

## EPHESIANS 4:17-19

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 commenced for us the section of the book that was application of the doctrines set out in chapters 1-3. So far in this chapter Paul has been telling the Christians at Ephesus how they are to behave and he has focused upon their behaviour in the church. They are to keep the unity, and they are to do this by using their spiritual gifts so that the church will grow up into Christ and mature. Now Paul is going to tell the believers at Ephesus how to behave in the world.

This section goes from 4:17 – 5:21 and Paul wants the church to understand how important his words are by introducing them with a forceful sentence (v 17). Paul insists that the church must not live like the unbelieving Gentiles and his insistence is not Paul throwing his weight around as an apostle but it carries the authority of the Lord for it is in the lord that he insists on such behaviour. So how are the believers to live in Ephesus?

#### 1. THEY ARE NOT TO LIVE LIKE THE GENTILES (v 18)

The Christians at Ephesus live in a new relationship with Christ they are no longer living under the leadership of their sinful nature or Satan therefore Paul says their behaviour must reflect this. They are no longer to live like the Gentiles do, Gentiles of course stands for the unbelieving world around them. A change has taken place in their hearts therefore that will be reflected in their lives. Now in the Greek there are no commands, here for Paul is not telling them what to do but he is describing the consequences of those who have been united together in Christ.

A change has taken place and if no change has taken place then there has been no conversion experience. If a change has taken place and they have come to know the Lord Jesus then there will be a change of behaviour in our world, which is why Paul is insisting on such behaviour. Now immediately I trust you can see an application for us. When someone comes to know the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour then they are in a new relationship with Him.

Their old sinful nature no longer controls and dominates and Satan no longer holds sway instead the Lord is Master and in control. He grants us his Holy Spirit who guides and directs us into righteousness. Therefore a change in our behaviour is seen in the church where we are united to our fellow Christians therefore we seek to work out our unity with them and we seek to use our Spiritual gifts for the benefit of the maturity of the church. But that change is also seen in the world in which we live, it is seen in the community where God has placed us and we no longer live like everyone else. A Christian has a different master than those of the world therefore our behaviour will reflect that new ownership. A temptation for Christians especially young Christians is to be like the world, is to do what our friends are doing but Paul says the opposite we are no longer to do what they do we no longer live like them.

Paul recognised the pull that their previous life has on the believers at Ephesus up until their conversion they had followed the Gentile way of life and therefore Paul knew the influence of their past life was great. There must have be a constant temptation to revert to their old and familiar ways. They perhaps were tempted to think of past friends and pastimes that had given them so much pleasure and so that just increased their temptations.

However they now knew that their service to their one true God rules out any going back to an old way of life or to old habits. But how do the unbelieving world live?

That temptation is still with us today isn't it? Have you never thought in your worst moments what life would be like if you were not a Christian? Are there not times when we think life might be better

for us if we just lived like everyone else? There is always a temptation for us to go back for there is a tendency within us that desire to fit in with the ways of our culture. We are bombarded today from our television radio's newspapers with ideas that are presented as pleasurable and desirable. Therefore the believers in Ephesus and believers today are not to take our standards from the communities in which we live.

No Christ has died for us to save us and rescue us from all our sin, he has broken the power of sin in our lives therefore we must live as people who have been set free by the power of Christ. Paul now lists some of he characteristics of living like the Gentiles, how does the person of this world live.

**a) Their thinking is futile (v 17)** – The word “futile” means empty or meaningless they set their minds on things of no real value. What we set our mind upon will determine our aim and purpose in life and as far as Paul is concerned the sort of things that occupy the mind of the unbeliever leads them to live a life without purpose and real meaning. Of course no unbeliever will agree with this but let's think about it for a moment. What does the average person want out of life today?

I suggest that most want an easy passage with no trouble, plenty of money and plenty of pleasure. That is what they set their minds upon from one week to the next. So they work not for satisfaction but in order to live their dream in order that they might go out at the weekend for pleasure. They live in order to have those holidays that they dream about or to have that house or car or to give to their children what they themselves could not have when they were young. Basically if you look at what the unbelieving world is thinking about on a daily basis then it comes down to selfishness.

