

The Necessary Rejection

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I'm so glad to see so many of you out, familiar faces and new faces. Welcome to our church. We're glad that you're all with us. Whether you've been here for a long time or a short time, we're glad to have you at Truth Community Church. As I was getting ready this morning for some reason a conversation from probably 12 years ago flashed into my mind in remembrance. It was kind of fitting for the topic today and the passage that we're going to look at. I was with a man who was in his 60s who was talking with a potential future pastor and he said to the pastor at the time something just very clear and succinct that just stood out in my mind after all these years. He said, "I want to grow," and knowing the background of his church, I knew that he was expressing a fact, a hunger and a dissatisfaction with the fact that, "I want God's word and I miss God's word and life is short and I want to grow." There was just an urgency about it to him that struck my mind and my friend, Earl, I don't know what happened to him but I just remember him speaking and being so concerned that he wanted to grow. Now, that comes to my mind because here I am in a room full of people that are just like that. I know that you want to grow. That's the only reason that you would come to Truth Community Church. Not the only reason but that would be a primary motivating factor for someone to come to this church is that you want to grow spiritually and there is within your heart a hunger and a desire to become more like Christ, to understand Scripture more, and to be shaped into the image of your Lord. That's one of the things that unites us together. We all share that desire. I want that desire. I want to grow, you know, I don't want to be spiritually mediocre and I know that you don't either.

We are coming to our passage and we're coming up on a passage here in Ephesians 4 that is specifically designed for that purpose. The good news for you is that it's not just that you want to grow but God wants you to grow as well. In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to grow. In fact, we can go so far as to say that the Lord Jesus Christ commands you to grow spiritually. That's awesome and a fearsome thing but it's also very encouraging that the thing that you desire in your heart to grow spiritually is the very thing that Christ commands you to do. So our Lord Jesus Christ is on your side in your spiritual growth, not only that, he lays forth before you the manner in which you can grow, in which you certainly can grow. And I imagine that some of you have gone through times in your life and perhaps you're here today frustrated and discouraged in your pursuit of spiritual growth. You say, "I have stopped and started. I have gone 3 steps forward and 4 steps back so many times that I just start to get weary of the whole process." Well, the good

news for you is that there is a way forward and there is a clarity about it. No matter how many times you have fallen, there is a way forward of spiritual growth for you to develop spiritually, to develop in your character, to develop in your knowledge of Christ that is laid out for us in the passage that we're going to be looking at for the next several weeks.

Before we get to Ephesians, I want to turn to Matthew 16, if you would, because this will help you understand and bridge between the mindset that you came in with to where we need to go in Scripture here today. Matthew 16, it's a passage that I haven't preached on, per se here, but I have referred to this in times gone by. Jesus is with his disciples and he is about to bring them to a point of clarity of faith and in chapter 16, verse 13, Jesus was asking his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" He asked them, "What does the world say about me? What does the man on the street have to say about the Son of Man?" And they give him the opinions that they have heard and that have been reported to them. They say, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." "Lord, they see something about you but there is no settled opinion. There is a lot of differences of opinion in the world about who you are and what you stand for and what you represent and the world is unclear about it." And I never lose my fascination with what Jesus responded to them in verse 15, he said, "But who do you say that I am?" Jesus said, "Okay, now that we have the mindset of the world, let's set the mindset of the world aside and just deal directly with you. Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" He said, "Peter, you're right. God bless you and God has blessed you to have that level of clarity in your mind."

The point here is that God so works in the disciples of Christ to give them a clarity and a mindset and an understanding that is distinct from the world around them and that is the starting point to spiritual growth for you as we're going to see as we turn now to Ephesians 4, if you would turn there with me now, and just having that mindset. Here's the thing: this is what I continually want to impress upon the people of God whenever I have opportunity to teach: we understand, don't we, that the world's thinking is messed up. We understand that the world doesn't have the first clue about what truth is and that there are all kinds of competing philosophies, there are all kinds of arguments against the truthfulness of the Bible and against the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone and that you can even hear those voices from people who would say that they are evangelical Christians. We understand all of that. We get that but here is the thing for you, beloved, for you individually, for you singular person: the fact that there are conflicting, confused, ungodly opinions in the world is no barrier to your spiritual growth. In fact, it's a little bit like a trampoline in that when you consciously recognize the way the world thinks and the way that the world acts, that becomes like a trampoline that you bounce off of in order to enter into the realm of spiritual growth. You reject it and you move into a different realm of thought. You go into a whole different worldview, a whole different mindset. You say, "My whole mind is going to function differently from the environment around me." This is utterly essential and this is the crucial starting point of spiritual growth as Paul lays it out for us in Ephesians 4.

