

Paul had just exhorted us to be built up in the faith by receiving from the teaching gifts within the body. We are to be built up until we all reach unity in the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (4:13) It is then that we won't be shaken by false teachings and crafty cults that would lure us into darkness. Instead, we will grow up in connection with the head of our spiritual body, Christ. (4:15) It is in connection with Him that we are united with the rest of the body and increase in love. (4:16) This growing that is described is both a mental grasp of spiritual truth (2Timothy 2:15) and the transformation of the heart by that truth. (Colossians 3:16) It requires a yielding of the will so that Christ, the head of the body, may direct us. (James 4:7)

The Apostles and prophets presented the truth in its pure form, the Word of God. The evangelists present the saving truth of the message for our conversion. The pastors/teachers disciple us in spiritual growth. Our part is to receive the Word and let it do its work in our hearts. (James 1:21) Paul continues by doing the first and last role. He is an Apostle presenting the Word, but he is also discipling them as a pastor/teacher by giving them the admonitions in our passage for today. He is contrasting our old life with our new life. By defining the two, he is clarifying for the reader what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit. Though the change is brought about by the power of the Spirit, the world, the flesh, and the Devil are always enticing us to compromise with to our old ways. (2Timothy 4:10)

*17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.* It is interesting for us today to see that Paul had to describe the way of the old nature as the normal life of non-Jews. After all, many Jews memorized the Scriptures and tried to live according to them. He could have pointed out the way many Jews became prideful of their obedience to the letter of the law while missing the Spirit, but many of his readers are Gentiles. The Jews non-conformity and separateness from the sensual culture around them was already somewhat of an example to the Gentiles. In fact, many Gentiles attended synagogues to hear about the one true God and to learn how they might please Him. They were called "God fearers". (Acts 17:4) It was easier to illustrate the life of the flesh using the Gentile way of life. The difference between depending on works and depending on the completed work of Christ is another lesson. (Romans 3:20)

Paul is elaborating on what he instructed them in the beginning of the chapter. *1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,* Ephesians 4:1 (ESV) He wrote something similar to the

**Commented [notes1]: Ephesians 4:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

**Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 4:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

**Commented [notes3]: Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Commented [notes4]: 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

**Commented [notes5]: Colossians 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**Commented [notes6]: James 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**Commented [notes7]: James 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

**Commented [notes8]: 2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

**Commented [notes9]: Acts 17:4 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

**Commented [notes10]: Romans 3:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Thessalonian church. <sup>12</sup> *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*

1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV) Living like the Gentiles in the futility of their minds is an example of how *not* to live. Those who do not believe in the Word of God just have their best judgment to go on, and the Bible says our hearts are desperately sick. (Jeremiah 17:9) We hear people say, "I had to follow my heart." Yes, that is all you have without Jesus, and so we justify anything that we want. We pick a belief system that elevates our pride and excuses our indulgence in selfish, ungodly acts.

**Commented [notes11]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Once we have heard the Word of truth, heard the call to God's kingdom and glory, we can't excuse the old behavior any longer. (Luke 12:47) We can no longer justify our sinful actions. The Word of God clarifies for us what God's will is. It clarifies what is sinful. (Psalm 119:9) Now our justifications are exposed. Our thinking is no longer futile, because it must conform to the Word of God. The Greek word for futility (*mataiotes*) has several meanings, all of which apply. Vanity is a synonym for futility, meaning of no value or substance. Another meaning is depravity. The mind before re-birth is depraved. It has no restraining power to keep it righteous. The word also has the figurative meaning of transience. It is ever changing with the conditions. Secularism sees this as a virtue, but the Bible sees it as a vice. God's word is unchanging. (Isaiah 40:8) Right is always right and wrong is always wrong, because God is unchanging, and right and wrong are based on His nature.

**Commented [notes12]: Luke 12:47 (ESV)**

<sup>47</sup> And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.

