
Ephesians 4:17-22

Ephesians 4:17

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

This passage of Ephesians, verses 17 to 24, is probably the strongest and most graphic warning to Christians in the New Testament!

Paul issues this warning now because he knows that the great results of the previous verses depend on the personal choices that people make in the Christian life.

In this passage we are shown that it is possible for a Christian to have a darkened spirit (soul), an understanding that is like that of an unbeliever (other Gentiles), and the empty soul that has no spiritual understanding in it.

And we are also shown that it is completely unnecessary for any of us to have these problems. But as long as we live we are dependent on doctrine from the Word of God and on our day-to-day resolve to learn Bible truth at the feet of those the Lord has provided as communicators.

The developed Christian life in Grace is supposed to lead to maturity, edification, and effective function, as described in 4:11-16. But when a Christian's understanding is darkened, he becomes sensitive to the opinions of other people, his self-consciousness leads him to flail around in a hundred directions. Self-consciousness leads to self-pity, then bitterness and implacability.

But God has ordained a system for getting Bible truth into the believer, via the public proclamation of the Word of God and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is incumbent upon every believer to keep himself on track by staying in God's plan for spiritual growth.

"This I say, therefore"

"This" is a reference to the statements which follow, comments on the subject of insensitivity, obtuseness, and indifference in the soul. Indifference to the Word of God is a Christian's greatest occupational hazard. The apostle warns about the hardness of soul which is the direct result of failure to obtain Bible teaching and spiritual understanding.

The first hints about the problems of immaturity are brought out in Eph. 4:14. Immature Christians are "children", gullible, pushed about by every phony idea that comes along ("winds of doctrine"), and easily fooled by crafty imitators.

Everyone begins the Christian life as a novice; we all started our Christian walk as "babes in Christ." A new believer is expected to be naive, to behave as a "child", and not to know how to function as an "adult." Young children have to grow up.

But the spiritual "babe" needs to take in spiritual food every day in order to grow. Otherwise, the effects of spiritual malnutrition will be obvious for everyone to see. Verses 11 to 16 tell us how to grow up spiritually and function like adults. Verses 17 to 19 verses show what happens to Christians who do not follow the Lord's plan for growth.

"and testify in the Lord" - a use of the verb MARTUREW, "to make a solemn appeal".

Paul is very concerned for his Ephesian friends and colleagues. In his wide travels he has seen every kind of dysfunctional Christian. He knows what Christians need for Christian growth and spiritual health, and he knows how easy it is for indifference to develop. He begs his friends not to "walk as other Gentiles walk".

"that you walk not as other Gentiles walk"

"walk" refers to the pattern of life a person follows. Chapter 4 began with his exhortation to "walk worthy of the vocation to which you are called." And he continues in chapter 5 with "Therefore, be followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love..."

"Gentiles" is ETHNEI, the plural of ETHNOS, "a nation; a people". Here the reference is to the rest of the "general population" who have not accepted Christ as Savior. Paul is pointing out that if a Christian has deadness of soul, his manner of life will exactly resemble that of the unbeliever.

1 Cor. 3:3, "For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?"

Christians are supposed to be distinguished by their walk. But there are believers, just as there are unbelievers, who are moral or immoral, religious or irreligious, self-righteous and legalistic, living in overt sin or not, in short having nothing to distinguish them from other people.

Now begins the statement of the main problem in Christianity and in individual Christians' lives.

"in the vanity of their mind"

"Vanity" is the Greek word MATAIOTEIS, "emptiness; vain; fruitless; without profit".

A believer who is occupied with Christ and living in the Word is constantly "renewing his mind" by a process in which he continually takes in (inhales) the Word of God and exercises the Word (exhales). Let's read ahead...

Eph. 4:22-24, That you put off concerning the former manner of life the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND, and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The apostle Paul makes a very similar plea to the Christians in Rome in Romans 12.

Romans 12:1,2, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The opposite of a RENEWED mind is an EMPTY mind.

