

As a Christian, do you ever feel like a fish out of water in comparison to the rest of the world? For example, last week there was about 15 of us here for worship and there were hundreds of people – adults and children across the parking lot playing and watching soccer – and they started arriving at 7:30 in the morning.

Most of us would not even consider that because Sunday for us is a day of worship, not for playing soccer – at least in the morning, when they should be worshipping God.

But many of those people did not think nothing of it. The games were scheduled and they were going to be there even if it was on Sunday. Now, I am not judging whether there were any Christians among them – I will let God do that. But generally, the Christian knows that he or she should be in church on Sunday morning. I realize that there can be occasional exceptions – but, as I said, we should be in church, worshipping God on most Sunday mornings.

The thing that we see, however, is that there is a difference between the way that a non-Christian acts and the way that a Christian acts. Consider what we read in Epistle lesson for today – turn with me to Ephesians 4.

The Apostle Paul is writing to Christians. In the first three chapters, as we looked at a couple of weeks ago, Paul tells them all that God has done for them and the blessings of their salvation. Beginning in chapter 4 he tells the results — that is, what they are to do because of the salvation that God has given them.

For example, he has told them in verse 1 of chapter 4, to walk worthy of the calling that they have received, as we saw a couple of weeks ago. That worthy walk is what he then fleshes out in the rest of his letter and notice clearly the difference between the non-Christian – who he refers to as the Gentiles, and the Christian.

Look at what he tells them – 4:17: “*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk,*” Again, the word therefore is there, and it again refers to what he has said before. He draws their attention to the fact that there is to be a distinct difference between the way the Gentiles – the non-Christian walks and the way that the Christian does.

Notice that Paul tells them *that you should no longer walk ...* in other words he is comparing their walk before they became Christians, to the way that they should walk now as Christians.

As he goes on he describes the way the non-Christians walk – “*in the futility of their mind, 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; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*”

We see that the non-Christian – the unbeliever walks in the futility of their mind – this has the sense of foolishness or vanity – in other words they think that what they are doing is the right thing, but it really is not.

In many ways this reminds of the way that many in our nation and world are walking – they are walking in ways that are contrary to God’s Word and what is acceptable to Him – and yet they think they are doing the right thing. They truly believe that in the name of love all things are acceptable – even those things that God says is wrong.

The reason for this is in what we read as we go on – *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; ...*

Think about this for a moment as we consider these words – first, their understanding is darkened. This actually goes back to our sin nature. Remember that because of Adam’s sin, we are all born as sinners – we are sinners from the moment of conception – even before we had committed any actual sins. The point is that our hearts are sinful – and those without Christ will only act according to their sinful natures – because their understanding is darkened.

And as we see they are alienated from the life of God. Earlier on in this letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that those without Christ are at war with God. Those at war with God are on the side of darkness, or to put it more plainly – with Satan.

It is sometimes hard for us to accept, but there really are only two kinds of people in the world – those who are at war with God – these are the children of the devil – and those who are at peace with God. These are those who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord – and, as we have seen are part of the family of God ... we are the sons of God.

Getting back to our passage, we see the conduct and actions of those who are not part of God’s family, they truly are blind to things of God and the ways of God. I heard on the news that the Taliban in Afghanistan are recruiting children as young as seven to be suicide bombers. Only those whose hearts are completely darkened by sin and blind to the things of God would do such a thing.

This is part of what is described in 4:19: “*who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*” Again, we see the immorality that is accepted as normal. In the Gentile or non-Christian world at the time that Paul is writing all types of debauchery was practiced. Sort of what we see today, isn’t it?

Yes, go for all the gusto you can ... live for the moment, regardless of the consequences ... get all the satisfaction that you can, while you can. Again, we see an example from the headlines – one of the 6<sup>th</sup> richest men in the US – a billionaire – was arrested on Friday for insider trading. It’s not that he didn’t have enough money – he had to be greedy and want more. A clear example of those whose heart is darkened by sin and who are blind to the ways of God.

If the Apostle Paul had stopped there, we might be tempted to throw up our hands and give up. But remember, he is comparing the Christian and the non-Christian – so we consider what he says as he goes on – Ephesians 4:20-24: “*But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*”

In other words, as Christians we know better. We know that there are the ways of the world and the ways of God – and therefore we are to be different. There is, in this words of that maxim that we see often – that we are to put off the old man and to put on the new man. In other words, we are to put off the ways that the world finds acceptable and to put on the ways that God finds acceptable.

As those who are Christians, we now have the Spirit of God in us. Our hearts, while we are still sinful, has the light of the gospel and we are no longer blind to the truth of God's Word. Therefore we don't have to walk as the non-Christian walks. We CAN walk in the light of God's revealed Word. We CAN do that which is pleasing to Him. We DON'T have to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, because we have God's Spirit – the Holy Spirit with us.

And so we can put off the old ways and put on the new ways. Consider again what the scriptures says – *and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

Wow – we, as Christians, have been created according to God in righteousness and holiness. Now, this does not mean we are perfect – but what it does mean is that we don't have to walk in the vices of the non-Christian – we can walk in a way that is in accord with God's Word.

Through the end of the chapter Paul gives us some examples of the things that we are to put off and the things that we are to put on – 4:25-32 (READ). Simple, we are not to lie, but to speak the truth. We can be angry, but we are not to sin. We are not to steal, but to work. With the concluding words: Ephesians 4:32: “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*” Again, put off the old ways ... and put on the new ways of God.

The bottom line is that as we live this way, we will be different from the rest of the world. Lying is an accepted practice – just look at the political scene. Stealing, if you can get away with it, is an accepted practice and so forth.

So, indeed, as we walk worthy ... as we walk the way the God wants us to walk, we will be like a fish out of water. But it is the way that God wants us to walk in response to all that He has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.