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C0504 -- Jan. 26, 2005 – Ephesians 4:17-19 – The Old Man

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT MY GIFT IS?

First, the Scriptures never command us to seek to find out what our gift is.ⁱ I think this observation is somewhat significant. The Scriptures seek to simply point out that we all have at least one gift and that the gifts are ministries that are designed to edify and build up the Church. However, the Scriptures assume that we can discover what our gift is. The underlying assumption in Corinthians for example is that these people know what gift they have. Their problem was not in knowing what gift they had but rather what the gifts were and their purpose. They thought they were special “abilities” that were for self and therefore resulted in boasting. Paul corrected this by teaching that the gifts were “ministries” given by God and designed to edify one another. How does one know what his gift is? There are several general things that you must do to discover what your gift is.

First, you must put God first in everything. Your basic orientation to every area of life should start with God (that’s what we call DVP). People are born with the natural orientation of starting with self (that’s what we call HVP). All men are born depraved and their basic orientation to every area of life starts with self (Rom. 5:12). After God graciously saves you at the moment you believe in Christ two things must take place. 1) Your thought life must be re-oriented. How is the mind re-oriented in every area of life so that it starts with God? By careful search and inquiry of Scripture.ⁱⁱ 2) Your behavior must be re-oriented so that it starts with God. Since we are all born with behavior patterns that are against God and start with self to please self then once we become Christians our behavior needs to change. Our basic moral orientation must also be re-oriented so that it starts with God. How is our behavior changed? The process begins by careful search and inquiry of Scripture followed by doing His commandments by the power of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the first step toward recognizing what your spiritual gift is requires change in our thought life and behavior. No change can take place in these areas apart from the word of God. The more we do this the more we put God first in everything and the better position we are in to realize our spiritual gift so we can minister to others.

Second, you must seek God's specific will for your life. Discovering God's specific will for your life also requires careful search and inquiry of Scripture while in fellowship with God. This sets up the environment so that God is directing your steps (Prov 3:5-6). When you do so you are on your way to recognizing your spiritual gift.

Third, you must pray that God would reveal your spiritual gift to you. If we don't ask God to reveal our gift to us we shouldn't expect Him to reveal them to us. God answers prayer and God wants you to know your spiritual gift so you can minister effectively.

Fourth, you should expect confirmation from others. Most often others can see our gifts more clearly than we can. To them it is clear where we should minister whereas for us we still aren't sure. Be sensitive to the remarks of others because God often uses others to confirm to us our uncertainties.

Fifth, you must be prepared to face responsibility when you realize your gift. You have a responsibility to the rest of the Church to use the gift of ministry God has given you. The burden of knowing this should lead you to minister. The joy of the gift should inspire you to minister.

So, there are five things you must do in order to recognize your spiritual gift:

- 1) you must put God first in everything
- 2) you must seek God's specific will for your life
- 3) you must pray that God would reveal your spiritual gift to you
- 4) you should expect confirmation from others
- 5) you must be prepared to face responsibility when you realize your gift.

This helps us answer the second question of why some Christians never seem to discover their spiritual gift.

WHY SOME CHRISTIANS NEVER DISCOVER THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFT

Simple, they don't do the five things listed above. The primary thing they do not do is search and inquire the word of God. Search and inquire what the gifts are. Do a word study.

Discover examples of people in the early church who had these gifts and see what things they did throughout the NT to get ideas of how they ministered. That will give you a personalized picture of the gifts and how to minister them to others.

WHY ISN'T EVERYONE'S SPIRITUAL GIFT ABUNDANTLY OBVIOUS?

If the Spirit is the one whose power enables us to minister then why isn't it abundantly obvious who has what gift? There are two aspects to this question. First, the answer lies in the amount of enablement necessary to minister the gift. When we read Paul's lists we should quickly realize that some of the "gifts" required an extra-ordinary enablement to perform (e.g. healing, prophecy, tongues) while others required enablement, but no more than any other daily Christian activity (e.g. teaching, administration, serving). This is one reason some people's spiritual gifts are not abundantly obvious. The enablement needed is not out of the ordinary. Secondly, everyone's spiritual gift is not abundantly obvious because Christ determines the measure of grace given to each individual (Eph 4:7). Some are given more grace and others less. Those who possess less will not be as obvious. Fortunately, it is not the measure of the grace given that determines reward but our use of the gift. God knows all these factors, we should not focus on factors that we cannot control; we should leave that to God. What we should do is be actively ministering to one another to the capacity that God has given to each of us with the goal of equipping others to do ministry so that the Church will be built up to the full stature of Christ. When each of us works together then we work like a healthy body. No one should be doing too much and no should be doing too little. We should all be doing to our capacity. When we do it brings glory to God.

