Ephesians 4

- In our previous study, Paul asked the believers in Ephesus not to walk as they once did when they lived as unbelievers
  - Paul uses the metaphor of a journey by foot, a “walk,” to represent the course of an earthly life
    - In vs.17-19 Paul described the walk of an unbeliever from God’s point of view
    - “Gentiles,” Paul called unbelievers, walk in futility of mind
    - Their thinking is vain, futile
    - Because they assume they understand life’s purpose and meaning, but they walk in the dark
  - The world chases wrong things in wrong ways out of ignorance, and after all is said and done, they just return to dust
    - Paul said their minds are darkened in their understanding of truth
    - Which is a way of describing the spiritual blindness that all people possess at birth, which prevents them from knowing God
    - They are excluded from eternal life, because of their blindness
    - And over the course of their lives, their conscience becomes increasingly callous, increasingly greedy for sensuality in all forms
  - Paul moved his audience through this progression to make a point of how thinking drives behavior
    - The world’s ignorance of God and their callous hearts explains their wanton life of sin
    - An unbeliever’s mind is trapped by a perspective; a view of self and the world that justifies pursuing a lifestyle of greed, violence, lust and hatred
    - They walk according to what they know
    - Unless God intervenes to bring a person to a knowledge of the truth, they will remain in the darkness

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• On the other hand, a person who has received the truth by means of the Spirit gains an understanding of God that can transform their walk of life
  o Which is where Paul goes next…speaking of how believers should live

  Eph. 4:20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,
  Eph. 4:21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,
  Eph. 4:22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
  Eph. 4:23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
  Eph. 4:24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

• Paul opens saying the church did not learn Christ “in this way”
  o He’s speaking of the way the unbelieving learn their walk of life
    • Unbelievers walk by stumbling in spiritual darkness
    • They learn their walk according to the flesh, which drives them from one lustful desire to another
    • They have no spiritual compass, so the flesh rules
    • And this was our walk prior to faith too
  o But now Paul says you have a new walk, a walk with Christ, but you and I don’t learn our walk in the same way that unbelievers learn their walk
    • We don’t learn to walk with Christ by paying attention to the desires of the flesh
    • Our direction in life comes from the spirit
    • Yet some Christians fail to make this leap…they continue to walk according to what their flesh wants
    • The Bible has a term for a Christian who walks in Christ the same way they walked prior to faith: a carnal Christian
  o The word carnal literally means flesh
    • It’s the name the Bible gives to a believer who charts their path in life by paying attention to the desires of the flesh
    • Certainly all of us experience a degree of carnality
• All of us follow after the desires of our flesh from time to time
• And none of us are free of the temptations the flesh brings
  o But the question Paul is asking the church this morning is, are we letting our flesh drive our path in life?
    • Is carnality the rule or the exception?
    • Are we moving toward a new path, growing in a closer walk with Christ
    • Or are we trying to learn Christ the way we learned our prior life?
• Paul says we do not learn Christ the way the world learns, that is, with our flesh leading the way
  o We learn Christ by the spirit as a matter of God’s grace
    • And notice Paul didn’t say learn Christianity or learn obedience or learn piety
    • He said learn Christ, because we’re talking about a walk of knowing Him Who dwells in us
    • Knowing His character, His love, His mercy, His expectations, His values, His call on our lives
  o A believer’s call is to know Christ fully, which is a lifelong process
    • And if it’s a true pursuit, it’s a pursuit of spirit
    • For that’s the only way to know Christ truly
  o That’s why Paul adds in v.21 if his audience had, in fact, heard Christ in their hearts
    • The person who has merely learned Christ in a physical, fleshly sense is still an unbeliever
    • That kind of learning is head knowledge without spiritual understanding, which is not a saving knowledge of Christ
  o In that sense, the flesh can pursue Christ in the same way it pursues any other sensuality
    • Pursuing religion rather than relationship is a common tragedy
• We see it everyday among Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other false faiths

• They invoke the name of Jesus but don’t know the true Gospel

• Since they try to learn Christ in the flesh, they learn nothing, and so their fleshly pursuit leaves them just as lost as before

