

John Newton was an English-American preacher and former slave-ship captain who lived in the 18th century. He was the writer of many hymns, including Amazing Grace.

A few years before John Newton died, a friend was having breakfast with him. Their custom was to read from the Bible after the meal. Because Newton's eyes were growing dim, his friend would read, then Newton would comment briefly on the passage.

For that day, the selection was from 1 Corinthians 15. When the words "*by the grace of God I am what I am*" were read, Newton was silent for several minutes. Then he said:

I am not what I ought to be. How imperfect and deficient I am!
I am not what I wish to be, although I abhor that which is evil and would cleave to what is good.
I am not what I hope to be, but soon I shall put off mortality and with it all sin.

Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor yet what I hope to be...I can truly say, I am not what I once was: a slave to sin and Satan.

All things new...

London businessman Lindsay Clegg told the story of a warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash around the interior.

As he showed a prospective buyer the property, Clegg took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage.

"Forget about the repairs," the buyer said. "When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site. When saves a sinner, the old life is over. God makes all things new.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Apostle Paul writes, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*"

Because of the death and resurrection of the Jesus Christ there are three transactions which are credited to the believer's account. All of these transactions have occurred in the past but have present results.

With the **first transaction**—the believer's sins were forgiven. They were paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ.

With the **second transaction**—the flesh, that internal traitor, was condemned and no longer rules the believer. The believer does not have to obey the flesh when he or she is tempted to sin.

Colossians 3:9 tells us that "the flesh" no longer has power to dominate you. Romans 8:12 tells us that the believer is no longer debtor to the flesh. This means that you are no longer under any obligation to serve sin, any more than the children of Israel had to serve Pharaoh after they marched victoriously through the Red Sea.

The *third transaction* that is credited to the Christian's account is his or her birth as a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. Romans 6, verse 4, tells us that the old man was destroyed so that we might walk in "newness of life".

Romans 6:6 tells us that the "Old Man" was put to death and the "New Man" has been birthed. This means that the believer should possess a new mind, a new heart, new desires, new ambitions, new pursuits, new joys, a new peace, a new power, a new victory.

Again, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away and behold, all things become new."

Galatians 2:20 says the Christian has, "been crucified with Christ; it is no longer you who live, but Christ lives in you..."

Colossians 3:3 says, "You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

Because of the spiritual effects of Christ's death and His resurrection, the Christian no longer lives for himself (i.e. to the flesh), but from now on "for him who died" and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Our text today is taken from Ephesians 4:17-24 where the Apostle Paul makes the point that when a person comes to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, a change takes place in that person's life. "Have you been changed?"

Eph 4:17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,

Eph 4:18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

Eph 4:19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Paul starts out and reminds his readers of the walk of the Gentiles. The word **Gentile** comes from the Greek word, *ethnos*, eth'-nos, we get our English word, *ethnic* from this word.

This word means, "a race" or "a tribe." In the Bible the Gentile was a foreigner or a non-Jew. In Ephesians 4, it is used to describe the group of people who were *heathen* or *pagan*; they did not worship the God of the Bible. In 1 Thess. 4:5, Paul writes of "*the Gentiles who do not know God.*"

In verses 17 to 19 of our text, Paul makes several points about the Gentiles' walk:

1. *They walk in the futility of their mind.*

The word "walk" in the Scripture refers to the person's lifestyle. It refers to the way someone conducts him or herself—it is one's manner of living.

When he uses the word "mind" he is not speaking of merely the intellect or the capacity to understand, but the ability to recognize moral good and spiritual truth. In other words, the things of God are past finding out to the unbeliever and sometimes they even appear to be foolishness to the unbeliever.

The unbeliever has a hard time understanding why a Christian would give up his or her Sunday to worship a God they can't see or hear and even worse, not only to give their time but their treasures and talents to Him.

The polite unbeliever might say, *"If that's your thing..."* The mocker might say things like, "Why you gonna give that preacher your money to pay his car bill?"

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God unto salvation. In the next chapter it's written, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14)*

The unbeliever walks in the emptiness that is there when God is not in their life. The walk in their carnalities—pleasing the desires of their flesh is what motivates them. If it feels good they do it and will justify their irreverent behavior to the grave.

Everything the unbeliever does is out of selfish, flesh-driven motive. Even when they do good deeds for others, like send money for Haitian Earthquake Relief, is to give themselves a good feeling inside or a sense of worth because they helped someone.

So the first characteristic of the unbeliever is that he or she walks in the futility of their mind.

2. *They walk being darkened in their understanding.*

Here Paul is elaborating on what he just said concerning the futile mind of the heathen.