B. WALKING IN HOLINESS (4:17-32)

Eph 4:17-32 is the second of five sections distinguished by the use of the word "walk" in conjunction with the word "therefore" (4:1-16; 4:17-32; 5:2-7; 5:8-14; 5:15ff). In other words, in light of our redemption in Christ there ought to be a change in how we walk, how we conduct ourselves in the world. The first change in our walk was found in 4:1-16 where Paul exhorted us to walk in unity. The doctrine behind walking in unity is the positional unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ (2:11-21; 3:2-13). The second change in our walk is found in 4:17-32 where Paul invokes us to walk in holiness. The doctrine behind walking in holiness is our transformation from being dead in transgressions and sins to being made alive in Jesus Christ (2:1-10). This section has two parts. Part 1 is found in 4:17-19 where he discusses how the believer should not walk (i.e. the old man) and part 2 is found in 4:20-32 where he tells us how the believer should walk (i.e. the new man).

You should see Paul's principal of replacement. Before the cross there was hostility between Jew and Gentile because of the barrier of the twisted Mosaic Law. Now that the barrier was abolished through

Christ's fulfillment of the Mosaic Law there is to be unity of Jew and Gentile believers.

Before we were dead in sins and we had a sinful lifestyle that grew out of our sinful nature,

<u>APPLICATION</u>	<u>SCRIPTURE</u>	<u>DOCTRINAL BASIS</u>	<u>SCRIPTURE</u>
Hostile Lifestyle	2:11-12, 14-15a, 1	Barrier between Jew and Gentile b/c Twisted Law	2:15a
Walk in Unity	4:1-16	Barrier Destroyed by Christ's fulfilling Law	2:13-14, 15b-22
Sinful Lifestyle	4:17-19 2:2-3	Dead in Sins	2:1, 5
Walk in Holiness	4:20-32	Alive in Christ	2:4-10

now we have been made alive in Christ and we are to have a holy lifestyle. The Bible never says don't do X without also saying, instead do Y. Don't walk like the old man, instead, walk like the new man. If you train your child by saying, "don't do this and don't do that" then you're going to run into problems later on because I guarantee you can't cover all the no, no's. What you have to train yourself to with the child is to say "don't do X, instead do Y." Most of us are in the habit of giving a list of no, no's. The first word a child often learns is "no". Giving a list of no, no's won't work and it won't produce godliness. It's not enough to simply abstain from some behavior. Abstaining does not produce godliness. In Scripture the negative is don't sin, the positive is do the commands of Christ. So, you have to learn the principal of replacement. The old man has habitual sin patterns that have to undergo de-habituation and then re-habituation. To break out of old sin patterns you have to replace them with new godly patterns. If you don't replace your old sin patterns with a new godly pattern then you will find yourself sliding from one sin pattern to another (e.g. alcoholics often trade alcohol for cigarettes and then cigarettes for food binging, etc...). This is the way the sin nature works. Every Christian is at a different point in terms of living consistent to Christian truth. And every Christian is moving toward Christ or away from Christ.



Positionally all believers are like Christ. Experientially, we are not all like Christ. We are supposed to be moving toward Christ-likeness. The consistent Christian is the one whose walk most reflects Scripture in every facet. Once we understand the doctrine behind the

application then we have a solid basis for moving toward Christ-likeness. In Ephesians 4 this means if we understood the doctrine of Ephesians 2 and 3 then we should now apply that doctrine by walking in unity and walking in holiness. Believers who don't understand the doctrine can't walk this way because it is the doctrine that is the basis for the walk. Any sustained obedience to God's commandments requires a sound doctrinal basis for doing so. We just can't operate in a vacuum for any sustained period of time. We must have sound doctrine as a basis.

1. The Old Man (4:17-19)

a. His nature (4:17-18)

Greek Text 4:17 Touto oun lego kai marturomai en kurio, meketi humas peripatein, kathos kai ta ethne peripatei en mataioteti tou noos auton,

Translation 4:17 This therefore, I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles walk in the uselessness/futility/vanity of their (plural) mind (singular),

Touto oun, "This therefore". He begins with the words *touto oun (this therefore)*. This is Paul's way of resuming the thought of 4:1-3 where he was imploring our walk to change. In 4:1 Paul exhorts us to walk worthy of the calling with which we were called. Now he is exhorting us not to walk like the Gentiles because this would not be worthy of our calling.

