

The Pearl of the Epistles – Ephesians

A New Life

Ephesians 4:17-21

Ephesians 4:17-21 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: 19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But ye have not so learned Christ; 21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

Introduction

The condition of man today stems all the way back to the creation and the Garden of Eden. It was here that God fellowshiped daily with Adam and Eve. God gave Adam a special job to do; tend the garden (Genesis 2: 15). How wonderful and marvelous it must have been.

But something happened that changed everything. Adam and Eve sinned and once they did something interesting happened, they discovered that they were naked. Up until the sin, they did were not aware of their nakedness. They tried to cover up their sin from God by sewing some fig leaves together for clothing.

Our clothing and dress says a lot about us. Look around you today and normally the choice of in what people wear is a reflection of their inner self.

Today we will look at what the “clothing of the world” looks like to God.

Walk Not As the World (v. 17)

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord – Paul might be considered to encourage them in the name of the LORD or this is a testimonial of God to give to the church at Ephesus. Going back to Ephesians 4:1, the apostle is wanting to stir them up, or beseech them to change.

“...that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” – We are given to understand that most of the membership of the church at Ephesus were Gentile converts. Therefore, Paul is encouraging them not to live (walk) as the un-converted Gentiles live their lives. They were to be different. What is the difference you ask? The Gentiles have *“vanity of their mind.”*

The writer of the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes started out by saying:

***Ecclesiastes 1:2** Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*

And ended the Book with:

***Ecclesiastes 12:8** Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.*

The word vanity that the Apostle Paul is using concerns behavior. Paul, in speaking to the Ephesians, wanted them to consider the spiritual blindness, depravity of the heart, and moral bankruptcy of the Gentiles. The mind holds the most power of the human makeup. The mind is the center of reasoning and as such, reigns over the will. The desire to sin or restrain from sinning is in the will. Therefore, if the desire of the person is to consistently sin without regard, or consideration of the results of their sin, that person's life is vain.

This is what the Apostle is warning them about the Gentiles...their desire to sin without regard.

Alienated From God (vv. 18-19)

***Ephesians 4:18-19** Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: **19** Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

The vanity of the Gentiles is shown. So, what is the effect of the vanity of the Gentiles?

The following describes the downward spiral for a life without God. It begins with a hardening of the heart. This is followed by 2) darkness of the heart (an absence of spiritual understanding). From

hardness to darkness to 3) deadness (calling good evil and evil good) and finally 4) recklessness (they are beyond feeling, so they give themselves over to sensuality – throwing off all restraint).

They have their... *understanding darkened* – Albert Barnes explains this idea;

“...understanding becomes darkened by indulgence in sin.... A man who is unchaste has no perception of the loveliness of purity. A man who is avaricious or covetous has no just views of the beauty of benevolence. A man who indulges in low vices will weaken his mental powers, and render himself incapable of intellectual effort. Indulgence in vice destroys the intellect as well as the body, and unfits a man to appreciate the truth of a proposition in morals, or in mathematics, or the beauty of a poem, as well as the truth and beauty of religion. Nothing is more obvious than that indulgence in sin weakens the mental powers, and renders them unfit for high intellectual effort.”¹

...being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them – “being alienated” from the commonwealth of Israel with no God. They are ignorant concerning the life God imagined for His creation. God is the author, source and finisher of all life. Nothing exists without Him. The Gentiles (those that do not worship God) live a life which was in sharp contrast to the will of God, which he cannot approve. So they are alienated from God through the desire not to know God.

Isaiah 5:20 *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*

...because of the blindness of their heart – The Greek word used for *blindness* is used to describe “a stone harder than marble.” Today we would call this a “heart of stone.” This same word is used in Mark 3:5-6 to describe the hearts of those in the synagogue that decided to kill Jesus as He healed the man with the withered hand.

Mark 3:5-6 *And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. 6 And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.*

¹ Albert Barnes, Notes on the Bible, electronic edition, SwordSearcher software.

“Blindness” or “hardness” describes the person’s unwillingness to respond to the truth of God’s message.

Who, being past feeling – because they are alienated from God, they have no feeling. They have been so hardened against the desires of God that their lives are hopeless; shameless, and beyond feeling. Oh they can have joy for a season, but it does not last. This is the end result of a lengthy process of the habit of sin

...have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, - Lasciviousness is the total disregard for decency whether in private or in public. There are those that reject God and all His teachings.

...to work all uncleanness with greediness – God gave Moses the written Law on Mt. Sinai. In that Law giving, God defined what He considered clean and unclean. It was the duty of the priest to distinguish between clean and unclean; holy and common and teach that to the people. Each believer in the church at Ephesus was considered a priest (Romans 1:6) and as such should consider whether a thing is clean or unclean. Those that are away from God, cannot establish the holiness of something, but they commit uncleanness with covetousness. Their life is a continual state of immoral activity, leaving them with no feeling of wrongdoing. This is a downward spiral into the depths of depravity. As J. Vernon McGee says:

“If you paint the town red tonight, you have to have a bigger bucket and a bigger brush for tomorrow night. The meaning here is to covet the very depths of immorality. Men in sin are never satisfied with sin. They become abandoned to sin. This is what it means in chapter 1 of Romans that God gave them up to all uncleanness through their own lusts. You can reach the place, my friend, where you are an abandoned sinner.”²

Learn From Jesus (vv. 20-21)

Ephesians 4:20-21 *But ye have not so learned Christ; 21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:*

The English Standard Version translation says:

² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 257). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But that is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him,³

The Apostle Paul is expressing to the church that they have received the doctrines of Christ and have been taught differently by Him. His teaching is that they must abandon those worldly desires in their life.

Conclusion

Just like in the Garden of Eden, man today tries to hide their sins from God. Adam and Eve couldn't, so why does the 21st Century Christian think they can?

Man's general nature is one of living a life of vanity, with their understanding darkened and with no regard to sin.

The believer is to live to a higher standard. We are to follow the teachings of Jesus. After all, He gave everything for you.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, you have confessed your sins to Christ and hold fast His teachings. For every believer, there was a B. C., a *before Christ*. The depravity committed in that life are to be abandoned in the new birth, for a life filled with the teachings and blessings of Jesus Christ.

Robert C. Crowder

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Eph 4:20–21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.