

Greetings Christ Church of Wiesbaden! And welcome to our online worship service.

For those of you who are tuning in through YouTube, I invite you to go to our website and download a worship order which is available under the sermons tab.

Also, if you would like better video resolution, you can raise the resolution in the YouTube settings.

Today we are continuing our study of Ephesians and I am excited that we are entering a new section of the letter.

For several weeks we have considered the unity of the church and now we are entering a section that deals with applying all that we have learned so far in the letter.

Ephesians is classic in its divisions because in the first 4 and a half chapters, Paul has focused on doctrine. In chapters 1-3, he dealt with God's grand plan of salvation.

Then in chapter 4, he spent 16 verses discussing the unity of the church.

And now, after making these doctrinal points, in Ephesians 4:17, Paul begins to apply what he has taught.

Now, you may be saying: "Finally, we are getting into the practical section. All of this focus on doctrine has been less than exciting."

Yet we should realize that both parts of this letter are indispensable- the doctrinal and the practical.

The theological and the ethical.

They cannot be separated. They are like two sides of the same coin.

Because the Christian life is one of **living out God's truth**.

Doctrine has to precede application.

And application has to follow doctrine.

The Christian life is never: "Do these works so that you can be a Christian."

Instead, the bible tells us to be, or act like, what we already are.

It's is like God is telling us: Be who you are.

Be who I have made you to be.

So our Christian life begins with a secure identity and then, out of that identity, we move on to our actions.

The connection between the doctrinal and the practical is very important because some Christians like to focus primarily on doctrine.

And others are more passionate for the practical commands of scripture.

Yet both are indispensable.

Neither can be discarded without doing harm to God's truth.

Application must follow doctrine and doctrine must precede application.

And today we are going to get practical.

Paul begins this practical section by telling us: Don't.

Don't be like the Gentiles- like those who do not know God.

He begins negative.

But he does this to startle us so that we might be what God has made us to be.

So let us read Ephesians 4:17-19.

**Ephesians 4:17** Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Say: This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

The passage we are studying is entirely negative, from beginning to end.  
And while this may be off-putting to us, we need understand why Paul is negative.

First, he is being clear and direct.  
And we should appreciate this about him.  
Paul doesn't mince words. He doesn't just want us to like him.  
He wants us to grow in Christ.

But second, Paul begins this section negatively because what he is saying is so important.  
Spiritual life and death hang in the balance.  
And he wants to draw a stark contrast between the two.

Paul's negative beginning emphasizes the seriousness of the situation.  
He's solemn.

You have a sermon outline in your worship order.  
And, the first point there is...

## I. Solemnity

Paul starts off by alerting us to his seriousness.  
He says:

**17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord...**

This is a solemn preface.  
He's alerting us that what he is about to say is of the utmost importance.  
It's similar to the preface that Jesus sometimes used: **Truly I say to you...**  
And when things were most important, Jesus would say: **Truly, Truly I say to you...**

Prefaces like this are important because they alert us to the **gravity** of what is about to be said.  
And notice also how Paul puts his Apostolic weight behind his words.

Now this **I say and testify in the Lord...**

Paul is an apostle and he wants us to receive his words as the very words of God.  
He is not giving us advice or an opinion.  
He is telling us something essential- something that is from the Lord.

And his command is this:

## II. You Must No Longer Walk as the Gentiles Do

In the Bible the word **walk** is used to describe one's way of life.  
It doesn't so much refer to individual actions as much as it does to our pattern of life.  
Our walk refers to how we live in the day to day.

And here, he warns us not to walk or live as the Gentiles do.  
Now the funny thing about this command is that many, if not most in the Ephesian church culturally were Gentiles.

Yet now that they are in Christ, their cultural identity of being Gentiles is demoted.  
So whatever they culturally were previously, now, In Christ, they are first and foremost God's people.

It's a reminder that they are a new creation.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote:

**2 Corinthians 5:17**, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

And so Paul commands us to cast off the sinful ways of our former life and be the people he made us to be.

Paul doesn't have in mind just a few life changes.

Instead, what he has in mind is comprehensive.

And this is why his first critique of the Gentile life has to do with their state of mind.

## A. The Futility of Their Minds

He says:

**...you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.**

When Paul speaks about the mind, he is referring to their entire person.

The mind controls the person and here, the Gentile mind is considered **futile**.

Now this is a devastating critique.