The word "darkened" is a perfect participle which means "to darken or blind the mind" and it's in the perfect tense in the Greek to show that sin has permanently blinded the Gentile's mind and this person cannot and will not "see the light" unless the Lord opens his eyes.

In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 Paul writes, *"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."*

Since their mind is darkened, they cannot understand the things of God—they cannot desire the things of God. Romans 3:10-11 says, *"As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God."*

Paul is really laying down the law when it comes to to the depravity of the human race.

I remember that it was in Bible College, back in the mid-eighties, when I first was introduced to the doctrine of the depravity of the human race.

I was taught that because of Adam's disobedience that led to his estrangement from God...

- We didn't have the capacity to find God.
- We didn't have the desire to know God
- We didn't have the desire to search for God.

So God has to take the initiative to reveal Himself to us.

It is like an adult hiding from a 2 year old. If an adult really wanted to hide from a 2 year old the toddler would not be able to find him.

But our situation is even more complex than hiding from a two-year-old. Just imagine leaving a book on Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* on the coffee table and expect a 2 year old to grab it and begin to acquaint himself with it?

But it is even more complex than that—Take away the child's senses of sight, hearing, smell and see if he or she can learn Einstein.

But it is even more complex than that—Take away the child's desire to learn and to know.

But *our* case is even sadder than that because God is infinitely more than Einstein.

God says it this way:

Isaiah 55:8-9- *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

In Romans chapter one, Paul graphically summarizes the depravity of humanity. The sad part of what I about to read is that it tells us that even when God lets man in on the truth of the nature of God, he tramples under his feet. The reading is from the Amplified Bible¹.

¹⁹*For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [Himself] has shown it to them.*

²⁰*For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made (His handiworks). So [men] are without excuse [altogether without any defense or justification],^(B)*

²¹*Because when they knew and recognized Him as God, they did not honor and glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. But instead they became futile and ^(C)godless in their thinking [with vain imaginings, foolish reasoning, and stupid speculations] and their senseless minds were darkened.*

²²*Claiming to be wise, they became fools [professing to be smart, they made simpletons of themselves].*

²³*And by them the glory and majesty and excellence of the immortal God were exchanged for and represented by images, resembling mortal man and birds and beasts and reptiles.*

²⁴*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their [own] hearts to sexual impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves [abandoning them to the degrading power of sin],*

²⁵*Because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever! Amen (so be it).^(C)*

²⁶*For this reason God gave them over and abandoned them to vile affections and degrading passions. For their women exchanged their natural function for an unnatural and abnormal one,*

¹ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passages/?search=romans%201&version=AMP>

²⁷And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze (burning out, consumed) with lust for one another--men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own ^[d]bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong-doing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution.

²⁸And so, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God or approve of Him or consider Him worth the knowing, God gave them over to a base and condemned mind to do things not proper or decent but loathsome,

²⁹Until they were filled (permeated and saturated) with every kind of unrighteousness, iniquity, grasping and covetous greed, and malice. [They were] full of envy and jealousy, murder, strife, deceit and treachery, ill will and cruel ways. [They were] secret backbiters and gossipers,

³⁰Slanderers, hateful to and hating God, full of insolence, arrogance, [and] boasting; inventors of new forms of evil, disobedient and undutiful to parents.

³¹[They were] without understanding, conscienceless and faithless, heartless and loveless [and] merciless.

³²Though they are fully aware of God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them themselves but approve and applaud others who practice them.

So the Gentiles or the heathen walked: “in the futility of their mind” and were “darkened in their understanding...”

3. They walk excluded from the life of God.

The word "excluded" means in the original languages "to be estranged" and it is used of those who have estranged *themselves* from God. It means also, "to shut out from one's fellowship and intimacy."

We see this today as many people want to have nothing to do with God. They want Him out of the schools; they want Him out of the government; they want Him out of society and out of marriage, the family and the home.

They want to shut God out period—unless of course when they run into some serious trouble or a crisis in their life, then He is among the first they will cry out to.

4. They walk in ignorance.

Having a darkened understanding and shutting God out of their lives was not because of external reasons. That is, they couldn't blame their environment on their spiritual condition.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:18 that the Gentile-pagan condition was as a result of an ignorance that was *internal*—an ignorance that was in their own heart.

5. They walk in the hardness of their hearts.

Paul goes on to say that unbelievers were morally and spiritually ignorant because of the *hardness of their hearts*.

The word "hardness" or "blindness (KJV)" comes from a root word in the Greek which means "hard skin". It means literally "the covering with a callous."

