Ephesians 4:17-24

Putting off the old and putting on the new

Sermon

We are starting a new series in Ephesians this morning – "A New Way to Walk". For three chapters Paul has told us about who we are, now Paul wants to tell us how we are to walk. He uses the metaphor of "walking" much like we would use it – if I were to say, "walk like a man", you would know I mean, "be courageous.", or maybe, "be strong like a man", or "be a man of integrity". So walking is a picture of the Christian life as a journey that each of us must make from start to finish…and GOD is the one who gets us from start to finish.

Paul tells the Ephesians, "***take care how you walk***": We are to "walk" (slide). In 4:1 - "***walk*** in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called". In 4:17 – "no longer ***walk*** as the Gentiles". In 5:2 – "***walk*** in love as Christ loved us". In 5:8 – "***walk*** as children of light". In 5:15 – "look carefully then how you ***walk***, not as unwise but as wise". So we're going to spend several weeks in this series considering how we are to "walk" in a new way.

Order of salvation (slide). Scripture teaches that GOD IS THE ONE WHO SAVES, and there is a chronology of events that happen in the lives of those He chooses to save. God has made a plan to save us. Scripture is CLEAR that GOD is the one who saves us, we deserve NONE of the praise, we do NONE of the *walking apart from Him….and we are commanded to walk*. Each event in God's plan must happen in order for us to make it to the finish line – glorification! – no more working and walking, but now praising and joy in the presence of God forever and ever. It's important to know God's plan, and how God gets us to the end. **First, God chose us - election**. His choice had nothing to do with you. He didn't choose you because you are special. He didn't choose you based on anything you've done. It was solely His good pleasure to choose you, and God chooses whomever He wills. His ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts. If you believe in Jesus this morning, "praise God that He chose you!" In Ephesians 1:4 Paul stretches his arms out across your salvation – "He chose you in Him (in Christ - election) before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him (glorification)". **Then when the time came, God called you forth by His Holy Spirit – conversion (new birth…REGENERATION).** God called you out from the dead, even as He called out Noah from the flood, even as Jesus called forth Lazarus from the grave – "Lazarus, come forth!" And so you heard the gospel preached at some point in time and the Holy Spirit awakened you to the truth of the Gospel, miracle of all miracles YOU BELIEVED! And you were born again - raised from death to life. In Ephesians 2:1-8 Paul told us that we were "dead" but God "made us alive with Christ" through "faith" and by grace alone we are saved. **When this happened, you were justified**. A glorious word that basically means "declared by God to be righteous". ***Everyone in***

this room is in one of two camps. You are either justified, "declared righteous", through faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone, because you've been born again, OR you are still "dead in trespasses and sins" and you must be born again! If the Holy Spirit speaks to you this morning, TRUST IN CHRIST FOR SALVATION! If not, you will remain in your sin and deadness. So respond to the Holy Spirit's call and be saved. Do not harden your heart to the Holy Spirit, respond this morning and be saved!

This brings us to "sanctification". This is where Christians now live, and are now "walking" and the final goal is "glorification". The word "sanctification" means "to be made holy" or "set apart" from the rest of the world. This is a process where God's Holy Spirit who has made us alive, now causes us to "walk in holiness" and the final result of our sanctification is "glorification" where we will stand before God "holy and blameless".

Two of the ways that God sanctifies us is through warnings, and through statements about who we now are. Warnings to not go back, and statements about who we are and who we will become and living in light of that. I see both in our passage this morning.

Notice…conversion cannot happen without election. Justification can't happen without conversion. Sanctification cannot happen without justification…and listen very carefully… glorification will not happen apart from sanctification – the process where God, through His Spirit, empowers us to "walk in holiness".

Chain slide: Instead of arrows, think of salvation as a chain of events. It's not a chain that can break. It's God's chain, God is the one who saves, and therefore God is the one who pulls you to the end. But it's extremely essential for our growth as Christians to know how every link is chained to the next.

So THIS… **broken chain slide**….is an impossibility. If you are truly saved, the chain will not break! AND if you are truly saved, each link must happen. The link of sanctification happens through warnings and through knowing truths of who we are. ***Therefore, Paul wants us to know who we now are, and he wants to warn to no longer walk as we once walked.***

Here is the main point this morning: ***You are a new creation, therefore be careful how you walk, and be sure to dress accordingly.***

1. Be careful how you walk (vv.17-19)

> **Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.**

Notice, he is talking to Christians…and he is WARNING THEM – BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK. Why does Paul continue to remind the Ephesians of their former life? He did this back in chapter 2 as well – "you were dead in trespasses and sins", and "you walked according to the course of this world and the devil", and, "you were a child of wrath", and "you Gentiles, remember that you were cut off from Christ, without hope, and without God in this world." Is Paul just being a bummer with all of these reminders and warnings?! He is going to do it again in chapter 5…and we'll see that he reminds them that the person who walks in darkness will not inherit the Kingdom of God – therefore, WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT! Why would Paul talk to Christians in this way? ***Because Christians are destined for heaven, and it's the warnings of Scripture that will get us safely home.***