To have a futile mind is to have your direction and aim in life ultimately be useless.

It's vain, empty, purposeless.

Like the writer of Ecclesiastes begins his book:

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

In Ecclesiastes, the writer looks at the world apart from God and he concludes that life is ultimately just going nowhere.

And so here in Ephesians, Paul wants us to examine the Gentile life and ask ourselves, **where is it leading?**

What is it ultimately accomplishing?

What is the meaning and purpose of such a life?

In our day the prevailing philosophy is secularism.

And secularism ultimately can make no real assertions about the meaning in life.

Because secularism makes no reference to God.

It believes only what it can see and experience.

And so, the secular philosophy ultimately cannot reasonably explain why we have conceptions of beauty or right and wrong.

In the secular worldview, human rights are no more logical than snail rights.

For what makes a human more valuable than a snail?

Because the secular worldview can make no positive assertions regarding meaning or purpose in life- it is ultimately a bleak and hopeless philosophy.

This is why the famous French playwright Albert Camus said:

...the first question of Philosophy is whether or not one should kill oneself.

If nothing ultimately matters...

If there is no ultimate meaning in life...

Then why not just end it all?

Yet none of us is comfortable with these conclusions.

We want to live in a world where right and wrong aren't just matters of opinion.

Where good and evil aren't just matters of taste and cultural bias.

We want to live in a world that has meaning.

Yet the secular worldview ultimately offers us nothing solid.

If God isn't the one who provides us with meaning, then our meaning in life will have to be invented.

And in that case, it just becomes a matter of opinion.

It's all relative. All opinions are valid.

Because there is no objective truth, no ultimate standard by which we can know what the meaning of life actually is.

This is the fatal flaw of the secular worldview and it shows to us the truth of Paul's first statement:

**17 ...you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.**

In Romans, Paul speaks about this futility of thinking when he says in Romans 1:21-23:

**Romans 1:21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

This is a sad condition, to have a futile manner of life.  
To have your life ultimately aimed at a useless purpose.  
Paul goes on to describe the Gentile life by telling us they are...

## B. Darkened in their Understanding

And this refers to the unbeliever's inability to see or embrace Spiritual truth.  
Previously, when Paul spoke of the mind, he was looking at the person comprehensively.  
Not just their intellect, but the entire person as a whole.  
Yet here, when he refers to the understanding, he is referring specifically to the intellect and a person's reasonableness.

And the critique is that outside of Christ, our understandings are darkened.  
This means that there are spiritual truths that the unbeliever just doesn't see.  
It doesn't mean they are stupid.  
Unbelievers can have the best brains.  
Yet when a person is in a state of unbelief, they are insensible to spiritual truth.

Consider the preaching of Jesus.  
He was no doubt the best preacher to ever walk the face of the earth.  
But because what he said was Spiritually perceived, many walked away from his sermons unconvinced.  
This was not because he failed to prepare adequately or because the people he spoke to were lacking in intelligence.  
It was because there was a blindness in their minds and hearts.  
They were darkened in their understanding.

And because of this, no matter what he said, when it came to Spiritual truth, those who would not believe remained insensitive to his words.

Paul wrote about this phenomena in 2 Corinthians 4:3.  
He noticed that not everyone responded in faith to his preaching.  
And so he said:

**2 Corinthians 4:3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

To be darkened in understanding means to be insensible to Spiritual truth.  
It is neither real or attractive to such a one.

And the reason for this is that they are...

## C. Alienated From the Life of God

To be alienated means to be cut off.  
And in this case, the unbeliever is cut off from God's life.

Sure the person is living. This is true of them physically.  
Their heart is beating and their lungs are breathing.  
But spiritually, they are absolutely dead.

In the New Testament, there are two kinds of life.  
Bios and Zoe.  
Bios refers to biological, physical life.  
It is the sort of life that humans share with plants and animals.

Zoe refers to Spiritual life- the type of life that God has.  
And at the fall, all of humanity lost this Zoe type of life.  
Our Bios life continued but our Zoe life expired.

And this is why Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1, that we were all by nature “dead in our trespasses and sins.”  
We lost that ability to be sensitive and responsive to God’s truth.  
***We became estranged, cut off, alienated.***

And this alienation is felt in us as we are restless and deeply lonely.  
This explains why you can be surrounded by family and friends, have people who care for you and have quality relationships and yet at the same time feel deeply alone and lost.