lego kai marturomai en kurio, "I say and testify in the Lord,". Paul is **saying this and testifying this in the Lord**. This shows that this is not just Paul's opinion. This is the Lord's words and the Lord's testimony. Paul is not creating exhortations but has been sent as a divine messenger, carrying the full authority of the sender. The sender in this case is **the Lord**. The **Lord** throughout Ephesians is the 2nd person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. This phrase demonstrates that Paul was cognizant that he was writing Scripture.

meketi humas peripatein, kathos kai ta ethne peripatei, "that you no longer walk as the Gentiles walk,". The command comes in the negative; **no longer walk as the Gentiles**. The positive command will come in 4:20-32. But here, this negative command shows that it is very possible for genuine Christians to **walk like Gentiles**. In Ephesus most of the believers were Gentiles not Jews. It was quite natural for them to **walk as Gentiles** because they were **Gentiles** but now they are Christians. Therefore they should **no longer walk as Gentiles** but as Christians. The central idea of these verses is that there should be a change of conduct. What the **Gentile** walk looks like is described here in 4:17-19. What the

Christian walk looks like is described in 4:20-32. We are to change from one walk to another walk. As you might imagine, these verses are central to biblical counseling.

en mataioteti tou noos auton, “**in the uselessness/futility/vanity of their (plural) mind (singular),**”. As **Gentiles** we used to **walk in the futility of our mind**. The Greek word for **futility** is *mataiotes* (Rom 8:20; 2 Pt 2:18). It is used in the LXX version of Ecclesiastes 39 times. It translates the word **vanity**. Vanity is nothingness, uselessness, purposelessness, worthlessness, and absurdity. Vanity appears to have substance but doesn't. Like warm breath on a cold morning. Therefore, this is describing the **gentile** lifestyle as an outworking of the **Gentile mind**. And the **Gentile...mind** is a worthless, useless, purposeless absurdity (1 Cor. 3:20). The **mind** here (*nous*) is the part of man that does the “thinking, the understanding”. The **mind** of man was originally created to think about and understand God's revelation but because of the Fall man's mind is unable to understand God's revelation. The Scriptures are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). Therefore, unbelievers minds, which are full of vanity, ignorant of the things of God, direct them into a lifestyle of **vanity**.

The Christian mind is not vain. We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). We have been given the spiritual capacity to understand God and His word (1 John 5:20). Therefore, our mind is prepared to fulfill its original function which was to think about and understand God's revelation. That's why man has a mind in contrast to animals. Paul says the mind of the unbeliever reasons like a brute beast. He uses this analogy of unbelievers with animals because animals can't understand God's revelation. Unbelievers are just like animals in this respect. In contrast, Christians are able to think about and understand God's revelation so we should **no longer walk like the Gentiles in our minds**.

Interestingly, the word **mind** here (*nous*) is in the singular. **Gentiles** have basically “one mind”, “one way of thinking”, “one basic mindset”. This is because there is basically one person behind the unbelieving mind, Satan (2 Cor 4:4). Therefore we should expect the **Gentile mind** to have “one basic mindset”. Ultimately, the world is coming to a one world government with one world currency and one world political and military agenda (destroy the Jew). That would require “one mindedness” among the **Gentiles** and one basic personality behind the **Gentiles**, Satan.

Greek Text 4:18 eskotomenoi te dianoia ontes, apellotriomenoi tes zoes tou theou dia ten agnoian ten ousan en autois, dia ten torosin tes kardias auton,

Translation 4:18 being darkened in the reasoning process, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them on account of the hardness of their (plural) heart (singular),

eskotomenoi te dianoia ontos, “being darkened in the reasoning process,”. Verse 18 contains two participial phrases **being darkened** and **being alienated**. The **Gentile mind** is **being darkened in understanding** and is **being alienated from the life of God**. First let’s look at this **darkening in the understanding**. The Greek word for **darkened** here is *skotizo* and it means “to be clouded, to be darkened” (Rom 1:21; 11:10). This is a passive participle meaning that some force acts on the mind causing this cloudiness (sin nature). The word translated **understanding** is *dianoia* (Eph 2:3; Col 1:21; 1 John 5:20). It really refers to the **reasoning processes** that go on in the mind. In other words, the reason that the **Gentiles** walk in the **futility of their mind** is because their **reasoning processes** have been and are darkened (perfect tense). **Gentiles** think that they are reasoning properly but they are not, their thinking is **cloudy, murky, darkened**.