• But we have been taught the truth “in Him” Paul says in v.21
  o As one who has heard the true Gospel and has received it in the spirit, we are born again
    • We learn the truth in Jesus by the Spirit, and so our walk of life as a follower of Jesus must continue as it began…in the Spirit
    • Which begins by laying aside their old self, Paul says, which is that former manner of life
    • Manner of life in v.22 can also be translated lifestyle
  o Paul’s choice of words suggests a garment being taken off, like an old coat
    • That garment represents an old way of thinking and with it comes an old way of behaving
    • Paul says those things are clinging to us, but we must take them off
  o So imagine at the moment you came to faith in Jesus Christ, your inner person was brought to life spiritually
    • By God’s Spirit, we gained a new spirit that is sinless and obedient to His every word Paul says in Romans 6
    • But our new inner self is still cloaked in our old flesh nature, like a filthy overcoat
  o If we’re going to walk properly with Christ, displaying His likeness in union with our brothers and sisters in the body, we need to jettison that old nature
    • Paul says we need to lay it aside, like someone taking off the old coat, setting it on the ground and walking off without it
    • Paul uses a Greek verb in the aorist infinitive form, which describes an ongoing imperative or command
• We are to ever more, continue laying aside the coat, as if we are removing the garment one thread at a time
  o That coat represents our old life, the way we thought and walked in the flesh, the life we knew before Christ
    • We need to dump that old life like a cheap suit
    • But it’s a life-long pursuit, and even Paul’s choice of verb tense reflects that truth
    • We start today, and each day we set aside the old self so that more of Christ living in us shines through
  • That’s the call of sanctification in the life of every believer
    o Before faith we were spiritually dead and the flesh ruled
      • Now we have access to the mind of Christ and have been given a spirit that desires to obey Him
      • That’s how we learned Christ
      • Yet we’re still clothed in a flesh that wants to draw us away from Christ
    o Paul says that flesh is even now being corrupted by its lustful desires
      • That process didn’t stop when we became a believer
      • Your body is still in decay destined to return to dust
      • Our body is literally dying around us, a death made necessary by its corrupt nature
    o So to stretch my analogy a bit further, if our old coat is falling apart on us, why seek to preserve it?
      • Why try to hold it together?
      • Instead, take hold of those fraying threads and give a good pull to hasten its unraveling
      • Ultimately the Lord will replace it, and even now we can diminish its power in our lives
      • That’s what Paul means when he says we must not learn Christ according to flesh, but we must lay that old self aside
• Now if only it were so easy, right?
  o We all know that when it comes to sin, the struggle is real
    • While some of us may be more successful in our struggles than others, no one is totally free of the fight
    • So how can Paul speak of this challenge so casually, as if to suggest it's simply a matter of setting our mind to it
    • Well maybe it's a little simpler than we thought
  o The hard work is actually done by Jesus Himself
    • Paul says in v.23 be renewed in the spirit of our mind
    • To renew simply means to make something new
  o We know we have already been made new spiritually by faith in Christ
    • We were born again in the spirit, and we received Christ’s Spirit
    • But Paul says we must also be renewed in the spirit of our mind
  o The term “spirit of the mind” refers to our thinking, attitudes and outlook on life
    • Our thinking must now be made new, taught by that new spirit we received from Christ
    • The Greek verb translated “be renewed” is passive which means the work of changing our mind is done to us, not by us
    • We give ourselves over to the study of Christ in His word, and He creates the change in our thinking
    • He will renew our minds by His truth so that we gain a desire to live according to our Spirit
• As we are renewed in our minds, Paul says in v.24 we will put on a new self
  o This is the second key verb of action in this passage
    • In the first case, Paul said lay aside the old self, the old coat that hides our new spiritual self
    • That was a verb of action, calling for us to take steps to disassemble the old ways of life
• But we are not to learn Christ in the old way
  o The old way hears the Bible say lay aside the old self, and we start making lists, drawing up plans, pledging commitments, etc.
    • Certainly some of these steps may be sensible and warranted in the face of ongoing sin
    • But real, lasting progress doesn’t come from what we do in the flesh
    • We don’t learn Christ this way
  o Instead we learn Christ spiritually, Paul says
    • And the key to setting aside the old is to obtain Christ-like thinking, which only comes from spiritual training in His word
    • And by that renewing we will put on the new self which is in the likeness of God
• Paul is presenting a beautiful picture that contrasts our spiritual reality to our outward appearance
  o We learn Christ through an inward change of spirit, which is a work done by God alone
    • This is the saving work of knowing Christ by grace
    • Initially, at the moment our new spirit arrives, it’s obscured by our old, sinful flesh that covers the new inner person
    • In that sense, our sinful lifestyle is like a filthy garment hiding our new nature
  o So God asks us to lay aside the old self and put on the new self
    • Or in other words, we are called to make our outer appearance agree with the inner truth of who we have become in Christ
    • And it’s a process of renewing our mind so that we think like Christ
    • Because if we think like Christ, we’re more likely to act like Him
  o A few years ago it became fashionable to wear clothing that said WWJD (What would Jesus do?)
• The idea was to stir our conscience to think in godly ways to promote godly behavior

