



THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Walking Worthy of our Calling, part 2

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This time in redemptive history is characterized by spiritual warfare. Paul has made this point throughout Ephesians. For example, in Ephesians 1:21, we learn that Jesus has been exalted over every force in the universe. In 2:1-3, we learned that the Ephesians once following the devil, but now they are children God. Paul further told us in Ephesians 3:10 that God's purpose in uniting all things in Christ was to display his wisdom in the church to the angels and the demons. In Ephesians 4:7-10, we learn that Jesus is victorious over sin, the devil and death, and has given us gifts. Finally, in Ephesians 6:12, Paul tells us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against cosmic powers. Right now, we live amid a war.



We who have trusted in Jesus and have turned from our sins have a part to play in this war. Truly, we are saved by God's glorious grace in Christ through faith; salvation is not our doing (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet, true saving faith transforms us to desire to walk worthy of our calling.

Last week, Paul explained that walking worthy of our calling compelled us to prize unity. This week, in Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul describes that walking worthy of our calling entails walking in holiness.

Let's investigate these truths together.

DO NOT WALK LIKE THE GENTILES (EPHESIANS 4:17-19)

“*17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*



The gospel demands that the Ephesians live completely differently. Their former lifestyle is the old man, and that man has died. Paul describes their old lifestyle as futile, darkened, far from God, and grounded in ignorance because of the hardness of their hearts (17-19).

The image of a hard heart is truly terrifying. This image pictures a stubborn refusal to follow Christ. Jesus identified the religious elite of his day as having hard hearts (Mark 3:5). Likewise, Moses identifies the Pharaoh of the exodus as having a hard heart. The religious elite and Pharaoh were both hostile to God because of their sin. The Ephesians, before coming to Christ, we're like the religious elite and Pharaoh, their hearts were hard. Church family, our hearts were in the same dreadful state before coming to Christ. Sin hardens hearts, and we have all sinned.

The Gentiles' hardness of hearts has caused extensive damage. Their hard heart has caused them to be ignorant of the things of God (18). They do not know how to please God because they do not want to please God. As a result, the Gentiles have been and continue to be far from God (18). Then, this distance from God leads to greater tragedy. Their thoughts are characterized by darkness, and their minds are characterized by futility (17-18). Think of the images here Church family. Futility is the idea of vanity; something that fades quickly. A



shadow is futile. This is how Paul is describing every non-Christian's mind. Moreover, darkness causes people to stumble and it makes people hostile to the light. This is evident anytime a young child wakes you up by turning on the light at 5:00 am, and John 3 tells us that we once walked in darkness and then the light shone on us. What is our response to light shining on us according to John? We hated the light (John 3:20), and let's not forget who the light is in John – Jesus (John 1:9-13)! These are not good images, but terrifying ones, and this is how Paul chose to describe the Ephesians' prior lifestyle.

Paul further describes the utter selfishness of the former life in verse 19. He describes the former life as characterized by sensuality, greed, and all kinds of impurity. Each of these nouns indicates the desire to satisfy self, not God and not others, in any way their appetites lead. This was the Ephesians' former self, and this was our former life.

Now, Paul has already explained emphatically our former reality of being outside of Christ with all of its horrors and our new reality of being in Christ with all of its blessings; yet, Paul is compelled to bring up these truths again. Why? These truths that we were once in a horrific state but are now in a blessed state transform us. They do not merely inform us – although they do that – they transform us. At this point in the passage, the message is this – live differently than you did before coming to Christ!

WE LEARNED CHRIST (EPHESIANS 4:20-24)

“*20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!*
— *21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self,[a] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*”

Paul has a specific reason in mind when he calls the church to live differently. Paul says, “But that is not the way you learned Christ (20)!” The reason is Christ and what we learned about him. What has the power to transform our darkened minds into spheres of immense light? What has the power to take minds set on fleeting shadows on set them on the permanent rock? The answer is Christ. Hearing about Christ and being taught about Christ transforms us to be like Christ.