Now, as you know, in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, Paul has been describing and praising God for the nature of salvation. He says God chose us for salvation in Christ. He redeemed us by the blood of Christ. He has sealed us with his Spirit. He made Jews and Gentiles who were formerly hostile into one body in Christ. Now, we in the church, we live in unity because we share one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one calling, one God and Father." One, one, one, there is this unity and we use our gifts to serve one another and in that diversity we magnify and advance the unity all the more. The whole fullness of salvation is incredible. It is a great act of God that he has been gracious to us with, brought us into his family and now is continuing to work out eternal purposes in our lives. This is a magnificent salvation that has been bestowed upon you and me.

Now, what Paul says as he goes along is that true salvation and what salvation should do in you and in me is this: it should produce a life that grows in harmony with the truth that has saved us. Your life attitudes and your life behavior and your life priorities are increasingly conformed to the greatness of the salvation that God has given to you. Look at Ephesians 2:10, these life patterns, these life priorities are summed up in the metaphor of a walk, a picture of a progression in life and Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Now, that verse comes right on the heels of better known verses perhaps that say that we have been saved "by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast." Some people like to stop at chapter 2 verse 9 as if that were the end of everything that Paul had to say about it, "You are saved by faith therefore go in peace and do whatever you want to do." Well, that's not biblical salvation if you stop there. You've got to keep reading what Paul wrote in the rest of the book and what Paul says is that God saved us so that there would be a walk that would transpire in your life that flows from the way that he has saved you and the truth of Scripture that tells you about that.

Now, beloved, as we move forward and just kind of see these key markers in the book and remind ourselves of them because we have talked about all of this in the past, in Ephesians 4:1, look at what he says. Paul says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You see, there are these key points, these key markers that unify the book together that if you just read kind of carelessly or quickly, you might miss and you miss the flow and the force in what Paul is driving at. We need to see, you need to see the force of what he is saying, the major argument it is that he is advancing because in the rest of the letter he's now going to talk about the nature of this walk. So look at chapter 2, verse 10 again, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Then he says some other things and now he picks up that theme again in chapter 4:1 and he says, "Therefore I implore you to walk in a manner worthy your calling." God saved you to walk this way, now I implore you to walk in a manner that is worthy of that. So we are seeing a major structure, a major fundamental point that he is pressing upon us. As believers in Christ, this is now getting down to the core of the way that we are to think about our existence. This goes to the fundamentals of how your mind should work and everything that motivates you and captivates you. He says, "I want you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling."

Now, what does that walk involve? Well, look at chapter 4:15, which we saw last time. What is your walk to be like? Well, it gets back to the theme that we introduced here. Paul says there in the middle of 15, "we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." You have been saved by God. God saved you by grace through faith in Christ. He did that so that you would walk in the works that he prepared for you before the beginning of time. God shaped you exactly for the life that he has given you. If you are a Christian, you can look at your life in all of its sorrows or difficulties or opportunities or privileges. God has shaped you for that and giving you the circumstances that he intends for you to use as the platform in which you would glorify him, in which you would serve him, in which you would make him known. So you can gather up all of your weaknesses, all of your past failings, all of your present opportunities, the things that cause you to rejoice and the things that cause you sorrow and say, "This is the stage that God has given to me personally and uniquely for me to walk in good works." So everything about your life that has been given to you is bound up in this call, Paul says. "You walk worthily in your life in the midst of what God has given you and what you are to do in that is you are to grow. You are to develop spiritually. You are to become more like Christ in exactly what God has given you."

Now, a little pastoral interlude here. Because that's true, because God has sovereignly orchestrated every aspect of your life that you now have here today, that means 2 things and this is a whole other series of messages with what I'm about to say in 2 sentences but that means that, first of all, you can let go of all of your regret and questioning about things that happened in the past. Whatever sins or successes or whatever has brought you to this point today, today is the environment in which you find yourself that God has given you and says, "Now you grow right where you're at right now." So you can stop asking questions, "Well, what if I had done this? What if I had turned right instead of left? What if I had pursued a different career or not? What if I had married somebody else instead of the spouse that I now have?" You can forget all of that because it is irrelevant. It does not matter. You deal with life and deal with reality as you have it right now and understand that that is the stage, today is the stage that God has given you in which you are to grow in the life that he has given you. He didn't give you a different life. He doesn't want you to try to grow in a life that doesn't exist, does he? That would be foolishness. You couldn't even do that. So whatever your life is today, that is the life in which you are to grow and so you can put away the questions and put away the regrets and just say, "Okay, let's look forward," as Paul says, "forgetting the things that lie behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on to know the glory of Christ," Philippians 3. He says, "So I forget about everything that's behind. My task is to grow now and that's what I'm reaching forward to." So we have to clear out a lot of distorted thinking in order to even approach things right.

