



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

Walk in Newness of Life...

Ephesians 4:17-32

^{NIV} **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. 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. 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. ²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² 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; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ **"In your anger do not sin"**: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

This morning we have reached another important point in our study. You will remember that when we began our study I divided the book of Ephesians into

two different parts. The first three chapters were what we called the **“indicative”** section of the book. Paul reminded us of all that Christ has accomplished on our behalf. He reminded us that once we were dead in trespasses and sins but that Christ came into the world and redeemed us or bought us out of the realm of sin and death. But not only did Christ redeem us from sin, he also incorporated us into his glorious new society, the church. He gifted us for service in that society by the dispensing to us the Holy Spirit.

Then in chapter four, Paul moved into what I called the **“imperative”** section of the book. In these last three chapters Paul spells out for us what our responsibilities are now that we have been redeemed and incorporated into the church. You will remember that I spoke of the importance of the word **“therefore”**. You see it at the beginning of chapter four and we see it in the text we are looking at this morning. But just to remind you again, whenever you see the word “therefore” in the text you should ask yourself the question, **“What is it there for?”** The reason you should do so is because **“therefore”** will almost always follow as the result of some doctrinal truth. Christ has accomplished such and such...therefore we ought to live in such a manner. The result of knowing that simple fact will ever keep us aware of the importance of doctrine. Doctrine is not to be some mere, cold and dusty recounting of facts; it is to be the lifeblood of how and why we live in a special way. Essentially, our life is to be a life of gratitude lived out in the glorious light of all that Christ has accomplished.

We saw that from the very beginning of chapter four. Paul calls us to live in unity and peace with each other. Now, he gets very specific. He is going to tell us just how we are to do that. Notice what he says:

^{NIV} **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. 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. 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.

The thing that is so interesting about this part of the passage is that Paul connects knowledge and behavior one more time. He says and he affirms in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Himself that we are no longer to walk as the Gentiles walk. By that he means that we are to have a decidedly different kind of life from unbelievers. There is to be something morally superior about our lives and whatever that thing is, it is to be observable. I am not promoting any sort of legalism here, but it is fair to ask the question, **“How are our lives to be different than those of unbelievers?”**

Our actions are to be different for sure.

But even the way we think is to be different. I want you to notice Paul’s emphasis on terms that have to do with the mind.

^{NIV} **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. 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.

The Gentiles walk in **“the futility or emptiness of their mind”**. They do so because their understanding is **“darkened”**. They are excluded from the life of God because of **“ignorance”** and the **“hardness of their heart”**. There is an intellectual disconnect between their minds and God. That is not to say that such

men are not educated. They may have diplomas and degrees and we are certainly not opposed to education. The Presbyterian heritage has always been devoted to the education of clergy, members and their children. What we are talking about here is something sinister. We are talking about the hardening of their will. And really, the process is exactly the reverse of the order that we find it in our English Bible. You see Paul is saying this occurs because of this...which occurs because of this...which occurs because of this...and when you get to the last item in the list you are really at the root cause of all their problems. Let me see if I can arrange it according to its logical order.

Then Gentiles walk in the emptiness of their minds...

They do so because of the hardness of their hearts...

As a result they walk in willful ignorance of God and His created world...

As a result, they walk about in their darkened estate separated from God...

It reminds us, of course, of Pharaoh in the Old Testament. I mean ask yourselves, **“At what point did he have enough facts to respond to the power of God?”** He had enough information right from the beginning, but it was his willful obstinacy that caused him to press on in ignorance of all the signs and miracles of God that were being displayed before his very eyes.

But its one thing to be separated from God through their willful ignorance, Paul says they don't stop there. In this darkened condition they commit the worst kind of folly. Look how he says it.

^{NIV} **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.

You see it is this willful obstinacy that leads men on to commit the most heinous kinds of sensuality. They become callous or hardened to the life of sin that they choose. But it is not just the people of Paul's day that did so. Our world is engaged in the same kind of willful obstinacy today. There is underfoot today a concerted effort to strip away the knowledge of God. Let me read for you a portion of an article taken from the Wall Street Journal to illustrate what I mean.

When Princeton University's Center for Human Values offered Peter Singer the Professorship of Bioethics, they may not have realized what they were getting. A somewhat obscure academic...Mr. Singer is well known in his field for an uncompromising philosophy that pulls together the disparate strands of abortion-rights proponents, animal-rights activists and advocates of euthanasia.

