

Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-24

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In the previous passage of Ephesians 4:11-16 Paul laid out God's plan for the church. Paul wanted the church to grow to become more and more like Jesus together. And how was that supposed to happen? As the leadership of the church teaches the church, people will be repaired and restored so that all of us can speak the truth in love to one another so that the body matures. This shows that truth is what changes us. The truth is what sets us free.

As we will see in this text, every time we sin it is because we are believing a lie. Just like Eve in the garden, when we sin we are believing that the forbidden fruit will be better than obeying God. We doubt that God really wants the best for us. We believe the lie that we know how to make ourselves happy, and so we take for ourselves what we want. So whether it is getting angry at our kids, complaining, being selfish and self indulgent, or some other idol, we sin because we doubt that God's way is best. So the truth is what will set us free and change us. The truth is what will make us more like Jesus.

But as we saw, we need to speak the truth in love. If we are truly going to be a church that helps each other to become more like Jesus, we can't yell the truth at each other. It is far too easy to tell other people the truth to cut them down. It is far too easy to tell other people that they are wrong because we feel that we are better than they are. But that isn't love. True love will correct other people, but it will only do so because of a deep care and concern for the other person.

So if we want to be a church that grows to be like Jesus, we must learn how to speak the truth in love to one another. Paul is very concerned with the unity of the church. We must be a family together if we are going to be what God wants us to be. God wants us to be a family together that represents Jesus to this world so that Jesus looks good. So let's all work together to be more like Jesus together so that He will get all the glory. We love Jesus, and so more than anything we want the whole world to know how great He is.

So now we are going to pick up where we left off. Now Paul is going to talk about our new life in Christ. If we are going to be a church family that looks like Jesus, we will live a completely new life that looks nothing like the world.

Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Paul begins this section by *testifying* that we must no longer walk as we used to walk. Why does Paul use the word 'testify'? What does it mean when someone testifies? Someone testifies in court. The word testify means that you are giving evidence as a witness. So when Paul says that he testifies that we shouldn't walk as we used to, he is telling us how serious it is. It is very important that as Christians our whole way of life changes.

Notice that Paul says we must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. He is using this word walk to refer to our whole way of life. And so Paul is telling us in very serious words that we can't live like we used to. If we are followers of Jesus, our whole lives and way of living must change. But how?

Paul says that before we were Christians, our minds were futile. That means our minds were empty and worthless. Paul then says that our understanding was darkened. Without the truth, it is as if we were blind, in the dark. Think about it. What do people who don't know God really know? The only thing in the universe worth knowing they pretend doesn't exist. Or they pretend that God isn't that great.

It would be like if someone was driving their car toward the edge of a huge cliff. And there was a sign that said that the cliff was coming, but this person just said that there was no cliff. And so they just kept driving right off the cliff and fell to their death. That person who drove off the cliff may understand other things. They could even be a great car mechanic or a great race car driver. But really, that person who pretended like there wasn't a cliff and drove their car off the cliff is stupid. They are blind. They didn't know the one truth that really mattered.

And it's the same way with people who don't know God. They may be really smart. They may know a lot of things. But the only thing that really matters they don't know. So Paul says that people who don't know God have empty minds, and darkened understanding. It's like they are in a pitch black room and can't see anything. And so Paul says that they are ignorant and says that they are separated from God.

There is one fact in the world that is the most basic fact in the universe: There is a God and He created everything. All other truth is based upon that. So it doesn't matter what else you know, if you don't know that truth and if that truth hasn't changed your life, then you are foolish. So Paul says that the world is ignorant and separated from God. They are alienated from the life of God, they don't get to share in God Himself! They are missing what life truly is!

But Paul then goes on to say that the world's ignorance is because of their hardness of heart. That is the real issue according to Paul. We often think that people don't believe in God because they don't understand God. But Paul is telling us that really, people don't know God because they make a choice. The world is choosing to reject God. People don't want to know God because they want their sin more than God. That is why Paul says that their hearts have become hard.

So Paul actually says that they have no self control and just give in to whatever sin they want. That's what "They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" means. The world is greedy, always wanting more. The world wants their sin more than God, and so their hearts are hard to God. That means the world is insensitive to God, doesn't even feel guilt or shame for craving their sin.

And really, that's what all of us were like before God saved us. From the time that we are born, all we can think about is 'me'. From the day we are born, all we can think about is what we want. And so Paul says that if we don't know God, it is because our hearts have chosen our sin and so our hearts have become hard to God. I don't know if you have ever thought about that before. But that is really pretty scary to think about. If God didn't save me, that's what I would be like. I would be a slave to my own desires. Paul says that if we don't know God, our hearts are just so selfish that all we want is what we want. And so Paul says that without God, we are in complete darkness.