Now, verse 16, Ephesians 4. That's the end of the interlude now. I'm still in my introduction, by the way. Why are you laughing? I know, some people are done by this time. You know, some preachers are done in the amount of time I introduce this but look at verse 16. Paul says that "the whole body, being fitted and held together according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building

up of itself in love." Great salvation in which you are intended to grow, okay? That's Paul's point. This kind of summarizes everything. Now here in verse 17, he is going to unfold for you how it is that you grow. What I love about the Scriptures, the practicality of it is, if somebody just came to you, if I just stood up and said to you, "Look Sam, you must grow spiritually. Kevin, you need to grow. Catherine, Lisa, Edward, you need to grow. Let's close in prayer." That would be really frustrating, wouldn't it? To be given a command without any idea of how to go out and fulfill it. We don't know. We need God to teach us through his word about exactly what he wants and exactly what that looks like and it's not enough for us to set our own standard and this is what many of you do and I say this in sympathy and to help you because I have had some of these conversations with you. "I want to grow and therefore I'm going to read my Bible more and I'm going to pray more and that's how I'm going to grow." Well, no, that's not the right way to think. You're not thinking rightly when you start at that point. I'm all in favor of you reading your Bible more. I'm all in favor of you praying more but you have to understand the biblical process by which growth occurs. You need to understand the way that God has instructed us to grow and what we see as we study Ephesians 4 is that it starts further back. Most of you want to fix things and you want to fix them fast and you find yourself with kind of a broken down spiritual life and you want a quick fix. You want something that you can stick in the spiritual microwave and punch in 30 seconds and come out and have it be done. It doesn't work that way and the impatience of that is a barrier to your own spiritual development. We have to take the time to slow down and see what God says about spiritual growth and we're going to see that in verses 17 through 19 here.

Let me read our text for this morning, Ephesians 4:17-19. Paul says,

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Those 3 verses do far more for your spiritual growth than you would ever suspect and I dare say that many people would not go to this passage as the starting point for someone who says, "How do I grow spiritually?" Not too many people would go to this passage and say, "Well, let's start here and see what the word of God says about this." But beloved, we don't want to fall into that trap. You and I are not going to make that mistake. This passage is absolutely indispensable for your growth in Christ because it teaches you to think rightly about the world in which you live. It gives you that trampoline to bounce off of and to move into a different realm of thought. We are all creatures of our environment. We are all creatures of our culture. We don't realize how much the ways and thinking of the world have shaped and influenced us. It's like someone said: the last creature that you would ask what it is like to be wet is a fish because a fish doesn't know anything other than being wet. I would add to that that a fish can't talk and so it wouldn't do any good to ask a fish what it is like to be wet because it would just, you know, do its little mouth thing and want to get thrown back into the lake.

My point is that you are a creature of your culture more than you realize and Paul helps us think through these things in a way that helps us recognize our environment so that we could set it aside and reject it as being that which is contrary to our goal of spiritual growth. We need to think in the negative before we consider the positive and that's what Paul does for us here.

So I'm going to structure this message around 3 points for you here today that are the starting points of spiritual growth and, first of all, our first point for this morning is to show you the necessary rejection. The necessary rejection because in this passage, Paul is explaining to you and is explaining to us what our position in Christ requires from us. Remember that God has saved us out of a sinful and wicked world. Christ has called us out of the world to leave the world behind and to follow him. Well, we need to think through what that means and so Paul says, look at verse 17 here with me, he says, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind." Now, stay with me here, if you would. Do you see that word "so." In the ESV, I think it says "now." It's the same word that elsewhere in Scripture is often translated "therefore." So for the reasons, here's what he's saying, "For the reasons that I have explained leading up to this, for those reasons, here is what you must do as a result. Because God has given you a great salvation, therefore you must do this. Because the call of Christ on your life is for you to grow, therefore here's what flows as a result of that." That word "so" is so important. It's very strategic because it is connecting the command about the walk and the growth of the Christian life with what he is immediately about to say. You must understand this. This is really vital. This is really significant and strategic. So you want to grow like we were talking about? Christ commands you to grow. God has given this great salvation so here's where we go from here. Here's where we take those desires and commands and this is what comes next. This is the first step in the path of spiritual growth. Even if you have been a Christian for a very long time, we all come back to this point right here. What we're about to see is bonded together, is glued together, with what we've already seen in God's work in our salvation.

