

“Renouncing Our Former Ways”  
Ephesians 4:17-19  
(Preached at Trinity, March 1, 2015)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I’ve pointed out, Chapters 1-3 have a focus that is primarily doctrinal in nature, while Chapters 4-6 are more practical. It flows from what we must know to what we must do.  
**Chapter 4** opened with the words:  
"I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"
  - A. It announces the high calling of the Christian and implores us to walk worthy of this calling.
  - B. The word “walk” identifies the course of one’s life. Paul implores us to walk in a manner in harmony with the Christian life—in holiness, in service.
2. In **Verses 1-16** Paul has reminded us that we have been joined together in unity and that each individual has a responsibility to strengthen the whole.  
**Ephesians 4:16 NAU** - "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."
3. Now as we come to **Verse 17** Paul again uses the word “walk” only now he uses it in the negative—from how we must walk to how we must not walk.  
**Ephesians 4:17 NAU** - "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk"
  - Paul often calls us to remember what we were because Christianity is a mighty turn from the past.
  - Verse 17** - We used to walk like the rest of the world but no longer.
  - Verse 28** - We used to steal, but no longer
  - Chapter 5:8** – We were in darkness, but no longer
4. Paul is speaking in strong words here. He is speaking with divine authority. As I stated in **verse 11** the office of Apostle was unique. The Apostles were the spokesmen of Christ. They spoke as His representatives. Paul was aware of this as he writes in **Verse 17** – "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord"
5. The word “Gentiles” here should be seen as synonymous with the word pagan. The KJV adds the word “other” but it would be best to accept the text without it.
  - A. In other words Paul is admonishing his readers to no longer live like pagans.
  - B. “No longer” implies that this was once exactly how we walked. Christians have renounced this former way of life.
6. Paul then proceeds to enumerate some of the features of the pagan life. I want us to look at these this morning. We must never forget that from which we have been delivered.
  - I. Corrupt thinking
  - II. Hardness of heart – callous & without feeling
  - III. Sensuality and impurity
  - IV. Greed & Covetousness

## I. Corrupt thinking

A. Paul describes it as vain reasoning, darkened understanding, and ignorance. It is a total blindness

**Verses 4:17-18** - "that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup> being darkened in their understanding"

1. All of lost humanity is spiritually blind. We are void of the ability to understand God in a true and proper way.
2. While it is true that in sinning human beings have brought blindness upon themselves, it is also equally true that God decreed that they should persist in blindness.
3. This is called **judicial hardening** – it is a blindness that God has imposed  
**Romans 1:28 NAU** - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper"
4. John Calvin describes this judicial hardening  
"As it belongs to Him to give eyes to see, and to enlighten minds by the spirit of judgment and understanding, so He alone deprives us of all light, when he sees that by a wicked and depraved hatred of the truth we of our own accord wish for darkness."
- c. Jesus describes this love for darkness  
**John 3:19 NAU** - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."

B. Human beings like to see themselves as basically good people who may make occasional mistakes. The truth is we are corrupt at the very core of our being.

1. Paul describes it here in terms of the effect it has had upon our mind
  - a. **Verse 17** - "futility of their mind" – "futility" means emptiness; a complete void. It isn't that the mind of the lost man is filled with nothing. It's that they are filled with that which will lead to nothing.
  - b. **Verse 18** - "darkened in their understanding"
2. It leads to foolish thinking  
**Romans 1:22 NAU** – "Professing to be wise, they became fools"
  - a. This corrupt thinking leads to corrupt deeds.
  - b. Evil seems good—like the best choice.
3. Lost humanity is void of knowing how to approach God
  - a. They see many ways to approach God and come to wrong conclusions
  - b. They judge themselves using other men as their standard
  - c. They subject the Bible to their own blind reason
  - d. They govern their behavior by their own reason – not God's Law

C. Jesus came to open the blind eyes of His people

1. We shall never properly understand our Lord's Kingdom unless we receive our sight  
**John 3:3 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. We have to be recreated from within. Our minds must be transformed
  - a. This is called regeneration or the new birth
  - b. It is referred to passing from darkness into light
3. NO LONGER – So how are we to avoid walking in the futility of our mind? Our minds must be continually infused with truth. As Christians we must continually fill our minds with the Word of God.

