

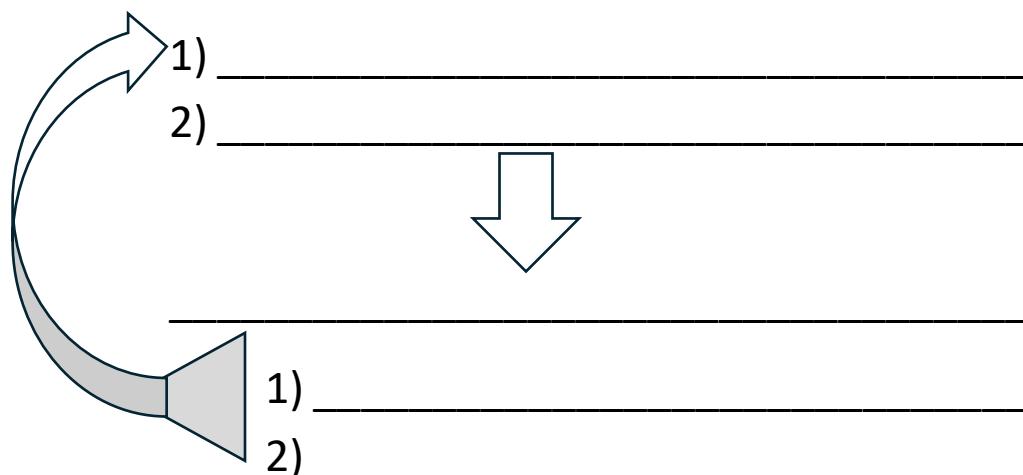
The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:17-24

Session 37: Notetaker

Vs. 17 – Condition of Unsaved Gentiles:

Vs. 18 – _____



The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:17-24

Session 37: How Other Gentiles Walk

As we saw last week, verse 17 begins the practical application of the doctrine to perfect our godly living. When we trusted Christ as our Savior, we underwent the most profound change in the world – and this should always be in our minds. That is to say, we are not people who have decided to be a little more moral than we used to be, or who have decided to join a church, or whatever else.

What makes us a Christian, what makes us saints, what makes us sons and daughters of our heavenly Father is that we have been given a new nature, we are a new creature, and in that we are altogether different from what we were before.

This is the principle which Paul takes up in this section of Ephesians, and in vs. 17 he begins to apply it. As we remember the truth about ourselves, we will find certain things are unthinkable; even impossible, and we will never look at them again because we can so clearly see that we have been separated forever from all that we were before.

What we have in vv. 17-19 are descriptions of how the other Gentiles walk, even how we used to walk. Now, as we read vs. 17, notice the solemn manner of Paul as he calls attention to something that is of vital importance.

Ephesians 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

Paul doesn't just "say therefore," but he adds "and testify in the Lord." This is an expression Paul uses to emphasize the utter truthfulness of what he is about to say. Notice a few other times in which Paul does this.

Acts 20:26 Wherefore **I take you to record** this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*.

Galatians 5:3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

Romans 1:9 **For God is my witness**, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover **I call God for a record upon my soul**, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

Philippians 1:8 **For God is my record**, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; **God is witness**:

What are these expressions doing? Paul is essentially saying that he is calling God as a witness to the truth of what he says. And when we think of a witness, what do we think of? A witness stands to give testimony, and this exactly how Paul means it. Paul isn't just stating his opinion, and people would say that very thing about Paul: "Oh, that's just Paul's opinion" or "Paul says that because he used to be a Pharisee."

When Paul speaks "in the Lord," he is speaking with the full authority of an Apostle. As Paul said back in Ephesians 2:20, we believers are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets", and as an apostle, Christ gave Paul to the church to speak truth with authority. That is what he means when he says "I testify in the Lord."

To what was Paul testifying? Paul starts with six negatives.