A negative Christian "exhales", that is, he thinks, speaks, and acts based on the contents of his mind. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." However, because he does not "inhale" the Word

of God, he can only "exhale" his own ideas, his own doctrines, or the ideas and doctrines that he has picked up from whatever sources in the world.

When a soul is empty, there is a resulting "vacuum" that pulls in false doctrines, doctrines of demons, darkness. Satan has a complete system of false theology to be used to ensnare the novice, the unprotected, the gullible. Today these doctrines may be any system of religion, existentialism, communism, or any other non-biblical proposition. Into the "vacuum" will go misery, mental attitude sins, religion, legalism, emphasis on details of life, human viewpoint, and so forth.

1 Tim. 4:1-3, Now the Spirit speaks expressly that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and KNOW THE TRUTH.

"of their mind" - NOUS. This word is a reference to the mind as a container of the thoughts of the soul. The phrase is not "...vanity of thoughts" but "...emptiness of the mind, the container of thoughts."

The verb equivalent to NOUS is NOEW, "to think". The noun, therefore, means "place of thinking". Both these words are used extensively in the Greek New Testament; and both words are used with various prefixes to indicate different kinds of thinking.

For example, DIANOIA is DIA + NOUS. DIA is the preposition "through", so DIANOIA are thoughts moving "through the mind", or simply "active thoughts." This is used in Eph. 4:18.

In another example, the Greeks had an expression for changing one's thoughts, METANOIA, the "changing of the mind." This word was translated "repentance" in the King James Version, and the word "repent" 17th Century England meant "to rethink" or to change one's mind about something. The change in idiom in modern times has resulted in a lot of confusion about repentance; but repentance is simply changing one's mind, reversing previous thinking.

Verse 17 reads, then, "This is say, therefore, and make a solemn warning in the Lord that your manner of life is not to be as the Gentiles manner of life, in the emptiness of the mentality of the soul."

Ephesians 4:18

"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;"

"Understanding" is DIANOIA, the activity of thinking in the soul.

READ Isa. 55:7-9, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, says the Lord ..."

There are two types of active thinking [DIANOIA] that are available to a Christian.

The first type is called DARKNESS and refers both to satanic thoughts and human viewpoint.

Col. 1:21, And you that were once alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now has he reconciled."

2 Cor. 10:5, Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

And from 1 Tim. 4:1, "...doctrines of demons"

The opposite type of active thinking is DOCTRINE, which is the Word of God active in the mind of the believer.

Again - the way a believer sets himself up for trouble and darkness in the soul is to NEGLECT BIBLE TEACHING. It happens when one is too busy, apathetic, antagonistic toward doctrine, or antagonistic toward the teacher of doctrine.

"darkness" is SKOTIDZW, "to shroud in darkness; to be benighted; to bring about moral obscurity."

The process of darkness: the Christian who is negative toward Bible truth opens up his soul and empties it; satanic doctrines occupy the soul by moving into the vacuum. There are scores of repercussions; here are eight of them.

1. Darkness causes a Christian to fail to orient to the plan of God. He does not know God's plan or how it works, and he does not know how he fits into God's plan.
2. Darkness brings about a failure to orient to the grace of God. The result is arrogance and legalism, lack of forgiveness, lack of graciousness.
3. Darkness causes inner misery, unhappiness, lack of peace. These things cannot be compensated for by anything in life, but the negative Christian spends his life in a frantic but futile pursuit of happiness through the details of life.
4. Darkness can bring about neuroses and psychoses.

Phil. 4:6,7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard [STABILIZE] your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

5. Darkness results in a frantic search for happiness through details of life, or through some form of sublimation.
 6. Darkness leads to slavery to the details of life. Sins may grow out of legitimate things in life (money, success, pleasure, sex, social life, family, loved ones, career, hobbies, health, status symbols).
 7. Darkness leads to apostasy, erroneous thinking, false doctrine in the soul.
 8. Darkness is accompanied by a lack of capacity to love, leading to pseudo-love towards God, family, the community.
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"being alienated from the life of God" - the perfect passive participle of APALLOTRIOW, "to alienate".

