

Discovering God's purpose

Living in purity (A distinctive mindset)
(Eph. 4:17-24)

Intro: As Christians, we need to keep thinking about who we are and what we are called to be. Knowing our purpose will unite and energize us; and it will enable to evaluate the success of what we do.

Ephesians gives us the most definitive statement of what God has called us to be; because this book tells us about what God purposed to accomplish through Christ. In it we learn that we, the church, are the product of God's eternal planning and he has made known to us his purpose for us.

When we become members of the church we enter a covenant with God to receive many wonderful blessings while we live in keeping with the Lord's will. We can't enjoy the wealth without walking the walk. This walk has at least four main aspects: unity, purity, harmony, victory.

Last week we learned that God wants us to walk in unity. We noticed that God wants us to hold fast to the principles that brought us together in unity and to build upon these principles to spiritual maturity, to a comprehensive knowledge of the truth, of the Lord and to a way of life modeled after the Lord.

So then we could say, we not only need to walk in unity but to **walk in purity**. When we become Christians, when we are baptized, we declare the death of the person we used to be and we are raised to walk in newness of life. **Our unity in Christ is based upon becoming like Christ!!** Therefore, we need then to **“put off the grave clothes and put on the grace clothes”**. In Ephesians Paul calls us to a distinctive moral life and grows out of a distinctive moral mindset! (Eph. 4:17-24)

The call to be a Christian changes our attitude toward life itself. The Christian is not to imitate the life of the unsaved people around him. Paul makes this clear by contrasting the way the unbeliever lives with the way the believer lives.

The pagan mindset

A. Their attitude

1. In the futility of their mind (vanity, lack of real purpose, going nowhere) Here is a person who thinks he knows everything; but really knows nothing about life. He doesn't really know the answers to the big questions.
2. Darkened in understanding (ironically professing to be wise they reject the real wisdom of God) In reality, the unsaved man has no real understanding of what is world is about nor what his own life is all about! If he doesn't understand God, he cannot understand himself!

What we end up with is "improved means to unimproved ends"! (Thoreau).

3. Hardened in heart (callous) The heart has become callous (under the power or domination of sin.) Have you ever heard the term "petrified"? A piece of soft wood can over time become rock. A man's heart can become like that. He can reach the point that he doesn't really care anymore about what is right any more. What is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after. - Ernest Hemingway

That's the way the people of Paul's world lived. And frankly, that's the way the people of our world live. "There is no such thing as absolute truth." In 1991 in a George Barna poll 66% of Americans agreed: 3/4's of 18-25 year olds, 59% of 55+ year olds.

B. The consequence

1. Given to sensuality (Cf. Gal. 5:19, wantonness) "vice that throws off all restraint and flaunts itself, "unawed by shame or fear, and without regard for self-respect, for the rights and feelings of others, or for public decency" (Bruce) to practice every kind of impurity with greediness. When a man walks in his own wisdom he lives a life of self-indulgence. He has little or no self-control.

2. Excluded from the life of God (the way, the truth, and the life all go together). To live in this attitude is to forfeit the richest blessings of life (the spiritual blessings found Christ). It is to viewed from God's standpoint as dead!

As Dorothy Sayers observed, "In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair ... the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die."

This is the work of the pagan lifestyle. It manifests itself in the "works of the flesh". (Gal. 5:19ff) Hearing Paul's words is just like reading yesterday's newspaper!

But let us not forget Paul's point. Paul did not rehearse the sins of the pagan world to make Christians feel a sense of self-righteousness and superiority; but to warn them lest their conviction be eroded by the world about them! Lest they deceive themselves into thinking that they could live this way too and still enjoy God's blessings.

The Christian mindset

A. His attitude

1. Not in the futility of the mind but with meaningful purpose; not in human wisdom but in the truth of divine revelation.

Notice Paul's stress upon education of the conscience. It is a matter of hearing and learning!

Consequently we experience “a renewing of the mind”, a new way of thinking.

2. Not darkened in understanding but learned in the truth in Christ. Christ's word is a revelation of himself. To know the word is to know Christ and to be able to put him on. Paul didn't speak about learning about Christ; but learning Christ. Again we see that becoming like Christ is the objective of our calling. Let the mind of the Master be the master of your mind

3. Not callous but sensitive in conscience (renewed in mind). We cannot allow ourselves to walk away from the word unchanged. If we do, our hearts are hardened. We are changed for the worse! We must let the word change our thinking (Prov. 23:7). If we neglect the revelation of God we neglect the only hope we have for spiritual power and growth. One just as well imagine growing without eating, as growing spiritually without studying and prayer over the word of God!

B. The consequence

Lay aside the old man, corrupted by the lust of deceit (deceitful desires).

Sin is deceitful. It promises more than it delivers. It takes you farther than you want to go (it enslaves). And its consequences are obscured.

"You will have fun". It initially offers pleasure but ends up giving pain. (Ask people with broken homes, dying of aids).

"You can quit any time"! It takes you farther than you want to go; it enslaves.

Have you ever thought about what sin might say if it was presented truthfully?

"Go ahead and go to bed with her. You will have surrendered your own self-respect, you will have tied your spirit to someone you do not love, you will regret that you did not save yourself for the one you marry, you will get aids or s.t.d. You may be infertile; you may even die."

Put on new self, created in righteousness and truth.

A fascinating parallel. In the original creation, God created man in his image. Now God has started a new humanity created after his likeness. We have been created (2:10) for good works (to bear his image).

Conclusion: What Paul makes clear in this text that there are two mindsets we may choose. One of them leads to futility, darkness, and death. The other leads to understanding, truth, and life.

To those of us who have made that choice to follow Christ, let us renew our commitment to keep the mindset that looks to the Lord for instruction. Let us “walk the walk” of a godly mindset.

If not, please don't live another day without the Lord. Every day you resist the teaching of God the harder your heart becomes and the harder it will be for you to come back to God. Don't let that happen to you. Come and enjoy the blessings he has prepared for you!