

Ephesians 4E

- 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

- 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
 - 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”
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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?
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
- 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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?
 - 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

[Eph. 4:25](#) Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

[Eph. 4:26](#) be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

[Eph. 4:27](#) and do not give the devil an opportunity.

[Eph. 4:28](#) 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.

[Eph. 4:29](#) 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.

[Eph. 4:30](#) Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

[Eph. 4:31](#) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

[Eph. 4:32](#) 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
- 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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

- We will cover Paul's fifth command next time as we move into Chapter 5
 - 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