People make stupid (i.e. sinful) decisions because they think stupid thoughts. But why do they think those thoughts in the first place?

***Transition:** Ultimately, the problem wasn’t with the physical minds of those caught in ungodly lifestyles themselves. In fact, many brilliant people have made incredibly stupid decisions in their personal lives. Highly intellectual professors have lived sinful, immoral, and empty lifestyles while simple, “backward” people have lived pure and God-honoring lives.*

***So if intellectual ability doesn’t account for the wrong thinking of the world, what could?***

## **B. Our hearts were hardened.**

Paul gives the answer at the end of verse 18 – their hearts were hardened. The KJV translates this word as “blindness,” but the idea of this word is probably more likely to be “hardness.” The Greek word has the means the inability to perceive spiritual truth (cf Mark 3:5; John 12:40). ***They didn’t believe the truth of God, not because they couldn’t, but because they wouldn’t.*** It was a hardened will that led to a wrong worldview. We often think of people, especially smart people, as basically neutral. But everyone has biases and presuppositions. Everyone wants certain things to be true and doesn’t want other things to be true.

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<sup>1</sup> You are free to use my stories if you like, but if you have personal illustrations or stories you have picked up working with kids, those might work better.

***Many people believe that education will solve the world's problems. Can you think of any examples where knowing the danger of wrong failed to keep people from doing wrong?***

**(Illustration)** The end result is that these people become calloused in their sin. If you're a guitar player, a farmer, or a sailor, you know all about callouses. Doing activities like bailing hay, playing the guitar, or tying a lot of ropes can result in blisters for the person whose hands are not used to such rough activities. But over time, the blisters harden, and once delicate hands become tough. While that can be helpful if you are a budding musician or have a lot of cows to feed, when that happens in your soul it's a different story. Those who sin over and over become hardened in their sin, so that they are less and less likely to listen to the truth of God.

**C. Our desires were corrupt.**

When one rejects God, there is nothing left to live for except selfish, greedy ambitions. The word "lasciviousness" is defined by one Greek dictionary as "lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable, *self-abandonment*."<sup>2</sup> Scripture then goes on to describe them as "greedy to practice every kind of impurity." What unsaved people desire to do is totally opposed to what God would have them to do.

This can be obvious in some of the more extreme cases of our society: the sexual perverts, sadistic serial killers, and corrupt businessmen. But all of us, if we are honest, struggle with darker desires. Some have become so normalized in our culture, they are not even viewed as twisted anymore, such as lust. Even though not always acted upon, all people find themselves battling the monster within, the desire to have and do things they know is wrong.

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<sup>2</sup> A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG), ἀσέλγεια, ας, ἡ, pg. 141.

**(Illustration)** The Wilds frequently borrows the biblical image of a tree to drive home this point. Our actions are like fruit on a tree, if you don't like the fruit on the tree, you can't just pick it off and tape different fruit on. If you don't like the fruit of a tree, you've got to fix the tree! Unless the tree itself changes, it will keep producing the same fruit it has been producing. Likewise, you and I will continue to make the same choices we have been making over and over unless we are changed. **What you do won't change until who you are does.**

## **II. What salvation did for us (vv 20-24).**

Paul shifts here from describing what unbelievers look like to describing what characterizes believers. Our lives took a dramatic break from the lives of unbelievers.

### **A. Salvation taught us Christ.**

Paul states that Christians know better than to live the way the unsaved do, because they have learned better! Verse 20 says that they have "learned Christ." It's interesting to note this verse doesn't say, "learned from Christ" or "learned about Christ." The believers in Ephesus had learned Christ. Not just about him, not just what he taught, but had come to actually, personally know *him*.

Paul goes on to say that the believers in Ephesus heard about Christ, and were taught the truth about him. Christianity without a true understanding of Christ is not possible. Growth in holiness happens inside a relationship. You won't grow to be more like Jesus if you don't spend time with Jesus.

***How do we who never met Christ "learn Christ"? How do believers learn Christ? How does learning Christ help us grow in holiness?***

### **B. Salvation gave us a new nature.**

Paul goes on to describe our salvation as putting off, being renewed, and putting on. Some debate whether these are indicatives or imperatives (statements of fact or commands). In

other words, did Paul tell these believers they needed to put off and put on, or did he tell them that they already had put off and put on? The Greek is unclear, and scholars are divided. Most translations take these as commands “You have been taught... that you must put off/be renewed/put on,” in part because Paul follows this discussion up with a list of things he commands them to put off and put on. Colossians 3:9-10, which is a parallel passage, is very clearly indicatives (you have put off/have put on).

While this passage probably refers to the fact that we have been given a new nature like it does in Colossians, that new nature is seen in the practical application of putting off sin and putting on righteous behaviors. We have both died to the old man and have put on the new man (Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9-10). But we also must put to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13). ***We are dead to sin, so we must kill sin.***

***How can the Bible say we are dead to sin when we still sin so much, and when the pull to sin seems so great?***

**(Illustration)** Just as a father would say to an immature nineteen year old son, “You’re a man now, start acting like it!” the Bible comes to Christians and says “You are a new man now, start acting like it!”

The key to all of this is the renewing of our minds. In Greek, the renewal of our minds is a present verb, which means it is an ongoing activity. Whereas putting off our old selves and putting on our new selves takes place in a moment (at salvation), changing the way we think is a process that we need to constantly be engaged in. The result of all of this is that we are “recreated” into the likeness of God by showing others what his righteousness and holiness looks like.

***How does a believer renew their mind? In what ways does renewing your mind help you live the Christian life? Why is renewing the mind a step many overlook?***

### **III. What we should look like after salvation (vv 25-32).**

After exposing the wrong living of unbelievers and reminding them of what had changed and needs to change, Paul got specific. He took these principles and applied them very practically to real life issues the Ephesians were facing. He shows them patterns and behaviors that looked like the old man they used to be and showed them what they needed to do to live like the new man in Christ that they already were.

***Take some time and work through the following issues, addressing what needs to be put off, put on, and what the shift in thinking needs to be.***

- **Lying (25)**
- **Anger (26-27)**
- **Stealing (28)**
- **Speech (29-30)**
- **Bitterness (31-32)**

Noticed that all of these are once again sins committed against other people. Paul's emphasis here appears to be on how God's calling changes the way his children interact with others (especially with other believers). Paul will continue looking at how God's community should live out their new standing in Christ in the following chapters, but here he has set the pattern for what change should look like. We need to walk differently by putting off sinful practices, changing the way we think about sin, God, and ourselves, and putting on the right practices in our speech, actions, and attitudes.