

## Lesson 7 Ephesians 4:17-5:2

### Think Right, Do Right, Walk in Love

Sometimes I wish that there were not section headings in our Bibles. It breaks up the flow of the letter and that can make us miss how sections are logically connected. For example, above verse 17 in my Bible it says, "The New Life". This immediately makes me think that the following verses are all about my new life in Christ. And they are about that but they are so much *bigger* than that!

Paul has just finished telling the Ephesian Christians about the church, how they are to pursue unity and grow together toward maturity in Christ, working together so that the church builds itself up in love. Now Paul is going to put some practical words behind what that looks like. In verses 17-24 of chapter 4, Paul tells the Ephesians how to Think Right. In verses 25-32, Paul tells the Ephesians how to Do Right. Finally, at the end of our passage today, in verses 1-2 of chapter 5, Paul gives a command about how to Walk in Love. So, Think Right, Do Right and Walk In Love are how we will break down the passage this week. All of these, as we will see tie directly back to building up the church, encouraging and equipping one another toward maturity and building the church up in love. What is our individual part in doing this? Let's see.

### Think Right

Read Verses 17-24. I want to draw your attention to a few points in this passage. Look at how much of it has to do with our minds, how we think.

The mind of an unbeliever:

- Vs 17 – how the Gentiles walk is a result of the **futility of their minds**
- Vs 18 – the Gentiles have **darkened understanding and ignorance**
- Vs 22 –**Deceitful** desires corrupt lives (and is it not our **minds** which are deceived?)

What we do with our minds matters! Believers should not think like unbelievers think! Look at the outcome of their way of thinking! They are alienated from the life of God. They are given up to sensuality and greedy to practice every kind of impurity. This way of thinking and living destroys lives. How did they get here? There are a couple of phrases that indicate that this lifestyle developed over time. They ignored their consciences, that God given warning flag that tells us we are headed in the wrong direction! Their hardness of heart and callousness didn't happen all at once. Callouses take time to develop. Hearts take time to harden.

Verse 19 says that they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality. They are no longer attempting to engage their minds at all. They are just doing what feels right to them. Follow your heart the world says! The prophet Jeremiah tells us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately sick. (Jeremiah 17:9) Is that what we want to follow? Look down at verse 22 of Ephesians 4. This way of thinking belongs to the believer's *former* way of life. And this way of life was corrupt through deceitful

desires. That is a good description of sin, isn't it? Sin makes such sweet promises to satisfy us, we desire sin and the satisfaction that it promises. But it is deceitful, delivering dissatisfaction instead of satisfaction, bigger hunger instead of contentment, death instead of life.

Paul says this is not how a believer should think.

The mind of a believer:

- Vs 20 – Believers should have **learned** Christ
- Vs 21 – Believers should be **taught** in Christ
- Vs 23 – Believers are to be renewed in the spirit of their **minds**

Believers are to have been taught and to have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus. While sin lies and deceives, the truth is in Jesus. We are to be renewed in our thinking, in our very spirits realizing that we are created after the very likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. This is the very opposite of having a hard heart or ignorance about who God is!

And how are believers to learn Christ and be taught in him? In the passage leading into this Paul says that Jesus gave the church “apostles, the prophets, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Did you catch that? “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God”. Do you see the connection?

Paul wants them to think rightly about God, not with futile minds like the Gentiles. As we know God by the Spirit's help (remember in 1:17 and 3:18-19 Paul is praying for the Ephesians know God and to know His love through the Spirit's help) and as we are renewing our minds with his truth with the help of the church, we can live in this new manner of life.

What does it look like as we live in this new manner of life? This 'new self'? This brings us to our second point today, “Do Right”.

### **Do Right**

Read verses 25-32.

Paul is asking them to do more than just stop doing wrong, the Ephesian Christians are to actively do right. These are great examples of putting off the old self and manner of life and putting on the new self-created after the likeness of God. Put off this, put on that.

