

Off with the Old, On with the New, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 4:19–24

Code: 1929

INTRODUCTION

One of the great passages in the Bible, 1 John 5:4-5 is a fitting comparison to Ephesians 4:17-24: "Whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The Greek word translated "overcometh" (nike) means "to conquer," "have victory," "be superior," or "overcome." Salvation transforms a loser into a winner and a victim into a victor. It makes us all overcomers.

In John 16:33 our Lord says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." In becoming one with Jesus Christ, we become overcomers with Him. We rise above the world (1 John 5:4). We rise above death, saying with Paul, "O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). We rise above sin, for "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14). And we also rise above Satan himself (1 John 4:4). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Therefore we are to live as heavenly citizens. As overcomers we are "risen with Christ" and are to "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1). Since we possess a new nature, we have the potential to live out a new lifestyle. That's the essence of Paul's discussion in Ephesians 4:17-24.

REVIEW

Whereas Ephesians 1-3 describes the new nature of the believer, 4-6 describes how the new nature ought to manifest itself. Paul contrasted the old lifestyle and the new lifestyle--the old walk and the new walk. In 4:17 he says, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk." Our new lifestyle is to be different from what it was before our salvation. In fact, God saves us to be different. According to Ephesians 2:10 we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." While we are overcomers, 1 John 5:19 says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." The world is coddled by Satan, but we have risen above it into the very presence of God. We aren't like "Gentiles who know not God" (1 Thess. 4:5). When we come to Jesus Christ we are transformed, and our lifestyle is to match our new nature.

The key to our new nature is the way we think. That's why Ephesians 4:23 says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." We're not to think the way we did before we knew Christ.

Before we look at the walk of the new man, let's review the characteristics of the old walk.

I. THE OLD WALK (vv. 17b-19)

Ephesians 2:1-3 informs us that sinners walk according to the world, the flesh, and the devil. In Ephesians 4:17-19 Paul shows the results of that kind of walk by delineating four characteristics of pagan thinking and lifestyle.

A. Self-Centeredness (v. 17b)

"Ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."

B. Ignorance (v. 18)

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that

is in them, because of the blindness [hardness] of their heart."

C. Shamelessness (v. 19a)

"Who, being past feeling."

D. Perversion (v. 19b)

"[They] have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

LESSON

1. The characteristics of a reprobate mind

a) "Lasciviousness" The Greek word translated "lasciviousness" (aselgeia) refers to the person who is so dominated by sin that he doesn't care what people say or think. He is not shocked by his own sin—he has no sense of decency or shame. Aselgeia rarely occurs alone in the New Testament. It is usually connected with the following (1) Drunkenness In Romans 13:13, Galatians 5:19-21, and 1 Peter 4:3 aselgeia is listed with a particular type of drunkenness referred to as "reveling" (Gk., komos). Originally komos referred to a band of friends who accompanied a victor on his way home from the games. Usually they got drunk along the way. Eventually komos came to mean "brawling in drunkenness." When connected with aselgeia, it referred to a person whose self-indulgence and lack of restraint gave way to ribald drunkenness. (2) Sexual sin In Mark 7:22, 2 Corinthians 12:21, Galatians 5:19, and 2 Peter 2:18 aselgeia is mentioned with sexual sin. A lascivious person has no more shame than an animal in gratifying his or her sexual desire. b) "Greediness" In Mark 7:22, 2 Peter 2:2-3, and our present text—Ephesians 4:19—aselgeia is used with pleonexia, which is translated "greediness." It is not some isolated inner attitude, but an uncontrollable vice. Unbelievers are characterized by lasciviousness, which can involve drunkenness, sexual indecency, and uncontrollable lust. While it's true that most unbelievers don't live to that extreme, they don't have the resources to restrain themselves from going that far. Only by the grace of God exhibited in the world through the preserving influence of the Holy Spirit and the church does anyone avoid such depths of evil. (1) Romans 1:29—Here pleonexia reveals the sin of the godless as they turn their backs on God to fulfill their desires. (2) Luke 12:15—Greediness also characterizes the person who evaluates life only in material terms. (3) 1 Thessalonians 2:5—Pleonexia describes those who take advantage of others (cf. 4:6). (4) Colossians 3:5—Here pleonexia is identified with idolatry because it is the worship of things rather than the true God. In many passages, including Ephesians 4:19, pleonexia is connected with sexual evil. It is the desire to have what is illicit and forbidden, wanting it so badly that it is willing to destroy anyone or anything standing in the way. There are many people like that in our society. And there will be more: 2 Timothy 3:13 says, "Evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse." As we edge closer to the time of our Lord's return, those kind of people will inundate society.

