

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #14

Ephesians 4:17-32

There is an interesting phenomenon that we all have seen in biblical Christianity. Some people come to faith in Jesus Christ and the change seems to be instant and dramatic. They turn their backs on their previous life, walk away and move forward for God. Some others who come to faith in Christ seem to struggle in this area. For them victory does not come so easily or quickly. But regardless of where we are at now, God expects that we will change thinking, behavior and lifestyle to reflect His grace.

Ephesus was a wild heathen city with lots of vices and lures. In fact, in 1955 archaeologists discovered a section of the city where several brothels had been located. The way they found them was that imbedded in the rock was a footprint that pointed the way to the brothels. Ephesus was an immoral place, which offered all of the lures and temptations of a city like Las Vegas.

Some of the believers, who had truly believed on Jesus Christ, were actually struggling and giving into the vices and lures. It is true that God wants each of us to live our lives in a fallen world, but He wants us living life in such a way that we do not look like a fallen person. God never told the Ephesians to move out of the city and get away from the people; what He told them was to demonstrate the grace of God to the people.

Now the words “walk no longer” of **verse 17** speak of a continual action that was taking place and needed to stop. This was not just a nice suggestion from Paul; Paul says in **verse 17** this was from him and the Lord. So Paul says believers should stop living like lost people and so does the Lord.

By the way, this fact refutes any idea of Lordship salvation. These believers were saved, but they were struggling in the areas Paul mentions. Lordship salvation teaches that in order to be saved you must believe in Jesus Christ and make Him Lord of your life and if you don't you are not saved. Paul did not believe that and he did not teach that. What these believers are challenged to do is go to work on living life in such a way that they are not living anymore like heathens. The possibility is there for everyone to actually live life as a believer, but Jesus Christ does not want that.

These Ephesians needed to be challenged to the fact that since they had received the gift of God's grace, they needed to reflect that grace in the way they lived their lives. In other words, there were some believers in Ephesus who were still living their lives just like some of the heathens and they needed to rethink it and stop it.

Also in view of the present tense of the verb “to walk” (**v. 17**) the emphasis is on a continual walk or lifestyle. None of us will ever reach sinless perfectionism. None of us will ever reach a point where we don't struggle with something and don't need to work on something. However, we do have the responsibility to see to it that we do not continually live our lives as some lost heathen would live. That is the point Paul develops here:

IN VIEW OF GOD'S GRACE THAT HAS CALLED US INTO SALVATION AND PUT US INTO JESUS CHRIST, WE HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY NOT TO CONTINUALLY LIVE OUR LIVES LIKE SOME WORLDLY HEATHEN.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ there are only two sets of clothes you wear. Either you wear the clothing of filthy rags of unrighteousness or you wear the clean clothing of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you choose to live life as a heathen, your life will be unfulfilling and you will end up losing eternal rewards. The potential is there to live life as a heathen and Paul writes to prevent that.

In Greek, **verse 17** begins with a conjunction “therefore.” The King James has the word there and so does the older New American Standard Bibles. This connects us to all that has gone on before previously. Since each of us is an important body part of the family of God, we need to reflect the fact that we are a member of Christ's family and body. There are three main thoughts that Paul develops in this text:

THOUGHT #1 – Believers need to stop living their lives like worldly heathens live their lives. **4:17-19**

God does not want us living our lives like we did before we were saved and the potential to live like a heathen is very real and very possible. This world and the people in it present a strong lure and the normal tendency is for us to try to adapt and fit into our culture. When we come to faith in Christ, we still live in this world and you cannot deny its enticing lures. In these verses Paul gives a good graphic description as to how heathens think and live. The language used here describes their “total depravity” perfectly. This is the way it is for one apart from Jesus Christ and never should this be the way it is for us.

(Heathen Quality #1) - A heathen lives life in the futility of his mind. **4:17b**

From God's perspective a heathen has a “futile” or useless mind that thinks things that are of no value or use to God. An unbeliever thinks completely different than a believer should think. Their goals, ambitions and desires are of no value to God. If we are not careful, we can think like them.

(Heathen Quality #2) - A heathen lives life with an understanding that is dark. **4:18a**

Apart from God's grace, a heathen has no capacity to see and understand truth and to even make proper good-versus-bad, light-versus-darkness decisions. No matter what a lost person understands, he does not understand it properly because his mind is spiritually dark. A lost person does not begin with the basic truth God has revealed; therefore, everything else will be colored in darkness. He will not see things clearly or accurately.

I heard a great illustration of this. For those of us who know how to type, you know that if you do not start with your fingers on the proper keys, everything you type is senseless. If your fingers are just one key off, nothing is accurate. So it is with a lost mind it is off and it affects everything about their understanding.

(Heathen Quality #3) - A heathen lives life excluded from any life of God. 4:18b

That word “excluded” (απαλλοτριω) is one that speaks of a life completely estranged and alienated from God. Make no mistake about this fact, unbelievers are not neutral when it comes to God; they are alienated from Him and they are excluded from having any relationship with Him.