Now watch this in verse 17, it says, "So this I say," Paul speaking in the first person and he says, "and affirm together with the Lord." Paul is saying, "This isn't just my opinion here. What I am saying here comes from the Lord himself." Indeed in the original language it says "in the Lord. I affirm this together in the Lord. This is the realm of the Lord's instruction. This is what Christ himself is speaking and commanding to you." Christ is speaking through his apostle, working through the inspired word of God, and telling you this is how you begin to grow. So what we're seeing here, Christ is commanding us. This isn't just reading a 2,000 year old text. Christ through his word today is commanding us as his people saying, "This is what I want you to do next." This is authoritative instruction from the Lord himself. That means something. That means that you and I have a solemn responsibility to receive what God's word says here, to respond to it and to apply it to our lives. And what Paul is about to do, he's about to make a frontal assault on the whole way that the world thinks and he says, "You must think in this way also. This is where it all begins." There is a rejection that needs to take place.

Look at verse 17 with me again. Paul says, "I affirm together with the Lord," in the context of talking about your spiritual growth, here's where it starts, "I say that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk." He tells them, "Don't walk this way any longer," and what he's saying here, beloved, I'll try to slow myself down and give you time to receive the fullness of what he's saying. This is massive. What he's saying is that the Gentiles, meaning non-Christians, have a way that they live. They have a way that they think. They operate out of a set of presuppositions and they have certain characteristics of heart. What Christ is commanding you is that you need to recognize that, understand it, and utterly reject it as having any relevance to your own life. He is calling upon you to assess the world around you, to think through the principles and priority that guide their thinking and behavior and to reject everything about it as we are going to see. It's incredible. It's incredible the depth of what this is saying and how profound it is. It is an advance on that conversation that Christ had with his disciples. "Who do people say I am?" "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah." "You reject that. Forget about what the world says. Be your own man. Think independently and you shape your heart and your mind after what I instruct you to do."

And what is that instruction? Well, at the core of what we're going to see over the next couple of verses is that you need to understand that at the core, the world in which you live and live and move and have your earthly being, that world, the mindset of unsaved people, is opposed to Christ. It is opposed to God. It is opposed to truth. And everything that you see going on in the world around you flows out of those presuppositions, flows out of those principles, flows out of those philosophies that are opposed to God and his truth and you need to recognize that and not be sucked in like a vortex into their way of thought. It's a whole different way of thinking and what Paul is saying is that you must be different and it's not just that you're different, that you're consciously different. You have thought through these things. You recognize the alien nature of the spiritual environment that you find yourself in and you reject it. Then next week in verses 22-24, we'll see how Paul replaces that with a new way to think. For today, we're just focusing on the necessary rejection of the world and its thinking.

To be a Christian means that you embrace the fact that you're not going to be like the people around you. You're going to think differently than they do. You're going to have different priorities and you gladly embrace that. Christianity is not for those who want to be popular in the world. Christianity is not for those who want to be liked and favored by their unsaved friends. What do unsaved people do with people that are like Christ? What did they do to Christ? They crucified him. They killed him because they wanted to silence him. Well, Jesus said, "If they did that to the Master, they are going to have a similar attitude toward the student." So it's very important for us to understand, contrary to the voices that tell us that we need to conform to the world and to be more like the world so that they will like us and maybe if they like us they'll listen to what we have to say about Christ. No, that's absolutely false. That is a lie and a snare from the devil trying to get you to come into the world environment, the world thinking, the world philosophy so that they will like you. They're not going to like us. There is too much hostility between the worldviews for that to be possible so stop hankering after the affection and praise and acceptance of the world because their very philosophy forbids it.

Paul goes and explains this to us in what follows in a very powerful passage that you could rightly stop and spend weeks on this passage but we're not going to do that which is a preacher's way of saying I don't have anything remotely prepared like that so we're just going to go on. I don't have 6 weeks of material on it but it's that important. So you recognize the necessary rejection that you no longer walk as the Gentiles walk in their thinking and in their behavior. You realize that this requires a distinction if I'm going to grow and I must grow because of what God has done. I'm under a compulsion of conscience. I'm under a mandate of my affections and because this is what I love and this is who I love, I want to move in that direction, not stay in the world that despised and rejected him. Why would you do that? If you love Christ and if he saved you from sin, why would you want to stay in the realm of the world that opposes him and despises him? It doesn't make any sense, does it? You see, we need the clarity of things that basic and fundamental so that everything else that flows will happen accordingly.

