



## **Ephesians Week 9 - Ephesians 4:17-24**

*November 5, 2023 - Pastor Jason Carter*

Two weeks ago, we visited the first half of chapter 4 and discussed that we have all been called and in unity we will grow as a successful body of believers on mission. We jumped ahead last week to lay a foundational principle for how to live this out and treat each other in ways that will grow in unity. The basic principle is to imitate God (Eph 5:1,2) learning to walk in God's love towards each other. Now this week we will return to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of chapter 4 and start looking at how we can no longer live like Gentiles and live to imitate God.

**Ephesians 4:17-18 NIV <sup>17</sup>** "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking."

Paul is painting a picture of Gentiles: people who have not allowed Jesus to shape or change their life, values, or behaviors. He is using language to catch their attention: **I tell you this and I insist on it; No longer live as Gentiles, in the futility of their thinking.**

- STOP and think: As a Christian, does your thinking and living align with God's word?
- Do you find yourself walking out your faith like you don't know Him? Reacting to situations instead of responding?
- What does it look like to live a life aligned with His word, to live a life responding vs reacting?

**V.18** "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

Paul is creating a contrast between those who do not know Christ and who we are now called to be as Christ-followers. Don't live like you don't know God. God calls us out of living a certain way, thinking a certain way, and behaving a certain way.

Don't live like you don't know better, like you don't know who you are, like you have not been redeemed, bought back, forgiven, and filled with the Spirit of God.

Remember who you are, what Jesus has done; that you are the church, to be on mission with Him and each other.

- Isn't it amazing how often we want to grow up and have our "freedom" and be able to demand whatever we want but then that so-called freedom leads to bondage?

How have you seen this in your life?

- How can wrong thinking seep into your life of pursuing Jesus?

- Do we tend to see God's law as rules vs principles for a fulfilling life of purpose?

How so? What happens when we live with this mindset?

- What ways of thinking, living, and behaving have you seen needed to be changed in your life after you surrendered to Christ?

The Gentiles have directly rejected God and His ways. Paul is warning them AND US that this is who you *were* and if not intentional, we can return to these old ways.

Paul is speaking to believers who are tempted OR are going back to old ways because they want their own way.

**He shows them a PATTERN of "not knowing"** (v17,18):

**1. Futility in their thinking- (NLT - "Hopelessly confused")**

- Futility: meaningless, worthless, pointless, useless, ineffective, hopeless
- Thinking outside of God's direction leads to consumption, degradation, greed, lust, thirst for power, independence. Why? Because it is divorced from truth and tainted by self.
- How often have you heard people justify bad decisions and bad behavior because they wanted what they wanted? We can all think back to when sin led us and the resulting consequences.

**2. Darkened in their understanding- (NLT - "minds are full of darkness")**

- We lose our discernment of where the sin is leading. The further away we get, we lose the discernment of right and wrong.
- We get separated from the value of truth.
- We are lost and confused because we can't "see" - nothing is illuminated. Our minds have been darkened by sin and desire.
- Morality won't make sense. If truth is subjective, like today's society, anything goes.
- There is no "light" to allow for recognition of safe vs unsafe.

**3. Separated from the life of God because of ignorance**

- This does not have to do with intellect. Unbelief is not about mental acuity but morality.

- We begin to be separated because we choose to reject truth of God.
- Ignorance is a consequence of choosing to be separated from God. We cannot "see" therefore we cannot "know". If we do not know how can we live in truth?
- **We live in an age of relativism where everything is permissible**

#### 4. **Due to the hardening of the heart.**

- Refusal to engage God in His truth.
- Sit under Biblical teaching but refuse to change.
- When you are outside of it, you can see it.

#### **This is not God's design nor desire—He never wanted us to harden our hearts towards Him.**

- Prodigal sons: lost son leaves the house, lost son remains in the house. Both were in the pattern of "not knowing" and "futile thinking." Explain how so.

**V. 19** "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed." (NET- "because they are callous")

Their hearts are calloused. God calls it "hearts of stone."

Interesting that He did not say "captured" but "given themselves over to" which leads to captivity, bondage, and spiritual blindness. This means they made a willing CHOICE to move in that direction and to continue in it.

#### **Church, don't grow callous, grow hardened and cold hearts.**

#### **V. 19 Indulge in every kind of impurity**

- Habituated, consistently give into. Basically, it is lust.
- This is not just about sex. Lust means you can't satisfy the urge so you continue to give themselves over to lust and greed over and over. Always consuming but never satisfied
- **1 Timothy 6:10 NLT** "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows."