**Commented [notes13]: Psalm 119:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

**Commented [notes14]: Isaiah 40:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

We once lived in this ever changing state of mind that was depraved and futile, but we are to no longer do so for <sup>18</sup> *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

What is wrong with man's unredeemed way of thinking? It is not enlightened by the Word of God. It is a product of our fallen nature. As much as we'd like to think we can connect with cosmic consciousness or some higher self, Paul is declaring that without Christ we are alienated from the life of God! We can't get to God on our own. (Psalm 14:2-3) We are hopeless without the aid of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God that draws us to the One that made a way, Jesus. We can try our whole lifetime, or as the Hindus believe, a thousand lifetimes, but our thinking is still futile. (Psalm 14:3)

**Commented [notes15]: Psalm 14:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

<sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

**Commented [notes16]: Psalm 14:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

The reason that we are alienated from God is because we are ignorant of God and how to get to God. Before the evangelist enlightens us to the way, we keep looking within or even without to all the wrong things. The reason we will not look to the grace of God is due to the hardness of our heart. Our hard hearts will always think we are good enough. We will always see ourselves as good as the next guy and worthy of heaven, or deny that there is a final judgment. Our flesh cringes at this verse. We can believe it is true of others, but never of our self. Do this little experiment. Put yourself in the verse and sense the repulsion that comes from your old nature. "Without Jesus, I am darkened in my understanding, alienated from the life God because of the ignorance that is in me,

due to my hardened heart.” Do you feel your old nature’s repulsion toward that truth? (Psalm 119:113)

*<sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.* It’s not that our conscience isn’t active or that the Holy Spirit doesn’t convict us of sin, but rather that we become callous. (Romans 2:15) We are helpless to resist the temptations without the life of Christ in us. When we indulge again and again, whether in body or in mind, we develop a calloused heart. Eventually we even quit trying to resist and just give ourselves over to sensuality. We make excuses in our mind that it is really acceptable and the guilt and shame is something we just need to get over, and then we throw ourselves into that sin with abandon. It takes over our thought life. (Genesis 6:5)

Funny thing about sin, it promises more than it delivers and always costs more than the advertised price. It is pleasurable, at first, but then we have to have more in a greater quantity to reach the same level of satisfaction. We become greedy to practice every kind of impurity. As the NIV puts it, “with a continual lust for more”. Every addict can testify to the truth of this Scripture. Please don’t think that addiction is only drugs and pornography. We can get addicted to exaggeration, to eating, or to anything that is an illegitimate or legitimate pleasure. Most acceptable addictions to the world are legitimate pleasures in which we over indulge. No one wants to admit how much of their thought life revolves around that pleasure and how often it takes control.

Perhaps the most subtle addiction is to pride. We can think that we are a good person and in no need of God. (Psalm 10:4) Every action becomes a demonstration of what we believe is our sacrificial goodness, when all the while we are just trying to exalt ourselves in others’ eyes. We can live every minute for what others think of us and ignore what God thinks of us.

*<sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ!* – Now we have the contrast. That was all about how we once lived, but now we are going to read of the new life. The new life conforms to Christ. The goal of the new life is to let Christ live in us. (Galatians 2:20) We learned Christ when we heard the Gospel. We heard of how He demonstrated righteousness. We heard of His obedience to the Father, even unto death. (Philippians 2:8) We know He lived for the Father’s glory. We learned of His sacrificial love for us all. (John 10:18)

*<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,* Paul is assuming that his readers have heard the about the life of Christ. He assumes that they understand that the truth is in Jesus. If you haven’t studied the Gospels, then you wouldn’t understand the contrast Paul is drawing, for the sharpest contrast with the world is the life of Jesus. He is the truth! (1John 5:20) We need the

**Commented [notes17]: Psalm 119:113 (ESV)**

<sup>113</sup> I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.

**Commented [notes18]: Romans 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

**Commented [notes19]: Genesis 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

**Commented [notes20]: Psalm 10:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

**Commented [notes21]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Commented [notes22]: Philippians 2:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**Commented [notes23]: John 10:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

**Commented [notes24]: 1 John 5:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

demonstration of holiness in the life of Jesus to understand what it looks like. He is our perfect example. We judge our inclinations by lining them up with His life. (3John 1:11)

*22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,* We should have learned to put off our old self, that is, to definitively put it away at a point in time with the result continuing to the present. That old nature's source of satisfaction, its abuse of God's good creation, should have been put down with our old self. Our old nature satisfied itself in a destructive cycle of indulgence. When we became a new creation in Christ, we were to once and for all set that down. (2Corinthians 5:17) In other letters, Paul tells us to crucify our old nature. (Galatians 5:24) Our manner of life in Christ should be completely different for it has a completely different source, Jesus! (Romans 6:6)

Just in case we aren't sure what he is referring to, he describes it. It is that which belonged to our former manner of life. It is corrupt through deceitful desires. The desires engrained in that old self were lying to us all along. They could never deliver what they promised. They were only very poor substitutes for what our heart longs for in Christ. He is the source of true pleasure and joy! (Psalm 16:11) Everything else is either pointing to Him, or to a lying, destructive substitute. If we are in Christ we should have put off our old self.

