

A Christian Walk instead of a Futile Walk

Ephesians 4:17-24

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Introduction

The book of Ephesians begins with a wonderful description of how God has lavished His grace upon His people through Jesus Christ.

- For three chapters, we are told of how God has brought us from spiritual death to eternal life through our precious Saviour Jesus Christ.
 - We have been called to live in God's house as His own children forever and ever, and God is at work in us to shape us into all He wants us to be as His children.
 - He has taken the worst—miserable fallen men and women—and has given them the best—eternal communion as His sons and daughters forever and ever!
 - And after three chapters of speaking about how marvellous all this is and of trying to help us to see how rich this grace really is...
- We come to chapter 4, and we are urged to walk worthy of this high calling that we have.
 - We have already seen how we are to walk together with our brothers and sisters in the Lord—seeking to help each other to become all that God wants us to be as His Children by the grace of Jesus Christ.
 - We are to work at it together in the roles that God has appointed for each one of us...
 - And today, we come to verse 17 where we are told most plainly that walking worthy of our Christian calling means walking entirely different than we walked before we came to know Christ.
 - Here we are shown, in a general way, the radical difference between the way an unbeliever walks and the way a Christian walks...
 - It is not just a superficial difference...
 - It goes right to the very core of what we are as a person.
 - If you are in Jesus Christ, you have an entirely different principle that governs your walk than those who do not know Christ.
 - In verses 17-24, we are shown what that difference is in general terms...
 - Then, in the sections that follow, we are given particulars of how that root shows itself in particular areas of conduct.
 - Today we will look at the root, in the weeks to come at the particulars.

Let's begin today then by looking at the fact that:

I. All who are outside of Christ (Gentiles) walk in the futility of their mind...

- Futility is the very governing principle of their thoughts which thoughts are expressed in their walk.
 - You understand, of course, that their walk is how they conduct themselves...
 - But their walk arises out of the thoughts of their mind...
 - And these thoughts are futile...

A. If you want to find out just how futile these thoughts are, just go out in our community and ask people what they are living for...

1. We are all walking through life—some are going fast, some are going slow, but everyone of us is walking along on the path of life...
 - And as we are walking, we are all going somewhere...
 - Surely one of the most basic questions of all is where?
 - Where are you trying to go?
 - What are those thoughts that govern what you do?

2. If you asked that question, you would find...

a. That many people had never even thought about it!

1) There they are, in some cases running at full speed—going going going...

- running like someone who is about to miss a flight—
 - trying to get ahead in their career—
 - spending hours on perfecting their beauty—
 - or whatever...

- But they have never even stopped to consider where they are going or what they are trying to achieve.

- What futility this is!
- They are on the treadmill of life, running just to run.

2) Jay Adams once lectured to a whole room full of doctoral candidates in the field of psychology in Germany,

- And as he spoke about how as a counsellor, you want to help people change...
 - the students all agreed...
- Then he asked them the most basic question of all—

- “What do you want the counselee to look like at the end of the counselling process?”
 - His question was met with complete silence...
 - Here they were, going into a life calling that was all about changing people...
 - and they never stopped to think about what they wanted to change them into!
 - They were walking, but they did not know where they were going.
- 3) That’s the way many people are in their walk...
- They have many things they are pursuing, but they never stopped to consider what their whole life is about...
 - That is a walk of futility
- b. But there would be others to whom you put the question (What are you living for?) who would have some much more definite answers...
- 1) You would meet with noble ones who would tell you that they are trying to do good in the world...
- a) This might be to help the poor or the oppressed,
- or it might be to save the environment from destructive green house gasses...
 - Or you might even meet someone who told you that their whole agenda was to promote decency and morality.
- b) But even these noble aims are futile if they go no further than trying to help people and trying to make the world a better place...
- (i) I mean, that is a good thing to do... you are supposed to care for your neighbour...
- but so what if you succeed in ending poverty—for what end?
 - What does it achieve if everyone has enough of what they need?
 - What do they have if the environment is saved?
 - What if everyone is moral?
- (ii) Is there nothing beyond that?
- So we are a little happier for a while, the world is a little better place to live—and then we die.

- What has really been achieved.

TRANS> The walk of these do-gooders is futile unless there is some greater end to their work...

- but at least they have noble aims!

2) You would meet others whose aims were not so noble.

- They would tell you quite bluntly that they are trying to get all they can out of life.

a) You know, like the chap says:

- “Whoever has the most toys at the end wins.”

b) One such person would tell you that is supreme goal is riches,

- another, having lots of friends,
- another is seeking a special romance,
- another wants to experience pleasures of every sort,
- and yet another wants to achieve—
 - to be successful in business...
 - to be a great artist...
 - to excel in learning
 - to advance in sports...

c) But let us suppose that any one of these gets the object of their desire?

