

A PROHIBITION: WALK NOT...!

Ephesians 4.17-19: Your new life in Christ will result in a new lifestyle

Theme: Walk not as other Gentiles, in mindless vanity and self-centered behavior.

In Ephesians 4, Paul begins to speak of our practical application of the doctrine he taught us before, in Ephesians 1-3 (what we have and are “in Christ”).

- This entire fourth chapter speaks about our “walk”:
 1. (v1; v1-16) We need to *walk worthy* of our new vocation.
 2. (v17; v17-32) We need to *walk in the new man* (rather than in the old man).
- (v17) What follows now in vv17ff is based on what Paul just told us in vv1-16: “...*therefore*...”
 - ✓ (v1) We have a new “vocation” (a new work, a job, a responsibility, a task... a Mission).
 - ✓ (v11-12) That vocation is the work of the ministry that will build up the Body of Christ (ultimately: evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved).
 - ✓ “*Therefore*,” we ought to live differently! Our lifestyles ought to be *different* than lost people's (and different than our lives before we turned to Christ for salvation).

(v17-21) The difference in our “walk” begins with a prohibition:

1. (v17-19) We are first given a commandment: Walk not in vanity!
2. (v20-21) And then we are shown the contrast: Rather, learn Christ! (And this is what we call *discipleship*: following/imitating/learning Christ).

In this message we are going to look at vv17-19, the Lord's *prohibition* to “*walk not*”:

- But there is one thing we need to see before we start: Most all of the practical application of doctrine (our walk/life in Christ) is a *process of replacement*: Stop doing the wrong things and start doing the right.
- We will focus on the process of replacement specifically starting in v22, but we see it here, also.
- We need to *stop* walking like lost people in the world (v17-19) and *start* walking like Christ (v20-21).
- So, even though today we are only going to focus on the negative (stop living like other Gentiles), keep in mind that means you need to replace that behavior with the positive: Learn Christ!

I. (v17a)Your Previous Life: Walk not as other Gentiles!

A. Your “walk” is your “lifestyle.”

1. Your “walk” is your steady, step-by-step, moving through life; it refers to how you live out your life each and every day.
2. If we are truly saved, then there *will be* a change in our “walk.”
 - a) We have *repented* of sin and selfishness (turned *from* wrong behavior).
 - b) We have *turned to* Christ to trust Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.
3. And that means our walk/lifestyle as Christians *will be* different than the walk of the other Gentiles who are not Christians...

B. Your walk ought to be different than the walk of lost people.

1. It seems ridiculous to even have to say this: Our lives and lifestyles as Christians ought to be different than the lives and lifestyles of lost people.
 - a) But, in the modern-church culture of the developed world, it needs to be pointed out because so many pastors, teachers, authors, and leaders today say we need to look more like the world.
 - b) The Bible says just the opposite: If we are Christians, we will grow *out* of looking like the lost.
2. However, remember this: We are still Gentiles in the flesh...
 - a) Paul refers to lost people here as the “other Gentiles” because he is writing to Gentiles (the Ephesian believers).
 - b) Yes, we have been born again and “in Christ” we are totally new creatures: sons of God, neither Jew nor Gentile.
 - c) But, in the flesh we are still Gentiles and we should always keep in mind that we war against the flesh and its tendencies and appetites just like any other Gentile (that fact has not changed and will not change until Christ comes back and gives us a new body).
3. (Rom 6.4) We should be striving each and every day to walk in the *newness* of life, not in the old life of vanity that we lived as lost people.
 - And Paul says that the vain lifestyle of lost people in the world (the lifestyle we should actively and intentionally avoid) starts in the mind...

II. (v17b-19) Your Inner Life: Walk not in the vanity of your mind!

A. (v17b) Vanity: Defined...

1. Definition #1: Lack of real value; worthless, trivial, pointless (“*vanity, vanity, all is vanity.*”).
 - The mind of lost people (the other Gentiles) is given over to vain things—useless, empty, worthless, pointless pursuits (things of no eternal value).
2. Definition #2: Egotism, self-centeredness, conceit; a focus on self (“*he is a vain man*”).
 - The mind of lost people (the other Gentiles) is given over to the vanity of doing what is right in their own eyes, what they deem right and best for themselves.
3. Summary: Lost people (the other Gentiles) have a vain inner thought life. Their thoughts are continually *about themselves* and are of *no eternal value*.
 - a) They go through life seeking the next thing that will distract them, entertain them, or benefit them in a way they deem as important to them.
 - b) They give as little thought as possible to that which is of real value—that which is valuable for eternity: sin, righteousness, and judgment. Why is that...?