It is futile thinking for at the end of the day what profit is there in having all our dreams and expectations fulfilled. Just say we succeed if having that home, car and holidays we want. Just say we see our children grow up and achieve what we didn't achieve. What happens if we go through life with minimum trouble? At the end of the day we all die and then what? Then we face the judgement of God what good then will our worldly thinking be?

If we left God out of our thinking if he was not the one we wanted to please then what are we left with. Nothing but hell, that's why such thinking is futile and aimless, it has no purpose. Life without God is empty so is such thinking. But the Christian's thinking is not empty because he seeks not to please himself nor does he live for the here and now but he seeks to please God. God occupies his thinking, he meditates upon him he studies his word, he seeks to reform his life according to God's directives and he seeks to see God glorified in all he does. He doesn't seek to avoid trouble at all costs he is not easily influenced and swayed but he keeps his eyes of faith upon the Lord and follows him no matter where he may lead him and no matter what he might have to face as a result. So when the Christian gets up in the morning the Lord should dominate his thinking.

When he lives throughout the day the Lord drives his purpose and so when he goes to sleep at night his whole day has had purpose and direction for his day has been lived as unto the Lord. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul talks about the renewing of the mind being the key to being transformed from the pattern of this world. Conversion is a conversion of the mind as well as the heart and life. When someone becomes a Christian their thinking is changed and as a result their living is changed a well.

No longer is our thinking futile, wasted on meaningless thoughts but it is now clearly focused on the purposes of the Lord. That's why as Christian people we need to encourage our thinking to be biblical. The world bombards our minds with useless and futile thoughts but we need to ask God the Holy Spirit to continue to transform our thinking so that we become increasingly God centred. To do that we must read and feed our minds on good things. There's nothing wrong with reading fiction books but we must be careful that we read nothing else but fiction. We need to make sure that we are spending time reading good Christian books every day, books that will teach us and

inspire us as well as challenge us. We ought to make sure that we keep the balance between watching television and listening or reading good Christian material.

Why not listen to a sermon one evening rather than reading that novel or watching that drama. Of course we must never neglect the reading of the word of God for it is that, that will transform our thinking and keep us focused. I know we live in a day when people are reading less and less. Well if you find reading difficult and reading a Christian book is not something you would even think of doing then please do not neglect to read the bible.

I find little and often is the best way to read the bible or any book if you do not find reading easy. The more you do it the easier you might find it becomes. Whatever the case we all must find ways of feeding our minds on good Christian material whether it is through video's tapes, CD's television or books.

**b) Their understanding is darkened (v.18)** – See this is the second reason why the Christians at Ephesus cannot live like the Gentile unbelievers around them. The Christians at Ephesus have been enlightened (1:18) whereas the unbelievers are darkened in their understanding. The tense that is used for the word 'darkened' is a perfect tense meaning that this is permanent. Paul is not talking about a period in their lives where it seems that their understanding is darkened but otherwise it is enlightened, no Paul is saying that their understanding is dark all the time.

This is because the mind without God is dark all the time, therefore the unbeliever cannot think correctly about God or about the meaning and purpose of life. They need to have their minds enlightened by God otherwise they will continue in their darkened thinking. Paul goes on to describe such people as separated from the life of God and the word separated or alienated means belonging to the camp of the enemy.

Paul's point is that unbelievers are not simply neutral in their thinking about God but are in fact enemies of God and their thinking reveals that. Of course while they remain in the camp of the enemy then they are separated from the life that comes from God the life that brings understanding and purpose to all of life. They therefore do not live; as God desires they do not heed his word and do not think about him they simply live life for themselves and for the satisfaction of their own sinful desires.

They go as Paul has already said in this letter the way of the world the way of the devil himself.

The reason for their being separated from the life of God is their ignorance that is in them. Sometimes ignorance is quite innocent. There are many things of which we are ignorant because they are not relevant to our lives and are too difficult for us to understand for some other good reason we are ignorant. But that is not the ignorance that Paul is talking about here. For there is an ignorance that is blameworthy where we choose to be deliberately ignorant.