Every long-distance runner takes care regarding their gait and their stride. They correct it, and adjust it accordingly to prevent injury and to finish well. They get the right kind of shoes, they might put inserts in their shoes, and they set off. A marathon is a long distance to run. Even longer is the path that leads to eternal life. The Bible is clear that the Christian life is not a sprint, it's a marathon, and God is the one who gets us to the finish line…***and***…we must be careful how we run. This is the paradox of the Christian faith. Don't walk as you used to walk…run the race as God has designed you to run it. Christ has run on your behalf…salvation is in Him…AND YOU ARE TO RUN the race set before you.

So Paul once again describes their former walk and he says, "be careful to no longer walk this way!" **"in the futility of their minds"** – the idea is a triviality or a uselessness or a purposelessness. We have GREAT PURPOSE in Christ…so don't live your life is a wasteful way. God has a purpose for you! Don't live a trivial life. They were formerly consumed, as the whole world is consumed, with "triviality". Things that really are unimportant, a waste of time, that lead to **a wasteful way of thinking** leading to a **wasteful way of living**. Futile thinking leads to futile living. Can I ask you, "what is your mind consumed with?" Yesterday my good friend Phil encouraged the men to be read and open everywhere you go to simply say, "how can I pray for you!" When you say that, IMMEDIATELY your otherwise mundane, trivial day becomes ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT! Where has God strategically positioned you? How can you influence others around you for eternity? How can you spend your time immersed with that which is eternally significant? THINK OF THE MESSAGE WE BELIEVE – that the whole world is facing the wrath God, But God sent His Son on a rescue mission to save the world through His death and resurrection – WHAT COULD BE MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN THAT?! We have to feel the weight of significance regarding what God has entrusted to us…in order to flee from "trivial, vain, mundane, and useless living." DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE AS YOU ONCE WERE WASTING IT!

He further describes their old way of walking as "**being darkened in their understanding"** and even worse "**alienated from the life of God**". That's me! I was alienated

from the life of God. God means for us to have abundant LIFE! The devil wants to rob you of His life! You were formerly alienated from it…but God has given you abundant life that only comes through life in Jesus.

Paul says the Gentile way of walking is in **"ignorance"** that is **"due to their hardness of heart". "They have become callous"…**and therefore they are **"cut off from the life of God".** They don't heed the warning signs. Every guitar player wants to build callouses on their finger tips, so that the steel strings no longer hurt your fingers when you play them. Some people have calloused their hearts to the warning signs God has given them. Over time the warning signs just become white noise because you have chosen to ignore them. Are you heeding the warning signs of Scripture? When God convicts you…do you RUN, not walk towards repentance? When was the last time you heeded a warning sign from God?

If you go on a hike in the mountains, all along the trails there are often warning signs to keep you on the right path. Imagine a hiker seeing a sign that says, "keep off of path, danger ahead". But he doesn't heed the warning sign. As he goes another sign comes, "stay off path", but he keeps on going. Another one, "turn back now!" Until finally the hiker isn't even reading the signs anymore…why? He has become "calloused", his heart has become "hardened" to the warning signs. He's no longer paying attention, until eventually, he falls off a cliff.

The child of God heeds the promises of God, the child of God heeds the truths of God, the child of God heeds the commands of God, and the child of God heeds the warnings of God.

Be careful how you walk church. You will only make it to the end if God through His Holy Spirit causes you to HEED THE WARNINGS signs! The warning signs of Scripture, the reminders of who you once were, they're not a bummer…they're ***God's mercy to you*** – "stay on the path!", "turn right!", "don't go down this way, danger ahead!".

Paul is telling the Ephesians, "choose life!" Don't cut yourself off from the life of God…don't live life in a mundane trivial way! Don't harden your hearts, don't become callous as you once were. In short, "Don't go back!"

The people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years on a journey that should have taken approximately 11 days – and they NEVER ENTERED GOD'S REST! When the second generation was raised up by God and they were finally able to enter into God's rest and blessing in Canaan. Moses gave the people God's law a second time (Deuteronomy – second law) and pleaded with the people:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (Deut. 30:19-20)

Choose life church! And be greatly assured church…Christ will get you to the end. You know how I know God's Spirit lives in you…because you heed His warnings…and because Jesus walked perfectly for you so that your imperfect walk could be forgiven.

Jesus walked for you. The walk that we are to walk, Jesus went before us and walked it for us perfectly. We don't have to walk it perfectly because Jesus walked perfectly for us. Jesus always heeded the warning signs. Jesus never walked off course. God now credits to your account His perfect righteousness as a gift – that's justification – "declared righteous in Christ!". He walked the walk perfectly and He died on the cross to pay for our imperfect walk. The path we walk on is paved with the blood of Jesus!