I want you to see how this is connected with the previous section. Remember what we said Paul's plan for the church was? Paul says that God's plan for the church is that we learn the truth and speak the truth to one another. He says that the goal is to become mature and not tossed around by false doctrine. That is how we become more like Jesus. The truth that sets us free. The truth is like a light in a dark room. In a dark room you can't see anything. But if you turn on just one light, it can give enough light for you to be able to see everything clearly!

Before the light of who Jesus is comes into our lives, we are in darkness. We are blinded by our own desires. Our lust and our greed makes it so all we can see is what we want. We are looking everywhere for something that can fill us up. We are looking for happiness. We are looking for satisfaction. We are doing everything we can to try to fill up our hearts. And yet nothing can ever fill our hearts. And so that is why Paul says that our hearts become hard. Our hearts long for something to fill them up. Just like a drug addict can't enjoy life because all they can think about is the drug that they need, without Jesus, all of us are so greedy for things to fill us up that our hearts become hard to the one thing that is really good.

So Paul is telling us that the world is blind to God because their hearts are hard. And so the world are slaves to their own hard hearts. And their greedy and lustful hearts just try to get full of more and more sin.

So when the light turns on and we see that Jesus is better than everything, our lives should look completely different! We shouldn't be wandering around in the dark like the world trying to fill ourselves up with everything we can get our hands on. No! Now that we have seen the light, all we want to do is to run to the light. We have seen how beautiful Jesus is and He is all we want.

That's why Paul says, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" We are different. We are changed. We don't live for the same things anymore. Our hearts are not slaves to sin. As Christians, Jesus is all we want. And Jesus is enough for us. Jesus will fill us up. Jesus will satisfy us.

And that's why Paul tells us to put off our old self. What does that mean? Paul talks about our new self and our old self. Our old self is who we were before Jesus changed us. Our old self is what Paul has just been describing. Our old self is the person who is a slave to what we want, blinded by our hearts, blinded by sin. Our old self is how we used to live. Paul says that our old way of life was corrupted by deceitful desires.

That means that all sin lies to us. All sin tricks us. Sin tells us that we will be happy if we just get what we want. It's the same for a child or for an adult. A child that grabs a toy that their sister has does it because they are believing the lie that that toy can make them happy. They think that the toy is what they need. And so they fight or yell or cry or do whatever they can to try to get what they want. Their desire for that toy has blinded them. They can't see what is good. They can't see how much happier it would be for them to love than to have the toy.

Or as an adult we do the same things. Whether it is sex or success or some other desire that is driving us, it is way too easy for us to be blinded by what we want. We think that if we just get our desire that then we will be happy. But that's a lie! We are being tricked by a deceitful desire! The only thing that can make us happy is Jesus. He is the only one who is good enough to satisfy us.

So Paul tells us to put off the old life. Why would we want to live like that? Why would we want to go back to our old life where we were a slave to our own desires? Paul tells us to put off the old life and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

This is a reminder that we were created as spiritual beings. We all have a soul. We were created to know God with our minds. And so the only way to know God is for His Spirit to come into us and to change our minds. We need to be renewed. We need new life. And as Paul says, that new life comes through transformed thinking. As the truth of God's Word soaks into our minds it changes us.

And so Paul tells us to put off the old self and to "put on the new self which is created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

We were created in the image of God. We were made to know God and to be like God. So why do we all keep going back to our old way of life that just lived for ourselves. We don't want to be like that anymore! God has made us for so much more than to live for ourselves. He made us to be righteous and holy like Himself. And notice that the text says that this righteousness and holiness is of the truth.

That means that the truth is what makes us righteous and holy like God. The truth is where this righteousness and holiness come from. It's only when we see that God alone is worthy, that sharing in His life and being like Him is alone what is satisfying, that we will be made new. Our hearts will never be full, will never be satisfied unless God is what we want. This is what we were created for. This is how we were designed. We were made to enjoy God.

Have you ever seen one of the cartoons where the character is out in the desert, dying of thirst. And then they see a mirage and start to drink, only to find out that it is a mirage and their mouth is full of sand! That is what sin is like! It's a deceitful desire. We are dying of thirst. We are longing for something to quench our thirst. But sin is a lie. It is a mirage in the desert. We think it will quench our thirst and really, we will just get a mouth full of sand! So don't go back to the mirage! Go to the spring of living water. God alone is good enough for us. He made us to enjoy Him, so don't be tricked by the lie. Put off the old self and put on the new self.

And so I must ask ourselves, what do we want today? When you have a quiet moment, what do you think about? What is it that you feel you just have to have? If your answer isn't Jesus, then put it off! Remember that Jesus is better. Remember that He is the only one who can quench your thirst. If you are a Christian, you have tasted how good He is. If you haven't given your life to Jesus yet, you may have never tasted how good He is. But He is inviting us. He is calling us to taste and see how good He is.

Aren't we tired of stumbling around in the dark? Aren't we sick of trying to quench our thirst with sand? Then let's put on the new self that is created in