...but give Mr. Singer his due. The soft-spoken Australian has a simple and clear principle to apply to all these moral debates: "**The most obvious reason for valuing the life of a being capable of experiencing pleasure or pain is the pleasure it can experience.**" So, he goes on to explain, in order to increase the "**total sum**" of pleasure, we can either bring into the world more beings capable of experiencing pleasure, increase the pleasure of already existing beings or remove what he calls "**miserable beings.**"

If cows lead pleasurable lives, Mr. Singer is for saving them from the butcher's knife; if handicapped people have lives that aren't pleasurable, Mr. Singer stands equally ready to have them killed. Thus, Mr. Singer supports all forms of euthanasia, voluntary or not; abortion and infanticide; and rights for animals. And who decides which lives are pleasurable? Presumably people as enlightened as Mr. Singer.

There is an impressive, if lunatic, consistency to his arguments. Unlike many pro-choice, animal-rights or "**death with dignity**" advocates, he does not feel compelled to hide his views behind euphemisms..."**But,**" he told me in an interview, "**many of our considered moral intuitions are formed for selfish reasons, or for religious reasons which were once strong but are now outdated.**" For instance, we justify killing animals because we want to eat them, he argues, and we prevent some women from choosing abortion merely because the pope

tells us to. Mr. Singer wants to take us into a brave new world where these traditional notions don't apply...

Consider Mr. Singer's stance on abortion. In his book "Practical Ethics," he begins by arguing that **"the life of a fetus is of no greater value than the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, etc., and that since no fetus is a person, no fetus has the same claim to life as a person."** So far Mr. Singer sounds like a conventional feminist. But then he adds the kicker: **"Now it must be admitted that these arguments apply to the newborn baby as much as to the fetus."** In short, he agrees with pro-life activists who argue that nothing distinguishes, say, partial-birth abortions from infanticide - though Mr. Singer approves of both. Unsurprisingly, pro-choice activists have kept their distance.

Similarly, Mr. Singer doesn't make any of the politically palatable arguments for euthanasia. While most proponents argue that a patient in great pain has the "right to die" if he so chooses, Mr. Singer bases his decision not on individual rights but on the notion that the overall sum of pleasure will be increased when an unhappy person dies. Opponents argue that once certain forms of euthanasia are adopted, it will be difficult to draw the line. Mr. Singer evidently relishes this prospect. **"Once we abandon those doctrines about the sanctity of human life that ... collapse as soon as they are questioned, it will be the refusal to accept killing that will be horrific."**

In assessing which lives are pleasurable and which are not, Mr. Singer also accounts for the lives of other creatures in the animal kingdom. **"We should recognize that from the points of view of different beings themselves, each life is of equal value,"** he writes. Mr. Singer is not convinced that just because **"a person's life may include the study of philosophy while a mouse's life cannot"** that **"one is more or less valuable than the other."** (Wall Street Journal 1998)

There is so much darkness there that it is hard to know where to start a refutation. But suffice it to say that it is not his lack of morality or ethics alone that trouble me. It is his initial assertion that causes me trouble. The value of life is about so much more than pleasure. To be sure there is a biblical command to obey and enjoy God forever, but the kind of pleasure that is spoken of in the Confession is the enjoyment of God in all His Excellency rather than enjoyment

for the sake of enjoyment, alone. That is one of the main reasons that I am an opponent of structuring our teaching and worship around trying to satisfy an unbelieving culture. Once you accept a faulty premise, there is no telling where the conclusions will lead.

But getting back to Paul. Paul turns from the futile life of Gentiles to a reminder of how we ought to live in the glorious new society in which we have been included.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:20**...You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² 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; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Do you see what he is saying? Notice the way contrasts the terms that he used to describe the Gentiles. There are the words **“learn”**, **“heard”**, **“taught”** and **“truth”**. What Paul is saying is that for us as Christians we are to be radically different than pagan Gentiles. We have been created in righteousness and have put on newness of life. Some commentators refer to this section as the **“school of Christ.”** I like that. You see Jesus is the subject of what we have been taught.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:20**...You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.

Christ and all that He accomplished is the subject of what we teach. When we teach anything else we have lost our authority. But not only is Christ the subject of our teaching, through the Spirit He is also the teacher.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:21**...Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

The idea here is that Christians are taught Christ by Christ. When someone stands up and faithfully delivers the message of Christ He does so in the authority of Christ.

...and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

Jesus is what is taught. He is the Teacher. He is also the very sphere or context of all we are. Being taught in Him may have reference to this new glorious body, the church. But whatever it means, Paul next moves on to discuss the behavior that such instruction demands.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:25**...Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ **"In your anger do not sin"**: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

You can see if hope that there are some very simple commands.

They are:

- (1) Speak the truth
- (2) Don't stay angry
- (3) Don't steal
- (4) Don't speak unwholesome words
- (5) Don't grieve the Spirit
- (6) Put away bitterness, wrath, fighting and slander

Some of the commands given by Paul are the same as the laws given in the 10 Commandments. Some of them are obvious. Speak the truth is probably related to bearing false witness against our neighbors, the 9th commandment. Don't stay angry is probably the 6th commandment against murder. Don't steal is the 8th commandment. No unwholesome words may be the 9th commandment or if they are considered to sexually-oriented then it may be the 7th commandment against adultery.