6. *They walk in callousness.*

The KJV renders this portion of verse 19 as "*who being past feeling*". This phrase comes from the Greek word which means, "to cease to feel pain or grief." It means "to become callous, insensible to pain or apathetic."

A guitar player has finger tips that are calloused. It comes from pressing down on the strings during regular play. When you begin to learn to play this instrument, your fingers will hurt like crazy at first but then over time the tips of your fingers will harden and you no longer feel the pain.

Paul is telling his readers that the Gentile's hearts were calloused—they were morally insensitive. Their hearts were no longer were sensitive to the conscience. (Expositors) When their conscience was trying to tell them that something was wrong or sinful, they did not notice any of the promptings.

7. *They walk in sensuality.*

In verse 19 of our text Paul says, "*They have given themselves over to...*" This phrase means "to give into the hands of another," "to betray," "to hand over," or "to give one's self up."

Today one would say "to sell down the river." The unbeliever hands himself over to *sensuality or lewdness (NKJV) or lasciviousness (KJV)*". This person acknowledges no restraints. There are no limits to his or her behavior.

The proof of this is that there is behavior that oftentimes expresses itself in the sexual arena that cannot be mentioned from this pulpit.

8. *They walk in impurity with greediness.*

Paul says the pagan walks in "impurity" or "uncleanness" [KJV]). This word describes every kind or *moral* impurity.

The word, "greediness" describes the condition or frame of mind in which they practiced the impurity.

They walk in impurity because of their greed. It usually is a greed for money, or pleasure, or companionship. It can be a greed for material things or even power that motivates a person to practice every kind of impurity.

So you see that a person without God is in deep depravity and the only thing that prevents people without God in their lives from going out of control is the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit.

We've already seen in Romans that one level of sin and debauchery leads to the next. It's like the serial rapist who acquired a habit as a boy just reading girly magazines at the local convenience store or the heroin addict who started off with smoking weed. Both of these addicts moved from one level to the next and before long they were committing the unimaginable.

Paul would not have to warn his Christian readers not to walk like the pagans if there wasn't a problem. Obviously, there were some in the early church who professed to be Christian but were exhibiting the behaviors or characteristics of the heathen who did not know God.

In verses 17 to 19 of Ephesians 4, Paul lists the characteristics of those who are not saved—those who are not born again—those who are not children of God and then gives the reason “real” Christians don’t act this way in verses 20 and 21:

“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus...”

There are several things that we can observe from Paul's comments in these verses.

1. Perhaps some of his readers are walking like the unbelievers because they are unbelievers.
2. Perhaps some of his readers learned about a Christ that was different than the biblical Jesus.
3. Perhaps some of his readers are indeed Christians who haven't been properly taught.

Paul writes, *“But you did not learn Christ in this way...”* This verse is in the *aorist* tense in the Greek language that it was originally written in. The aorist tense marks a specific time; it is a snapshot of an event in time.

The Apostle Paul was saying that at a specific moment of time they came to know Jesus in salvation.

Paul wasn't referring to knowing the doctrines of Christ but the person of Christ Himself. It wasn't that they learned *about* Jesus. They came to know Jesus in a personal way.

Do you know Jesus in a personal way?

If you were asked, “Do you know who Abraham Lincoln is?” Most of us would say. “Yes.”

If you were asked, “Do you know Abraham Lincoln?” Perhaps you would answer, “Give me the opportunity to study the books written about him and I can learn about him.”

In verse 21 Paul writes, *“But you did not learn Christ in this way...”* The word “learn” implies more than receiving instruction, though that is included. It is to learn Christ in such a way as to become a disciple or a follower of Christ.

What Paul is doing here is showing that in contrast to the insensitive, passion-dominated pagans who exist only to satisfy their lower nature, true believers have had a personal encounter with the living Christ that radically changes things about the person.

When a person comes to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, a change takes place in that person's life. Romans 6:6 tells us that the “Old Man” was put to death and the “New Man” has been birthed. This means that the believer should possess a new mind, a new heart, new desires, new ambitions, new pursuits, new joys, a new peace, a new power and a new victory.

In 1976 I trusted Jesus as my Savior. One thing I noticed about myself was that my personal ambitions were not as important as they once were.

In the year that I became a Christian, I was driving a fire engine red, 1974 Chevy Nova. I remember that before I got saved, I was consumed with customizing my car with wide tires, Mag wheels, air shocks and a glasspack muffler. I used to wax that car all the time--but after I came to know Jesus the car didn't have the appeal it used to have with me. When I got saved, I distinctly remember getting a desire for a family car and traded in my Chevy for a four-door Ford Granada.