2. The choice of a reprobate mind

How do people become so reprobate? Ephesians 4:19 says they "have given themselves over" to it. They made a constant, willful choice. And a choice made often becomes a habit. One's habits reap one's personality, one's personality reaps one's character, and one's character reaps one's destiny. It all begins with a series of choices. Sin is something you can't blame on anyone but yourself.

Understanding the Criminal Mind

For years criminal behavior was believed to result from environmental factors such as where a person lived or how he was treated by his parents. But that perspective was challenged by two researchers, Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow, in *The Criminal Personality* [N.Y.: Jason Aronsen, 1976, 1977, 1986]. This three-volume work, the result of years of clinical study of criminals, is like a Bible to those in law enforcement who analyze criminal behavior.

Its thesis is that criminal behavior is the result of warped thinking processes. In fact, three sections of volume I (over 200 pages) are devoted to "thinking errors characteristic of the criminal." The

researchers wrote, "Abandoning the search for causation and deciding not to work with feelings, we probed the criminal patterns of thought" (p. 52). They concluded, "It is remarkable that the criminal often derives as great an impact from his activities during nonarrestable phases as he does from crime.... The criminal's thinking patterns operate everywhere; they are not restricted to crime" (p. 53). The thinking process of the criminal mind is out of whack. Romans 1:28 calls it "a reprobate mind." The problem is in the criminal's mind, not his environment.

In endeavoring to explain the criminal mind, the researchers realized that common psychological and sociological explanations were unsatisfactory: "The idea that a man becomes a criminal because he is corrupted by his environment has proved to be too [weak] an explanation.... We have indicated that criminals come from a broad spectrum of homes, both disadvantaged and privileged. Within the same neighborhood, some are violators, and most are not. It is not the environment that turns a man into a criminal. Rather, it is a series of choices that he makes starting at a very early age" (pp. 104, 247).

They went on to conclude, "Perhaps most important is that [our studies have] demonstrated that a criminal is not a victim of circumstances. He makes choices early in life, regardless of his socioeconomic status, race, or parents' child-rearing practices.... Changing the environment does not change the man" (p. 249).

The Greek word translated "work" in Ephesians 4:19 (*ergasia*) is sometimes used of a business. People are so vile that they turn their sin into a business. That makes sense because they're greedy.

Our X-Rated Economy

Forbes magazine ([18 Sept. 1978] :81-92) ran a lead article entitled "The X-Rated Economy" by James Cook. He began by stating the obvious: "Pornography is ... no longer an illegal business. The market for pornography ... is not confined to perverts or other emotional cripples. To the contrary, the largest part of the market ... is middle class people.... In an increasingly ... permissive society, those who enjoy pornography are free to revel in it" (p. 81).

Cook went on to say that according to the California Department of Justice, the nation's pornographers do more than four billion dollars' worth of business a year--more than the combined incomes of the often supportive movie and music industries. Other estimates place the total pornographic business--including a large segment of the burgeoning home video market--at three times that much. The article said that skin magazines circulate sixteen million copies a month and generate nearly 500 million dollars a year in revenue. Adult films are seen by two million people per week at \$3.50 per ticket, grossing over 365 million dollars. (Remember, this article was written in 1978, so all these figures are much higher today.) Another hundred million dollars goes into sex toys. But the biggest grosser of all, Cook tells us, are "adult" bookstores. Some bookstores in New York take in \$10,000 a day. The Los Angeles Police Department estimates that \$125 million annually is spent in bookstores throughout the city.