So, the necessary rejection. It's necessary because the Lord commands it. What is it that we are to reject, point #2 here: you reject the wicked thinking. You reject the wicked thinking of the world. Oh, this is such a great passage. I really think this may be my favorite passage in all of the Bible as I consider what it says. What Paul is saying here or what Paul is doing, think about it like an onion, he's pulling back one layer at a time. One layer getting closer, one layer getting closer until he gets to the very core of the problem. So there is a progression in what you're about to see. There is a development of Paul's thought and he is like a doctor going from symptom to the root cause. It starts with a symptom. You go in and say, "Doctor, here are my symptoms. Here's why I'm feeling bad." The doctor says, "Oh, those symptoms tell me that here is your problem." Well, Paul goes through the symptoms of the world and gets to the core of what the problem is and when you think it through this way, you see clearly why you must reject the world and that will enable your spiritual growth.

So what does he do? He starts in verse 17 by referring to the futility of their mind. Look at verse 17 with me, if you would. Paul says, "You no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind." Now, Paul here in this passage is going to address the priority of the intellect over feelings. Notice that he says their mind in verse 17. He refers to the understanding in verse 18 and ignorance in verse 18 and so there is this emphasis on the mental, cognitive, understanding realm of life and what he says about Gentiles is not too flattering. I would love to preach this to an academy of scientists just because it would make them so upset with Scripture. But he refers to the futility of their mind, the vanity and emptiness of it. What he is saying here is this, he says, "The entire way that the world thinks has no purpose. It is worthless. It is fruitless. It starts from nothing. It is nothing and it leads to nothing. It is utter futility." It is a one clause summary of the entire book of Ecclesiastes, in other words. He says, "This has no purpose. Their way of thought, their philosophies, go nowhere." And whether it's philosophy, man-centered philosophy, or whether it's simply the pursuit of pleasure one after another, Paul says it is fruitless and it is worthless. Man-centered thinking, man-centered philosophies, do not explain the origin of the universe. They do not explain the end of the universe and its aimless with what they do come up with. There is no direction

to it. There is no source. There is no destination. There is no purpose in between because they reject the things before time and the things of after time and leave you with nothing. And where are the great intellectuals of prior centuries? Where are they? They are in a grave, if it's even marked. Their bones are rotting under the earth. Where did it lead them? It led them nowhere.

And it's not just about culture, beloved, speaking and realizing that Paul is after our individual spiritual growth here. We need to understand and we need to have it really clear in our mind and for you young people, you guys that are 14, 15, 16, setting the course of your life, you need to understand something really important: that your earthly success, whatever lies ahead of you and whatever you pursue, you have to realize that in the end earthly success is empty if it's just for you and if it's just about you attaining what you want to do. It doesn't go anywhere. If it's about pride and thinking like I used to, you know, I used to, I was really eager before I was a Christian, I wanted to go back to a high school reunion and be the man who made it and show off to all those people that didn't think I would become anything. Just foolish pride. No point in it and who cares what Don Green did anyway? It doesn't matter. It's irrelevant. If it's about just pursuing your pleasure and your lust, you realize there is nothing to it. It doesn't go anywhere. So whether you're pursuing a lifetime of pleasure or a lifetime of earthly recognition, understand the end of it all. Psalm 90:10 says, "Their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away." To realize, to understand that the pride and the labor and the pleasure of life is soon over even though it doesn't seem that way as you go day by day, 50 years goes by like that and another 50 and you're gone and what's the point? What are you leaving behind? What was the reason for that? Well, for those that don't know Christ, it just ended up being a fruitless, worthless, pointless endeavor because as a Ecclesiastes says many times, it just led to vanity. You turn to dust and there is nothing to leave behind. We have to realize this on a sense of worldview and we also need to understand it in our own personal lives.

Now, here's the question. It's one thing to make that assertion to say that their thinking is futile. Paul continues. Think of Paul as operating a drill and he's going deeper and deeper before he strikes oil, before he gets to the core. He is digging until he hits rock and he finds the bottom of it all. He's going progressively toward the bottom and so he makes this assertion about the futile worthlessness of world thinking and he answers the question, "Why is their thinking futile? Why can they not see life for what it really is? Why is their whole thought, their whole mind, their whole philosophy, why is it useless?" Well, he goes on and he says in verse 18, the attendant circumstance of their thinking is this, "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God." Their thinking is useless because their understanding is dark. They have no spiritual perception about God and his truth and if God is the source of life, if God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, if God – watch this, watch this, just think through the big picture of things – if God is the Creator, if God set creation in motion to achieve his purposes, if he is working all details to fulfill his purposes, Ephesians 1:10, and he will bring history to a conclusion that will result in the ultimate glory being given to Christ before an eternal state is ushered in and that's what's really happening in the history of the unfolding of the universe, then those who reject Scripture, unsaved men who mock