- Then what?
 - What good is it to have all the riches in the world, or to be the best hockey player or to win the Nobel Prize?
 - What good is it to have great friends and great sex if that is all you have?
- What do you have if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?

B. What is wrong with the Gentiles that they live in such futility?

- The Apostle tells us in verses 18-19.

1. First, he says that they have a futile walk because their understanding is darkened.

a. They cannot see that there is something much more to live for.

1) There is a deep ignorance that has gotten into them...

a) You see that Paul speak of it as “ignorance that is in them.”

- It is worse than physical blindness, because it is a blindness is down inside—
 - They cannot see clearly.
- b) The darkening of the understanding is described here as something that happened to them in the past that has ongoing results...
 - And so it is—
 - Our ignorance came when we went for knowledge in the Garden of Eden...
 - Our understanding was darkened the moment we turned from God in order to live according to our own ideas about good and evil...
 - When we thought we could better determine what was good for us and what was bad for us than our Creator could...
 - That was the beginning of the greatest darkness of all.
 - This darkness entered the human race some 6000 years ago,
 - and it has been with us ever since...
 - Darkness came into us and took us over so that we could no longer understand what life is all about.
- 2) The essence of our darkness is that we are alienated from the life of God... as it says in verse 18...
 - Without Him, we are left to make our way through this world in absolute futility...
 - Going here and going there, but at last going nowhere!
 - Our conduct is, as Peter says,
 - “aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.”
- b. Now my friends, there is no escaping of the fact that our lives are meant be lived for our Creator.
 - He made us for Himself—In Him we live and move and have our being...
 - We did not put ourselves here:
 - All things are of Him and through Him and to Him.
 - He put us here and so we are here for Him.
 - And so to be alienated from life in communion with Him is to be alienated from life...

- To go through your whole life without the purpose of your life being found in your Creator is to miss everything...
 - It is to walk in death...
 - It is the height of futility!
 - It is to spin your wheels, whether you spin them fast or slow...
 - You are like a light bulb that will not illumine...
 - or like a car that will not drive...
 - or like a fruit tree that does not bear fruit.
 - All is vanity, all is futility!
- c. And what is it that keeps us cut off from God until (and unless) Christ changes us?
- Look at the end of verse 18...
 - 1) It is because of the blindness of our heart...
 - The word translated “blindness” here is an instructive one...
 - It refers to a hard, thick covering of skin—a callus—
 - a callus that keeps you from being able to feel anything.
 - You can put your hand on hot stove and you not take it off because you can’t feel it burning your skin.
 - You have lost all sensitivity.
 - 2) That is how every human being is until the Lord removes the callus.
 - This callus is there as an impenetrable barrier between the sinner and his God...
 - Nothing of the true knowledge of God can pass through it...
 - There is this radical resistance, this hardness of heart, that shuts out our Creator.
2. Verse 19 speaks of the consequences of being cut off from God by this callus as far as how it affects the Gentile’s walk.
- a. You see that they are described as being “past feeling”...
 - 1) That is, they are incapable of feeling pain or grief...
 - The stove does not burn them!
 - There is no sensitivity to what is around them—they cannot sense what is around them...

- 2) If this term is applied to a person in relation to other humans,
- you might think here of psychopath—or a sociopath—
 - a person who shows no regard for the people around him...
 - He can kill or wound another human being and show no remorse...
 - It is as if other people aren't even around...
 - He is one of those people who makes you ask the question in the Beatles song, "Nowhere Man..."
 - "Can you even see me?"
 - He lives with such disregard of the people around him that you aren't even sure if he realises that other people are even there.
- 3) Well, take this same anti-social, nobody-else-exists attitude and refer it to a person's relationship with God and you have what we all are without Christ...
- a) God could well ask the question of such a person, "Can you see me at all?"
- There is a complete lack of regard for our Creator and for what pleases Him or displeases Him.
- b) Think about this...
- Which is the greater insensitivity?
 - To have no regard for your neighbour?
 - Or to have no sense of your Creator in His image you were made and in whom you live and move and have your being?
 - Certainly, there is a great blindness if you have no regard for your neighbour's presence.
 - Most people don't burp and pick their nose in public because they are sensitive to the people around them...
 - When driving their car, they do not drive as if no one else exists...just running people down as they go without a thought...
 - When robbing a bank, they don't do it in the plain sight of a law enforcement officer...
 - They are mindful of the people around them unless there is something seriously wrong with them...

