

**Ephesians 4: 17-20; “You Have Not So Learned Christ”, Message # 33 in a series entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, A Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall, for October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021.**

The apostle Paul has been speaking to us about the Church, the body of Christ in previous verses. He now turns his attention to our walk with Christ. He says in verse 17 that we should not walk (we should not live our lives) as the rest of the Gentiles live, in the futility of their mind. What does that mean? Where does their futility come from? Well Paul goes on to explain this statement in 3 ways. 1<sup>st</sup> – The futility of men’s minds comes from their being darkened in their understanding because of their ignorance and blindness. 2<sup>nd</sup> – It comes from their being past feeling having given themselves over to sensuality. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – It comes from their not having learned Christ. As we hear about these things tonight, let us consider that Christ would have us to pity the lost people around us, and think of how we can bring the gospel to them, so that they might be saved.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Futility in the lives of unbelieving people comes from their ignorance and blindness.**

Let me read verse 17 to you once again. “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Verses 17 and 18 of our text give us one of the best descriptions which we have in the whole Bible, of the doctrine of the total depravity of all men apart from Christ. Paul gives us 4 very pertinent descriptions – futility of mind, their understanding darkened, they are alienated from the life of God, and this has brought to all men, blindness of heart.

In Ephesians 2, Paul was talking about the Gentiles who lacked the privileges which the Jews had. Here he talks about the problem that both Gentiles and Jews have, by nature, within them. Apart from Christ, they are walking, they are living their lives, in a futile way. Not just some of them, but all of them. What does the word “futile” mean? Webster’s Dictionary from 1828 says this: It means – “Trifling; of no weight or importance; answering no valuable purpose; worthless.” This word is used in our text in direct reference to the mind, the way that people think, and the things that they think about. Their thoughts are often upon trifling matters instead of the most important matter, which is knowing God. Their thoughts are often upon things of no real weight or importance, worldly things alone, and thus their thoughts answer to no valuable purpose in God’s sight, and ultimately not even their own purposes.

Their thoughts are often worthless because they are not centered upon God Himself, and His glory. Nor are their thoughts focused at all upon His word and His commandments, which if they paid attention to them and kept them, would do them much good. Instead, there is a supreme selfishness which is found in all of mankind, by nature, even in the most outwardly moral person who has ever lived. The King James and the American Standard Version of 1901 translate the word – vanity. The word in the Greek is ματαιοτης (mat-ah-yot-ace), and Strong’s Greek Dictionary says that the word refers to transientness and moral depravity. You find Solomon bemoaning this fact in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Let’s hear his conclusion by turning to Ecclesiastes 12, and verse 6-8. “Remember Your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain., or the wheel broken at the well.” “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity.” Whenever we think about what we could share with people around us who do not have God, we should think of this verse – Remember your Creator before you die. For that is the picture of verses 6 and 7. The silver cord is the connection which holds body and soul together;

physically the central nervous system. The golden bowl is the picture of the faculties of the mind, housed in the skull. When these are broken, then death is approaching.

And the pitcher shattered at the fountain and the wheel broken at the well is the physical heart which receives the blood and pours it out continually; pumping it throughout the body. When the heart stops beating the body dies. Directly related to this is the wheel at the cistern, which is a description of the great arteries through which the blood flows. The whole circulatory system of the blood is aptly described here as “a wheel” which receives the blood being pumped from the heart, and in connection with its passing through the lungs, a person regularly draws in oxygen by breathing in the air, and brings this necessary oxygen into the body as a regular supply for the continuance of physical life.

The whole process of breathing in, and the circulation of blood over and over again throughout the whole body is beautifully described by the metaphor of the wheel at the well, drawing up water. When the drawing in of breath ceases, and when the pulse stops, the person’s circulation stops, and the person physically dies. Now, it is good for all people to think about the vanity of life; that they cannot keep themselves alive to pursue all of the vain things that will entertain them for a time. Let us tell them that it is all vanity without Christ, and their heart and mind being changed by God in the New Birth. Only one life, too soon ‘tis past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.

The next description of depravity is found in verse 18; that all people have their understanding darkened, because they are alienated from the life of God. Their understanding is dark by nature because they are alienated from the life of God. They are estranged from the Spiritual Life which God gives to those who will trust in His Son. That spiritual life, which was inherently in Adam and Eve in the Garden garden of Eden, was lost by their sin. And depravity of heart and mind has then been passed down to all men; this darkness of mind and understanding, this blindness of heart. This is why, when a person is saved, they must have light shined into their heart so that they can begin to see the truth of their need of Christ.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4: 3-6 – “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” So we see here that a veil lies upon the understanding of those who are perishing in their sins. And not only are all people blind by nature, but then the Devil, the god of this age, further blinds people if he can, by keeping the gospel from them, lest they see the light of the truth by hearing it. When God shines His light effectually upon a person, then that person is saved. In this shining of light, there is an accompanied power exercised by the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of the heart, the eyes of that person’s understanding, so that they will grasp the truth and implications of the gospel.