apellotriomenoi tes zoes tou theou, “being alienated from the life of God”. Second participial phrase that describes the Gentile mind is that it is **excluded from the life of God**. As **Gentiles** we were **alienated from the life of God** (Eph 2:12; Col 1:21). What is the **life of God**? The idea is that **Gentiles** do not enjoy the fullness of life, the supernatural life that Christians enjoy. Gentiles are born without this fullness of life and continue without this fullness of life until they become Christians. Believers do have the **life of God** and therefore we are able to walk differently than we once did because we have God’s transforming power toward us (3:20-21). These verses are describing all of us, all **Gentiles** before we became Christians. You were **walking in the futility of your mind...you were darkened in your reasoning processes...you were alienated from the life of God**. This section of Ephesians largely parallels Ephesians 2:1-3; 2:4-10. Paul is connecting our lifestyle to our doctrine. Our lifestyle is not some abstract thing but is rooted and grounded in historic doctrine.

dia ten agnoian ten ousan en autois, “because of the ignorance that is in them”. Next Paul gives the reason **Gentiles** are **alienated**. The reason **Gentiles** are **alienated** is **because of the ignorance that is in them** (1 Pt 1:14). Importantly, this **ignorance** is not an innocent **ignorance**. **Gentiles** are not just passively sitting there as *ignoramus*. Turn over to Romans 1:18-23. This is a parallel passage to Ephesians 4:17-19. As you can see this is a willful suppression, a deliberate and flagrant rejection of God. These people are not *innocently ignorant* but they are *willfully ignorant*. This is what makes them responsible. Paul says they are without excuse (Rom. 1:23; 2:1). Here Paul says the **ignorance is in them**. It is

not some external thing that **alienates** them **from the life of God**. In other words, it's not because of God or any other external factor that these people are **alienated from the life of God**. It's an internal reason, an internal factor that is responsible for this alienation (sin nature). But why are they **ignorant**? What is the internal factor that makes them **ignorant**?

dia ten torosin tes kardias auton, “**on account of the hardness of their (plural) heart (singular)**,”. Paul says it is because of **the hardness of their heart**. The **heart** is the center of a person, the seat of thought, understanding, and will or volition. The **Gentile heart** is **hardened** so that it cannot penetrate into the revelation of God. He can't understand or perceive because his **heart** is **hardened** (Rom 11:25). What Paul is referring to is what we know as the sin nature. That's the root of the problem here. He describes the sin nature by the phrase **hardness of heart**.

Now, let's back off from these five descriptions of the Gentile and I'll show you the relationship between these five things. There is a cause-effect relationship between these five characteristics of the **Gentiles**. We have to reverse Paul's order to show this.



The root cause of this is the **hardness of heart**. The heart is the seat of the mind, the reasoning processes, the will or volition and this part of man is hardened toward God. So, this is describing the basic nature of the unbeliever. Paul doesn't mention it here but in 2:3 he said that we were all “*by nature children of wrath*”. The **Gentile** is sinful by nature. We are condemned for who we are in Adam (sin nature) as well as for what we do (personal sin). If these things describe their nature then 4:19 describes the lifestyle that naturally grows out of this nature.

b. His lifestyle (4:19)

Greek Text 4:19 oitines apelgekotes eautous paredokan te aselgeia eis ergasian akatharsias pases en pleonexia.

Translation 4:19 who, having become callous, have given themselves over to indecency for the practicing of every kind of impurity with greediness.

oitines apelgekotes, “who, having become callous,”. They have become callous. A callous may refer to a hardened part of the skin. Not supple, but callous. When our skin becomes callous we can’t feel pain anymore. That’s what this word is all about. The Gentiles...have become insensitive or calloused to God and His ways. Morally they are apathetic. Because they have become callous to God their conduct of indecency, impurity, and greediness naturally follows.

eautous paredokan te aselgeia, “have given themselves over to indecency”. First, they have given themselves over to sensuality. The Greek word here would better be translated indecency (cf. Mk 7:21-23). It’s a word that is always associated with the flesh (cf. Rom 13:13; Gal 5:19; 1 Pt 4:3). See, this indecency is coming from within the man. The word indecency refers to blatant public acts. It is an exercising of undue freedom, abusive, blatant acts. For example, cursing in public, wearing crude t-shirts, crude bumper stickers, using rude or suggestive gestures in public, public drunkenness, public nudity, and public sex. This is the natural outgrowth of the sin nature. These people have no regard for moral standards, they have truly become a law unto themselves (cf. Rom 1:26-32). They corrupt society and culture in a blatant and shameless manner. They have no sanctity for human life or respect for others.

