

EPHESIANS

ALIVE IN CHRIST

WHAT WE ONCE WERE

Ephesians 4:17–24

RELATED SCRIPTURES

Leviticus 19:2 | Romans 1:18–32 | Philippians 2:12–13

STUDY FOR SERMON FROM 07.27.25

SUMMARY

Paul makes a comparison between what these particular Gentile converts of Ephesus once were and who they are *now*. Before their life in Christ, they walked “in the futility of their minds” (v. 17). This remark makes a commentary on Gentile idol worship (or worship of anything other than one true God), which, in the final analysis, can never bring peace, lasting satisfaction, or life; only God can do that. Paul describes the futile worship of false gods with terms and phrases like “darkened in understanding,” “ignorance,” and “hardness of heart” (v. 18). Paul’s point is that their pursuit of sin has a compounding effect—it only leads to deeper sin and a callousness towards it which then gives way to “sensuality, greed, and practice of every kind of impurity” (v. 19). The more someone gives into sin, the more it makes them utterly incapable of grasping the truth of God and his gospel. However, Paul tells the church that this was their state *before* they “learned Christ” (v. 20). To learn Christ is to know Christ and know him is to be familiar with “the truth in Jesus” (v. 21). Throughout the first half of his letter to the church, Paul has been reminding them of the truth of Jesus—that they have been “raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly places” (2:6), are members of the “one new man” (2:15), and have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand” (2:10). So with these reminders of who they are in Christ—the new creation that they are—they should therefore “put off your old self,” and be “renewed in the spirit of your minds,” by putting on the “new self” (vv. 22-24). Putting on the new self is only possible because Christ has made his followers a new creation; he’s given them a renewed ability to reject sin and pursue the righteousness of the One in whose image they are cast. Since Christ changed us, we now have the ability and duty to participate in our sanctification, or as Paul stated in another letter, to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

GROUP QUESTIONS

Share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you from the sermon or your direct reading of Ephesians 4:17-24.

If the pursuit of sin has a compounding effect, does the pursuit of righteousness have a compounding effect too? Can you recall a time when you experienced the compounding impact of pursuing righteousness?

Paul gives the church instruction that they are to be “renewed in the spirit of your minds.” What do you suppose he means by this—what does it mean to be “renewed in the spirit of your minds”?

If there’s one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of this portion of Scripture, what is that thing?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

As you pray, be sure to include today’s themes in what you bring before God.