

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/15/91
Ephesians 4:17-21 "Living for God in an Ungodly World"

Intro (of service): Theme--Purity
Intro (of message):

Review:

Eph 1-3 Our Riches in Christ--What do we have in Christ? See 1:3
Eph 4-6 Our Responsibilities in Christ--What are we to do in Christ?

- 4:1 "Walk worthy. . ." How do we do that?
1. Walk in Unity (4:1-16)
 2. Walk in Purity (4:17-5:17)
 3. Walk under the control of the Holy Spirit (5:18-6:9)
 4. Walk on Guard against the Evil One (6:10-20)

Illust:

Key: As Christians, we are called to walk in Purity.
Our challenge is to live for God in a ungodly world. To be distinct, as salt and light in a decaying and deluded society. We are called to be a holy people (I Pt 1:15), peculiar people (I Pt 2:9), a separated people (II Cor 6:17), a pure people.

Some are wondering about 2 questions. . .

- Q: Why be pure? (this week--4:17-21)
Q: How can we be pure? (next week--4:22ff)

Q: If you are a Christian, why should you live a pure life?

Proposition: In Ephesians 4:17-21, Paul challenges us with 2 reasons we ought to live a life of purity.

- I. Be Pure because of what the World is like (17-19).
- A. Their Cognition (17)
 - B. Their Conscience (18a)
 - C. Their Condition (18b)
 - D. Their Conduct (19)
- II. Be Pure because of what Christ is like (20-21).

I. Be Pure because of what the World is like (17-19).

V 17 "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord that ye walk not. . ."

Paul is writing to Christians. Remember that. That's key. Why? Christians have the power to walk differently. Non-Christians don't. Why not? They are spiritually dead. They are enslaved by their sins. They are powerless to be different (see 2:1-3). Oh, the world may dress up the skeleton a little bit--they can give the old man money, and education, and train him in social etiquette. But there's one thing the world can't change for the old man. His deadness. He's still dead. Powerless to live and enjoy the life God intended.

Listen to some good news. If you are a Christian, if you have repented of your sins, and received Jesus Christ into your life, guess what? You have the power to walk differently. You have the potential to live a Christ-like life. It's there.

See Rom 6:11-13

"Walk not as the Gentiles"--Who are the Gentiles? In the strict sense, non-Jews (2:11-12). Here it's used in a more general sense, those who are not the people of God. Those who have not committed their lives to Jesus Christ. The world of unregenerate people.

"Henceforth"--No longer. The implication is clear. The Ephesians used to walk just like the Gentiles. Before they met Christ. But in Christ, everything changes! So Paul would say, "Don't walk like you used to, and like the world still does!"

Lest you think, "Well no one's going to tell me how to live. That's only Paul's opinion!" Look carefully at 2 phrases in v 17:

- "I say"
"I testify in the Lord"

The common mentality today is this--"You have your convictions. I have mine. Don't push your onto me, and I won't push mine onto you." Which being interpreted means, "Just because I'm a Christian doesn't mean I can't do whatever I want with my life. . ."

Is that true?

Paul testifies to the very will of the Lord for us when he says, "Don't walk like the Gentiles walk." Stated positively, "Be pure. Be pure because of what the world is like."

Q: What is the world like? How did unregenerate people in Ephesus live? How do unregenerate people in W'burg live?

A: Paul reveals 4 things about the world in vv 17-19.

Warning: I need to warn you of something. Before we even begin to dissect the next 3 verses, you need to know this. Vv 17-19 go against the grain of one of the most promoted teachings in our culture. Our culture says, "Man is basically good. The problem with man is his environment. If we could give Johnny more education, and more money, and provide him with a better job, and better social skills, we could eliminate the problems of society. Because man is basically and essentially and inherently good."

Is that true? Is man basically good? Is his main problem his environment? No. The Bible teaches his main problem is not external, but internal. His main problem is his heart. He is not basically good. He has a corrupt heart.

Illust:

Paul gives us a vivid description of the natural man, the world. 4 things have been tragically affected by their sin.

A. Their Cognition (17)

V 17b "in the vanity of their mind"

Q: What was it like to live in Ephesus?