Church family, my response to verse 21 is mixed! On the one hand, I rejoice since I have heard about Christ and been taught about him. I know Jesus and have experienced his incredible mercy despite myself. On

the other hand, I mourn since billions of people have never heard the name of Jesus before. Right now, there are roughly 3 billion people on this planet who have no idea who Jesus is. Therefore, they still walk in darkness and in the futility of their minds. They still, even now, 2000 years after Jesus died on the cross, have no idea that the God of this universe came to this earth to live the life they were called to live and then to die their death. They have no idea that they can be brought near to God as his children. They have never heard; they have never been taught. Church family, this must end. Right now, your church is thinking about creative ways for us to take the gospel to those who have never heard. This week, I would ask that you contemplate the realities of the unreached and ask God how he will use you for their joy.

Church, the Ephesians have heard about Jesus and were taught about him. What did they learn exactly? Paul describes this in verse 22-24. They learned 1) to put off the old self, 2) to be renewed in their minds, and 3) to put on the new self.

1) We learned to put off the old self (22). This is what we did when we came to know the Lord. The old self was taken off. Paul describes that this old self was corrupt



because of deceitful desires. Remember, before coming to know the Lord, the Ephesians desired to satisfy themselves and this desire corrupted them (19). Church, we live in a society that tells us that the pathway to happiness is indulging yourself. This is an epidemic. Yet, this is not the pathway to happiness according to Ephesians; rather, that is the pathway to corruption. We are to put off the pursuit of gratifying self.

2) We were taught to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (23). This is an ongoing process; God continually renews our mind by teaching us about Christ! As the Spirit continually reminds us about Jesus, how he served others, not himself, we are renewed. When we gaze on Christ, the one who humbled himself by taking on flesh and then died a sinners' death, our mind is renewed not to crave the selfish pursuit of the old self, but to deeply desire to walk in holiness.

3) We learned to put on the new self (24). Church family, when God saved us, we put on the new self which is a new creation. Paul describes the new man as in "righteousness and holiness of truth." Unlike the former life that is characterized by futility, darkness, and ignorance, our new life is characterized by beautiful things – true righteousness and holiness.



Church family, Paul is encouraging the Ephesians about their identity in Christ. They have put off the old man, are being renewed daily, and have put on the new man. Thus, the Ephesians should walk in holiness! This is what they learned.

WALK AS THOSE WHO HAVE LEARNED CHRIST (EPHESIANS 4:25-32)

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25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



Finally, in verses 25-32, Paul explains in detail what it looks like to walk in holiness. Before we look into the specifics, notice that Paul does not merely tell us what “to take off” but what “to put on.” In other words, walking in holiness means we stop walking as Gentiles, and we walk as we have learned Christ – we stop the old lifestyle, and we begin a new one. To simply stop the old lifestyle is not enough; we must also put on the new.

First, since we have put away falsehood, we are to speak the truth to one another. Interestingly, Paul does not say, “Put away falsehood;” rather, he says “having put away falsehood.” Church this is something every Christian has done. Remember what we learned about Christ in verse 22? We took off the old man when we came to know Jesus! Notice Paul uses the same verb here to draw our attention to an important point – the old life is characterized by falsehood and the new life is characterized by truth.

Church family, Paul has already emphasized the need to speak the truth in 4:15; there is explained that speaking the truth is integral to our maturity. Here is tells us that speaking the truth is integral to our identity. We see this in two places. 1) Our new self is described as true (24) while the old self is described as corrupt (22). 2) In verse 25, Paul tells us that that “we are members one of another.” The image Paul uses here is of a body.



He uses this image to indicate how much we depend on one another. Our identity demands speaking the truth church family since we all depend on one another.

Second, our anger should not lead to sin. Anger is often sinful since we are often angry at people because of how they have “inconvenienced us.” However, there is a “righteous anger.” When sin causes us to be angry and zealous for God, then we are experiencing righteous anger. Jesus experienced this in the Temple before his crucifixion. God himself experiences this toward sinners who do not repent. We often experience unrighteous anger.