Disorientation to the plan of God is a result of darkness. A Christian can live his whole life on this earth and always be out of phase with God's plan for his life. This can go on indefinitely as long as the believer refuses to hear and believe the Word of God.

All of this is caused by...

"through the ignorance that is in them" - DIA plus AGNOIA. "By means of" or "because of" the "ignorance" that is in them.

This word is, literally, "no thinking". The Greek word describes someone who is ignorant of the content of something that he is supposed to know. To "ignore" means "not to think about".

Therefore, the Christian in darkness either has not learned Bible doctrine, or he does not think of the Bible doctrine to which he has been exposed. So he lives in darkness. Without knowledge of the Word of God it is impossible to orient to God's plan of Grace. When a believer lacks knowledge and edification he is out of step with the plan of God.

"in them" refers to believers who have darkness in their souls.

"because of the blindness of their hearts"

"Blindness" is POROSIS, which is a direct cognate of the English word "porosis". POROSIS means "callous" or "something which has hardened or petrified". It is used for the buildup of scars from multiple wounds in the same place, hence "scar tissue."

So verse 18 reads, "Having become darkened in thinking, having been alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the callous on their heart."

So, in verses 17 and 18, all the ingredients for soul blackness have been presented:

1. Negative volition towards Bible truth
2. The resulting callous (scar tissue) on the soul
3. The opening up of the vacuum (emptiness) of the soul
4. Darkness in the soul
5. Subjectivity
6. Alienation from the life of God.

Ephesians 4:19

"Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Remember - Paul is warning Christians not to fall into this lifestyle. It is easy to associate a sinful manner of living with non-Christians. But Christians who live apart from the plan of God can easily be involved in "Gentile" lasciviousness or uncleanness.

"Who" is a relative pronoun referring to people who have callous on their souls, who are negative toward Bible teaching.

"being past feeling" is APALGEO, "to cease to feel anything; to become calloused". Callous develops from failure to learn and appropriate the Word of God. For the negative Christian, callous remains on the soul and accumulates, resulting in a lack of feeling. In other words, his situation continually gets worse.

Darkness of the soul is characterized by mental attitude sins, such as arrogance, bitterness, jealousy, worry, vindictiveness, implacability.

The antidote is first, Confession of Sin; then, Occupation with Christ and Living in the Word.

"have given themselves over unto lasciviousness". Literally, "have betrayed themselves into immoral sexual activity (ASELGEIA)"

"to work all uncleanness" - or, "to make a profession of impurity".

"with greediness" - this is the frantic search for happiness through the details of life. Because details of life cannot satisfy, the search becomes more and more intense, resulting in greediness.

Greediness is the willingness to do something immoral, illegal, or harmful to other people in order to obtain something one desires. The Christian life removes greediness because a believer trusts God to supply all needs and has the patience to wait for God's timing in everything.

Ephesians 4:20,21

But you have not so learned Christ; If so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

Francis Foulkes in "Ephesians", "'But you' the apostle says to his readers, emphasizing the personal pronoun, 'can no longer walk in that way. You have not so learned Christ. The truth of God and of His purpose has come to dominate your minds, and this truth has ethical implications. Your lives are no longer dark, your minds no longer vain. You are no longer alienated but walking step by step in the full light of the Lord, and in fellowship with Him. So you must finish with all immorality, and the passion for what is impure, and for what outrages the souls and bodies of others.'"

The ability to stand alone for that which is right is one of the truest signs of maturity in the Christian life. It is the sign that one has openly identified himself with a superior way of life - with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE VERY CAREFULLY THE SEQUENCE FOLLOWED IN THIS PROCESS OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY!!

You learn Bible truth; you grow in Christ; you become more like Him; you are edified.

Result: whereas you were once in darkness, you are now "light in the Lord" and you "walk as a child of light".

The Christian life is NOT a process by which you turn over multiple new leaves and form yourself into a product that is somehow acceptable to God.

