

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

Paul has talked a lot about what it means to be remade – to belong to a body of believers that have been made new. He has talked about grace, about mercy, about unity, all around the *mystery* that has now been revealed. Up until now, he has focused on what it means to belong to a body of believers that is striving to be whole in Christ.

But what about you as an individual? Does this gift of grace affect that?

I hope so!

And indeed, it does.

Paul now shifts from our work as a body, to what the gospel means to us as individuals, us in our daily comings and goings. In how we relate to others. In doing so, he addresses how we *ought not* to behave and how we *ought* to behave.

Yes, there are “rules” we must seek to abide by as Christians, but by no means do these rules don’t *make* us Christian...only God makes us Christian – by grace, through faith, as a gift as we read in Ephesians 2:1-10. These rules are for our flourishing, to set us apart, to show us how to reflect Jesus to the world, not to put us in a box or keep us put down.

So, what does Paul have to say about how we are *not* to behave?

Let’s find out...

1. In verse 17, Paul gives a command to us.
 - a. How do you know it is a command?
 - b. How does make it clear that the command he is giving is binding?
 - c. What command does he give?
 - d. What does it mean to “walk” here?
 - e. Define *futility*
 - f. How do you picture someone who is “futile” in their mind?
 - g. Who are the Gentiles? Why does God want Hos people to be different?
2. In verse 18, Paul describes what this looks like
 - a. What is the root cause of this futility? (Read Ezekiel 11:17-21; Romans 2:1-5)
 - b. What does Paul say this leads to here? (Reread Ephesians 2:12)
 - c. Do you know people who have what you would consider a “hard heart”? Who or what are they hard towards? How does that make them behave around others?
 - d. Is your heart sometimes “hard” towards something? How can/do you rectify that?
3. In verse 19, Paul continues with the effects of this state
 - a. Define *callous*
 - b. What (or who) are they *callous* towards?
 - c. Paul uses the phrase “given themselves up”, does this imply a sort of “victim” mentality or does this imply a willful choice?
 - d. Read the following passages. What can you do to avoid these kinds of things?
 - i. Romans 1:24-28
 - ii. Hebrews 10:26-31

- iii. 1 Timothy 4:1-5
 - e. What have they given themselves up to? In what ways have you sometimes “given yourselves up” to similar things?
 - f. Paul also uses the phrase “greedy to practice”, again, what does this imply about their sin?
- 4. Then in verses 20 and 21, Paul begins addressing them
 - a. Notice what Paul says...he does not say “learned *about* Christ”, he says “learned Christ”. What does this say about our relationship with Jesus?
 - b. When Paul says “but that is not the way you learned Christ” he is telling them something about how they learned Christ. Do you remember how Paul would know this?
 - c. Paul sort of pokes them a little when he starts with the word “assuming...” in verse 21. How could what he writes be considered a sort of ribbing? Why would he do that?
 - d. Where does Paul say truth lies?
 - e. Do you need to sometimes be reminded about what you have been taught or what you know?
 - i. Read Colossians 2:6-8
 - f. How can that help you in your daily walk?
- 5. In verse 22, Paul begins to remind them of a few things specifically that they were taught
 - a. What is the first thing Paul tells them to do?
 - i. Colossians 2:9-13
 - ii. Colossians 3:5-11
 - b. What is “the old self”? In what ways is your “old self” still hanging around?
 - c. Define *corrupt* and *deceitful*
 - i. What does Paul say is the cause of this corruption?
 - ii. You may have heard the idea that as long as you don’t actually do something sinful, that desiring it is not sinful. What does verse 22 have to say about that?
- 6. In verses 23 and 24 Paul gives us the solution to this corruption
 - a. What is this solution?
 - i. Read Romans 12:1-2
 - b. Who renews us?
 - i. Read Romans 8:27-29
 - c. What are we to put on?
 - i. In contrast to the *old* self, what is this *new* self?
 - ii. Read Galatians 2:17-21
 - d. Who is this “new self” made to look like?
 - e. How is this “new self” made?
 - i. Define *righteousness* and *holiness*
 - f. What implications does this have for how you are to live?
- 7. In this passage, Paul has talked a lot about what we are NOT to do, and he has given us the reason we can do what we are supposed to do.
 - a. Given that the next passage is about what we are supposed to do, why do you think Paul ends this passage the way he does?
- 8. Paul has talked a lot about “the old self” and being enslaved to sin.
 - a. Is sin simply “doing bad things” or is there more to it?
 - b. What is the root of sin?
 - c. Can we simply choose not to stop sinning?
 - d. Why or why not?
- 9. How many times does Paul reference Jesus in this passage?

In this section of Ephesians, Paul has gotten pretty practical and has shown us how we used to be, and how we are now supposed to be. He begins this section by testifying in the Lord, and ends with being created after God's likeness – it must be important then to realize that without Jesus, we can't even begin to aspire to the expectations Paul lays on us!

When we think that we are doing well because "I haven't killed anyone", we set the bar very low indeed! Even when we say "I thought about it, but didn't actually do it, so I'm OK", we set the bar pretty much just as low.

Matthew 5:21–30 (21) *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* **(22)** *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (23) So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (25) Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. (26) Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (27) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* **(28)** *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (29) 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. (30) 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. (ESV)*

Jesus said that desiring evil or thinking evil is just as bad as committing evil. Why?

Because desiring things that are against God is just as sinful as doing things that are against God.

Sin starts with a willful decision to do something that is wrong, or to desire something that is wrong. Our wills are not neutral, if they were, we could never choose anything. Because of this cursed creation, our wills are bent towards sin, and without Jesus working in us, we would never choose righteousness. But, because of Jesus' work in us, we are "new creations" who can desire righteousness.

You might have heard me say something about "total depravity", and this is what I am referring to – not that we are as evil as we could be, but that we are so radically corrupted that sin permeates every part of our being, even our wills, such that without Jesus' work in us, we are utterly incapable of seeing any reason to turn from the sin we love to the God we hate.

That is what "the Gentiles" are.

But it is not what children of God are.

So, as Paul commands, we are not to be like them. At all.

We are to walk in the light as He is in the light.

And we can only do that with His help.