Pornography is big business, but it's part of the old life. The apostle Paul rightly instructed us not to walk as unbelievers (Eph. 4:17). Their lifestyle is not to be ours.

Examine Yourself!

Are you still hanging onto the lifestyle you followed before you became a Christian? James 4:4 says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." If you didn't make a conscious effort to cut yourself off from the system of this world when you came to Christ, you have reason to question whether your salvation was genuine.

First John 2:15 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him." When a person becomes a Christian, he desires to cut himself off from the world. Although the world continues to tempt us from time to time, we're to forsake the devil's evil system.

An immoral, ungodly person who supposedly accepts Jesus but never changes his lifestyle is not a Christian. To say that a person can come to Christ without making a break from the world is a lie. That kind of thinking will send more people down the broad road to destruction rather than the narrow way to salvation (Matt. 7:13-14). There must be a change of lifestyle!

People in the world live in ignorance, following their own musings without decency in a greedy quest to fulfill their lusts (Eph. 4:17-19). But when a person comes to Jesus Christ, he recognizes what his life has been and knows it can now be different. It's not an easy life--that's why Paul commanded us not to live as we did before we came to Christ (Eph. 4:17). But we can live it because we have a new nature.

Is Repentance Necessary for Salvation?

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached a powerful sermon that had a tremendous effect on the people who heard it. Acts 2:37 says, "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They realized they were in a terrible mess and needed to do something different to get out of it. The first thing Peter said they needed to do was "repent" (v. 38). No one can come to Jesus Christ unless he repents. Jesus began His ministry proclaiming, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). The apostle Paul preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Peter went on to say, "Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Repentance is crucial! It is a conscious choice to turn from the world, sin, and evil.

Verse 40 continues, "With many other words did [Peter] testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation." Peter exhorted the people to cut themselves off from the world, change their lifestyles, turn their backs on their sinfulness, and live holy lives. You can't be saved if you don't repent from your sin and make a break with the world.

If you came to Jesus Christ thinking all you had to do was believe but didn't have to confess your sin or be willing to cut yourself off from this evil world, you have missed the point of salvation. Many people's lives haven't changed at all since they supposedly believed in Christ. For example, some acted immorally and still act immorally. Some committed adultery and still continue to commit adultery. And some committed fornication and still continue to commit fornication. Yet according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, fornicators and adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. If you are really saved, you will make a conscious attempt to break away from the things of the world, so don't go back to them.

II. THE NEW WALK (vv. 20-24)

When we became Christians God gave us a different kind of mind. Peter called it a pure mind (2 Pet. 3:1). Paul said to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). What are the characteristics of the believer's mind?

A. A Christ-Centered Life (vv. 20-21a)

"Ye have not so learned [from] Christ, if so be that ye have heard him."

We are no longer controlled by a self-centered mind; we learn from Christ. Christ thinks for us, acts through us, loves through us, feels through us, and serves through us. The lives we live are not ours but Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20). Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ Himself said, "Ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). We are to love as Christ has loved us (Eph. 5:2). First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abideth in him [Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." An unsaved person walks in the vanity of his own mind,

but a saved person walks according to the mind of Christ.

The Greek word translated "learned" (manthano) means "to learn by inquiry." As a person inquires about Jesus Christ and discovers the reality of who He is and commits his life to Him, Christ begins to think for him. Paul said, "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

God has a plan for the universe, and as long as Christ is working in us, He's working out a part of that plan through us. Paul noted that He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). Every day is a fantastic adventure for the Christian because we're in the middle of God's unfolding plan for the ages.

B. A Knowledge of the Truth (v. 21b)

"[You] have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

When you give your life to Christ you are saying to Him, "You're the ruler of all. I acknowledge that You are Lord." You can't become a Christian without somehow acknowledging the lordship of Christ.

