

Ephesians 4:17-24

Introduction – v. 17a : “Therefore” (Gk. *oun*) is used to resume what was begun in vv. 1-3. The same word is used in v. 1 to draw an inference from the doctrines developed in chapters 1-3. “I say ... and testify” emphasizes the solemnity of what follows. “In the Lord” is an appeal to Christ Himself as the authority behind these injunctions. “As the other Gentiles walk” (KJV) should be translated, “as the Gentiles also walk.” But, the recipients of this letter were Gentiles. This strange command thus emphasizes the drastic removal from previous cultural moorings (cf. Eph. 2:11-16, 1 Cor. 10:32).

Vv. 17ff. provide a chronological scheme of our conversion:

1. The cause of our former behavior (17b-18).
2. The manner of our former behavior (19).
3. The critical moment of our learning Christ (20-21).
4. The achieved results of our learning Christ (22-24).
5. The appropriate behavior to characterize us now (25-6:20)

The Cause of our Former Behavior – vv. 17b-18 : These 5 phrases provide a descending ladder from cause to effect, each phrase explaining the previous. Gentiles walk the way they do

↳ because (Gk. ‘en’ of cause) their minds are vain

↳ because (participle) they are alienated from the life of God

↳ because (participle) their understanding is darkened

↳ because (Gk. ‘dia’+acc.) they are ignorant

↳ because (Gk. ‘dia’+acc.) their heart is hard.

“Mind” (Gk. *nous*) – origin of our thoughts, emotions, decisions, etc.

“Understanding” (Gk. *dianoia*) – those thoughts, etc. which the mind produces

“Heart” (Gk. *kardia*) – the innermost core of our person, the seat of our character

The word translated “blindness” in the KJV (*pw’rwsis*) is better translated “hardness.”

The ignorance referred to is surely ignorance of the gospel of Christ (cf. vv. 20-21, also 1:13).

The Manner of our Former Behavior – v. 19 : Consider the irony of being simultaneously “past feeling” and “licentious” (sensual). Being detached from any spiritual sensitivity they endlessly feed the appetites of their 5 mundane senses. “Impurity” (Gk. *akatharsia*) in its literal sense refers to what is filthy and putrid. The very things that repel God are what the Gentiles “work with greediness.”

The Conversion Experience – vv. 20-21 : The phrase “learn Christ” is awkward (in Greek as well as English), but appropriate. In contrast to most ordinary relationships, we begin our relationship with Christ by a willful acquisition of certain truths about Him. Whereas the evangelist ‘preaches’ Christ (Ac. 8:5, 1 Co. 1:23, 5:12, etc.), the convert ‘learns’ Him.

This verse claims tells us in what manner we did not learn Christ, namely the manner of our former way of thinking (i.e. in a manner appealing to our sensuality, darkened understanding, etc.).

The word order of v. 21 of the Greek text indicates an emphasis, which is not evident in any of the translations, as follows: "If indeed *it was Him* you heard of, and *in Him* you were taught. Two more observations add to this emphasis on Christ. First, "as the truth is in Jesus," signifies the uniqueness of Christ (cf. Jn. 14:6). Second, Paul incorporates the definite article with Jesus' name (lit. the Jesus), which he very rarely does, to further emphasize His uniqueness.

Thus the argument is, "you did not learn Jesus in such a manner, assuming the Jesus you learned about was the real Jesus," or conversely, "If those were the ways you learned Jesus, then it wasn't the real Jesus you learned." Consider the vast implications of this truth upon our practice of evangelism – an approach to soul-winning that seeks to make Christ appealing to the carnal mind has ceased to preach the real Jesus! One final observation from the Greek text, the phrase "heard Him" can grammatically only refer to hearing Him spoken about, not hearing Him speak (akouw + accusative not genitive).

The Achieved Results of our Conversion, vv. 22-24 : These verses consist of 3 infinitives, "to put off," "to be renewed," and "to put on." Grammatically these can be understood either as actions we are being told to currently perform, having learned Christ, or as actions which we already performed when we learned Christ. This question is settled by an obvious parallel passage, Col. 3:5-11. Notice Col. 3:5-8 enjoins us to no longer walk in such and such a way (cf. Eph. 4:17), followed by the factual basis for our new walk, that we "have put off the old man" and "have put on the new man" (Col. 3:9-10, cf. Eph. 4:22-24). See also Rom. 6:6.

"That ye put off" and "That ye put on" are in the aorist tense, indicating completed action.

"Be renewed" is in the present tense, indicating an on-going process.

"Old man" and "New man" refer not to the individual but to a whole community. Compare "new man" in Eph. 2:15 and Col. 10-11; also the "perfect man" in Eph. 4:13. The NASB translation "new/old self" is unfortunate.

Therefore, these verses do not teach that the sinful predisposition of our flesh has been replaced with a righteous one (cf. Rom. 7:14-25).

Rather, they refer to our removal from union with the humanity that is in Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12) and a new union with those that are in Christ (cf. Rom. 6:3-6).

Gone with the old man are the "deceitful lusts" (lit. lusts of deceit), that is our former proneness to be deceived into sinning (cf. Rom. 7:11).

"After God" (Gk. kata theon) apparently means "in God's image" (cf. Col. 3:10).

The specific qualities of God that characterize the church are "righteousness" and "holiness."

This righteousness and holiness is said to be "of the truth" (not "true holiness" as in KJV). Compare this to being "renewed in knowledge" in Col. 3:10.

Let us not devalue the precious knowledge of divine truth.

The Appropriate Character of Our Present Walk, 4:25-6:20