Put off falsehood, lying. Put on speaking the truth. More than just not lying, actively engage in speaking spiritual truth with one another in the church. We know Paul is talking about the church here because he says of the neighbor, “for we are members one of another”. We are to speak the truth in love so that the church grows up in every way into Christ according to 4:15.

Put off allowing anger to lead to sin. Put on dealing with your anger in a timely way. Why? So that Satan does not get a foothold within the church. Don't stew and simmer in your anger. That will only lead to sin. Anger often results from feeling slighted or treated unfair or unjustly in some way. You need to decide if it is something you can legitimately cover in love and let go. If you cannot then you need to

*humbly* and *graciously* go to the person who you feel wronged you and work it out with them with the goal of reconciliation. Matthew 18 outlines what this looks like but that is a lesson for another day.

Put off stealing. Put on honest work and sharing. Do you know what someone is who has just stopped stealing? A thief between jobs. Paul is calling for them to go beyond stopping the wrong actions and putting on the right action! Do right!

Put off corrupting talk. Put on speaking encouraging, fitting and grace filled words.

Put off bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice. All of it! These are all reactions to being slighted, of going after the justice that I think I deserve, getting that pound of flesh of someone who wronged me. Instead of acting that way toward one another, put on kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. How much so? Even as God in Christ forgave you.

Let me see if I can pull this together for you a little bit. All of these put-offs have a common thread of someone trying to get what they think they deserve. Their perceived rights have been violated and they are going to do whatever it takes to have just treatment. Consider this:

- Lying -> manipulating a situation or person to get the outcome I think I deserve
- Anger leading to sin -> sinning to take revenge or get the justice I think I deserve
- Stealing -> taking what I think I deserve
- Corrupting talk -> selfishly using my words with the freedom of speech I think I deserve
- Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice -> all reactions to feeling slighted, feeling I am not getting the justice or treatment or respect that I think I deserve.

All of these actions tear down the unity in the church. If each person lived like this, there would be no unity at all. Each person would be out for themselves, for what they think they rightly deserve and who would anyone else be to tell them differently.

This is where our second point, Do Right is directed by our first point, Think Right.

When we know God, when we our minds are renewed in the truth of Christ, we realize that we do not want what we deserve. We realize that we all fall short of the holiness and righteousness required by God and that we rightly and justly deserve death, eternity in hell separated from God. We understand and know – and continue to understand more and know more every day, the kindness and grace of God shown to us by choosing to sacrifice his only Son, Jesus Christ on our behalf.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we know and remember and appreciate the love of Christ for us in that Jesus Christ did not hold onto his right to stay in heaven with God and condemn all sinners to eternity in Hell, but rather, he took on the form of a servant, of man and came to earth and died the death we all deserve. When we think rightly about what we deserve, we cannot help but do rightly as well. The gospel drives us to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving of one another even as God in Christ forgave us.

### **Walk in Love**

When we think and act in these ways, we are as Paul calls the Ephesian Christians to do in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5. When we think and act in these ways, we are imitators of God, as beloved children. As we do this, we walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **Application**

So friend, what 'rights' are you holding onto that prevent you from walking in love?

Are you holding a grudge? Angry or bitter about what someone said about you or to you? Thinking to yourself that you deserve to be treated better than that!

Are you lying or clamoring or stealing to work things out the way you think you need or deserve them to be? To get the accolades or possessions or reputation or status that you think you deserve?

Are you using your words in a way to build yourself up or to build others up?

In what ways are you giving Satan a foothold as you pursue getting what the world is telling you that you deserve? Won't you turn that over to God? Won't you instead think rightly?

Think on the gospel. Preach it to yourself so that you are thinking rightly. Then go forward and walk in love as you appreciate anew how Christ gave himself up for you. Work to build up the church, the family of God as you give yourself sacrificially in loving one another even as Christ did for you.

Until we can be together again, may God bless you and keep you safe!