B. (v18a) The vain mind of a lost person has its understanding darkened.

1. The mind of a lost person is vain—worthless, pointless, and self-centered—because it *has no light*.
2. Where does *light* come from, the light that will illuminate the vain mind of the sinner?
 - a) (1Jn 1.5) God is light. Without God, the lost person is in darkness. But, how does God's light shine in the darkened understanding of lost man?
 - b) (Ps 119.130) God's Word is light. The Word of God illuminates the understanding. But, how does God's Word get into the vain mind and darkened understanding of the lost person?
 - c) (2Cor 4.3-6) The Gospel is light. And that light shines in the darkened understanding of the lost person when he *hears it* being preached to him (communication of the message of the cross).

3. The other Gentiles (lost people) have their understanding darkened—they have no true light from God—and because of that they live vain lives (their minds are vain, their lives are vain).
 - a) Everything for them revolves around “me” (vanity) and “my world” (the worthless pursuit of things in this world).
 - And it is sad to say, but: How many churches and church-goers display this same type of vain mindset: “It’s all about me and what I get out if now”? We ought to be different!
 - b) So, what is the solution to the problem? Well... where there is darkness, God commands the light to shine (Gen 1.3)!
4. (2Cor 4.6) God commands the light to shine in the darkness: Let there be light!
 - a) (2Cor 4.5) That means God commands us to preach Christ Jesus the Lord to those who are in darkness—communicate to them that Jesus is the Christ, and He is Lord.
 - b) (Eph 5.8, 13) You and I are the light in this dark world. In order to “shine” in the darkness, we need to preach...
 - (1) We need to communicate the Gospel (light!) to the darkened mind of lost people (we call that evangelism, for salvation).
 - (2) We need to communicate the God’s Word (light!) to the mind of saved people (we call that edification, for sanctification—more and more light until all the darkness is gone).
5. People walk in the vanity of their minds because their understanding is darkened, and the only cure for darkness is light: They need to know the Gospel... the Scripture... and God!

C. (v18b) Lost people (the other Gentiles) are also alienated from life.

1. They live in vanity (worthless, self-centered lives) because they have no light and because they are dead in their sins and trespasses.
2. And they are dead (alienated from life—eternal life, the “life of God”) because of ignorance (they lack knowledge, they are “blind in their hearts” and cannot see).
3. (Mat 28.19-20) This is precisely why Christ commanded His followers to go (get the light out into the midst of the darkness) and teach all nations.
 - a) The nations of this world are ignorant; they lack the knowledge that is necessary to live!
 - (1) Yes, they have an innate knowledge of God (all men everywhere know God exists).
 - (2) Yes, they have an innate knowledge that God is a moral Being (because they are!). Lost man knows God distinguishes between right and wrong, because he does (conscience).
 - (3) But, they are ignorant of the Gospel. They are ignorant of God’s Word, the words of life.
 - b) (Acts 17.30-31) And God may have “winked at” (put up with) this ignorance for a while, but no longer.
 - (1) (v30) God commands the ignorant, lost sinner to repent!
 - (2) (v31) And God does so by educating (teaching) that lost sinner about sin, righteousness, and judgment!
 - (3) And who does that “teaching” and “educating” of the ignorant lost sinner? We do!
 - a) (Gal 3.24) We are to teach lost sinners God’s Law, which is the schoolmaster that will bring them to the cross of Christ.
 - b) And then we are to teach them the Gospel—the message of the cross (salvation!).