Jesus not only walked for you, but Jesus walks with you. He does not promise life to be free from hardship and challenges. He empowers you through His Spirit to walk the walk and He gives you the example of how to walk. Jesus, as a man, walked the walk and He walks with you to get you to the end. There are dangers ahead, and trials will come. He does not promise life to be free from hardship and trials, but He does promise to walk through life with you. He knows what it means to walk the walk. He is our perfect substitute – He walked for you. He is our perfect example and our help – He walks with you…and now, Jesus commands you to walk. The warnings are given to keep you on the path. So be careful how you walk.

2. Be sure to dress accordingly (vv.20-24)

But that is not the way you learned Christ!— [21] assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, [22] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Everyone loves the way their clothes smell when they are fresh out of the dryer. They are warm, and they smell clean and fresh. Even better, when you buy a new shirt, or dress…you can't wait to put it on and wear it for the first time. Paul here uses "clothing language" – put off, put on - to describe our walk as Christians. Not only are we to heed the warning signs, but we are to dress accordingly.

Clothing in Scripture is a statement of identity. Priests were to be clothed with holy garments when they mediated between God and His people (Exo. 28:2). In the book of Zechariah, the priest Joshua has filthy garments that are replaced with white, festive garments demonstrating Adonai's cleansing (Zech. 3:1-4). Tamar in the book of Genesis wears "garments of widowhood" to identify her as a widow (Gen. 38:19). "Putting off" then is casting off your old identity – that old self who "is corrupt through deceitful desires". "Putting on" then is to

adopt your new identity in Christ – **"the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".**

A bride wouldn't show up to her wedding wearing flip flops and pajamas. She would dress accordingly. God says, "dress in a way that reflects who you are". She wears her engagement ring even before she is married to say, "I'm taken! My groom has already taken me…but the ceremony is coming soon." We need to dress as those who will one day be married. Revelation 19 tells us there is a wedding supper of the lamb where we will be presented to our groom as a pure and spotless bride. While we wait, we dress accordingly.

Notice Paul is making a statement about who we ARE – we are "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness". God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26), but because of our sin we didn't reflect His image as we were intended to. We were like statues that toppled over – marred, and unable to accurately reflect the image of our Creator. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, perfectly represented the Father. Hebrews 1 tells us He is the "exact imprint of God's nature. Now IN CHRIST we have been made new creations – so dress accordingly. God is recreating you after the image of His Son. And God sees you as clothed in the righteousness and holiness of Jesus! Your old "manner of conduct" is over…so put that off! You are new, so dress that way! 2 Cor. 5:17 – "if anyone is in Christ He is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new."

This is a "renewed" mindset God wants for us to adopt. Paul says, **"be renewed in the spirit of your mind".** This means seeing yourselves in Christ as new creatures with a new identity. Dress accordingly – wear the clothes that are fitting with who you are. Put off the old self, don't go back! Jesus walked for you, Jesus walks with you, and Jesus clothes you in His righteousness and holiness.

In closing: Do you need to heed God's warning? Are you starting to see the tendencies of your old self and you need to turn back, or "put off"? Maybe you've ignored the warning signs, and you're moving closer today towards a cliff – if you can still hear the voice of God…maybe it's turned into a faint whisper…but may the Spirit of God convict you in such a way that you repent, turn, and get back onto the path that leads to eternal life.

Maybe you need to put on. You need to see yourself as robed in the righteousness and holiness of Jesus. You may not feel like a new creation this morning…God says if you have put on Christ you are a new creation. So dress accordingly and be encouraged that you are robed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Maybe this morning God is calling you to put your faith in Jesus for the first time, or to once again renew your relationship with Him. Let's pray now and ask for God to apply all that we've learned to us all. PRAYER.

Connection Group Questions

1. Our new series is “A New Way to Walk” – share with the group some ways your life has changed since you made your decision to follow Him.
2. What are some things Paul said about who we are “in Christ” in Chapters 1-3? How does knowing who we are change how we are to live?
3. Read Ephesians 4:17-19 – Paul gives a description of the Gentiles here. Why does Paul warn the Ephesian Christians frequently about their former lifestyle?
4. In 4:18,19 Paul describes the Gentiles as having a “hardness of heart” and becoming “callous”. What do you think Paul means by this?
5. Read Hebrews 3:7-15 – how are the Israelites described in this passage during their wilderness wandering? What was the result of their spiritual condition?
6. How does the truth that Jesus walked ***for us*** and walks ***with us*** help us?
7. Read Ephesians 4:20-24 – Paul tells the Ephesians to “put off”, “be renewed”, and “put on”. Why does he use “clothing language”? Discuss some practical ways that these commands can be kept.
8. God is the one who leads us to eternal life ***and*** we are to walk in a way that leads to eternal life. How do both of these truths fit together for the child of God?
9. What are some things in your life that you need to “put off”? What are some things in your life that you are to “put on”? Pray for one another regarding these things.