Thinking Differently

A Study through the book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:17-20

We all know that as Christians we are called to live differently than the rest of the fallen world, but what we may not realize is that living differently starts with thinking differently. Let's talk about this today.

There can be no doubt that it is the Holy Spirit who empowers our transformation in Christ to where our lifestyles are being totally changed. But He doesn't do this without our cooperation.

How do we cooperate with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? By choosing to think differently as today's passage in Ephesians 4:17-20 directs us. Let's dive into these verses to get a better understanding of this truth.

Ephesians 4:17, "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."

When we read "and I insist on it in the Lord" we must read this with the knowledge that it is the Holy Spirit who is inspiring this writing, these are His words, hence, He is the one who is insisting! This should make all of us pay very close attention!

Notice how Paul equates how we live with how we think. In other words, how we think shapes what we do and how we live. The truth is that we can't live right unless we think right. Here in this verse, we see that thinking right begins with stop thinking in a futile manner.

The idea of "futility of thinking" is about thinking in a way that ultimately goes nowhere when it comes to God. These are thoughts that always misses the fundamental purpose of man's existence i.e. to truly know God and to truly love God. It's thinking that has no spiritual value.

We are exhorted in ***Colossians 3:2, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*** This doesn't mean that we must only think thoughts about God, but it does mean we must always involve God in all our thoughts.

A mindset that is not God-ward will always become a mindset that is going downward. Our next verse demonstrates this.

Ephesians 4:18, "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."

Notice how one's futility of thinking comes from being "darkened in their understanding", in other words they are clueless about our One True God and what He has revealed in His Holy Bible. Without this understanding they are separated from the life of God.

And being darkened in one's understanding comes from ongoing ignorance that is the result of one's heart being hardened. This tells us that hard hearts promote a kind of ignorance that

makes one miss God altogether. Jesus said in Matthew 13:15, “For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes.”

We see this after Jesus miraculously fed the 4000, He was warning the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees, but they didn’t get it. They thought it had something to do with them accidentally leaving behind the seven baskets of bread pieces after they crossed the lake.

They didn’t get that Jesus was warning them about unbelief, they didn’t see that Jesus just demonstrated once again that He is Jehovah Jeriah (the Lord our Provider) in the flesh. So, He said to them in Mark 8:17, “Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?”

Ephesians 4:19, “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”
Here we find the kind of lifestyle that futile thinking and hardened hearts ultimately lead to.

First, they lose all sensitivity. This is sensitivity refers to their God given consciences (see Rom. 2:15). One’s conscience is that inner moral gauge that God places in the hearts of all people. These are no longer are governed by it, they have no sense or concern of God’s ways or voice.

Without this sensitivity they give themselves over to sensuality, in other words allowing physical and sensory pleasure to be the purpose and to have the control of their lives.

Sensuality by nature is never satisfied, it demands a constant pursuit for more, for different, thus it’s always leading one to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more. It is at its very core the basis of all addictions.

Ephesians 4:20, “You however, did not come to know Christ that way”
Because we have not come to know Christ in this way, this whole passage is telling us that as followers of Jesus we cannot live in any of these ways any longer.

Thus, with the Holy Spirit’s help:

- We must abandon futile thinking by intentionally involving God in our thought life.
- We must reverse darkened understanding by adopting a Biblical worldview.
- We must refuse ignorance by studying God’s Word to show ourselves approved.
- We must repent for our harden hearts seeking God for a total heart change.
- We must pray for restoration of loss of sensitivity and start paying close attention to the Holy Spirit’s promptings.
- We must renounce in Jesus’ name living under the slavery of sensuality and its myriads of addictions. And walk in the freedom afforded to us by the cross of the Lord.

Doing these things promotes the kind of life we are called to live in the Lord.