• It was a nice idea, but it had the wrong approach
  o The bracelets should have asked WDJS (What did Jesus say?)
    • The key to obtaining a more godly walk is to begin to share Christ’s thoughts and desires
    • And that transformation of our mind comes from allowing God’s word to replace our own thoughts
    • Soon, the renewing of our mind leads us to a change in desires and a change of behavior
    • In time, we take on the likeness of God created in holiness, righteousness and truth, Paul says

• Perhaps you consider yourself a student of the Bible…I certainly like to think I am
  o And if so, you may be questioning this promise
    • You may look at your life and see plenty of sin
    • You know you continue to stumble and you’re struggling to gain hold of it
    • And even as you continue to study scripture you continue to make the same old mistakes
  o So perhaps you wonder if renewing your mind in God’s word is truly working in your case
    • May I suggest that the very fact you recognize your sin and are unhappy with it is proof in itself that the word of God is working in your life?
    • Furthermore, have you forgotten the various sins God has already removed from your life?
    • The behaviors you’ve already laid aside, the “threads” of the old self that you set down years ago?
  o Sanctification is a life-long process, and it takes time
I’m not excusing laziness or neglect in our walk, but I’m saying what scripture says.

Ever more, continue laying aside that coat.

And let the renewing of your mind affect that change over time.

How many stories could we tell here at OHBC over the past 30 years?

How many people have come through these doors, sat under the teaching of God’s word for years.

And in the course of time, lives were changed.

Marriages healed, addictions broken, lusts removed, hurts forgiven, anger cooled, resentment mollified, relationships restored.

Was it excellent preaching or stirring messages?

No, it was the simple truth of God’s word faithfully preached in season and out of season.

It was the renewing of our minds, learning Christ spiritually instead of simply making an outward show of religion.

And these are the things Paul expects to see changing in a church that sets its mind on learning Christ in the right way.

A walk with Christ means changing a thousands areas of our lives, but some sins are particularly harmful to the proper operation of the body.

Since the start of this chapter, Paul’s been emphasizing the need for unity in the body.

So now he turns his attention to five sins that especially work against unity.

Paul gives the church advice in countering these five sins against unity.

Each command has three parts:

- Paul gives a negative command
- Followed by a positive command
- Then finally a justification for the positive command.
Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

and do not give the devil an opportunity.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

First, Paul asks the church to set aside falsehood, or deception in the Greek

Deception is more than a spoken lie

- It includes anything that misrepresents reality, even flattery
- Deception runs counter to the unity of the body, because it causes us to lose trust in one another
- It's like that old garment re-emerges to cut us off from one another

Instead of deception, Paul gives the positive command to speak truth to one another

- He quotes Zechariah when the Lord told Israel something similar
- God wanted Israel to unify around the truth, just as Paul wishes the same for the Church
- Which is Paul's justification for his positive command, that we are members of one another