Nonetheless, when we do get angry, Paul instructs us not to sin. Sinful anger expresses itself in two ways: explosion – fits of rage, cursing, yelling, and hitting or passive aggression. Passive aggression withdrawing from someone to hurt them. We call this the “silent treatment” or the “cold shoulder.” At its core this is anger. Neither expression of anger – explosion or passive aggression – fits the Christian life. If we do not forsake these tactics, we give a place to the devil. Think of how horrific this is. By walking according to the old self, you give a place to the devil. In other words, he has a spot to work destruction and lies. It is no mistake, church family, that when you are angry



sinfully, you begin to speak lies and believe lies. Soon you will destroy the relationship with the one whom you are angry at. This is the work of the devil, and this is the work of the who practices explosive anger and passive aggression.

Third, do not steal but work and be generous. When a child steals something, the answer is not merely to tell them to stop. The answer is to teach them how to work hard, and then, teach them to be generous. The solution is the same for an adult who steals. The thief must put off stealing and put on hard work and generosity.

Fourth, we must replace corrupting talk with speech that builds one another up. Paul has described our Christian community as a building, a building where God dwells (Ephesians 2:19-21), and here, Paul explains that our words have the ability either to tear down or to build up the church. Our words are powerful. Thus, the old proverb that sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me, is a lie. Words can tear down the very building that the Spirit is building. Think about that! Words that tear down are rebellion against the Spirit.



This is why Paul says in the next verse “do not grieve the Holy Spirit” (30). Let’s just slow down for a moment. You and I can grieve God. We learn about this in the OT, for example. God grieves over the sin of humanity before the flood and God grieves over Saul’s kingship. Now, we learn, that we too can grieve God. Observe with me that you cannot grieve a mere force. Take Star Wars as an example. The force is not a person and thus the concept of someone grieving is never mentioned. The Holy Spirit is not a force; he is a person who can be grieved.

And we can grieve him. This reality must, it absolutely must, motivate us to use our words to build one another up. Listen, we must be careful with our words, so careful. Our words can tear down the work of the Spirit and in so doing, grieve him. If we are a church that loves God, we will take special care that our words build one another up and not tear one another down. Let’s banish the demonic proverb about sticks and stones from our vocabulary!

Fifth, we are to put off bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and all kinds of evil. The nouns used here communicates a dreadful reality. The idea here is that the old self was characterized by bitterness of heart that leads to angry thoughts and actions. Specifically,



the old self was prone to yelling untrue words about others. This person is prone to all kinds of evil; in other words, there is an endless list of evils near this person. This is not the way we learned Christ.

Rather, we are to replace all of this with kindness which Paul describes as having a tender heart and expressing forgiveness. Our tendencies toward one another should be tenderness, not anger. Even when a brother or sister sins against us, our reply should be forgiveness, not evil. Church family let's take serious what Paul tells us here. He says that we should forgive "just as" God has forgiven us in Christ. Thus, again, the gospel is the basis for our Christian life. The gospel is the heartbeat of the Christian life that motivates praise (1:3-14), prayer (1:15-23), and good works (2:8-10). Those good works are being discussed here. We must forgive for we have been forgiven.

Church family notice that the nature of our forgiveness should be "as" God's forgiveness. That means our forgiveness should not be less than God's. How has God forgiven us? He has removed our sin never to hold it against us again. This is how we must forgive. Church family, is this how you have forgiven? Or do you remind yourself of how others have sinned against you? Do you remind others often of how they have sinned against



you? Often, if we are reminding ourselves of the sins of others, we are working ourselves up against them. We are telling ourselves that they still deserve punishment for how they hurt us. This is not how God has forgiven us. God no longer punishes us for our sins so we should no longer punish others.



CONCLUSION

Oh, church, I want you to take a few minutes now, and pray about these sins. I want you to think about how you are prone to put on the old self, rather than the new self. I want you to confess anything that you may need to confess and to pray for grace that you may receive help to walk in holiness. Remember church, we have put on the new self. Therefore, let's walk in holiness for the glory of God!



LET'S PRAY

God help us to walk in holiness this week. Let our love for you motivate us to walk in a way that honors you and demonstrates to the world that you are God. Transform us now we pray, in Jesus name, we pray, Amen