Ephesian 4:20-24 But you did not learn Christ in that way, 21if indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus). 22As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires, 23and to be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind, 24and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness.

There is so much in this text. We could talk extensively of so many different things. But I think the thing to do is to ask ourselves what the purpose of the Holy Spirit was when he inspired these words in the Apostle Paul. So we will begin by trying to put this text into perspective.

The first thing that should strike is us those opening verses. They said this, **”So I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord: Do not walk any longer as the Gentiles walk, in their futile way of thinking. 18They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts. 19Because they have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity.”**

What I think is clear is that the Holy Spirit has directed out attention to the issues of the world. Now even though Paul is speaking of a pre-Christian society, a society that doesn’t want to hear about the true God or the things of the true God, you can still see the influences of this worldly way in today’s world. It alerts us to grasp that society operates and thinks in a vastly different way, a way that is anything but God pleasing.

A couple of phrases stand out. First, **“in the futility of their thinking.”** That word means “vanity, emptiness, aimlessness.” There is no direction, no goal, no real purpose behind what the unbelieving world does. In many cases, those involved in this kind of thinking are the ones who declare they have the insight, they have the true grasp of wisdom and happiness but when you look closer at their lives it is clear that turmoil, trouble and woes absolutely abound. I especially equate this phrase with what happens to the addict, substance addict or behavioral addict. They think their addiction is providing happiness and purpose and the next thing you know they are dead or find they have lost everything they held as near and dear. They didn’t even see it coming. That’s the world. It doesn’t see, can’t see the consequences of what they do, in our text called, **“The futility of their thinking.”**

How about the next phrases. The words actually complement each other to give us the whole picture. **“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts.”** These words tell us that this group can no longer discern right from wrong, good from bad, or holy from evil. The saddest part is that the ignorance is caused **“due to the hardness of their hearts.”** They refuse, they fight against, they run away from the source of godliness and good. They treat the Godly as if it were some sort of evil. Again, of their own choice.

Then the last phrases of importance. **“They have no sense of shame, they have given themselves over to sensuality, with an ever-increasing desire to practice every kind of impurity.”** Just think of all the things promoted in today’s world as a “right.” Ever notice that those “rights” are mostly involved in some sort of sensuality. The word means “unrestrained living.” It is all about what we feel, experience, being on the edge, pushing the limits and having absolutely no boundaries. And that word is further expanded by the phrase that says this happens in ever-increasing desires. It is saying that impurity gets out of control!

But if you really want a shock, then let’s just take a moment to contemplate another passage that has this same kind of message. I am going to guess that most of you will recognize our very present world. 2 Timothy 3:1-5. **“But know this: in the last days there will be terrible times. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemous, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, not able to reconcile with others, slanderous, without self-control, savage, haters of what is good, treacherous, reckless, puffed up with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding an outward form of godliness but denying its power.”**

Can you hear those words and deny that it is happening in our very lives now? Take a hard look around and you will see that many of the tenants of our society are collapsing simply because people don’t care or perhaps I should rather say, “care more for their personal self than society.” Unfortunately they don’t grasp that as they destroy the foundations of society there is only tyranny to replace it. Welcome to a world no longer governed by the wisdom of God!

In direct contrast to that, we find the words that I highlighted for you. In looking at the words before us we can begin to discern the reason, the purpose for which the Holy Spirit caused Paul to write. The Lord wants to make sure that Christians, those who profess and confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior grasp clearly and precisely that the ways of the world, the ways of darkness, all the things that we exposed so far, are not, did you hear that, NOT to be a part of our lives. Let’s explore why this is so.

First line. **“But you did not learn Christ in that way.”** Such a wonderfully simple phrase. Does Jesus come telling us to “go for the gusto, let it all hang out, or to fight for your right to party?” Does Jesus come offering darkness and ignorance or does he offer the light and truth? Just look at his life.

Jesus came perfect and holy. Jesus came to do what is right, good, just and kind. Jesus came not for himself but rather came for clearly unselfish purpose and cause. Don’t get confused. Jesus didn’t come to be God, Jesus already was God when He came. He set aside his majesty, power, dominion and authority to live holy and humble for the purpose of saving our wretched souls. He offers purity and right, holiness and goodness, not because we have those things but rather because He had them and he offers them to us. That’s what faith does. Faith believes that Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for our sins, and that He rose from the dead to make sure we grasp that in Him and through Him forgiveness of sins and eternal life is ours. His purpose is our salvation. His purpose is grant us the status of being his children and heirs of eternal life. When you look at Jesus you see, love, light, truth, wonder and salvation. That’s what we learn in Jesus.