We choose to ignore things that we ought to know things that we could well know if only we had the desire to do so. There are times when we choose to be ignorant where we wilfully choose not to know certain things. This is what Paul means by being ignorant here, unbelievers deliberately choose to be ignorant when it comes to the things of God, they openly decline to know God to repent and believe the good news. Paul traces this ignorance to their hard hearts.

The Greek word for hardening was used for the formation of a callus of the skin. When your skin is callus you have a loss of sensitivity and so Paul says that the unbeliever's heart becomes so hard that they lose their sense of feeling, it leads to insensitive actions (v 19)

Now you see Paul's whole point is that you cannot live like the Gentiles live because you are of a different nature. They are darkening we are of the light, they are separated from the life of God we possess such a life, they are ignorant we are not; they have hard hearts our hearts have become

sensitive to God. Therefore the life of the Christian must be completely different from the unbelieving world so the question is do we live our lives just like the unbelieving world or are we living differently for God.

You cannot continue to live like unbelievers and claim to be a Christian that is Paul's point. We are not like them, we were once but by the grace of God we have been enlightened and made sensitive to God. A Christian's lifestyle will reflect his or her new life, for we have the life of God in us. If someone claims to be Christian but consistently lives like an unbeliever then that person cannot be a Christian it is simply impossible.

You see the unbeliever cannot see what is staring him in the face. It is obvious that there is a God that we are sinners and that we cannot save ourselves, but because they are darkening in their understanding they simply cannot see it. They continue to chase a life that is empty and meaningless. Anyone with enlightened eyes can see that creation declares to us the existence and power of the invisible God. Anyone with enlightenment would be able to see that mankind is far from this God and therefore deprived of many spiritual blessings and privileges. But unbelievers are ignorant they cannot see it, this ignorant is in them and they have been like this from birth, they are like this by nature. They cannot change themselves and they do not want to change because their hearts are as hard as stone. So the unbeliever Scientist can examine the universe with all its design and beauty and yet remained unmoved by it.

How is it that the unbeliever can look at the cross of Jesus and yet walk away unchanged? They are ignorant and hard of heart that's why they can do it. But those who have been enlightened cannot look at creation without falling down before the Lord in awe and with a heart full of praise. No Christian can look at the cross without tears in their heart if not in their eyes. The unbeliever has a heart that is incapable of beating in a spiritual world; they are devoid of God in their understanding and in their living.

What is inside of course shows itself on the outside. So unbelievers who have hearts of stone hearts that becomes stone because they have hardened their hearts to God become totally insensitive. Nothing therefore holds them back from doing whatever appeals to their physical appetites; they simply do whatever they want even if it is seen as unclean and evil. They live to satisfy and please themselves and when they have had what they want they then what more of it for they find it never satisfies. You see Paul is painting a picture of where the unbeliever who continues to reject God lead too. If we totally cast God out of our thinking then our understanding of gospel things is darkened we cannot see it. Our lives become cut off from the life of God we deliberately ignore God's truths and hardened our hearts against his word.

This leads us to insensitivity and ultimately it leads to sensuality. It's no wonder that Paul says live no longer like the Gentiles but instead and we will see this next time we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds (v 23) which ultimately leads to holiness and righteousness of life.

So my dear brothers and sisters is there anything in your life that is like the Gentiles lifestyle, is there anything that needs to be put off and repented off? It has to go for you no longer live like the Gentiles and instead you must replace it with wholesomeness. Is it clear by your lifestyle that you are a Christian or could there be someone reading this who although you do not give full vent to your hard heart you still find this description true of you.

You realise that you lack purpose and meaning in life, you find yourself thinking of things that don't ultimately matter. Perhaps you know that you have ignored God's truth for years and you now find yourself increasingly becoming hard to the things of God. This has led you to become increasingly insensitive to others and you have found yourself at least wanting to do things that you would never have thought of doing before. If you see yourself in this description then you need to turn to the Lord immediately repent of all such sins and seek the forgiveness of the Lord.

The amazing thing is that if you do that in seriousness of heart you will find yourself being made clean and then you will no longer live like the Gentiles but you will begin to live, as we will see next time like Christ himself lived.

Amen