## II. Hardness of heart – callous & without feeling

**Ephesians 4:18-19 NAU** - "excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; <sup>19</sup> and they, having become callous"

- A. The Greek word refers to the loss of sensitivity
  1. The KJV translates it “past feeling”
  2. It is like a callus that forms on the hand of a worker that is tough and limited in feeling
  3. Spiritually it refers to having our consciences hardened and void of any spiritual sensitivity.
    - a. This is why almost no one today sees anything wrong with sexual relations outside of marriage.
    - b. Few feel guilty when they tell a lie
    - c. Some become so hardened that they feel nothing to take a life
  4. Paul describes it in **1 Timothy** a having our consciences seared with a branding iron
 

**1 Timothy 4:1-2 NAU** - "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron"
- B. Occasionally their consciences may be stirred
  1. There is the remnant of feeling for others where we can enter into their suffering - empathy
  2. The Gospel can stir feeling of guilt. But it can quickly pass. The Law condemns and can even produce trembling. But apart from the grace of the Holy Spirit it can be quickly forgotten.
  3. James warned about forgetful hearers
 

**James 1:22-24 NAU** - "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."
  4. The more we continue in sin the harder our hearts become. This is true of Christians as well as unbelievers.
- C. Paul says, “NO LONGER”
  1. Again, our consciences must be continually informed by the Word of God
  2. We must quickly repent of sin lest our hearts become hardened. Sin left unattended in our heart can cause an ever increasing hardness.

Paul then reveals the result of our blindness and seared conscience

### III. Sensuality and impurity

**Ephesians 4:19 NAU** - "have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

A. God gives us over to all manner of corruption. The word refers to sexual impurity

**Romans 1:26-27 NAU** - "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

1. Paul says homosexuality is simply testimony to a degraded heart
2. But we must not pretend that this is the only expression of our corruption. Our society is obsessed with sex
  - a. Pornography is an expression of the corruption of our heart  
It is a \$13 billion per year business  
9 out of 10 boys are exposed before age 18  
Surveys show that many professing Christian men are affected including a high percentage of pastors.
  - b. Our society has had their consciences seared  
There are few things that cause us to blush today

B. Paul says "NO LONGER"

1. Again, we need to bathe our lives in the Word of God
2. We must discipline our minds  
**Philippians 4:8 NAU** - "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." KJV, ESV – "Think on these things"
3. Paul says,  
**1 Thessalonians 5:22 NAU** - "abstain from every form of evil."  
**2 Timothy 2:22 NAU** - " Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."  
**Romans 12:1-2 NAU** - "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

IV. Greed & Covetousness – **Verse 19** - "with greediness."

- A. As we've seen, the problem is a heart issue – blindness, hardened hearts  
**Mark 7:21 NAU** - "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup> deeds of coveting and wickedness"
1. It is a heart fixed on greed – a desire for *things* or in this verse lusts that can never be satisfied.
  2. It is the desire to find greater value in material things than in God  
**Romans 1:21-23 NAU** - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."
  3. The Bible equates covetousness and greed with idolatry  
**Colossians 3:5 NAU** - "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."
  4. Jesus said we will always seek those things our heart is fixed upon  
**Matthew 6:21 NAU** - "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
- B. It is interesting that Paul places the sin of greed as consistent with paganism
1. Most of us see this as a small sin. It isn't as pronounced as murder. It doesn't hurt anyone. We can often hide this sin of the heart.
  2. The truth is, while it is a sin of the heart it can't be easily concealed.
  3. The Bible places it among the greatest of sins. We are commanded to disassociate from those filled with covetousness.  
**1 Corinthians 5:11 NAU** - " But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one."
  4. Paul places it alongside the most egregious of sins. It characterizes those who are lost in their sin  
**1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NAU** - " Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."
  5. The great danger for us is this sin is so easy for us to dismiss.
    - a. If you steal from someone your conscience immediately steps in and you fall under severe conviction until you make restoration.
    - b. We can be guilty of covetousness, however, and not even consider the wickedness.
    - c. Church members who do not tithe seldom consider it a great manifestation of covetousness. They've managed to put their conscience to sleep.
    - d. If you find yourself thinking upon worldly matters more than upon God and His kingdom covetousness has crept into your life.

6. Paul says, NO LONGER
- a. The cure for covetousness and greed is finding our greatest pleasure in Christ.
  - b. If covetousness is dissatisfaction with Christ then the cure is being satisfied with Christ.
  - c. If covetousness is caused by following the things of this world then the cure must be to follow after the things of God
  - d. If covetousness is giving license to worldly lusts, the cure is to seek those things that are above—to seek Christ, to seek the things of the Spirit.
  - e. You must learn to find contentment in Christ.  
**Philippians 4:11 NAU** - "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."  
 (1) The word for “learn” is μαθητεύω – it refers to an increase of knowledge.  
 (2) How do you learn to be content? By finding fulfillment in Christ. This comes through knowing Him, walking with Him, communing with Him, finding joy in Him.

**Conclusion:**

1. Paul’s point in this entire passage is that we have been changed. We are no longer what we once were. His charge to his readers is for us to be what we are.
2. No longer are we allowed to pursue the lusts of our flesh. We now hunger and thirst after righteousness.