

**Pentecost 11**  
**August 9, 2015**

*“Every Step You Take Is for Jesus”*

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**EPHESIANS 4:17-24**

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*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. <sup>20</sup> You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. <sup>21</sup> Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

The Christians living in the ancient city of Ephesus were living in a cesspool of sin. In the midst of their city was the temple to the goddess Diana which was one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. It had 127 magnificent marble columns over sixty feet tall and it was about the size of football field. Within the temple was the idol of the goddess Diana an ugly idol carved out of a black meteor. Around the temple were vendors selling statues of the goddess that people carried around with them in worship. Also around the temple were the numerous places where they engaged in orgiastic practices similar to what happened in the worship Baal. The worship was a kind of hysteria where people worked themselves into a frenzy with shouts and dances. The historian Heraclitus said the temple was, “The darkest of vileness. The morals were lower than animals, and inhabitants of Ephesus were fit only to be drowned.” It is in this awful vile place that a new people began to live a new life. It was here that Christians began walking the streets of the city reflecting to all around them the blood of Jesus that had rescued and saved them from the sin.

The Apostle Paul tells these people to not walk in the darkness of these people but to live their lives for Jesus. He says, “Don’t live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.” The Greek word that is translated as “live” could also be translated as “walk.” Wherever you walk this week you reflect the new life you have in Christ. You will come in contact with people who are not Christians. You want them to see that you are different. You want them to see the love that Jesus has for you shining forth in your life. Every step you take is for Jesus and his glory.

**You don’t want to walk in the old ways of the world**

Your walk in this life is radically different from people who are not Christian. Paul writes, “So, I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” People who are not believers in Christ are futile or empty in their thinking. Oh,

to be sure, they may be smart and intelligent and wise in many areas of life, but when it comes to being wise and knowing God's plan to save them and rescue them, they are futile or empty. They are totally stuck on saving themselves.

Paul says they are darkened in their understanding and separated from life with God. Here is how they are described in Isaiah 59. "We look for light but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes." And what is the cause of this blindness or this darkened understanding? It is because of their ignorance that is in them because they have hardened their hearts against God. Here is how Paul describes their situation in Romans 1, "For although they knew God they neither glorified him, as God or gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Remember how Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. He lost all sense of reason as he continued to put up with plague after plague instead of giving into God's demand to let his people go. Finally it says "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." In Romans 1 it says that God "gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts."

What happens to people when they totally give themselves over to sin? What happened to the people in Ephesus as they worshipped Diana? "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to plunge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." That certainly describes the people of Ephesus, but it is also a powerful description for what happened to God's Old Testament people in their worship of the fertility God Baal. Read the prophet Jeremiah and hear him deplore how the people worship God in his temple in the morning, but in the evening they craved going up to the high places to join the worship of Baal. They plunged themselves into every kind of impurity and they longed for even more. They became so calloused that they even sacrificed their own children to appease this awful God Baal.

What happens when people start making excuses for their sin and turning their hearts against the Lord? Imagine that this I am holding contains a sin that I have committed. When I shake the box, I can hear the sin inside. The more I try to wrap the sin with excuses like layers of duct tape, the thicker the layers become. If I keep making excuses and covering up what I do I can reach the point where I no longer feel any guilt.

The pagans in Ephesus felt no shame for their sin as they engaged in orgiastic rituals in the temple of Diana or threw people to the beasts in the arena. A gang member feels no shame or guilt in shooting at another gang member. An abortion clinic doctor feels no pain and guilt as the body of another human being is dismembered within the womb of its mother. The radical Islamic terrorist feels no pain or no conscience as he pulls the string and explodes the bomb that kills dozens of people.

Some of the Christians living in Ephesus once lived like that. They had no conscience. They gladly gave themselves over to immorality. They enjoyed seeing people torn apart by wild beasts in the arena. But now they were different. I think of what Paul said to the Christians living in Corinth. "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." They wanted to live a whole new life. They wanted every step they

took to be for Jesus. That's what I want and that's what you want as you step out into your world this coming week.

### **You want every step to be lived for Jesus**

When you come to know Christ your life totally changes. "You however did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." When the people came to know Jesus, it was totally different from the worship of the goddess Diana. When I come to know Christ, I come face to face with the reality that there is nothing in me that can possibly save myself. I learn from Jesus that the problem of sin is much deeper than the things I actually do. Sin is also found deep within my thoughts and desires.

For example in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says there is so much more to committing adultery than having relations with someone who is not your husband or wife. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery,' but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart." It is easy to point a finger at the adulterous people in Ephesus or the adulterous people in Hollywood. Three fingers are always pointing back at us to remind us of the times lustful and sinful thoughts have entered into our hearts.

When you get to know Jesus you discover he is the only one to save you. You see him live the perfect life you could never live. Never once did he lust after a woman or man. Never once did he have hateful and hurtful thoughts towards others. Never once did he fail to reach out and help people who were in need. When you get to know Jesus, as the people in Ephesus did, you discover that you are saved by his blood that was shed for you on the cross. As Paul wrote so beautifully to the people earlier in this letter. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

So as we walk through this life step by step we keep putting off the old way of life and putting on the new life we have in Christ. "You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires to be new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

This old way of life is dominated by the belief system that I have the freedom and the right to follow any gods that I want. The old way says that if I try my best to serve whatever god I believe in him, I will be rewarded with a better life in the future even after I die. On our trip to Colorado we listened a book about the Mayflower. It discussed how the Native Americans had different gods that were often connected to various animals and other things in nature. The old system of belief is always based on performance. Just be faithful to whatever god you choose and things will be OK. As Paul said it is corrupted by its deceitful desires. The worst thing that could ever happen to me as I walk through life is to go back to thinking there is something I need to add to what Christ has done to be truly worthy and acceptable to God.

Instead Paul encourages us to walk around in our community and in our homes by "putting on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." The new self

glories not in what I do but in what Christ has done for me. The new person we are in Christ joyfully proclaims, "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin." The new person we are in Christ wears the robe of righteousness he provides with a smile the face, a spring in the step and a song in the heart. We step out into each new day that dawns saying with Isaiah the prophet and say, " I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed m with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

It was Patrick of Ireland who began each day with these words, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me." Recently I asked someone how far they walked and he said, 2.47 miles. How did he know exactly how far he walked? Every step was measure by a GPS system he carried in his pocket. The Lord knows every step you take this common week. What a privilege it is to walk each step for Jesus and his glory. Amen.