- But how easily the sons of Adam will do things that offend God their Creator with hardly a second thought—
 - They will worship Him without even bothering to consider whether He approves the worship they offer!
 - Look at Israel—they constantly worshipped at the high places without regard to the fact that such worship displeased the one they were supposed to be worshipping!
 - Look at the Christian church today—there is all sorts of worship, but as a general rule, no one stops to ask if the songs we sing are the ones God’s wants or if He ever called us to put on a concert or a drama for Him.
 - See how men will commit adultery or blasphemy before the very eyes of Him who sees the very secrets of their heart and go on as if He is not there at all—
 - Him who has the power to destroy both body and soul in Hell!
 - They walk through their whole lives as if He is not even there at all!
 - What blindness this is!
 - What insensitivity to the presence of their Maker!
 - See how even those who clean up their outward conduct will walk around in the plain sight of God full of bitterness or complaining or lust or self-pity...
 - We have lost all sensitivity to God!
 - Look even at how deep the darkness was in Adam and Eve when they, after they had sinned,
 - they supposed they could cover up their nakedness before God with fig leaves!
 - Had them completely lost sight of who God was?
 - They were “past feeling” as all of their descendents are until and unless the Lord breaks through their blindness.
- b. Look at what those who are “past feeling” are said to have done according to verse 19:
- They have
 - “given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

- 1) The overall idea here is that because they are past feeling as far as any consideration of what God thinks...
 - They are abandoned to their own way—to live according to whatever they think is best...
 - This is the futility that we saw before...
 - They walk according to their own desires because they are cut off from the life of God.

- 2) When it says they have “given themselves over” it means just that—
 - The same word is used of Judas betrayal (or giving over) of the Lord Jesus Christ to His enemies—
 - Judas gave Christ over to His enemies as those who have lost all sensitivity to God deliver themselves over to live according to their own ideas and feelings...
 - They are turned over to walk in their own way... in futility!

- 3) Look at what they are said to give themselves over to...
 - a) First, to **lewdness**
 - This is a word that means unbridled lust, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence...
 - It is vice that throws off all restraint...
 - And I tell you that any time we creatures follow our desires when they are contrary to God’s desires,
 - it is the most unbridled, licentious behaviour!
 - We brazenly parade our wicked thoughts and actions right before the face of the Judge of all.

 - b) Then there is **uncleanness**
 - This is the word used throughout the OT to refer to filth caused by sin that God hates...
 - This is why there were so many washings appointed in the OT.
 - But the picture here is that human beings are walking around before God in the filth of their sins even when they are told that there is a fountain for cleansing in Jesus Christ...
 - They are so insensible of God, so hard, so callus that they can walk around in their filth as if nothing is wrong at all!

- What futility it is to see a moral crusader—fighting against abortion or oppression...
 - and that moral crusader has not even been washed before God from the filth of his own sin...
 - What blindness this is! What futility!
 - Can't he see that he needs a bath?
 - Can't he see how dirty he is before a holy God?
 - No, he cannot see.
 - That's the point Paul is making here.
 - He is unclean and he does nothing about it.
- c) Next there is **greediness**...
- (i) This word refers to an inappropriate desire to get more than my share...
 - A greedy person is insensible of others in his pursuit of personal gain—he disregards them...
 - (ii) Certainly this bears itself out very often in our conduct toward one another,
 - but here again we must bring this before our relationship with God...
 - All glory is due to Him—our walk as creatures is properly to be for Him alone as our Creator!
 - We are here for Him,
 - but our greediness exceeds all bounds because we try to take that glory for ourselves!
 - We have received all that we have from Him, but we boast as if we have not received it.
 - (iii) Do we not all struggle with this?
 - What happens when you are facing a crisis—a job loss or a major illness...
 - Your greed comes out when you act as though (or think as though) the most important thing of all is to keep your job—or to have your health.
 - You become anxious and fearful and angry...
 - You forget that you are here for God...
 - You become greedy for your health or your job instead of for His glory.

- It is right that you ask God to provide for you and to give you your health,
- but if He chooses not to, it is for you to have as your highest priority that God be glorified...

TRANS> You see, this brings us back to the question...

- What are you living for?
- Where are you going as you walk through this world?
- What is your life all about?
- Oh my friends,
 - If you are outside of Jesus Christ, you walking in utter futility.
 - The day of judgement will be a day of shame for you because everything about you and your callous heart will be exposed for exactly what it is.
 - What seems perfectly normal and acceptable now will be seen for what it is.
 - Let me say it to you again...
 - If you are outside of Jesus Christ, you walking in utter futility.
- I have shown you how futile the walk of those without Christ really is...
 - Now I want to show you how knowing Christ changes all that...