Ephesians 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, **that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk**, in the vanity of their mind,

When Paul says not to "walk" as other Gentiles, what does the word "walk" refer to? Our "walk" is our whole life, both the general tenor of our life and, at the same time, our life in its details. The bible sometimes uses the word "conversation" to convey this idea.

2 Corinthians 1:12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, **we have had our conversation in the world**, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Our conversation, our walk, is our manner of life in all its details.

Ephesians 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

Who are the “other Gentiles” to which Paul refers? Paul is talking about unsaved Gentiles. So, the admonition here is that saved Gentiles should no longer live their lives like unsaved Gentiles. If we are to change our walk, in what way are we to do so? Paul is about to tell us by giving us six issues that we should no longer do, but it is more than that.

Let’s start by reading the passage of negatives.

Ephesians 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,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.

Here, in distinction from what he wrote in Ephesians 2:2-3, Paul is not just describing evil living, but he is giving us the origin of the evil life of the unsaved. The truths in vv. 17-19 do not change with the times, for they are eternal principles which just as applicable today in America as they were 2000 years ago in Ephesus.

This passage is broken down into 3 parts:

- Verse 17 – makes a general statement about the condition of men (the vanity of their mind)
- Verse 18 – gives us the cause of the vanity
- Verse 19 – gives us the consequence of the vanity

There is a lot we could study in these three verses, much more than we can take the time to do in this study. But we do need to understand the terminology.

Vanity = emptiness, in the sense of aimless, pointless, lacking direction, or futility.

Mind = more than just the intellect, the total personality; thought, will, emotion, affection, conscience.

Putting it together, Paul is saying the life of the unsaved Gentile leads to nowhere and fails to give true satisfaction; it is a life of darkness where we search for truth and light, but in the end, just as Ecclesiastes says, it is all futile and empty.

This is what is meant when Paul says the “other Gentiles” walk in the vanity of their mind. But Paul is not content with just stating the general concept; he proceeds to show why people come to live such a life.

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**:

There are four phrases in vs. 18 and while each one is a part of the description, they actually pair up into two pairs. The first pair describes this condition in general.

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**:

The two things which can be said about the unsaved Gentile are that 1) their understanding is darkened, and 2) they are alienated, or estranged from the life of God.

And now we come to the second pair; but be careful here, for this second pair explains only the second phrase of the first pair. In other words, the second pair explains why the unsaved are “alienated from the life of God.”

The order of how things happen looks like this: Because their understanding is darkened they are 1) full of ignorance, and 2) their heart is hardened, and those two things lead to their estrangement from God.

This is important so that we don't turn things around and say something like: Their understanding is darkened because of the ignorance that is in them. That would be backwards. They are ignorant because their understanding is darkened.

Therefore, the fundamental statement: the darkening of their understanding leads to ignorance and hardening of their heart, which, in turn, leads to estrangement from God.

So, what does Paul mean by "understanding?" In this context he means mainly their intellect. Back in vs. 17, when Paul said "mind," he was not just referring to intellect, but much more that which pertains to the soul. The trouble with the unconverted man is that there is a veil over his heart, over his mind, and over his understanding; he cannot see.

I want to step aside here for a moment and show you something.

This "darkened understanding" is the same thing Paul is writing about in 2 Corinthians 3 where he is talking about Israel's veiled heart. And in the midst of this, Paul explains something about the purpose of the veil which was on Moses' faith.

If you remember what I am talking about from Exodus 34, when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, the skin of his face shined, and it made the people afraid to come near to him. So, Moses put a veil over his face while he was speaking to the people.

2 Corinthians 3:12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: ¹³ And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: ¹⁴ But **their minds were blinded**: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ. ¹⁵ But **even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.** ¹⁶ Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Look at vs. 13.

2 Corinthians 3:13 And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

In other words, the glorious shine on Moses faith eventually wore off. Evidently, the “glow” was a bit of ego trip for Moses because, according to this verse, Moses kept on wearing the veil so the Israelites would think the glow was still there. Moses did not allow them to see when the shine was no longer present on his face.