Likewise, unrighteous anger drives a wedge between members of the body

Notice Paul starts by saying be angry

- Anger in this context means having a healthy sense of righteous indignation against sin
• We should get a little angry when sin exists in the body, just as God shows wrath against sin
  o But then Paul gives the negative command not to sin
    • Paul makes a distinction between righteous forms of anger and sinful forms of anger
    • Anger itself is not wrong, as even Jesus displayed anger at times
    • But when the cause for our anger is not in keeping with righteousness, it is an expression of sin
  o If we become angry for righteous reasons, we must seek to resolve the issue “before the sun goes down,” Paul says
    • I don’t believe Paul meant literally before nightfall
    • Rather it’s a colloquialism meaning in a timely manner
    • This is Paul’s positive command in the context of anger, and it ensures we don’t let anger get control or lead us astray
• We can’t let anger fester because it gives opportunity for the devil, Paul justifies in v.27
  o The devil has no spiritual power over us
    • Our spirit has been born again and united with Christ’s spirit
    • Therefore, the enemy’s dominion has been broken in our life
  o Nevertheless, he desires to see God’s people operate according to their old nature rather than in the new nature they’ve received
    • So he’ll use any rope we give him to hang us
    • Anger may begin righteous, but if we fail to resolve the issue that created our anger in a timely manner, we take a risk
  o The enemy may turn our righteous anger into sin by leading us to grow resentful, jealous, spiteful, vindictive or worse
    • What may have begun as a righteous response to someone’s error has turned into sin itself
    • And these consequences of misplaced or unresolved anger will split a church apart in no time
• Thirdly, Paul says thieves must stop stealing
  ◦ Obviously, theft is wrong, but it can be especially devastating in the body of Christ
    • And that’s the implication here
    • Paul is concerned about those who make a dishonest living and bring that behavior into the church
    • It’s likely that behavior would only continue in the church, like with Judas among the apostles
    • This is another quick way to destroy the unity of the body by casting suspicions and distrust
  ◦ Instead, everyone should labor performing his own work in a good and acceptable fashion
    • Not only will we avoid casting shame on the name of Christ, but we also restore trust and unity in the body
    • Moreover, if we all work in honest ways, we are adding to the combined resources of the church body
    • Rather than one person stealing from another, everyone is gaining
  ◦ Which leads to Paul’s justification that it means the church will have that much more to share with those in need
    • For that is central to the mission of the church to care for those who enter in by faith
    • Earning an honest wage is a part of meeting that mission
• Fourth, Paul directs that we not let an unwholesome word leave our mouths
  ◦ The Greek word for unwholesome is literally counterfeit or worthless
    • Counterfeit currency is literally worthless, and so are certain kinds of speech
    • Gossip, innuendo, crude jokes or unfair remarks all have the potential to injure and weaken the body of Christ
    • Even an idle, unthoughtful word might fall into this category
  ◦ So we should think carefully before speaking
Paul's positive command is to speak only what's good for edification according to the need of the moment

- Edification means the strengthening of the body
- And there are times when saying nothing is the best thing we can do to edify the body
  - And our purpose in this command is simply to give grace to everyone
    - Grace means being nice to that person who hasn't necessarily been nice to us
    - Refraining from a criticism against the person who deserves critique
    - Listening patiently to the long-winded laughing at the joke the tenth time you've heard it
    - Showing grace to another by using carefully chosen words that edify

- Your Bible may not reflect this accurately, but Paul's justification for not speaking out of turn continues into v.30
  - In Greek, v.30 begins with the word “and” indicating Paul is connecting this thought to the prior thought
    - We wish to show grace to all in our speech because to do otherwise is to grieve the Holy Spirit
    - Since we have been shown grace through the Holy Spirit living in us, don't grieve the Holy Spirit by failing to show at least grace to others
  - In this context, grieving the Spirit is similar to the parable Jesus taught in Matthew 18 of the man who was himself forgiven a great debt but was unwilling to forgive a small debtor
    - Jesus said that the Lord expects us to be as ready to show grace to others as He was to us
    - This is a service we provide to God in thanks for His mercy
    - So if we fail in that regard in something as simple as a kind word, we grieve the Holy Spirit
    - The very One Who seals us by God's grace

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• We will cover Paul’s fifth command next time as we move into Chapter 5
  o That leaves us for this morning reflecting on the need to lay aside the old, and put on the new by renewing our mind in the word
    • And as we walk our new walk, give special consideration to those sins that interfere with the unity of the body
    • For our participation in the body of Christ is the first mission of every believer
    • And it is your spiritual service of worship