There is also a removal of the veil that covers the understanding, and the heart is opened by the Spirit to receive the truth of the gospel as it is being preached. This truth is related well by the apostle Paul in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3, verses 12-18, if you will turn over there with me. “Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech – unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Isreal could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.” “But their minds were blinded.” “For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.” “But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” “Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” So Paul and his helpers in the work of ministry had the great hope of seeing tangible results from the preaching ministry

because faith in Christ takes the veil away from a person's heart. This hope, of the Holy Spirit's work, was especially needed when they preached to the Jews. For the Jews had seen the glory of the Old Covenant as it was revealed to Moses, and evident upon his face when he came down from the mount with the 2 tablets of God's 10 commandments in his arms, and also on later occasions when he ministered to them. He had to veil his own face before them, the glory was so great.

But none of the Jews was able to keep the Old Covenant law perfectly. It could not lift their spiritual blindness, or give them life from God so that they would be able to keep it. But the glory in the New Covenant, of Christ's fulfilling the law and then dying for our sins, makes the New Covenant, a ministry of grace and righteousness, and not a covenant of works and condemnation. The veil of the Old Covenant ministry is completely taken away in Christ. The spiritual blindness is taken away and lifted. This is because the Lord the Holy Spirit ministers to every believer, the blessings of salvation purchased by Christ in His great redemption. Let us study to think of how we can help ignorant and blind sinners come out of darkness and into Christ's marvelous light.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Futility in the lives of unbelieving people comes from their being past feeling having given themselves over to lewdness.**

Verse 19 – “Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” The resistance of the mind to the spiritual things related to their understanding that they are a sinner and they need Christ, and that they must have God's help to be saved from this condition; all of the progression of sin will continue on towards sensuality and lewdness. It is the power and working of the Holy Spirit alone who can break down and overcome this resistance to the truth of the Bible and reality of depravity. But it is God's purpose to save His elect people. And so, He may let them sense the great futility of their life before He chooses to show mercy upon them.

This great work of the Spirit in salvation, in revealing the sinfulness of sin, and the glory of Christ, is absolutely essential to halt a person in the downward progression of sins. Otherwise they will give themselves over to their sin. They are held captive by the strength and power of sin. If the progress of sin is not halted, our text is saying that it will continue to grow stronger and the person will become more self-deceived. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3: 13 – “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” We should understand that it is the nature of sin to take a person to the place where they are past feeling any sense of guilt or shame that might come to them, when they engage in it.

As Adrian Rogers said in a sermon I heard many years ago – Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. Look over at Romans 8: 5-9 – “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” “So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

What do the words, “who live according to the flesh”, mean here? It means the person is living according to the corruption of nature that they are born with. Unbelievers “mind” the things of the flesh. They pay attention to those things which will please them most in a worldly sense; accumulating money and possessions, striving after the honors which men can bestow upon them. But when they once begin living for the lusts of the flesh, as listed in Galatians 5: 19-21, there will always be a downward progression in their sin. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy,

murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

I do not think that I need to go into these things in great depth except to say, that adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lewdness head the list. The nature of sensuality and lewdness is that they are very corrupting to the soul. These lusts and desires drag the person deeper and deeper into the defilement and pollution of mind, heart, and body. They become an addiction for the person who engages in them, from which it is impossible to escape except God intervenes. But thanks be to God, that He can break the power of sin over the sensual sinner’s life.

If a person believes in Jesus, they are set free from the law of sin and death. They now have the Spirit indwelling them. He comes to free from bondage and cleanse us from all sin. You are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. To be carnally minded was death, but now, being in the Spirit, you are spiritually minded, and so you have life and peace.

**And 3<sup>rd</sup> – The futility of men’s minds comes from their not having learned Christ.**

Verse 20 says – “But you have not so learned Christ...” We will look into this statement more in depth in our next study, but we can introduce the subject here – of what it means to learn Christ correctly from the beginning. To learn Christ correctly from the beginning means that you have come to understand what Christ has done for you, and how you should respond to what He has done for you. You have come to understand that when you called upon Him to save you, that He did exactly what He promised that He would. He took away your sins and He gave you His Holy Spirit so that you can walk with Him in your life day by day.

You realize by reading the Bible that Christ has saved you to walk with Him in righteousness and holiness, repenting of your sins and clothing yourself with His graces. You have come to realize that your life is not futile. You will not live for yourself, but for Him who loved You and gave Himself for you at the cross, and was raised from the dead for your justification. You realize that you are not alienated from the life of God, but you have been called to a life of communion with Him. You are not past feeling any longer but you feel very deeply any sin that you do commit, whether it is in your heart or your actions.

You have learned that the Holy Spirit has been given to you, and you do not want to grieve Him as He instructs you in how to live the Christian life according to the truth of the Bible. I will close with these verses from Matthew chapter 11, verses 28-30, which show us how we learn Christ. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” We learn Christ when we come to Him, laboring and heavy laden from a sense of the burden of our sins. We find that He will give us rest.

Having found our rest in Him, we want to take His yoke upon ourselves and learn from Him, spiritually and practically, how to keep Gods commandments. We find that we can do this because Christ’s teaching us by His grace and Spirit, in connection with His word, makes His yoke easy (learning to learn what is right and going about to do it) and His burden (the burden of consistently persevering in doing what is right), He makes that burden light. We come to find that He is gentle and humble in heart in the way that He teaches us and we are most willing to learn.

We praise Him and thank Him for the way that He leads us on the path of righteousness for His name’s sake, how He prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies; how He anoints us with His Holy Spirit, and how our cup runs over. We know that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. These things we have learned from Christ Himself.