A: To live in Ephesus was to live in a . . .

1. A great city

300,000 inhabitants, capital city of the Roman province of Asia; a great commercial center thanks to a large harbor

2. A Sports minded city

The seat of the Pan-Ionian Games. The whole country came to see these.

3. A grossly immoral city

The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis (Artemis and Diana were one and the same, the former the greek name, the latter Latin). This temple, already 400 years old in Paul's day, was one of the 7 Wonders of the World, 425' long by 220' wide by 60' feet high. In the sacred enclosure of the temple stood the image of Artemis, an image which the Ephesians said fell out of heaven. Artemis was a fertility goddess. And lest you think her shrine in the Temple was beautiful, it was not. It was a black, squat, ugly figure.

Because of Artemis, Ephesus was a grossly immoral city. Cultic prostitution was an important part of her worship. Hundreds of priestesses were available in the Temple to fulfill the base desires of the Ephesians.

4. A Crime-infested city

The Temple of Artemis possessed the right of asylum. That meant if a criminal could reach the Temple, he was safe. So criminals flocked to Ephesus, bringing with them their wicked trades and backgrounds.

People say, "It's tougher to live the Christian life today than ever before." I would question that. Ephesus was a sex-craved, crime-infested, sports-worshiping city. Yet what did Paul tell the Ephesian Christians? "Now I know you won't be able to do it, but try to be pure. . ." Did he say that? No! He said, "Don't walk as other Gentiles walk!"

Q: What's the first problem with unregenerate people in the world?

A: Their walk is affected by a vain mind.

V 17 "in the vanity of their mind"

Unsaved people have a problem with their Cognition. Notice Paul's emphasis on the "mind" here (vain minds, 17; darkened understanding, 18; ignorance, 18; blindness of heart, 18). The mind is key. Wild living begins with a wild mind. An unbridled lifestyle grows out of an unbridled mind.

Key: What you take into your mind through your eyegate and eargate will have direct bearing on your feelings and behavior.

The Gentiles walk in a godless way (17). Why? Because they have vain minds. But we're not to walk that way. We're to walk differently. And a new walk starts with a new mind.

Challenge: If you're a Christian, you have a responsibility to be discriminate about what you allow to occupy space in the braincells of you mind. Garbage in, garbage out. That goes for the music you listen to. The "entertainment" you watch. The books and magazines you read.

Illust: Prisoners guilty of rape. . . started with pornography

Q: Moms and dads, do you know what your children and teens are taking into their minds?

Illust: Comic book promoting homosexuality (McCleeses)

B. Their Conscience (18a)

V 18 "Having the understanding darkened"

Notice again the problem is with the mind. But the greek word is different--"understanding" = the part of man that thinks. Here it speaks of their intelligence. What's true of their intelligence?

"darkened"--What an irony! Unregenerate men today boast of their free-thinking, their openness of mind. They accuse us of being what? Narrowminded. But what does God's Word say? Their intelligence is darkened. They're living in the Dark Ages.

See II Cor 4:4

How can that be? Can't unsaved people have a lot of knowledge? Yes. Can't unregenerate people probe the intricacies of scientific knowledge? Yes. How then can Paul say their understanding is darkened?

It's because of their condition. . .

C. Their Condition (18b)

V 18b "being alienated from the life of God. . ."

Unregenerate men have access to lots of data. But they're not tuned into the One who can make sense of the data! They're "alienated" (separated). It starts with a vain cognition. Which proceeds to a darkened conscience. Which is linked to an alienated condition.

Illust: "Mind" problem today--humorous story about an executive that passed a mental hospital. . .

Unsaved people have a problem with their minds. The light of God's truth does not penetrate their minds. They have no place for God in their thought processes. So they suppress Him. They try to eliminate the very thought of God. They are alienated from the very "life of God". Why?

"ignorance"--which is the result of what?

"blindness of heart"--greek word "porosis"; referred to a substance harder than marble; medical writers used the word to refer to a calloused, bony formation on the joints. Hence the verb means "to petrify, or become hard".