The Campus Crusade for Christ illustration showing that when self is on the throne one's life is all out of order but when Jesus becomes King of one's life and His Lordship is acknowledged, order and purpose comes to one's life.



Self-Directed Life

Self is on the throne, directing decisions and actions (represented by the dots), often resulting in frustration. Jesus is outside the life.



Christ-Directed Life

Jesus is in the life and on the throne. Self is yielding to Jesus. The person sees Jesus' influence and direction in their life.

Paul says, *“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus...”*

But you did not learn Christ in this way,

The term “learn” that Paul used in Eph. 4:21, implies more than receiving instruction, though that is included. It is to learn Christ in such a way as to become a disciple or a follower of Christ.

What Paul is doing here is showing that in contrast to the insensitive, passion-dominated pagans who exist only to satisfy their lower nature (17-19), “You”, believers--those who have given their lives to Jesus Christ by faith--did not learn Christ in this way.

What did they learn? They learned the *“truth that is in Jesus.”*

Jesus is the personification of truth. So many things that we are hearing today are not trustworthy and reliable. If you want to see what truth looks like look at Jesus. If you want to hear what truth sounds like listen to Jesus.

The truth that's in Jesus, According to John MacArthur, is the truth about salvation that leads to the fullness of truth about God, man, creation, history, life, purpose, relationships, heaven, hell, judgment, and all that is truly important.

1 John 5:20 says, *“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”*

*(Eph 4:22 NASB) that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
(Eph 4:23 NASB) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,*

(Eph 4:24 NASB) and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The "former manner of life" or "conversation [KJV]" Paul refers to are the characteristics of the Gentiles that he just explained in verses 17-19.

As he uses the expression "lay aside" or "put off (KJV)" he uses the imagery of clothing or the changing of garments. The first thing that they were taught in Christ is that, upon receiving Christ, they were to "lay aside the old self." (Repentance and submission to God)

In another place of Scripture (Romans 6) Paul says that when a person becomes a Christian, the old self has been put to death, having died with Christ.

Rom 6:6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Rom 6:7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Now most of us know people who say they are Christians but whom also struggle with some of the same behaviors that Paul identifies as pagan.

Now most of us know people who say they are Christians but still have to fight to keep impure thoughts from taking control. There are people who profess to know Christ but have to keep their attitudes in check.

There are people who say they are Christians but can't manage a regular attendance pattern when it comes to worshipping Christ each Lord's Day.

I could go on and on about the lifestyles of those who say they are Christians but do not live the life.

But Paul says that we have put off the old self and if Christians have "put off" the old self, why do they still struggle with sin?

The answer is found in verse 23-24 of Ephesians 4.

Eph 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

Eph 4:23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

Eph 4:24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The problem is that many who say they have trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior are not being renewed in the spirit of their mind. The word "renewed" in verse 23 means to be "renovated from the inside out."

This continues the thought of verse 22. After the Christian has once-for-all put off the old man which is corrupted in accordance with, the lusts of deceit, he is to be renewed in the spirit of his mind and put on the new self.

Once this "laying aside" has taken place and the "renewing" is taking place and once they have begun to put on the new man (vs. 24), Paul begins to teach them the conduct that accompanies the true believer.

One cannot begin to live the Christian life until first he or she becomes a Christian. This is the "laying aside the old self" that Paul is speaking about.

It is unfair to expect an unbeliever to live like a Christian and think like a Christian and have Christian values until he or she first becomes a Christian.

Secondly, one cannot begin to successfully live the Christian life unless they keep themselves in the process of "*being renewed in the spirit of their mind.*"

Not only is it unfair to expect an unbeliever to live like a Christian until they become a Christian, it's unfair to expect a Christian to behave like a Christian until they've been taught.

You need to know that the process of "*being renewed in the spirit of your mind*" is where the majority of Christians fail. This is where the struggle begins.

This is why the devil fights tooth and nail to keep you from attending a Bible-believing, teaching and practicing church.

This is why the flesh resists anything that would threaten its security—the flesh fights against you getting into the Scriptures—memorizing and meditating on God's Word—this is why the flesh fights against you establishing and keep a regular habit of prayer.

So Paul says, "Lay aside the old self"—become a Christian. This is a one-time transaction.

Secondly, "*be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*" This is a continuous responsibility of putting yourself in the place where you can be taught the Word of God and then meditating on what you've been taught and the practice of memorizing Scripture.

Thirdly, one must "*put on the new self which was created in righteousness according to the pattern of what God is.*"

"*Putting on the new self*" is the practical application of Christian conduct:

Eph 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

Eph 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Eph 4:27 nor give place to the devil.

Eph 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Eph 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

We will look at this with more detail next time.