

**Walk in Holiness**  
*Ephesians 4:17-24*

**Introduction:** I got to experience something this past week that I had never done before. This past Monday on Patriots Day, I went with some friends to the Red Sox game and afterwards we cheered on runners in the Boston Marathon from Kenmore Square, the one-mile-to-go marker. You know what impressed me the most? The resolve in these athletes, even at the 25-mile mark, to finish the task at hand. There were people excited, running with no shows on and even runners running injured (share the story of Maickal Melamed). As I reflected on this resolve, I thought about their training plan. If I was preparing to run the Boston Marathon, I would study, learn from and imitate runners who have excelled in running marathons. In our text today, Paul returns to the walk analogy and exhorts us negatively, how we're not supposed to walk, and then positively, how we should walk now that we've come to know Christ. He calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus and learn from him and imitate him by walking in holiness.

**Read Ephesians 4:17-24**

**I. You are no longer dead like the Gentiles; so don't walk in impurity (4:17-19).**

- Paul wants to make it extremely clear that our lives must stand in sharp contrast to those who do not know Christ. After exhorting us to not walk as the Gentiles walk, he proceeds to explain why. One's inner thinking has a powerful effect on one's external actions. Paul describes how the Gentile's impure lifestyle originates and begins with in a "futile" way of thinking.

Paul gives four reasons why we should not walk like the Gentiles who are not followers of Christ:

**1. Their thinking is futile.**

- a. Paul's description here is similar to that in Romans 1:19-21, 25:

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his individual attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 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 . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

- b. 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.
  - i. 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."
- c. "The worshipful acknowledgement of the one God is foundational to all useful knowledge. Without this foundation, Gentile knowledge about how to live one's life is deeply flawed" (Frank Thielman, 296-97).
- d. Your mind is a powerful thing and what you set your mind on sets the trajectory of your entire life. What you think eventually plays itself out in how you act.

- e. “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**

- a. 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).
- b. Their existence is aimless because they are ignorant of the truth.

**3. They are alienated from the life of God.**

- a. God’s most important covenant promises was that he would give his people life (cf. Deut. 30:15-2).
- b. *They are alienated because of ignorance that is within them.*
  - i. The result of a darkened understanding is an ignorance of reality.
  - ii. I can know 10,000 facts but if I don’t know how they fit into the big picture, they mean nothing.
  - iii. Col. 1:16 – All things were created through Christ and for Christ.
- c. *They are alienated because their hearts are hardened.*
  - i. 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 have given themselves to unrestrained sensuality.**

- a. Finally these previous steps have resulted in outward behavior
- b. Callous: they have lost all sensitivity and no longer feel shame or embarrassment.
  - i. “Those who engage in it indulge a selfish desire to assert one’s absolute right to pleasure, no matter what anyone else might think of it, and in flagrant rebellion against the law” (Frank Thielman).
- c. 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.
- d. Sensuality:
  - i. 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).
- e. Doesn’t this describe our culture! People have become their own gods.
- f. 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 Christ.

**II. You are a new creation in Christ, so walk in holiness (4:20-24).**

- But (stark contrast), that is not the way you learned Christ.
  - 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.
  - “Learning Christ means welcoming him as a living person and being shaped by his teaching” (O’Brien, 324).

Paul then sets Christian teaching in contrast to the Gentile worldview with three infinitives.

- You are to put off your old self, to renew your mind, and to put on the new self.

### **1. Walk in holiness by putting off the old self.**

- a. 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.
- b. Was this transformation something that had already happened to a believer or something that should happen? In other words, is Paul describing what has already happened or commanding them to do these things?
  - i. Colossians
    - “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you . . . But now you must put them all away” (Col. 3:5, 8).
    - “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices” (Col. 3:9).
  - ii. In one sense, the old self has already been put off when you were born again.
  - iii. In another very real sense, we are still commanded to put off the old self.
  - iv. 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.
- c. Why are we to put off the old self?
  - i. 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).
  - ii. Second, the old self is corrupt by deceitful desires.
    - How do sinful desires deceive us? They promise to give life, joy and satisfaction, things only God can provide.
    - We are to put them off because in the end they do not satisfy us.

### **Sidebar on Sexual Sins and Deceitful Desires:**

- I want to take a few minutes to instruct you and help you think rightly about sexual sins because these kinds of sins are rampant in our culture today, even among believers.
- My viewpoint: I don’t stand here as one who is perfect. I’m not Jesus. In fact, I stand here as one who has previously indulged in sinful desires, being addicted to pornography for many years of my life from high school to college. I am a sinner saved by grace pursuing holiness.
- God’s plan for sex: he is opposed to all sexuality activity outside of heterosexual marriage.
- Let make one thing absolutely clear. If you are gay, you are welcome at RHC. You are welcome just like we welcome the heterosexual couple who is living together and having sex before marriage. God is not just opposed to homosexuality, he’s opposed to all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. All of us are sinners and in desperate need of God’s grace. We call everyone to walk in holiness.
  - Sex outside of marriage (before marriage, adultery, pornography):
    - We both have desires for each other and love each other and so it’s ok for us to engage in sexual immorality.