The Christian life IS a process by which you submit to His plan of grace, learn and apply the doctrines of the Word of God, and enjoy His work of reconciliation, restoration, and edification in your life, whereby you grow into a place of spiritual productivity.

TOPIC: SEPARATION

To put it another way: while separation is definitely a part of God's plan, you do not become more spiritual or more advanced in the Christian life by separating yourself from various evils. Rather, your advancement in the Christian life depends on the Word of God in your soul and your being filled with the Holy Spirit. As the Lord builds our lives, line upon line, precept upon precept, the fruit of the Spirit grows in our lives and our behavior changes, as shown in the verses that follow in chapter 4.

Ephesians 4:22

That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

Notice in verses 22 to 24 that the Christian life is one of moving from a former state to a future state, from the "old man" to the "new man". And the mechanism is described in verse 23 as being renewal that takes place in the mind. It is like a breathing process in which bad air goes out and good air comes in.

"that you put off" is APOTHESTHAI, "to lay aside" as in laying aside a garment.

The word "former" refers to us when we were unbelievers. An unbeliever may be religious or irreligious, moral or immoral, self-righteous or sincere - there are all types of unbelievers. And the qualities of an unbeliever are generated by the sin nature in his soul. It is very important to study the doctrine of the Sin Nature at this point, because the Bible describes us to a "T" and helps us to see just what it is that we are laying aside.

"which is corrupt" is from the Greek PHTHERO, "to be constantly depraved". This is the strongest Greek word for depravity and means "to be marked by corruption or evil."

"according to deceitful lusts" Lusts are the activators of the Sin Nature and the motivators of a person who not controlled by the Holy Spirit. There are all sorts of lust patterns, and any person will have one or more of them: power lust; the desire for approbation; sexual lust; lust for worldly possessions; etc. The result of lust, among other things, is slavery to the details of life - seeking happiness and satisfaction in what the world offers, rather than through God's plan.

Ephesians 4:23

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

This is one of the greatest concepts in the Christian life! This verse describes how the Christian life works - the very process!

If someone asks you, "How do I live the Christian life? How do I grow in Christ? How can I become a productive believer?", here is your answer.

The word "renewed" is ANANEOUSTHAI, which means "to be continually undergoing a restoration process". This is comparable or analogous to involuntary respiration, the automatic breathing process by which our lungs continually bring in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide and other gases which could be harmful to the body.

The Bible process is called edification. Bible doctrine comes in, first academically through the communication of the Word. Then, the Holy Spirit undertakes His teaching activity and gives us spiritual

perception of the things we have learned. As the Word of God comes in to our souls and gives us life, false doctrines are expelled; our human viewpoint is replaced by divine viewpoint. That which is harmful is replaced by that which is life-giving.

The only way to "put Christ first" in the life is to have maximum intake of God's Word accompanied by the continual filling of the Holy Spirit.

Here is the same process discussed in Romans.

Romans 12:1,2, I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ephesians 4:24

And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The "new man" refers to edification, the structure (OIKODOME) which the Father builds in a believer's life. Edification is the process of spiritual growth in a Christian who is living according to the plan of God and who is fulfilling the command to "grow in grace and in the knowledge" of Jesus Christ.

To grow in Christ, a Christian must be consistent on a daily basis in staying in fellowship with the Lord through confession of sin, and learning and applying Bible teaching.

Edification is the means of advancement and productivity in the Christian way of life.

Doctrine that is learned must feed both the human spirit and the human soul for capacity for both human and eternal life. Edification of the soul is the result.

Synonyms for Edification

Light. Eph. 5, "...walk as children of light.

"Christ formed in you" Gal 4:19, connotes edification.

"The new man," Eph 4; Col 3, refers to edification

"The perfect man," James 1:4.

"Imitators of God," Eph 5

1 Cor 14:26, "When you assemble, let all things be done for edification."

Acts 9:31, "All the church were having prosperity, having been edified, and advancing in occupation with Christ.