There are two reasons why they are excluded from any life of God: 1) An ignorance that is in them; 2) A hard heart. They are hard-hearted to the things of God. There is a hard-hearted ignorance in every unbeliever. The verbal “is” is present tense so this means this is their continual state. They are continually ignorant of God and His Word and will and they are continually hard-hearted to it. It has been well observed that ignorance of God and His Word will always lead to insensitivity to God in one’s heart.

The word “ignorance” is the word “agnostic.” Lost heathens live their lives without true knowledge of God and His Word. The actual word for “hardened” (πωρωσις) is one that actually refers to a hardened, calloused, petrified spiritual condition that is as hard as a stone (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 395). A lost person’s heart is stone-hardened against God, His Word and His Spirit.

Now Paul is warning believers that it is possible to become very ignorant and very insensitive to God and His Word. His challenge here is stop the process.

(Heathen Quality #4) - A heathen lives life in a callous way. 4:19a

The word “callous” (απαλγεω) is one that means to cease from feeling pain. The perfect tense of the participle means there is a point of time when a heathen stops responding to anything that causes him painful conviction and he continually stays in that condition.

Becoming calloused is a process. God convicts at some point and instead of responding to the conviction and feeling the need to do right, he becomes calloused. A heathen has no sensitivity to the fact that he has no relationship with God. He feels no shame about sin and he no longer senses that he even needs to change. Sin has a narcotic effect on the lost world and if the believer is not careful, it can also have a narcotic and gripping effect upon him. Believers can become calloused and Paul warns against it.

(Heathen Quality #5) - A heathen lives life in a sensual way. 4:19b

The word “sensual” (ασελγεια) speaks of excessive, licentious, immoral things with no boundaries or limits. A heathen society tolerates every kind of immoral vice and most don’t see anything wrong with it. When one loses sensitivity to God, one lives life fulfilling their lustful and sensual appetites no matter what they are. They are actually greedy to fulfill them. Lost heathens live their lives to fulfill their greedy lusts. In fact, the word “greed” refers to a desire for more and more.

In Ephesus was the temple of Diana and that temple featured all kinds of sexual activity and sexual perversions. Many of the Ephesians had formerly been in this world and had participated in this type of behavior and now that they were believers, Paul is admonishing them to get away from this.

We must be very careful to never allow a pagan culture to affect us in such a way that it defines our morality or our standards.

THOUGHT #2 – Believers have not learned to live their lives in Christ like this. **4:20-21**

The Greek is strong here and Paul says “you believers” never learned Christ this way. In other words, you believers have experienced the Person of Jesus Christ and you never learned that you should live your life as a lost heathen. Notice carefully **verse 21** says “you have heard Him and been taught in Him.” Now what does Paul mean by this? The Apostle Paul was the one who had personally been taught by Jesus Christ, they hadn’t. Paul means you have actually heard from Jesus Christ when you have been taught His Word. In other words, when you go to church to hear God’s Word expounded by one given a gift of God, you are actually going to be taught by Jesus Christ, who is God. That is how you should view the expounded Word—this is God’s Word to you.

To personally know Jesus Christ is the greatest level of knowledge anyone can ever have. There is no greater discipline of heart and mind than to know Jesus Christ to the point that He has dominating control over us. Jesus Christ will never lead a believer into a heathen lifestyle.

Now Paul’s point is you have never heard that as a believer you are supposed to live your life like a heathen. You did not hear that from the Word of God or from Jesus Christ. **There is not a true teacher of God’s grace who will ever teach that the lifestyle you are to pursue is a heathenistic, carefree, consequence free life of intentional sin.** No believer in Christ who has been instructed in the truth of God, has ever learned or been taught that they are to live their lives like a heathen.

THOUGHT #3 – Believers have been taught how they should live their lives. **4:22-32**

Now in these next verses, there are some infinitives and other syntactical things that explain what these believers had been taught. There are eleven teachings as to how we are to live in light of God’s grace to us.

Teaching #1 - Lay aside our old self. **4:22**

There are two options for a believer: Live life like your old unsaved self which pursued the fulfilling of lusts or live life like your new self in Christ which pursues righteousness. It is an expectation of every Grace Age believer that he will go to work on laying aside the old self. The thing that lures the old self is “deceitful lusts.” Lustful things that appeal to the old self are deceitful illusions. They promise joy and fulfillment and give you misery.

Each one of us has an old self that is continually being corrupted by deceitful lusts and the only way we can lay this aside is to continually walk away from the old stuff that characterized our old lives. We must toss aside our old self.

Teaching #2 - Be renewed in our mind . 4:23

The verbal “renewed” is present tense which speaks of a continual action. Here is a critical key; we need to be continually renewed in our minds by the Scriptures. This is why it is critical that when God’s people come to church they are carefully taught the Scriptures. It renews the mind.