Some have found a contradiction here with Romans 1:24, 26, 28. In Romans it says God gave them over, in Ephesians it says they gave themselves over. Which is it? How do we solve the contradiction? Does God give them over to indecency or do they give themselves over to indecency? The dilemma might be solved by the following: 1) people exercise their perversion of free will (a will enslaved to their nature which is sinful) by giving themselves over to sin and 2) God responds by giving them over to the sin which continues to enslave them. It’s a downward spiral into the depths of depravity.

eis ergasian akatharsias pases, “for the practicing of every kind of impurity”. Second, for the practicing of every kind of impurity. So, we’ve got indecency, now we have impurity. This refers to the practicing of all kinds of impurity. The word for practicing is closely related to the Greek word for “work, business, and profit” (Luke 12:58; Acts 19:24ff). Impurity has become the “business” of the world and is extremely “profitable”.

The most common **impurity** mentioned in Scripture is, of course, sexual **impurity** (Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:19). Of course, sex is a gift of God given to husband and wife, not boyfriend and girlfriend, not roommates, friends, etc...Sex is the #1 business in the world today. You didn't know the Bible said that but it does right here. It's everywhere, anywhere and with anyone. The more the merrier. This is the sin nature expressing itself in the form of **Gentile impurity**. Many Christians think that the only negatives to sexual impurity are STD's and pregnancy. If we can avoid those by some form of physical protection then sex is alright. This is dead wrong. The fallacy is to think of sex as a merely physical act. The Bible says it is both a physical and a spiritual act, the two become one. Sex connects people in a way that nothing else can. Proverbs chapter 5 addresses the issue of impure sex. Turn to

Proverbs 5:7-19 Now then, *my sons*, listen to me And do not depart from the words of my mouth. ⁸ Keep your way far from her And do not go near the door of her house, *you will give your vigor to others* [this is talking about sexual capacity. A man has a certain sexual capacity, a certain ability to enjoy sex with a woman. When he has sex with a woman he loses some of that capacity because the man and woman mold themselves to one another. If he has sex with another woman she doesn't fit that expected mold. Every time you have sex with a different partner you destroy some of your capacity for sexual enjoyment]. When you And your years to the cruel one; ¹⁰ And *strangers will be filled with your strength* [this is talking about sexual capacity again. remember that whenever you have sex with someone that is not your husband or wife you are stealing from your husband or wife. You are stealing what belongs to them and giving it to a stranger. That's stupidity] And your hard-earned goods *will go* to the house of an alien [financial loss]; ¹¹ And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed; ¹² And you say, "How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! ¹³ "I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors! ¹⁴ "I was almost in utter ruin In the midst of the assembly and congregation." [social ruin] ¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

So, sex is for marriage only and outside of that its **impurity**. If you have sex outside of marriage remember that it is not only a physical act but also a spiritual act. It destroys your capacity for enjoying sex in marriage and it is stealing what belongs to your husband or

wife. Other kinds of **impurity** are 1) perjury in a court of law, 2) poor ethics in business, etc...

en pleonexia, “**with greediness.**” Finally, Paul says **with greediness**. This describes the manner of their impurity. The word means “I want more”. I want more of whatever I desire. This could be 1) sex, 2) money, 3) drugs, 4) power, 5) influence, etc...I want more of these things regardless of the needs of others. This word conveys extreme selfishness. In Col. 3:5 Paul equates **greed** with idolatry. Coveting amounts to putting some thing at the center of your life and worship. “The reason Christians are not to be covetous is because they must believe that God supplies their needs and that they have no need for what God has given to someone else.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We might conclude by saying that unregenerate people are by nature sinful. The natural outgrowth of the sin nature is **public indecency, impurity, and greediness**. Unbelievers are totally consumed with themselves. This kind of selfishness is totally at odds with the person of Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us. It is self-love in contrast to love of others and of God. It is no wonder Paul exhorts believers not to walk as the Gentiles.

ⁱ Gene Getz, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and pastor made this observation.

ⁱⁱ For example, if we want to study art we have to start with God’s thinking about art. God’s thinking about art is found in the Bible. When we discover God’s thinking and re-orient our thinking to His thinking then we are thinking God’s thoughts after Him (Ps. 36:9). This means our minds have been transformed to Christ rather than conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). Although not many Christians have done this in basic areas of life some have. For example, if you are interested in God’s view of Art then you might be interested in the book *God Through the Looking Glass: Glimpses from the Arts* by William and Aida Spencer or, if you are interested, for example, in Mathematics then you might be interested in the book *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* by James Nickel. Personally, I think every Christian child should be trained to think about these areas in terms of God’s word as the basic starting point and pre-condition for every area of life. They are a part of everyone’s life and culture and they are God’s creations (Ps. 111:2).

ⁱⁱⁱ Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 592.

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