Unregenerate people not only have blind hearts, but hard hearts too.

Eg: Mt 13 Parable of 4 Soils--Some fell on wayside

13:19 "When any one hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. . ."

Listen. It's only because of God's common grace that the world is not worse than it is. Would you like to know what hell will be like? God will remove His common grace and allow men who've rejected Him to experience the horrors they've pursued in their vain imaginations!

What's Paul saying? "Don't walk like the Gentiles."

Quote: MacArthur, "Our problem in America is not to get the world to live like Christians, but to get Christians to stop living like the world."

Illust:

D. Their Conduct (19)

V 19 "Who being past feeling. . . lasciviousness. . ."

Q: What's the connection between v 18 and v 19?

A: Vv 17-19 present a downward progression. Vain thinking leads to vain living. A sinful mind leads to a sinful life. Everytime. "As a man thinks in his heart, so. . ."

Having described the condition of lost man in v 18, Paul looks at his conduct in v 19. What happens when a person fills his/her mind with vain thinking (17)? What happens when a man's conscience is seared and calloused to the things of God (18)? That person becomes. . .

"past feeling"--the conscience is lost

And he "gives himself"--willingly sells himself to something. . .

"lasciviousness" = sensuality, indecency, vice; "unblushing obscenity"

Some people try to hide their sin. Not so the one who has given himself to "lasciviousness". That unregenerate man delights in committing unblushing obscenity. He couldn't care less who he shocks or embarrasses by his sensual, self-centered conduct. He's not in the least ashamed about parading his indecency in public. He's given himself over to it! (see Rom 1:18ff) In fact, notice what he does. . .

"to work all uncleanness with greediness"

The word "work" can mean "business". He makes a business out of uncleanness! Isn't that the way it is in our society? We tolerate everything (or we're accused of "censorship") and make a business out of it!

Eg: Movie industry, Magazine industry--multi-million dollar businesses that use unblushing obscenity to make a buck!

Eg: Rock singer that actually relieved himself on his audience!

*Paul's question: What part do we have as Christians associating with this?!

The world's cognition is vain. Not ours. Their conscience is seared. Not ours. Their condition is hardened to God. Not ours. Their conduct is lewd. Not ours.

Problem: All of us are concerned about the great behavioral problems in our society. Rise in teenage pregnancies. Substance abuse. Increase of crime Yet where did each of these tragic acts begin? In an unguarded mind!

Listen. Do you know what salvation is? Salvation is first of all a what? A change of mind (that's repentance). We think differently about God than we used to. About Christ. About our lives.

Illust:

Tran: That's the first reason we should be pure--because of what the world is like.

Q: Is there hope? Can a person get out of the vicious, downward cycle of vv 17-19?

A: Yes! V 20 Come to know Christ and the life He offers!

II. Be Pure because of what Christ is like (20-21).

V 20 "But ye have not so learned Christ."

Problem: There's a danger in some circles to misuse v 17. Some wellmeaning Christians read, "Walk not as Gentiles walk. . .", and use this verse to promote a legalistic approach to the Christian life. "Christians should be different in every way, in the way we dress, the way we wear our hair, etc"

But notice. Paul doesn't say, "Be different for the sake of being different." Rather he says, "Be like Christ and you will be different!"

"learned" -- noun form is the word "disciple"

Paul saying this, "I didn't disciple you to be like the world! I disciplined you to be like Christ!"

There's the key to discipleship. Paul didn't say, "You did not so learn ABOUT Christ." No. He taught them Christ, not about Christ. That's the goal of discipleship. Help people to get to know Christ better, to know His words,

His expectations. Why? The Christian life is a life that revolves around Jesus Christ.

Q: Does your life?

Q: Do you believe in separation?

A: Depends what you mean by the word! If you mean that we are to disassociate ourselves from lost people, NO. That's impossible. In fact, we're called to take the hope of Christ to lost people! If you mean we are to separate ourselves from sin, and from worldliness, yes.

Quote: Our relationship to the world is like a boat's relationship to water. You're OK until the water gets into the boat!

Conclusion: Be pure. Why? Because of what the world is like. And because of what Christ is like.

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