

## “A New Personal Perspective” Ephesians 4:17-24

### *Introduction:*

1. Last weekend Sharon and I had the joy of attending my thirtieth high school class reunion. I thank God for all he has done for a number of my classmates, who are now serving the Lord in many ways. It was a blessing to see all my former classmates that attended and to wonder at, how shall I put this gracefully, how much we have “matured”. A number said to me, “You look just like you did in high school.” Now that can seem flattering until you think, “Are they telling me that I looked *this bad* in high school?” But seriously, it was a time to see each other in new ways, through adult eyes, and to have a new view or perspective of each other.

2. In a similar way, every follower of Christ needs to take a fresh look at himself or herself. Years ago Gene Getz wrote a book on the church that asserted that every church must see itself through three lenses: eternal, historical and cultural. The lens of eternity lets us see ourselves from God’s viewpoint, the lens of history reminds us of what God has done to bring us to this point, and the lens of culture provides us with the opportunity to know what we ought to do now. This morning, let’s take a look through the lenses of the Scriptures. As we look we will see that the Lord reminds us of what we were before salvation, of what change he produced at salvation, and of what we now are in Christ.

*Illustration:* In Hoosiers, coach Dale said of the team, “We are learning what we are and what we can be.”

3. Perhaps it is wise to remind ourselves of the working principle of the Christian life. In order to walk worthy of our calling, we must know what we are in Christ (our position) and then seek to conform how we act (our condition) to what we are in Christ. Paul develops this principle in this passage by contrasting the pagan and Christian lifestyles and by stressing the radical break from the pagan lifestyle that God caused by his grace.

*Exposition:* Three ingredients of having a Biblical view of oneself as a follower of Christ.

I. We used to walk as the nations do—in the futility of their thinking. 4:17-19

A. At all times a follower of Christ must evaluate non-Christian thinking from this perspective. We are no longer part of the worldly nations, though we live among them, because we are part of God’s new nation the church (2:11-22; cf. Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

1. The thoughts, the drives, the aspirations and the dreams of the ungodly are futile—empty, vain, meaningless of no value! See especially Eccl 1:12-18. From their point of view, the lifestyle they pursue is the height of wisdom, but from God’s it is the depth of foolishness.

2. Notice carefully that their problem is **internal** and **spiritual**. The worldly-minded person assumes that his or her problem is external and situational. They cannot bring themselves to confess that they need a deep and basic change from the inside out.

*Illustration:* Suppose you want to take a family picture at night in your house. You’ll get everyone combed and properly attired, clean up the room, turn on the lights, and get someone to take the picture. But suppose the camera’s batteries are dead. The camera won’t work! What do you do? Turn on more lights? Comb everyone’s hair again? Vacuum the room? No, you put new batteries in the camera!

*Apply:* Christian, your great challenge is to persuade non-Christians that their spiritual batteries are dead and that the only way for their life to work is for God to put in new batteries.

B. An analysis of the inner person of the pagan

1. Their understanding is darkened. People assume that they can think straight, that they have the ability to begin from themselves and to figure out life. But the constant state of the natural mind is darkness. Sinful people cannot see the glory of God (2 Cor 4:4; Jn 3:3).

2. Their desires toward God and holiness are hardened and past sensitivity. Instead of desiring God, people refuse to have room for God in their thoughts (Ps 10:4). Instead, they have pleasure in wickedness (Rm 1:32).

3. Their choices conform to a continual lust for impurity. The word used here refers to behavior that is unrestrained by law or morality, but indulges natural impulses or appetites in an unrestrained manner. The fallen human will is not free. It cannot make choices for good that are contrary to the sin-twisted mind and emotions. The will wants to choose impurity. *Point:* This is what we mean by total depravity or radical corruption. The heart or inner person of the unbeliever is biased toward what is ungodly and wicked. Sin or rebellion against God that dominates their inner person induces them to always make choices that conform to their biases. They cannot be led away from this inner corruption by skillful arguments, acts of love or pressure on the will.

*Transition:* What then can we do for them? Let us see what God did for us, and then we will know what the Lord must also do for them.

II. We came to know Christ a different way. 4:20-24

A. We received a teaching that recreated our inner persons.

1. The message of Christ first reached us on the awareness level. We “heard of him.” Notice carefully that we did not merely hear about religion or the church. We heard about Christ—his person, his will and his redemptive activity.

2. The truth that is in Jesus then renewed us on the internal level. We “were taught in him.” God the Holy Spirit reached into our hearts with the light of the Word and turned the lights on. God tells us this in various passages: Mt 11:25-27; 16:17; Jn 6:45; 2 Cor 4:6; Gal 1:15-16. When we see this, we can grasp why Jesus said that salvation is a matter of knowing God through his Son. Jn 17:3

B. We became new persons in Christ.

1. The old inner person was “put off”. At the time of salvation when we learned Christ, God taught us to put off the old self that was corrupted and dominated by sin.

2. The new inner person was “put on”. At the time of salvation when we learned Christ, God also taught us to put on the new self that is created to be like God and is led by the Holy Spirit.

*Point:* It is a mistake to call a Christian “totally depraved” or a “miserable sinner”. Sometimes we might act like we’re still totally depraved and might feel like we’re miserable sinners. But we are not. We are new in Christ.

*Clarification:* As totally depraved people do not follow all the ways of sin because of the operations of God’s common grace, so new people do not follow all the ways of holiness because of remaining sin. Sadly, we take our eyes off Christ, fail to live by faith in Christ, get out of step with the Spirit and fall into sin. But as the old man is under the dominion of sin, so the new man is under the dominion of grace (Rm 6:14).

*Apply:* We must tell ourselves everyday to live as the new people that we are in Jesus Christ.

III. We must maintain and develop this new personal perspective. 4:23-24

A. We must see ourselves in a new way—as created to be like God. At the moment of salvation, we receive new life as new persons. Part of the struggle of the Christian life is to view ourselves as what we now are in Christ, instead of what we used to be in Adam.

1. The image of God that was defaced and twisted in Adam is now restored in Christ. We are able to connect or communicate with the Holy God again.

2. This restored image involves the writing of God's laws on the heart and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Both produce new desires for true righteousness and holiness. We are no longer interested in the shams of religiosity and works righteousness.

B. We must also realize that our new inner person is in the process of renewal—"to be made new in the attitude of your minds."

1. Though we are new persons, we are not yet perfect persons. The new self must "put off" sinful practices and "put on" godly practices. This involves severe struggles with sin on a personal level. It means that we must replace the ways of the Gentiles with the ways of Christ.

2. The battleground is your mind. We must be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rm 12:1-2). As Jim Boice used to say, "We want to train Christians to think and to act Biblically."

*Apply:* This is the reason that Biblical instruction is so prominent in churches like ours. We are striving to transform minds so that God receives worship and praise from us in a whole life manner. Worship is impoverished without people whose inner persons are aflame with desire for God. As you and I live according to the truth that is in Jesus, then our hearts will overflow with worship and praise and fellowship and consecration and joy!

*Apply:* The mission statement of our church says that one of our purposes is "to glorify God through equipping believers to spiritual maturity." In pursuit of this purpose our present teaching ministry has the theme of "Building Better Personal Relationships". Except for some special services, most Sundays we'll be considering the following teaching in Ephesians. It will show how Christ's new people ought to develop or mature into Christ's way of interacting with people. I hope that you will profit from this theme, so bring a friend with you next week!