Sin summed up is that it leads to being "pierced with many sorrows."

Back to **v. 18 NLT** "minds are full of darkness"--they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against Him.

The heart is the seat of our desires and affections. It is the center of our being. (Mark 4 different types of soil of the heart)

### Things the heart experiences:

Desires: Matthew 5:28

Joy: Ephesians 5:19

Thoughts and reasoning: Gen. 6:5; Hebrews 4:12; Mark 2:8

Trouble and grief: John 14:1

Understanding: Isaiah 6:10; Matthew 13:15

Faith and belief: Mark 11:23; Romans 10:10; Hebrews 3:12

Good and evil come out of the heart: Luke 6:43-45

What we allow in our heart affects our *thinking*. And our thinking affects our *being*.

**Proverbs 4:23 NKJV** "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life."

**Our thoughts (mind) and our inner being (heart) are interconnected. Thoughts, feelings, dreams, desires, and our will. What we allow in our heart affects our thinking. And our thinking affects our heart or our being.**

Paul's point here is that believers cannot continue to live as unbelievers and expect to please God. We can't go through the motions of our Christianity and drift or grow cold, and our hearts cannot become hardened.

We use our **mind/knowledge/understanding/intellect** in serving God- we read the Bible, we use our reason, we use judgment. We must renew these gifts of our ability to think which God has given us.

We also must listen to the **conviction of the Spirit of God** speaking to our spirit- impression, gut level, a check in your spirit. (ie. It "seems" right, but I feel that I shouldn't do this right now. I don't have a peace about this decision right now. It doesn't feel settled in me.) And then we HAVE TO listen to that conviction.

**One of the greatest dangers to our heart becoming hardened towards God is to be unwilling.** Examples of what it means to be unwilling:

**Isaiah 30:9 NIV** "For these are rebellious people, deceitful children, children **unwilling** to listen to the Lord's instruction."

**Ezekiel 3:7 NIV** "But the people of Israel are **not willing** to listen to you because they are **not willing** to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate."

**Matthew 23:37 NIV** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were **not willing**."

- Is there a place with you that is unwilling in your relationship with the Lord?

**Ephesians 4:20-21 NIV** <sup>20</sup> "That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup> when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."

- You know better. Do you? How did you "learn" to do better?

**Some of us are just now beginning to discover and be taught. Keep pursuing Jesus, get in Christian community. He can lead you. Keep showing up!**

**Ephesians 4:22 NIV** <sup>22</sup> "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;"

### **How to put away our former life:**

#### **Step 1 Intentional act of defiance**

- Temptation is normal and part of life so we HAVE to learn how to take steps of DEFIANCE and REFUSE to give in to it.
- All of us have a list of former things of living that is still hanging around
- Let's change, let's be transformed, let's put off the old

(Pastor Jason referenced a Behr commercial about the "former owner" [ie. our old self] still hanging around. <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/bfcU/beh-r-stain-previous-owner>)

#### **Step 2 Engage the New**

**Ephesians 4:23 NIV** "to be made new in the attitude of your minds;"

- PJ's dog Jasper: If Jasper, the great squirrel hunter, can be trained. We can make new our minds!
- This runs deeper than just cognitive neural pathways in the brain. We have been made with the ability through the Spirit of God to make new our minds.
- Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to reorganize its synaptic connections.  
**With time and repetition, new connections become stronger, and old connections fade away.**
- **Romans 12:1-2 NLT** <sup>12</sup> "And so, dear brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>2</sup> Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."
- Don't you love how science is proving correct the word of God?

- The question is: do we want to put off the old self or are we unwilling? Do we want to have unity? Do we want to imitate God?

### **Step 3: Put on the new**

**Ephesians 4:24 NIV** "and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

- Righteousness and holiness: Right standing, right thinking, right living
- **Check your heart (Renew your mind):** What is coming up from within you? What is the root? Where is this coming from? Where does this originate? From God or where? From pain, resentment, bitterness, fear, love, joy peace? If you trace it back, does it lead to God or something else?
- We are to be rooted in the word of God
- **New thinking:** I have to ask myself, what does the Bible say and what does it look like to act and live in righteousness in this moment? In real life and in real time. How do I think and behave when I put on the new in this area? Holy Spirit, how do you help me?

**If we are to walk in faithfulness in God and unity with believers, we have to be proactive and intentional.**

Imitate God...put off the old, make new our minds, put on the new, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness

- Are we unwilling?
- Are we consistently taking off the old to put on the new?
- Are we tolerating old things hanging around?
- Pray and ask God to show you if there is some "former self" that you need to put off