- Homosexuality
  - I have desires of same sex attraction so homosexuality must be ok.
- Sam Allberry, who has written a great short book called, *Is God Anti-Gay?* says, “All of us have desires that are warped as a result of our fallen nature. Desires for things God has forbidden are a reflection of how sin has distorted me, not how God has made me” (Allberry, 30).
- The gospel helps us to see our own desires in a different light. Allberry later says, “We should expect a number of Christians to experience forms of same-sex attraction. We live in a fallen world. . . . What marks us out as Christian is not that we never experience such things, but how we respond to them when we do” (Allberry, 41).
- d. How are we supposed to respond to them? This is how you learned Christ – to put off sin; it is NOT an option. The reason you are to “put off” the old self is because the old way of life could only result in personal disintegration, similar to what Paul described of the Gentiles in 4:17-19.
  - i. Jesus didn’t call us to just put off certain sins. He calls us to put off all sin.
    - 1. “No one can pursue holiness who is not prepared to obey God in every area of his life” (Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Holiness*, 138).
  - ii. This must be the continual practice of our lives if we are to grow into maturity in Christ.
    - 1. “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you” (John Owen).
    - 2. “Every sin we commit reinforces the habit of sinning and makes it easier to sin” (Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Holiness*, 132).

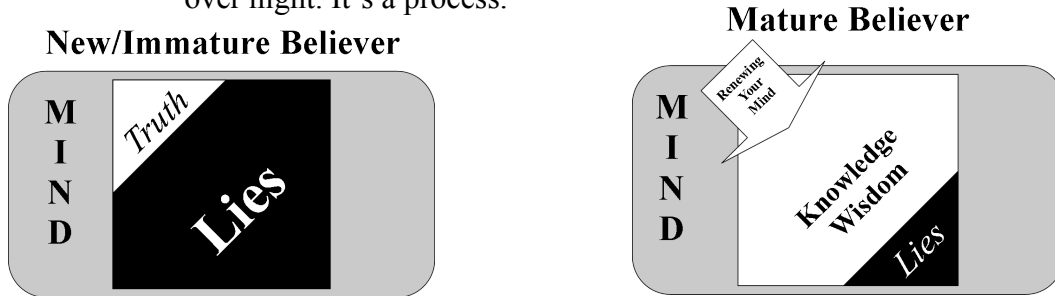
**Transition: How do you know if you are being deceived by sinful desires?**

**2. Walk in holiness by renewing your mind (4:23)**

- a. How do I know what practices, emotions, and attitudes that I’m supposed to put off and then later we’ll see, put on?
- b. We need some objective and reliable reality to renew our minds and teach us what is a good desire and what is a bad and sinful desire. What is a practice of the old self and what is a practice of the new self.
- c. This is similar to Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”
  - i. Don’t follow the world. Don’t walk like the Gentiles walk. You need objective truth about how to live this life.
- d. Why must our minds be renewed by the Word of God?
  - i. We believe that the Bible is the true, inerrant, infallible and authoritative source of all truth. It will never lead me astray. I can always trust it.
  - ii. My desires may deceive me. My mind is limited in knowledge. But God knows all things and wants what is best and good for my life.
- e. In contrast to the darkened Gentiles whose debased mind led to sin; here the renewal of the mind through the Word of God leads to holiness.
  - i. “If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds” (O’Brien quoting John Stott, 331).

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- f. Renewal of the mind is a process (pictures of the mind: new and mature believer)
  - i. ILLS: your mind is like a computer hard drive. When you come to faith in Christ, you no longer pay the penalty for your past, present, or future sin but your hard drive is not wiped clean. The process of sanctification is re-programming of your hard drive (your mind) and this doesn't take place over night. It's a process.



- ii. The more my mind is renewed, the more I can trust my desires (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1). This is also where Christian community around me (those with renewed minds) provides another objective voice to help me discern right and wrong.
- g. What is one step you will take this week to renew your mind?

### 3. Walk in holiness by putting on the new self.

- a. 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.
- b. 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 (reference 3 Circles). What does his original design look like? Jesus.
  - i. We are to grow to mature manhood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
  - ii. Jesus is the standard that we use to measure our holiness.
  - iii. “Let us never measure our religion by that of others, and think we are doing enough if we have gone beyond our neighbors” (J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*).
  - iv. We should be obeying the commands of Christ but also imitating his life and following his example. We should be putting on both actions and attitudes (Col. 3:12-15; Gal. 5:22-23).
- c. We can't just put off sin, we must also, simultaneously, put on Christ.
  - i. Some focus on putting off but give little attention to what they are putting on. These people equate godliness with a defined list of “don'ts”.
  - ii. Some put on love, compassion, and kindness and neglect putting off sinful ways.

**The Point: Since God has re-created you in Christ to be holy like him, walk in holiness.**

- How will you run? Set your eyes on the holiness of Christ and run with great resolve.