When we are outside of Christ, our relationship to God is characterized by alienation.  
Ernest Hemingway wrote about this alienation in his short story, The Capital of the World.

*In this story, he wrote of a father and his teenage son. The son had sinned against his father and in his shame he ran away from home. The father searched all over Spain for him, but still he could not find the boy. Finally, in the city of Madrid, in a last ditch effort to find his son, the father placed an ad in the daily paper. The ad read:  
“PACO MEET AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON TUESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN. – PAPA.”  
The father prayed the boy would see the ad and that he would come to the Hotel Montana.  
On Tuesday, the father arrived and he saw eight hundred boys named “Paco” who had come to meet their father in front of the Hotel Montana.*

By nature, we are alienated from the life of God.  
And when we come to Christ, the result is that we are reunited with the father who made us.

But if one remains in unbelief, it is...  
***... because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.***

#### D. Hardness of Heart

In the gospels, Jesus tells us the Parable of the Sower.  
And in this parable there are different types of soils:  
That of the path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground and then finally the good soil.

And while some of the soils are better than others, the worst soil was that of the path.  
Because that soil is so hard and impenetrable.  
The seed has no ability to grow- because Satan instantly snatches it away.

Yet from the human perspective, a hard heart is one that simply dismisses the truth of God immediately.  
It stands no chance.  
God word is simply refused.

And so what is needed to remedy this problem of a hard heart is a **new heart**.

In Ezekiel 36:26, God tells us about his plan to save his people.  
And this he will do by giving them a New Heart.  
The Lord says:

**Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

So let me ask you: What is the condition of your heart?

Are you responsive to God's word?  
Or have you grown hard to it?

Perhaps the scariest condition that we can ever find ourselves in is when we know what God's word says but we absolutely refuse to do it or believe it.

To have a hard heart towards God is to ignore His word.  
And when we do this over a long period of time, our hearts just grow harder and harder and harder.

The result is that they become completely calloused.  
And this is why Paul closes this section by saying:

**19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

### **E. Callous and Sensual**

When our hearts are calloused, we lose all feeling for those things that are right and good.  
A person with a calloused heart is driven only by their appetites and what benefits them.

In Jeremiah 6:15, the Lord tells us that in this condition, his people had lost their ability to blush.  
He's referring to shamelessness.  
And we see this in our culture quite broadly speaking.

Consider the increased normalization of pornography.  
Consider how coarse our public discourse has become.  
Language that used to be considered offensive has now become common in many quarters.  
Consider our societal greed and materialism.  
Consider how common divorce is, how common sex outside of marriage is, how crudely women are treated.

And the scary part is that often, people in the church don't look all that different from the people outside the church.

Now of course not every unbeliever is equally as callous and sensual.  
Martin Lloyd Jones uses the illustration of paddling in the ocean.  
Some are paddling out in the depths of sensuality while many others are staying nearer to the coastline, where the water is shallower.

But the fact remains that those who are in the shallow parts of the ocean are still in the ocean.  
They are still living with calloused hearts and in sensuality.

And the only way to flee from all of this is to get in Christ.  
Paul began this section on a negative note in order to startle us to life.

Because we know that even as Christians, these descriptions of the Gentile life are all at least partially true for us.  
We all live with indwelling sin and Paul is telling us that in Christ, that is not who we really are.

So let me ask you: How accurately do these verses describe you?

Would you say that you don't even care?  
Well, then you are probably that hard soil that Jesus spoke about in his parable.

Maybe your interest has been piqued?

Perhaps you concerned for now?  
But will that concern for the state of your soul quickly die away?  
If so, then you are probably the **stony ground** of Jesus' parable.

Perhaps you are in a wrestling match.  
On the one hand, you are desirous to live for Christ.  
But on the other hand, you really love the world and the ways of the world.  
This is where many Christians are.  
In this case they are the thorny ground.  
They are saved, yet they are not fruitful because they love the world and this chokes out any growth that could otherwise develop.

Yet if we are walking in Christ, with daily repentance, then we are the good soil that God desires.  
This means that our daily prayer – our hearts cry is like this:

“Lord, soften my heart.

Forgive me of my sin and help me to live a life that is responsive to your word.

When I get off the path, Lord help me to quickly correct myself and not live there, out of your will.”

If this is our continual prayer, then we show ourselves to be the good soil that God desires and the people of God that he created us to be.

Amen.

Pray.