II. When you know Christ, your walk is entirely transformed.

A. Paul, after speaking to the Ephesians about the futile walk of the Gentiles says,

- “But you have not so learned Christ.”
1. You see that Paul is setting up a contrast here...
 - between the Gentiles in general and those who have known Christ.
 - The thing that makes the Ephesians entirely different is that they have known Christ.
 - a. Paul is emphasising the difference by emphasising the word “you”
 - But **you** have not so learned Christ...
 - You are different than the rest of the Gentiles who do not know Him.
 - b. Paul is explaining why they should not walk as the rest of the Gentiles do—in the futility of their minds...
 - Christians should walk in an entirely different manner because they have learned Christ...

2. These words are deliberately unusual... “learned Christ”
 - a. You see, there are many who know about Christ...
 - They may even be baptised and be members of the church...
 - They may be able to explain deep theological concepts...
 - They may be very zealous in serving their community...
 - They may live very moral upright lives...
 - They may be present at every worship service...
 - and yet they may not really know Christ.
 - b. But Paul is talking about those who have learned Christ Himself—they have come to know Him...
 - 1) He explains that they have “heard Him and been taught by Him.”
 - This is a literal translation!
 - These Ephesians, who heard the gospel long after Christ had ascended into heaven,
 - are said to have heard Jesus and to have been taught by Him.
 - 2) How can this be? They had never met Christ.
 - a) Paul is talking about the spiritual knowing of Christ that transforms people—
 - a knowing that is far superior to knowing the facts about Him...
 - far superior even to touching Him or seeing Him or hearing His voice when He was on the earth.
 - b) This is the knowledge of Christ that comes to you when the Lord Jesus breaks through that callousness that I talked about before...
 - When He breaks to pieces the stony, stubborn, God-resisting heart and brings in His light and truth...
 - It is the knowledge of Christ that hears His voice and follows Him.
 - His word breaks in and gives life and light where there was only darkness and death.
 - He speaks into your life.
 - c) This is what Jesus was talking about in John’s gospel...
 - (i) In chapter 5:24 when He said:
 - John 5:24-27: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most

assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

- You see that this is a hearing that gives life to those who are spiritually dead...
 - It is Christ coming to you and making Himself known to you as Lord and Saviour.

(ii) In John 10 He says something else about this hearing of His voice:

- In this chapter Jesus speaks about Himself as the good shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.
- And He explains that His sheep—those He came to save—will hear His voice and receive eternal life from Him...
 - Addressing those who have not heard His voice in this way, He says:
 - John 10:25-28: Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

(iii) This hearing of Christ's voice is a hearing that leads to a true personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

- It comes through hearing the preaching of the word, but only to the sheep who are awakened by that word and so hear it as the very message of the Son of God.
- They come away from that hearing entirely transformed because now they know the Lord as Saviour.
 - The Word exposes the futility of their own walk...
 - They see their callousness and their uncleanness and their greediness as it truly is...
 - His Word breaks in...
- And it shows them that He is the Lord of heaven who came to earth to cleanse them—
 - by dying on the cross for the remission of their sins,
 - and by imparting to them the Spirit of life...

- And when they hear His voice, and know that it is His voice, they believe and come to Him with thanksgiving for life and salvation.
- That is what it means to learn Christ...
- The truth is in Him and the truth is imparted to you when you hear His voice and believe...

B. This has a huge effect on your life... you can no longer walk as you once walked.

1. You can no longer walk in the futility of your mind because now you are enlightened in the spirit of your mind...
 - a. Instead of futility there—thoughts and plans and desires that are disconnected from God...
 - there is now truth—truth that is in Jesus.
 - Now you know why you are here, you know where you came from and where you are going...
 - Now you walk with purpose instead of in futility.
 - You know that you are here for the glory of God and that your life is found in serving Him and in knowing Him and drawing strength from Him—
 - Life is living in communion with your Creator.
 - b. Verse 23 refers to this change as being renewed in the spirit of your mind...
 - 1) It is not so much that your mind did not work right before—you had things you loved and things you hated and things you understood...
 - The problem was that you are entirely cut off from God so that your life was not oriented around your Creator.
 - All you had to live for was your own imagination and your own desires because you did not know the true God.
 - 2) To be renewed in the spirit of your mind is to have a whole new governing principle there that transforms your desires so that they conform to God's will...
 - a) His law is written on your heart so that you delight in it...
 - His law becomes a part of you...
 - You become one who delights to do His will and one who is even prepared to suffer for Him if called to do so.