Now what is interesting here is that Paul not only tells the Ephesians what not to do, but he also tells them why.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:25**...Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Notice what his reason for speaking the truth is. It is because we are members of one another. How wonderful it would be if we could get to the place where we trusted each other so much that we would tell each other the truth. I'm not talking about in a mean-spirited way either. For example:

Dr. Clarence Bass, professor emeritus at Bethel Theological Seminary, early in his ministry preached in a church in Los Angeles. He thought he had done quite well as he stood at the door greeting people as they left the sanctuary. The remarks about his preaching were complimentary. That is, until a little old man commented, "**You preached too long.**" Dr. Bass wasn't fazed by the remark,

especially in light of the many positive comments. **"You didn't preach loud enough,"** came another negative comment; it was from the same little old man. Dr. Bass thought it strange that the man had come through the line twice, but when the same man came through the line a third time and exclaimed, **"You used too many big words"** --this called for some explanation. Dr. Bass sought out a deacon who stood nearby and asked him, **"Do you see that little old man over there? Who is he?"** **"Don't pay any attention to him,"** the deacon replied. **"All he does is go around and repeat everything he hears."** Pulpit and Bible Study Helps, Vol 16, #5, p. 1

What would be world-changing would be an environment where we could speak the truth to each other in love for the building up of the body. I have wondered a thousand times about one of our recent political scandals. I know political pundits are right to excoriate such immoral behavior but it leads me to wonder if there was anybody in their lives that had enough affection for them to pull them aside and say, **"Brother, you know I love you and I want you to know that the track you're heading down will lead to shame, degradation, and embarrassment."** Maybe there was not. Let us pray that it will not be the case here.

Next, Paul adds:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:26...**"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

Oh, that we could get the point he is making here. Oh, that we would begin to keep such lists very short. Sometimes we get mad at our friends or our mates and instead of taking the time to resolve it right then and there, we let it fester until its too late. It is amazing how we can replay conversations over and over in our minds until we have worked ourselves up to the boiling point. We replay what

we should have said or could have said and the next time we see that person we simply are laying wait to shed innocent blood. It's especially that way with married couples. One person will get angry and the other doesn't take it seriously and before either one knows what has happened, Satan has found a foothold and there is so much damage done that neither person can forgive.

If I could give any advice in this regard, it would be stay until you have resolution. Lingering anger does lingering damage. Husbands and wives vow to one another that you won't let your busy schedules keep you from making resolution. Don't let anger rob us of the unity we should enjoy in Christ.

But not only are we to speak the truth and to keep our conflicts resolved, we are also to stop stealing.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:28**...He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

In our search for Christian unity, we are to put aside our selfishness and our lusts. Instead, we are to work for what we have and we are to do so that we will have enough to share with those who are in need. It doesn't matter how you give, whether its your money or your time. But every one of us needs to ask ourselves if we are fulfilling this command of Scripture. Are we earning our money honestly and fairly or are we just going through the motions? Are we doing our work as unto the Lord? Is there some venue in which we give of ourselves? Young people this is just as important a question for you as it is for us. Do you have some area of your life where you contribute to the body of Christ based upon your honest labor.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:29**...Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

We are not to speak unwholesome words. It is hard to know from the vocabulary whether there is related to slandering our neighbor or just plain old filthy talk. But Paul helps us to include both...when he tells us that instead of unwholesome talk we are to speak words that edify or build up. We are to avoid filthy language or suggestive language. We are to avoid cleverness when it means the destruction of someone's reputation. We are to speak only in a way that edifies or builds up the body of Christ.

Finally, we are to avoid grieving the Spirit.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:30**...And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Now, there has been a lot of discussion about how we can grieve the Spirit of God. But I think the simplest answer is right there in the text. I believe that the second sentence referring to "**bitterness, wrath, anger and clamor**" is the manner in which we grieve the Spirit. There are two reasons why I think that is true:

- (1) Christian unity seems to be the whole purpose of the second half of the book
- (2) The verb "you were sealed" is plural. The point is not that individual Christians grieve the Holy Spirit but rather that groups of Christians grieve the Spirit by their behavior.

The reason that such discord is so unconscionable is because it is by that same Spirit that we are sealed until the day of redemption. And Paul gives us the alternative behavior. Instead of being filled with discord and wrath, we should be tender-hearted and forgiving just as Christ forgave us.

Of course, when we think about how Christ has forgiven us we are compelled to live in gratitude. It is always to be the driving force for our behavior. If you think of these commands and how we violate them almost everyday in almost every relationship and recognize that such a failure deserves the eternal wrath of God, it gives you a new appreciation for Christ's obedience to the demands of the law.

Let's pray.