Christ, who do not recognize God, who do not bend the knee to God, who propose alternate theories to explain the purpose of the universe, they have nothing to contribute to the discussion. They totally miss the point. They are darkened in their understanding. The lights are not on. They have nothing to contribute to the discussion because they reject the most fundamental premises of truth. They reject the authority of Scripture. They reject creation of man by God. They mock Christ. They hate the call to forsake self and follow Christ. That's the mindset of the world. It was true 2,000 years ago when Paul wrote it and it's true now. Just little bits of different window-dressing on the same basic, termite infested house of thought that is doomed to destruction. Their understanding is darkened and that's why, as we go along, you say, "Their thinking is futile. It's worthless. It leads nowhere. I need to reject it. Why do I need to reject it? It's because it is divorced from, they think from, they teach from completely ungodly naturalistic principles that cannot explain the true meaning of life and so they have nothing that can contribute to my spiritual growth. I need to realize it for the threat to my growth that it is." It's very fundamental.

Now, Paul goes on. He says they are futile in their mind. They are darkened in their understanding. He goes further. Remember, he's speaking to us as Christians. He's speaking to us as those who have been born again by the Spirit of God. We have received new life from God from above and we operate in the realm of that truth. We operate in the realm of what God has done in our hearts which is true. Which is real. Which is objectively fact. We have life from God as Christians and that is the audience to which Paul writes. Well, what can we say about those who are futile in their mind, who are darkened in their understanding, who reject the very Gospel and the very concept of the God of the Bible? What can we say about them? Well, it's obvious. They are darkened in their understanding, look at the next clause, they are "excluded from the life of God." They do not have the life of God in them. They do not know the God of the Bible. They have no part in the life which God possesses. They have no part in the life which God gives to us, his children, as those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They don't share in that. They are dead to it. It is foreign to them. It is alien to them. They are outside the realm in which we exist.

Paul says, "I want you to understand that. I want you to think through it." Look, I really think that if you could speak to somebody in an intelligent discussion who was consciously not a Christian, he would acknowledge, "Yeah, I do not know the Scriptures. I don't accept the Scriptures. I reject Christ." But at the core of it all, they are ignorant according to Scripture. They are unregenerate. They do not know the Bible. They do not know the God of the Bible. They do not know the Christ of Scripture. They do not see the consequences of sin. Some of them would reject an increasingly, as you know, reject the very concept of an absolute truth and an absolute morality. There can't be sin if there is no absolute morality. If you're defining absolutes out of existence, then you have defined everything about our spiritual life out of existence. Whatever you think about that philosophically, realize that that has no overlap with the life of God found in the Scriptures. These men are spiritually dead. They know nothing about the true God and they like it that way and what you need to understand is that those are the principles that

are framing the world in which you live. We'll talk about that more in a moment to illustrate that and help you see it even further. But they are outside of the life of God.

Here's the thing, beloved: we're defined by the work of God in our lives. We are defined by the fact that God has caused us to be born again to a living hope in Christ Jesus. That is the defining aspect of what it means to be a believer. We're in this realm that comes from Christ. Now, they have no share in that. They are outside of that. They are unregenerate. They have no life from God and so you have to see that they are excluded from and when Paul says they are excluded from the life of God, here's the thing: what defines us as Christians is utterly alien to them. They have no experience, no knowledge of it. We're in completely different realms, is what Paul is saying. The fact that we share a physical planet and we breathe the same air says nothing about the spiritual realms in which we exist. So the very thing that we hold most dear is unknown to them.

Now, Paul goes one step further here as he's telling us to reject their wicked thinking so that we could grow spiritually. Why are they in that state? Why are they like that? How is it that they find themselves in that miserable condition without even sometimes recognizing it? Beloved, it is not a lack of information. It is not because they haven't had enough facts put in front of them. Paul makes this clear as he goes on. He says they are "excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them." Why are they ignorant? Why are they outside of this life that we share? He just keeps giving causal reasons, unfolding it, and now he gets to the core of it. He says they are in that state of death, they are in that state of ignorance because, here's why, on account of this, "because of the hardness of their heart." Paul places moral culpability upon them for their ignorant, lost state. He says that unbelievers do not know God because their heart is hard like a rock. It's hard as a rock. It's steely like flint. Truth just bounces off of it with no receptivity to it at all. Here's the thing and this passage is parallel to Romans 1 that talks about how God handed people over to their sins and reflects this condition as being a judicial act of God, Romans 1 does, here is the human responsibility side of it in Ephesians 4. Paul is calling out their accountability for their condition and saying, "They are like this because they are hard. They are resistant. They are unteachable. They want nothing to do with it."