*23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,* Now the way we think is guided by the Word of God and the life of Jesus. The spirit of our mind is no longer a "please me" spirit, but the Spirit of Jesus. That means we think of what will please God first and foremost. What will bring Him glory? In what way can I serve Him today? That is the great contrast. Paul is telling us that if we are in Christ our thought life should be completely transformed. (Romans 12:2) If it hasn't been, we need to bring it to the cross. We need to recognize its sinful patterns. We need to expose the lie that we have fallen for and reject it as such. But we also need to let the light eliminate the darkness. (5:8)

If we used to think pleasing the flesh nature was worthwhile, we need to recognize that it is never satisfied, but that Christ brings true satisfaction to our soul. (Psalm 87:7) If we used to let our thoughts run wild and indulge in fantasy that is not glorifying to God, we need to capture every thought and make it obedient to Christ. (2Corinthians 10:5) If our brain slips into songs with ungodly lyrics, we need to replace those tunes with ones that glorify God. Renew your mind with the Word of God.

Some believers go to the extreme of not enjoying anything that is natural. God created all things to richly enjoy in their proper place and time. (Nehemiah 8:10) There are all kinds of legitimate pleasures that when enjoyed without over indulging in them, point us to the love of God and His goodness to us. Paul is not pointing to this extreme. What goes on in the mind is an indicator of whether or not the pleasure is godly.

**Commented [notes25]: 3 John 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

**Commented [notes26]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

**Commented [notes27]: Galatians 5:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

**Commented [notes28]: Romans 6:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

**Commented [notes29]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

**Commented [notes30]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Commented [notes31]: Ephesians 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

**Commented [notes32]: Psalm 87:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Singers and dancers alike say, "All my springs are in you. E

**Commented [notes33]: 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

**Commented [notes34]: Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

<sup>24</sup> *and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* Once we have put off the old self, the void must be filled with the new self, a new creation, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Romans 13:14) The image lost in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:27) is being restored, but will be completely restored when we see Him face to face. (1John 3:2)

Paul is telling us that our new nature is God like. We should be expressing the attributes of God that we read about in the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-24) He mentioned a few at the beginning of the chapter, humility, gentleness, and patience. "Put on" is in the same tense as the command to "put off". We are to definitively do so at a point in time with an ongoing effect of it being done.

In this paragraph, Paul has told us that our manner of life should have undergone a total transformation. We once lived with an insatiable appetite to please our self in one way or another. Our minds were dominated with selfish thoughts. Now our darkened minds have been enlightened by the Word and life of Jesus. Our calloused hearts have been made sensitive to the conviction of the Spirit. Instead of being alienated from God we live in communion with God. Our way of thinking has undergone a total transformation. It is now set apart for service to God instead of continually trying to please self. What a miracle! That is the wonder of new birth. (John 3:7) That is what it means to be born from above. We have put aside the old nature with its deceptive desires, and *put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Is this true of you? Only Jesus can do a miracle like this one Paul described. If you haven't experienced this transformation, go to Him today and ask Him to work this miracle in you. Have you done so already and yet find yourself in your old self and its deceitful desires? Ask the Lord to help you to put off that old self once and for all. Then surrender your heart and mind to Jesus, every desire, every pattern of life, every hope and dream, and be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God! (3:19; Luke 11:13)

#### Questions

- 1 How do the gifts of 4:11 work together to one end?
- 2 Why did Paul use Gentiles in verse 17?
- 3 What are other translations of "futility"?
- 4 Why is our former thinking futile?
- 5 What is wrong with man's thinking?
- 6 What's wrong with sin's advertisement?
- 7 How do we learn Christ?
- 8 What assumption does Paul make in telling us about the new self?
- 9 Describe putting off the old self.
- 10 Describe putting on the new self.
- 11 Contrast the two.

#### Commented [notes35]: Romans 13:14 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

#### Commented [notes36]: Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

#### Commented [notes37]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

#### Commented [notes38]: Galatians 5:22-24 (NIV)

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.  
<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

#### Commented [notes39]: John 3:7 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

#### Commented [notes40]: Ephesians 3:19 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

#### Commented [notes41]: Luke 11:13 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!