In the same way, the Jewish people generally believe that the glory still emanates from the law.

2 Corinthians 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ.¹⁵ But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

The result for the Jew is that even when he listens to the reading of the scriptures every Sabbath day in the synagogue, he does not see the meaning. He hears the words, but he misses the spirit of what the words are teaching.

There is a veil blinding them. They think they know the truth, they even spend their time discussing it, but they do not see it. Why is this? It is because something is standing between them and the truth so that they cannot see it.

2 Corinthians 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

In other words, Satan is at work darkening the understanding of the unsaved. And since this is about their understanding, their intellect, then there is a two-fold strategy: 1) keep the unsaved from ever hearing the gospel, and 2) if they do hear the gospel, corrupt it.

The chief thing people are ignorant of is God Himself. They do not know Him or the truth about Him. They are ignorant of His character, His being, His glory, His purposes, His dispensations, His will and His attributes.

The man whose understanding is darkened, the bible calls foolish. A foolish man is a man who lacks understanding, a man who does something because he does not know better, he blunders into things without thinking. He lacks understanding.

This is why “the fool hath said in his heart, there is not God.” He says this because he has no understanding. Paul says the same kind of thing in Romans 1, where he explains that even though God has made man in His own image, though creation ought to be speaking to them about God, and though they started out worshipping the Creator, they are now worshipping the creature. Why?

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and **their foolish heart was darkened.**

And then look at the next verse.

Romans 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Having their understanding darkened is why Paul describes the unbeliever’s state as one of darkness. Look at the prophecy in Isaiah of Israel’s Messiah showing up to the nation.

Isaiah 9:2 **The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light:** they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

And this prophecy is fulfilled by Jesus in Matthew 4.

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

Matthew 4:14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

Matthew 4:16 **The people which sat in darkness saw great light;** and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Picture the human race sitting in darkness, trying to find a way out, but cannot. At last, it has sat down in utter despair and hopelessness, and has sunk into cynicism – they have no light and no knowledge. Then, at last, people see a great light – the gospel!

Acts 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.¹⁶ But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; ¹⁷ Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, ¹⁸ To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Finally, let's return to our text and finish up vs. 18.

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:

To end this session, I want to talk about the life of God. What does Paul mean by this? Exactly what kind of “life” are the unsaved alienated from?

There are those who think that this refers to a life of which God approves, the life which God commands, or the life which is according to the scriptures. But that is not what Paul is talking about. The life of God is not the virtuous life only, or a life lived in accordance with the law, but it goes well beyond that.

The life of God is God's own life, the divine life, the life of His Son within us! Unsaved men are alienated from the life which is in God Himself. What Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:18 is the same thing Peter is saying to the believing remnant in 2 Peter 1:4.

2 Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these **ye might be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The alienation was true from the fall of man in the garden. Originally, man was in fellowship with God. His destiny was to know God and fellowship with Him. Man was in perfect communion and fellowship with God. But all of that changed at the Fall. Why do we see men walking in the vanity of their mind? Because they have fallen from the life of God.

What people normally call “life” is not life, it is mere existence. A man in sin does not live, he exists, he is living like an animal; he is chasing vanities.

He has become cut off from the life of God, the source of his being, and he is merely existing. He is outside, in a wilderness, restless, troubled and dissatisfied. He has a vague thought within him that he was meant for something bigger, that he was not made to die, but he cannot find it on his own.

By having this sense of God within him, man must worship something, so he makes his own gods; he makes idols. In ancient times, they made them of wood or stone or metals. In some places, people still do that. But we have other ways of doing that today, for we are idolatrous by nature, all of us!

So, we worship ourselves, our family, our country, our wealth, our position – for we must have a god. There is a sense of worship in every man and so man is trying to satisfy it. He tries with philosophy and a hundred other things, but that does not do it.

But enough of this, for I think we get the point. Man does not see and does not know that his one need is his need of God, the knowledge of God, the very life of God. And the only way to have that life today is by trusting Christ as Savior.