

Walk in Holiness

Ephesians 4:17-24; August 27, 2017

Introduction and Context:

Last week I began my sermon with this picture of my family. Last Friday we celebrated Zoe's "Gotcha Day," the day we got her in China three years ago. I used it to highlight how much she's grown over the past three years and to lead in to this question: how do we grow as followers of Jesus?

- We become new followers of Jesus when we initially respond to the gospel. You might say we are "babies in Christ" (see 2:4-5; 10). But we're not supposed to stay babies.
- Read 4:11-14 (this is what we looked at last week):
 - Our aim in life is to become more and more like Jesus. To grow from babies and children "in Christ" to "mature" men and woman of God.
 - We grow to become like Jesus not in isolation but in community (read 4:15-16).
 - God's plan involves using you and I to help other become like Jesus as we "speak the truth in love." Scripture + Relationships + Time.
- We concluded our time together dreaming about the transformation God could bring in your life and in the lives of those you invest in. Your relationships would be different at home (marriage, kids, roommates), at work, at school and in our city. But not only will your life be changed, so will someone else's as you help others grow to maturity in Christ.

Transition: This week's sermon is part-two of what we began looking at last week. In our passage last week, we were given a big picture view and this week our passage is going to into more detail on the actual specifics of how were are transformed more and more to be like Jesus.

Read Ephesians 4:17-24

The flow of the text:

- Paul begins in verses 17-19 stating negatively how we are *not* supposed to walk and live out this Christian life and then in verses 20-24 he states the positive, how we are supposed to walk and live the Christian life.

The Point: Since you are a new creation in Jesus, walk in holiness like him.

We're going to follow Paul's argument in the text and look at this point both from the negative and the positive. Negatively, the truth is this:

I. Don't walk in impurity like nonbelievers (4:17-19).

Review the "walk" language:

- 2:1-2: You were dead...and once *walked*
- 2:10: You are a new creation, *created in Christ Jesus* to *walk* in good works.
- 4:1: *Walk* in a manner worthy...

Paul's argument is pretty clear: now that you have been "made alive" and are a new creation in Christ, the way you "walk" and live your life has a new trajectory. We follow Jesus. Paul is challenging us to not just follow our cultural values and assumptions of what is good, right and true. We're not just supposed to drift with the culture and go along with the cultural crowd. Here's four reasons why.

1. Their thinking is futile.

- Paul's description here is similar to that in Romans 1:21, 25:

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 became darkened . . . they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:21, 25 ESV)

- At the root of futile thinking is an elevation of the creature above the creator. We take the place of God and determine what is right and wrong.
 - We are being really arrogant when we do this. We are basically saying, "God, I know what's best for my life better than you do."
- Your mind is a powerful thing and what you set your mind on sets the trajectory of your entire life. What you think and believe eventually plays itself out in how you act.
- "And an obstinate rejection of the truth of God is the beginning of the terrible downward path of evil" (Peter O'Brien, 322).

2. Their understanding is darkened.

- As far as their understanding, they exist in darkness. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:2).

3. They are alienated from the life of God.

- God's most important covenant promises was that he would give his people life (cf. Deut. 30:15-2).
 - *They are alienated because of ignorance that is within them.*
 - The result of a darkened understanding is an ignorance of reality.
 - I can know 10,000 facts but if I don't know how they fit into the big picture, they mean nothing (cf. Col. 1:16).
 - *They are alienated because their hearts are hardened.*
 - They are like a stone toward all that is spiritual. It does not move them, attract them, or delight them.

4. They are callous and given to unrestrained sensuality.

- Finally these previous steps have resulted in outward behavior
- Callous: they have lost all sensitivity and no longer feel shame or embarrassment.
- Unrestrained: there were no restraints holding back their plunge into all kinds of

degrading activities. They had a continual greed and lust for more and more impurity.

- Sensuality:
 - This word refers to twisted behavior that is often of a sexual nature and is done in defiance of God (cf. Gal. 5:19; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rom. 13:13).
- Doesn't this describe our culture! People have become their own gods.
- If we throw out God we are only left to a) our own thinking and b) our own desires.

Paul is calling us to not look to culture to learn how God wants us to conduct ourselves but to look to Jesus.

II. Walk in holiness like Jesus (4:20-24).

But (stark contrast), that is not the way you learned Christ (4:20-21).

- Paul evokes the image of a school.
- You initially responded to Christ (Eph. 1:13) and you are receiving ongoing instruction by him. You haven't just learned about him though, you have developed a personal and living relationship with him and are being shaped by his teaching.