Now it is possible that “the spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit that works in harmony with the mind. The actual verb “renew” (ανανεωσ) is a compound verb which means to take our minds upward from some moment of time. In other words, every time we take our minds and feed them on the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will work in our minds and they will be renewed. We don’t need to be saved again, but we need our minds renewed again.

Teaching #3 - Put on the new self. 4:24

Now the word “new” (καινος) does speak of a new quality. Ever since we have believed, we are a new quality person and we are to clothe ourselves with a lifestyle that says “I belong to God.” We must make pointed decisions to display the new quality of our new self. We are to pursue things that are righteous and holy, not things that are lustful and fleshly.

We are not the same person anymore since we have believed. We are now God’s property and we need to display that. In any given situation we must make a decision. We will either choose to act like the old self or we will choose to act like the new self.

Teaching #4 - Replace falsehood with truth . 4:25

We are to speak in ways that harmonize with fact and reality. If there is one place on the face of this earth where people should expect to hear truth it is at church.

It certainly seems to appear that some of the Ephesians struggled somewhat with telling the truth. It is interesting that Paul did not simply say “stop lying”; what he also said was start telling the truth. Don’t speak lies, speak truth.

Teaching #5 - Deal appropriately with anger . 4:26

The command is to be angry, but do not let anger become sin. Now when you read this verse and compare it to **verse 31**, there seems to be a contradiction. Here it says “be angry” and there is says “put anger away.” Two possibilities of meaning to **verse 26**– 1) There are times when one should get angry but anger needs to be governed so it does not become sinful; 2) Anger is legitimate in certain contexts, but never an out of control anger.

The idea of not letting the “sun go down on your anger” (Deut. 24:13-15) is the idea of rectifying something very soon, even by the end of the day.

Anger can and will eat at you and destroy you and destroy relationships. If you let anger fester, it will ruin you and can ruin a church. So deal with anger appropriately. If you want to get mad and angry about something, get angry about your own flesh and sin and do something about that. Satan loves to get brothers and sisters in the church mad at each other so he can destroy unity and love.

Teaching #6 - Do not do things that would give the devil any opportunity to get you. **4:27**

In the context, the meaning is if we do not deal with things quickly before the sun goes down Satan will use it as an opportunity to lead the believer into sin. The best way to deal with things is quickly and immediately. Whether it be anger or lusts, deal with things immediately. In that way, the devil has no opportunity to get you. When you sin, confess it. When you do wrong, make it right. When you say something false, tell the truth.

Teaching #7 - Replace stealing with working. **4:28**

When we are functioning at the highest level of grace, we will want to work not only to pay our own bills and take care of our own wants and needs, but also so we can help others who are needy.

It is a true demonstration of God's grace for us to work hard, earn money and use it to help others who have need. The article "the" which precedes the noun "need" would seem to suggest specifically one who is in the context of the church.

Teaching #8 - Replace bad speech with good speech. **4:29**

Our words can have a wonderful effect on people and they also can have a devastating effect on people. God does not want worthless, senseless, stupid and sinful speech coming out of our mouths. He wants us carefully thinking about what we say to each other. He wants us to use our speech to promote grace. He wants us to use our speech to build each other up, not tear each other down.

Teaching #9 - Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. **4:30**

Now here is one time when the King James Version and the New International Version does a better job than the New American Standard. In Greek there is a conjunction "and" which connects **verse 30** to the previous verse. There are many ways we may grieve the Holy Spirit, but the way stressed here is by what we say.

The word "grieve" (λυπεω) is one that means to do things that could bring grief or pain to the Holy Spirit who lives in every believer. Grieving the Holy Spirit is not the same as quenching the Holy Spirit or stifling the Holy Spirit, but it is the first part of the process that will lead to this.

Now I want to speak to you as one who has sensed moments when I have grieved the Holy Spirit. I know it the instant I do it. I immediately sense God's Spirit has been grieved and I am sick inside. So what I immediately do right then and there is typically get down on my knees and confess it to God. I do not want anything I do, say or think to stifle my relationship with God.

A wise prayer for us to pray on a regular basis is for God to keep us so sensitive to the Holy Spirit that we will not do, say or think things that can grieve Him.

Teaching #10 - Put away all hateful things. **4:31**

In this verse Paul lists five vices to eliminate. As we analyze each of them, it appears that most of these things are internal things that if not put away come out in external ways.

Eliminate bitterness (sharp and harsh disposition), wrath (hot and passionate and impulsive anger), anger (impulsive angry disposition), clamor (always crying and clamoring), slander (impious and profane speech) and malice (evil, depraved, bad things). We must let these things go.

Teaching #11 - Be kind and tenderhearted and forgiving . **4:32**

The most God-like thing you and I will ever do in our lifetime is to forgive one another. A life that is willing to compassionately forgive others is the most enriching life we can ever live. We are to forgive "just as God in Christ has forgiven" us.

When someone comes to us and says they are sorry and asks for our forgiveness, we should be willing to immediately forgive. Why? That is what God does with every one of us.