They suppress their conscience with an unteachable spirit. They reject the testimony of God, the existence and the attributes of God that are displayed in the heavens 24/7, 365 all around them. They won't even look at it. They won't even consider it. When conscience tries to speak to them, they suppress it and deny it. They won't have it. You hand them a Bible and say, "Here is the word of God," they say, "I don't care." You speak to them about Christ and they want nothing to do with it and quickly move into profane babbling trying to silence the discussion. You speak to them about your own conversion and what do they say? "That's good for you but that's not for me." And in all the multiplied witnesses that God has given in creation, in conscience, in the Canon of Scripture, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in your own conversion, they won't hear of it. Why? Because they don't want it. They reject it. They refuse it. Their heart is cold and hard like stone.

Well, okay, if that's how you're going to be but understand there are consequences that flow from that. Look back at Ephesians 4. Now that we've gotten to the bottom of it we can work our way back. We go back kind of in reverse order. We don't often do this. You go back up and you see the point. Paul says their hard heart has created ignorance within them. That ignorance excludes them from the life of God and gives them a dark understanding and therefore their mind is futile. At root of the ungodly age in which we live, at root is a fundamental hardness of heart that rejects the God of the Bible, that rejects our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore the only alternative if Christ is the light and you cast him out, the only thing left to replace it is darkness. Their ultimate problem is that they refused to hear and they refused to yield and those moral choices that are embedded in their heart have consequences that manifest themselves in a dark, fruitless, futile, vain mind that makes their whole way of thinking in life, in the final analysis, worthless. And you trace it all the way back, you take the symptoms and follow it back to the root cause, at the core of it is a problem with their heart. Unreconciled and irreconcilable toward God. That's what Paul is saying here.

Now, just a word here. Paul is speaking about the whole Gentile environment and what we see coming out of our culture and what we see in individual lives may not be the worst manifestation of every possible permutation of this at every possible moment in time but it is the ocean in which they swim. It is that which informs their whole approach to life and so whether someone seems a little bit outwardly respectable or whether they are the drunk in the gutter, so to speak, it's all coming from common roots and what you have to do, you have to be discerning enough to say, "This is the environment in which I live and I reject that. In obedience to the command of the Lord, I reject the unteachable spirit. I reject the ignorance. I reject the futility. I reject all of that which makes them what they are. I reject that because I want to follow the command of Christ. I want to grow spiritually like my friend Earl said, and it starts with cleansing your mind of the presuppositions and the priorities of the world, recognizing them and saying that's not me. I'm going to separate from that." And the significance of that is so profound because what you're saying is, "I reject the very environment in which I live." 1 John 2:15, don't love the world or the things that are in the world. You know, as profound as it is, it's actually pretty basic. This is Christianity 101.

So as James said, in fact, let's turn over to that because that's an important passage that just popped into my mind. James 4, this is a magnificent commentary on this whole passage and everything that Paul is saying here. You see it elsewhere in the writings of James. James 4:4 says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Paul has explained in Ephesians 4 why that must be the case. They are ignorant. They are excluded from the life of God in their heart of hearts toward the things of God. How could you join with that if you're a Christian? Do you understand the profound spiritual call that Christ is placing right now on your heart to reject all of that? You cannot continue in your love for the world if you name the name of Christ. You need to recognize the hostility of it and separate yourself from it. You must reject it. Lock the door so that you can't go out. Don't leave the back door open. Close it off. Seal it off. Break it off so that you can't go back in your thinking to that way of life and thought.

You reject the wicked thinking. That's the first step in your spiritual growth. That's where some of you are at, I know. "I don't want to be like that." You're saying, "Of course! Of course! I agree! I agree! That's where my heart is at." Well, praise the Lord, that's where you need to be.

That brings us to our third point here this morning: to reject the wicked behavior. We won't spend as much time here. Reject the wicked behavior. The wicked thinking gives rise to wicked behavior and if you think about this in terms broadly of culture and society as opposed to trying to tie it to specific individuals you know, it will help you process what Paul is saying here because he's speaking in the plural. Look at verse 19. He says, "and they, having become callous," and so he's making a collective reference to society and culture, understanding that individuals live within that culture. And what he's doing here in verse 19, he's continuing to expose the darkness of the way of the unsaved so that we would be motivated to pursue godliness instead. Look at verse 19, he says, "and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." He's now moving from the realm of thought to the realm of behavior and explaining and pointing out the nature of the world, again, painting it in dark colors so that you would be appalled by it and motivated to turn from it and never be tempted to turn back.