- b) This affects you at the deepest level where others can see—it is a change at the root of your life that affects the fruit...
 - Let me see if I can illustrate this...
 - Instead of walking around feeling put upon, you walk around with an orientation to serve your neighbour...
 - Instead of lying in bed at night worrying or lusting, you lie awake giving thanks to the Lord for His goodness...
 - Instead of complaining when things do not go as you please, you consider how you may honour the Lord in those matters...
 - Instead of becoming bitter or lashing back at those who wrong you, you begin to plan how you may do good to them...
 - The spirit of your mind is where real change occurs...
 - This is where the plans and purposes and motives are found...
 - This is where the Lord rejuvenates you...
- 3) This initial renewal that comes when you come to know Christ is spoken of in many different ways throughout Scripture...
 - It is called the new birth
 - It is called repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus
 - It is called being crucified with Christ
 - It is called becoming a new creation in Christ in which old things are passed away and all things become new.
 - It is called being buried with Him in baptism and raised again to walk in newness of life.
 - It is called having your stony heart removed and being given a heart of flesh
 - It is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - It is called the washing of regeneration
 - It is called having God's law written on your heart
 - It is called being given a new spirit
- 2. It is so radical a change that the apostle refers to it in our text as a putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new man...
 - He tells you that this is what you learned that when you came to Christ...
 - To give up on yourself and to walk according to Christ...
 - a. The old man is what you were when you walked in the futility of your mind...
 - 1) It is what you were when you followed your own way (the deceitful lusts) and thought that was where life was to be found...

- Your own desires are said to be deceitful because they promise you so much and give you so little...
 - They promise life and happiness, but deliver nothing but death and sorrow.
- 2) The Old man grows, but only in corruption...
- As long as you walk according to your own ways, you move further and further away from God...
 - you become less and less what human beings were created to be...
- b. And the new man is what you became when the triune God created new life in you.
- 1) Verse 24 says that he is created in true righteousness and holiness...
- a) Righteousness is that you live in proper relation to others—
- not in greed, but as one who gives to each His due...
 - You give God the glory that is His, and you give your neighbour the service that God calls you to give to that neighbour.
 - Without the new life, there is this greed that keeps wanting more and more.
- b) Holiness is that dedication to God—
- That living in response to Him so that you trust Him for life and all that you need, completely dedicate yourself to Him, and respond to Him with thanksgiving...
- 2) You have been created anew through Jesus Christ in this true righteousness and holiness...
- And so it is for you to walk a whole new walk...
 - to live a whole new life.
 - The old is passing away—the new has come!
- c. But understand, of course, that this is all a work in process...
- 1) You are not perfected all at once—
- That is why this whole section began with a call to no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their minds...
 - That is something we still do—
 - We still have those futile thoughts that govern us...

- 2) The great encouragement here is that we have been given new thoughts govern us—
- Christ has given us these thought.
 - He is redeemed us from our aimless conduct so that we can walk according to holiness and righteousness,
 - and that our new walk might rise from within—from the Spirit of the mind—
 - where He is replaced futility with truth.

Conclusion:

- Examine yourself
 - What is it that makes you tick?
 - What are you living for?
 - What are you walking according to?
 - The futility of the old man that is being corrupted—are you just aimlessly seeking to fulfil your own desires?
 - Or are you walking according to truth—according to Christ as He is revealed to you in God’s Word?
 - Does His Word speak into your conduct from within?
 - What are you going after?
 - What is at the root of your actions?
- It is a very sad thing that as a judgement upon us, the Lord is turning people all across North America over to walk in their own imaginations again...
 - More and more we are hearing the message broadcast and accepted that true spirituality comes by looking within—
 - the very place Pagans have always looked!
 - We have Rob Bell teaching us to trust in ourselves and we have Oprah Winfrey teaching a class of 500,000 disciples that true spirituality is found by turning within.
 - The Message of the Lord Jesus is so opposite to this...
 - His message is that **He** is the truth...that only corruption is found within.
 - That truth is found by turning **away** from yourself and the imagination of your own heart and by turning to Him.
 - The true child of God is one trusts in the Lord with all his heart and leans not on His own understanding...

- He is the one who realises that He must be washed by the cleansing of Christ
 - He is the one who turns to Him for the cleansing through the cross...
 - He is the one who gives up on governing himself and finding his own way and looks outside of self to be ruled by Jesus Christ the Lord.
- Oh my brothers and sisters,
- Do not walk as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God...
 - Christ has taught you to put off the old man and put on the new man is being created in true righteousness and holiness.
 - Don't return to paganism—that is the old way—that is the way of death...
 - Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.
 - No one comes to the Father but through Him.