When you give Him your life you come under the truth. In 2 Corinthians 11:10 Paul says, "The truth of Christ is in me." First John 5:20-21 says, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

When we come to know Christ, come to know the truth about God, man, sin, creation, death, life, history, relationships, salvation, happiness, purpose, meaning, heaven, hell, faith, and grace.

C. A Sensitivity to Sin (v. 22)

"Put off concerning the former manner of life the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."

Christians know what it means to be corrupt and to see the result of lust. That's because we are sensitive to sin. Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

True subjects of the kingdom mourn over their sin. First John 1:8-10 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." A true Christian will acknowledge his sin because he is sensitive to it.

In Romans 7 we learn that Paul was never as sensitive to sin as he was after he became a Christian. In verse 24 he says, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He wasn't expressing an isolated experience but a way of life--a deep sensitivity to his own sinfulness.

D. A Renewed Mind (v. 23-24)

1. New thoughts (vv. 23)

"Be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

The Greek word translated "renewed" (ananeoo) is used only here in the New Testament. It means "to create again" or "make new." When you become a Christian, God gives you a new mind but you must fill it with new thoughts. A baby is born with a fresh, new mind, and then impressions are made in it that determine the course of his life. The same thing is true of a Christian. You enter into God's kingdom and you're given a fresh, new mind. You then need to build the right thoughts into your new mind. That's why Philippians 4:8 says, "Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." We have a renewed mind, not a reprobate mind.

2. New attitudes (v. 23)

"Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Instead of having a reprobate, vile, lascivious, greedy, unclean mind, we have a mind filled with righteousness and holiness. That naturally characterizes the way we live.

CONCLUSION

We're to "put off ... the old man" (v. 22) and "put on the new man" (v. 24). When you came, to Christ you acknowledged that you were a sinner and chose to forsake your sin and the evil things of this world. But Satan will dangle the world and its sin in front of you to tempt you to return to it. So Paul warned us not to return to it, but to put it off and put on righteousness and true holiness. That's not something you do once; it's something you do everyday. But how? Note the following resources. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction." If you want to live correctly, expose yourself to the Word of God. It will help you deal with the traces of the world still present in your life. Also take advantage of prayer. First John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, we will be forgiven. Let the Word of God expose your sin and let prayer cleanse it.

Focusing on the Facts

1. In what sense is a Christian an overcomer?
2. What two words is *aselgeia* often connected with? Explain each.
3. What word is *aselgeia* connected with in Ephesians 4:19? Define it.
4. How do people become reprobate?
5. What conclusions about the criminal personality did Yochelson and Samenow make in their book?
6. What current example from our society shows that people turn uncleanness into a business?
7. What kind of thinking about the nature of salvation can lead people down the wrong road?
8. When the people who heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost asked what they should do, what did Peter say? Explain (Acts 2:38).
9. What kind of mind is a Christian to have?
10. What are you saying to Christ when you give your life to Him?
11. Why do true subjects of God's kingdom mourn over their sin?
12. What two resources will help you put on righteousness and holiness each day?

Pondering the Principles

1. Throughout the centuries, athletes have endured grueling training to gain victory and the spoils that come with it, only to find that victory is often elusive. However Christians, as overcomers, have complete certainty about the ultimate victory, which is eternal life with Jesus Christ (1 John 5:1-5, 11-13). Look up the following verses and note how you can have victory over Satan (Matt. 4:1-11), death (John 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:54-57), and the world (1 John 5:4).
2. Review the section on the new walk (pp. 7-10). What are the four characteristics of the believer's mind? Note that you don't have to acquire those characteristics; they already are yours if you are a believer. Unfortunately our practice sometimes doesn't match our position in Christ. According to the conclusion at the end of the chapter, what two things must you do to make those four characteristics a reality in your life? Plan to implement the two resources at your disposal on a daily basis.

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