4. Review: Lost people (the other Gentiles) are alienated from life.
 - a) People walk in the vanity of the mind because their understanding is darkened.
 - b) And because their understanding is darkened, they are ignorant of God and the Gospel.
 - c) And because they are ignorant of God and the Gospel, they are alienated from (separated from) the life of God—eternal life. They are “dead” in their in their sins.
 - (1) And Paul says: Walk not like these other Gentiles (lost people)! Don't imitate them!
 - (a) Don't live with a vain mind! Let there be light in your thought life—your heart, mind!
 - (b) Know God by knowing the Gospel and Scripture—let there be light by ridding yourself of ignorance (learn the Gospel, learn the Scripture... learn Christ, and never stop learning).
 - (2) And we should never forget our duty: Someone shined the light of the Gospel in our darkened understanding. We now have the duty to do the same for others.

III. (v19) Your Visible Lifestyle: Walk not in vain works!

A. (Prov 23.7a) As a man thinketh in his heart (v17-18) so is he (v19).

1. Your behavior (works, lifestyle) is a direct result of your thought life.
2. The vanity of the mind (a worthless, self-centered “worldview”) will always result in a self-centered lifestyle given to satisfying one's own appetites. And that is Ephesians 4.19...

B. *Lasciviousness*: [def] Inclined to lust, sexual desire, and lewdness (“raunchy” and perverted).

1. This term accurately describes the moral state of our culture and country. Why is that...?
2. Without the preaching of the Gospel on the streets and the Scripture in the pulpits, a nation (a society and a culture) will be swiftly carried away to lasciviousness.
3. Without the light, darkness will prevail. And we are the light (preaching God's Word).

C. The end result of this vane lasciviousness is a lifestyle given to all uncleanness with greediness.

1. Again, just look at our society in the United States of America. We have rejected God's light:
 - a) We don't want Scripture and prayer and in our schools.
 - b) We don't want the Ten Commandments in the Supreme Court.
 - c) We don't want people to “invade our privacy” and “shove their religion down our throats” (so we come with no soliciting laws to keep the religious fanatics a good distance away).
 - d) We don't want pastors to teach and preach sound doctrine. No... we prefer a 20-minute narrative homily, good music that makes us feel good, and maybe a drama, dance or skit to illustrate the newest self-help technique that will lead us to living our best life now.
 - e) In the USA (as a whole), lost people and church-goers alike have rejected the light of the teaching of the Gospel and God's Word.
2. And what has been the fruit of that vanity? What behaviors have resulted from that mindset?
 - a) Our culture, society, and (many/most) churches are given over to the appetites of the people.
 - (1) Lost people: Raunchy movies and TV shows; sexual perversion and violence; drunkenness; gluttony. It's all about “me” and “what I want” and it's all about feeding “my” appetites.
 - (2) Church goers: Entertainment, feel-good-about-me sermonettes, etc. It's the same thing as we see in the world: the sinful appetites of man are given place and priority.

b) We ought to be different! We ought not to walk as the other Gentiles walk!

(1) We have the light of God (we know the Gospel and have the Scripture). That should make a visible and marked difference in our lives!

(2) And that means that we need to get God's light into our minds daily, so that it will lead us in our lifestyles daily. We need to read the Bible and do what it says!

Conclusion:

Outward behavior (v19) is always a result of our thought life (out of the heart are the issue of life).

- And the key to renewing our thought life is the light of God. We need to renew our minds!
 - ✓ Our understanding is naturally darkened because we are ignorant (we lack knowledge—the knowledge of God).
 - ✓ If you are *not saved*, you are ignorant of the Gospel and need light—you need someone to teach you the Gospel so that your understanding will not be dark anymore.
 - ✓ If you are *saved*, you need to understand that you are ignorant of God's Word (there is always more to learn of Christ!).
 - ✓ (v20-21) We *all* need to learn Christ, either for salvation or sanctification.
- If we want life and if we want to live different, it all has to start with the Gospel and God's Word.

And then, we need to make a diligent, intentional effort to shine as lights in the darkness of vane minds!

- We need to preach the Word... any and every way we can to whomever we can wherever we can.
- That is not an easy task, but Christ never said it would be. However, it is our new “vocation/Mission.”
- Our society (including church-goers) loves itself and loves its idols; it is *vain*. We need to intentionally and aggressively engage people through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel (salvation) and the Scripture (sound doctrine for sanctification—holiness).

That means: Walk not as other Gentiles, in mindless vanity and self-centered behavior. Develop a lifestyle based on the Gospel and the Word of God.