If I'm not supposed to walk in *impurity* as the Gentiles and nonbelievers walk, then how am I supposed to walk? Paul answers that question with three infinitives. We are to walk in *holiness* by...

1. Putting off the old self (4:22).

- Paul is using a "clothes" analogy to describe the process of transformation in the Christian life. You put off or take off certain clothes and dress yourself or put on other clothes.
- In one sense, the old self has already been put off when you were born again (cf. Col. 3:5-9).
- But, in a very real sense, we are still commanded to put off the old self. We are to become in practice what has been declared to be true of you in Christ. We are to live consistent with our new identity.
- Paul gives two reasons for why we should put off the old self.
 - First of all, the old self belongs to my former manner of life. I am no longer dead anymore (cf. 2:3). I have been made alive and I am now seated in the heavenly places with Christ (2:4-7).
 - Second, the old self is corrupt by deceitful desires.
 - Deceitful desires are desires for things that God has said are not good, right and true. These desires deceive us because they promise to give life, joy and satisfaction, things only God can provide.
 - These deceitful desires are a reflection of how sin has distorted me, not how God has made me.
 - If you don't *put off* sin, then you'll just spiral into the moral disintegration the Paul just described in 4:17-19.
- What does "putting off" the old self look like?

- It's a commitment to turn from all sin, anything that is contrary to God's will for our lives. We can't just put off certain sins.
- It must be the continual practice of our lives. You can't be passive to sin.
 - "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you" (John Owen).
 - "Every sin we commit reinforces the habit of sinning and makes it easier to sin" (Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Holiness*, 132).
- The first step in changing to become more like Jesus is by putting off sin.
 - Acknowledge that what you are doing is wrong.
 - Ask God for forgiveness and strength to change.
 - Turn from your sin: make the kind of lifestyle changes that will get you out of the path where you've gotten into trouble. The call to put off sin is a call into a radical amputation of evil.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30 ESV)

2. Renewing our minds (4:23)

- If the "futility of the mind" is the starting point for the moral degradation of the Gentiles then the constant "renewal of the mind" must be a crucial piece to a changed and holy life.
- This call to renewal is the same challenge in Romans 12:2:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 ESV)

- This is a call to combat your "deceitful desires" by renewing your minds with the truth of God's Word. The Word of God is an objective reality teaching us what is good, right and true. It teaches us what we should put off and put on (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Key to renewing your mind isn't just the hearing and/or reading of God's Word, but believing it.
 - Ex. Sensuality (Read Eph. 5:3-8). Will you believe that God's point of view is good, right and true. That the God who invites us into what is good also warns us of what is bad.
 - "Sex is like fire. When it blazes in the fireplace, a good fire warms and brightens the room, enhancing joy and companionship. But when fires ignite in the wrong places, the house burns down" (David Powlison).
 - When we hear and believe what God says about sexuality, you will seek to protect them and not lust after them. You'll treat others in a familial way: as brothers or sisters, mothers or fathers, sons or daughters.

3. Putting on the new self (4:24).

- If you are in Christ, then you are a new creation. You have been recreated in the image of God. You are to be righteous as he is righteous and holy as he is holy.
- God's plan is not just to save us from our sins and give us eternal life, he wants us to recover and pursue his original design, to be like Jesus.
- We can't just put off sin, we must also, simultaneously, put on Christ.
 - Illustration (from David Powlison): Think of your soul as room. When sin reigns in your life, that room is full of dark thoughts, dark actions and dark and deceptive people. There are two ways to fight the darkness to get it out of the room.
 - The first way is to cast it out, fight it, resist, and reject it. In other words, to put it off, to say no to evil.
 - The second way is to fill the room with light. As you fill your soul with Christ-like thoughts and action, with brothers and sisters in Christ who speak the truth in love then there's less room for darkness. In other words, when you renew your minds and let Christ transform your room, he will teach you to say no to what is wrong and yes to what is good, right and true.
- The call to "put on" the new self is a call to obey the commands of Christ and follow his example both in our attitudes and our actions (cf. Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:25-5:2; Col. 3:12-15).

Conclusion:

- Our goal and aim is to become like Jesus. This is a life-long process that won't be complete until we see him face to face. In our own journey and in our ministry to others, we must keep this "lifetime" journey as our goal even as we respond to the urgency of the choices we make every single day.
- We cannot predict the rate of sanctification, becoming like Jesus. Sometimes we're leaping like gazelles and at other times we're walking, trudging or even crawling. What's important is that we're facing the right direction.