Just think of all the phrases that Jesus used of himself. The great “I am’s” found in Scripture. **“I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Good Shepherd, the Living Water, the Bread of life, the True Vine,** and ultimately, **the Savior.”** Not a single negative thing in there. Not a destructive thing about him. Selfless, loving, gracious and good. All of these things for us.

Now notice the conditional sentence that Paul throws in there. **“IF indeed you have heard of him and were taught in him (since the truth is in Jesus).”** Here is where I think many a borderline Christian can be found. We want the blessings and wonders of Jesus but we don’t want Him as God and Lord. We want his salvation but at the same time we want the desires and lusts of the world around us. We want faith to be our badge of honor, but we want to keep that badge in our pocket. In these words Paul wants us to grasp that the badge is not to be in our pocket and hidden. We are to carry it proudly, actually that badge is really the shield of faith God gives for our good.

He goes on: **“As far as your former way of life is concerned, you were taught to take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be renewed continually in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new self, which has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness.”**

Here is the impact of Jesus in our life. Because of Jesus, because of his love and compassion, his care and concern for me, because Jesus laid down His life and suffered eternal hell for me, I am going to be different. I am going to strive to live to the glory of Jesus. I am going to live not according to the deceitful desires of the flesh, not in darkness and futile thinking but rather I am going to take off that old self and be renewed. I am going to use the new self, provided in Jesus for what is good and true and holy.

Nowhere did I say or does God’s Word say this would be easy. It is going to be a battle. It is going to a way of life contrary to how our sinful flesh wants to think. In Galatians 5 we hear this truth put this way: **“For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do.”** We are going to battle. There are going to be lots of skirmishes and fights in this war. We are going to be bruised, battered, and pushed to our limits. But if in that battle, I can, by serving Jesus, diminish the suffering of Jesus by just one tenth of a degree of hell, then I pray, God give me strength! God fill me with the wonder of Jesus so that His path, his way is mine. Dear souls, not because we have to but because Jesus Christ is our Savior from sin.

If you would, I am going to share the words found in my sermon study book. When something is well done it is worth hearing. The book is called: *Sermon studies of the Epistles, Series B.* It is an NPH publication. Published in 1993. This is pages 231-232.

*“Paul says that Christ is served only when the Christian puts off the old, sinful nature which resembles the unbeliever in every way. By bringing us to faith, God has put off the “old” for us. Because of Christ’s work the sin of our old Adam, along with his bad reputation and his insatiable desire for evil, is no longer charged against us. Appreciating what Christ has done, we will not want to give the “old” nature the upper hand in our lives. In our service to Christ and in our desire to remain in his truth, we will want to drown the “old self” continually through daily contrition and repentance.*

*How important it is for Christians to recognize the old nature as a constant and deadly threat to our salvation! It is a constant threat because it can never be reformed. It is “being corrupted,” Paul says. Note the present tense. The sinful nature never cleans up its act. In fact, it only gets worse as time goes on.*

*The Christian will want to realize this because the old nature is something that he will carry with him as long as he lives in this world. The old nature is a powerful threat because it is always ready and willing to be deceived by its deceitful desires. Deceitful desires, using an old trick of Satan, stirs up the old self by telling it half-truths. It leads the old nature to think only of the pleasure or the apparent gain to be had by sinning. It says nothing of the consequence of sin and the destruction to which it leads.*

*The deceit is very clever at times, even leading the Christian to believe that God overlooks a believer’s sins because he or she is a believer. The truth that is in Jesus assures that God never overlooks sin for any reason. He does forgive sin for the sake of his Son’s innocent suffering and death on behalf of all sinners.”*

I just thought those words so awesome. They help to put in perspective our lives and faith, but also remind us of the struggle we will have with our sinful flesh and the temptations Satan will surely bring. If you would, a final illustration to help you grasp the application of these words.

When you get to the pond, which you have been told is the ‘pond of life’ and you find that posted all about are signs that say, “NO SWIMMING!” No swimming is what God tells you. It doesn’t matter if it is hot and sunny. It doesn’t matter if the water looks refreshing and fun. No Swimming! Nor should we as God’s children decide that to wade in the water and splash ourselves is okay because that is not swimming. Stay out of the water and away from the water. What you don’t see is that it is not water but a poisonous acidic solution that will kill you. “No swimming” in evil is the Lord’s call to us. He is working to save us.

May the wonder of Jesus be your strength as we carry out these encouraging words! Amen.