Now, he says that they are callous. Those of you that work with your hands for a living, you have the sense of this. Your hands develop calluses on them. It's the same kind of word that is using there. What marks a callous except that there is not feeling in the skin at that point. It has just been rubbed and rubbed until the feeling is not there anymore. What he's saying is that unsaved people are like that morally because their rebellion and their hard heart has rubbed against the inner testimony of their conscience and their suppression has rubbed against the testimony of God, they come to a point where they don't feel the weight of it anymore. They are callous and what do they do in that calloused place? They lose the capacity to feel shame. They are hard and they go after still more. When men reject the fear of the Lord, evil sets in. Evil sets in. Those of you who are consciously rejecting Christ but you still feel the impulses of God's word operating on your heart, I plead with you to respond to God's word now because the more you condition yourself to reject it and ignore it, the more you're setting yourself up to become callous so it won't have any impact on you anymore. And when you become callous, you get set in the ways of the world and the outcome of that is your eternal destruction. I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I didn't warn you about that, would I? It's not just bad thinking is what Paul is saying. It's not just bad thinking from verse 18. Their lives are wretched.

Verse 19, they become callous, they "have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." The manifestations are many and when it's all said and done, they want more of the wretchedness and you see it playing out in society around us. Let me ask you some questions here. Why is it that actors and popular musicians can just parade the grossest depravity in front of a nationally televised audience and not feel any shame over it? That which should cause them to be ashamed, they are proud of, how can that be? Why do abortion doctors casually traffic in fetal body

parts while they are having a salad lunch and wine? How can they do that without being crushed by conscience and convicted? Why do college professors traffic in mental nonsense? Why do false teachers defraud their supporters and say silly things and make promises that they never could keep or intend to keep just so that people will give them money? And they do that repeatedly over and over again on television and radio, why do they do that? Why don't they stop? Why don't these people stop in their wickedness? Why do the eyes of your loved ones glaze over and they roll their eyes when once again you're trying to talk to them about Christ?

Do you see that it's all a common root? It's all because they have become callous. They are hard. They don't feel it anymore and that is why they have the freedom of mind and the freedom of life to pursue all of that degraded depravity. It's because the hardness of their heart has given them over to a futile mind and now there is nothing to restrain them as they go forward to pursue the sin that they love. It's not that they need more information, beloved, they have all the information they need. The fact of the matter is that if God called the world to an end right now, everyone who is outside of Christ has more than enough guilt and shame to convict them to be punished for all of eternity. They already know enough. It all has a common root. The unsaved have no fear of God. All of those different things that we described: the professors, the abortionists, the actors, the magicians, all of it. All of it traces back to a fundamental thing that we've talked about in the past: there is no fear of God at their heart to restrain them.

Now, that explains the world in which you live. Now let's come back and remember why Paul is telling us this. Go back to verse 17 as I'm almost done here. You go back to verse 17 and Paul says, "So this I say, because growth is the goal of the church, let me say this by the commandment of the Lord to you. I want you to recognize the wicked thinking of the world and how it leads to their wicked behavior and what I want you to do," he says, "I don't want you to walk like that anymore. In fact, Christ commands you, don't walk according to that way," and it's not just avoiding the behavior, it's recognizing the whole realm of thought and philosophy that gives birth to it. At core, godless. At core, hostile. At core, unteachable. And that explains why they can live like they do without any sense of shame and greedily going after more and more multiplications of sin and perversion. Paul says, "That's what the world is like." He says to you as a Christian, he says, "Don't you be like that." He says, "You think through it. You recognize it and you say I decisively reject that. The thinking of the world will not mark me. It will not influence me. Their unteachable heart is not going to be like me. I'll be teachable. Their hatred of God? Not me, I'm going to love God and fear him. Their mocking of Christ? Not me, I'll go outside the camp. I'll go outside the city and I'll suffer with Christ and I'll identify myself with Christ and I'll live with Christ and I'll be faithful with him even if it costs me." All of this separation takes place. You see the negative and disown it so that your mind and your heart is free to embrace the positives which is what we'll see next week. Come back and join us as we consider and continue on this path of spiritual growth.

Bow with me in prayer.

For those of you that are without Christ, I just described you. You need to be born again. You need a new life from above because you're in chains of sin that you cannot separate yourself from. I ask you and I invite you as your friend and as a friend, an ambassador of Christ, to call for Christ for mercy because you cannot save yourself. Father, for the rest of us, I pray that you would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

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