

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Off with the Old, On with the New, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-20

Code: 1928

Take your Bible, will you, with me, and let's look at the 4th chapter of Ephesians together, verses 17 through 24, our text for our study this morning. Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 17. I want to read the scripture to you, and then we'll, after having given you the setting, begin to talk about it, and see what God will say to us in it this morning. Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 17, the apostle Paul says, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

"But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former manner of life the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." And we'll stop there. When you receive Jesus Christ, when you are born again, when you enter into God's kingdom a tremendous change takes place in your basic nature. You are a totally different individual. In fact, the change that occurred when you were saved is more dramatic than the change that will occur when you die, because your new nature has already been created.

The new you has already been made. You are already fitted for heaven. You are already a citizen of God's kingdom. All death does is free up that new nature to enter into the presence of God. The greatest change has already happened, when you were saved, and everything is new. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." Now note it: he is a new creation. He doesn't receive something new; he is new. "Old things have passed away; all things have become new." There is a new creation. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." It's a new I, only it's not I – the life which I now live is the life of Christ living in me. Now I want you to keep focused on that thought; it's a new you, it's a new I, it's a new creation.

As you study the epistles of Paul, you find that he talks about a new will, a new mind, a new heart, a new power, a new knowledge, a new wisdom, a new perception, a new understanding, a new life, a new inheritance, a new relationship, a new righteousness, a new love, a new desire, a new citizenship, et cetera. In fact, summing it all up, the Bible says it is newness of life – newness of life. Now, I've heard a lot of people teach that when you become a Christian, God gives you something new. You still have your old nature, your old sin nature is still there and so forth, but God gives you

something new. According to the Word of God you are new; it isn't just a matter of addition, it is a matter of transformation. Do you understand the difference?

It is a renewed you, it is "I am crucified with Christ." The old "I" goes out of existence. "Nevertheless I live" – risen again – "but it is not I that lives, but it is Christ living in me." "Yet not I," says Paul, "but Christ liveth in me." Listen people, you need to grab this at the very beginning of our thoughts this morning. You are a new you. You say, "Well if I'm such a new me, how come I sin?" 'Cause you are a new you in a smelly old coat, and that coat is the flesh, that's your humanness. That's why in Romans 7:17, and Romans 7:20, Paul says, "It is sin that is in me. And again in 20, "It is sin that is in me." In other words, when I sin, it isn't my new nature sinning.

Now, this may be new to you, so hang on. "It is no more I that do it," he says. It's not that resurrected I, it's not that new nature that sins. And by the way, there is no old nature; that's a term foreign to Scripture, there's the old man. But the old is gone, you're new. But it is not the new I that sins; he says, "it is sin that dwelleth in me." In other words, it's that smelly coat of humanness that that new nature has to endure until it goes to be with the Lord. So what you need to deal with as a Christian is that smelly old coat; you need to get it off. That's why Peter uses the verb strip off, which means to take off dirty clothes and throw them, in 1 Peter 2. Get rid of that stuff.

We are not a remodel job, I want you to know that; and we are not just something to which something was added. I don't believe that a Christian has two natures. I think a Christian has one new nature. I dies, ego dies; I lives, so that Christian is a single new man, a total new creature, a new living I. But sin is a problem because he's got a smelly old coat of humanness on him. And what the Bible approaches is the fact that we need to begin to throw that old smelly stuff off. The new man is a new kind of human behavior, and we are to put on a new man – that is, a new humanness – to accommodate, and fit, and go with the new nature. But most of us have to fight to get rid of that old stuff.

In Colossians, chapter 3, the apostle Paul says that "if we have been risen with Christ" – in other words, the old I died and the new I rose. If we are a transformed, brand new nature, risen with Christ, then certainly we better, "Kill the members on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, covetousness," et cetera. In other words, you've got to get rid of the stinky old coat. When I went down to the Union Rescue Mission years ago and I preached down there, they showed me the de-licing room, where they go in there and de-lice. And they've got a whole bunch of those things on them, and it's quite a job, and they burn their clothes. It wouldn't do a bit of good to de-lice a guy and then put him back in his old bum clothes. Nobody'd believe he'd had a bath.

Got to get a new garment for a new man; and the same thing is true in the spiritual. As we have a new nature, as we have been recreated in Jesus Christ, as we have been made new, as we have been transformed, so that we now, right now, this moment, are ready for eternal heaven – our nature

is ready – then we need to chuck the old patterns, the old things, the old practices, the old life that hangs on us. Christ is formed in us. Paul even said that; he said, “O, I have birth pains until Christ is formed in you,” Galatians 4:19. It is the very life of Christ in us, and we are, it says in Ephesians 2, “created in Christ Jesus.” But the struggle is with that sin, that coat of sin that is our humanness.

Now, Paul is going to attack that very issue right here. He’s going to tell us, from chapter 4, verse 17, to the end of this book, how to get rid of that old coat, how to chuck that old stuff, how to accommodate a new suit for the new man. That’s his whole point. We have learned what the new man is in the first three chapters, right? Now we’re going to learn how the new man lives in the last three. He talked about the new nature and all that was involved in chapters 1 to 3, and now the new clothes, the new man, putting on the new man, putting off the old external, the old outside, the old man. It’s kind of like Romans 6:13.

If it’s true that we have risen with Christ, if it’s true that we’re brand new and transformed, then we should “never yield our instruments as instruments of unrighteousness, but we should yield our members as instruments of God.” The reason the Bible is so full of the word “therefore” is because it is incumbent upon us to behave in accord with who we are. That’s why the Bible is loaded with “therefores” and “wherefores.” In fact, chapter 4 would be a good illustration; verse 1 has a therefore, verse 17 has a therefore, verse 25 has a wherefore, chapter 5 has a therefore. And the whole of the Christian life is a pile of “therefores” and “wherefores” – why? Because it is demanding from us a response of obedience to the identity that God has given us in Christ.

Now, we’re going to look at how the new nature functions in behavior in the new man. That’s our thought as we examine this text. Now, I want you to go back to verse 1, so we can really pick up the context. Chapter 4, verse 1: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy” – now we can stop there for a moment. All right, that’s the whole thrust of 4, 5, and 6, the worthy walk. “I beseech you that you walk worthy.” Worthy of what? “The vocation to which you’re called,” the new nature, the identity that was delineated in chapter 1, 2, and 3. “Walk worthy.” Now, how is that going to work? How do we walk worthy? Jump to verse 17. Here’s the first way: “I say therefore, testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk.”

Now, here’s the first thing he really has to say directly about walking worthy. It is a different walk. We are to live different than the world lives. Now, there is some debate about whether the phrase, “other Gentiles walk,” is in or out in certain manuscripts, and for our sake we’ll include it, because it’s implied if it isn’t in, and I lean to the fact that’s it’s probably in the text anyway. But the point is the idea here is that we are to walk worthy, verse 1. And then he gives that wonderful interlude in verses 2 to 16 about unity, and spiritual maturity, and growth as a sort of a composite of the church. In other words, he’s talked in generalities about how the church is to function, and now he gets specific. Now here, you, as a believer, face the fact of what He wants you to do.

How am I to walk worthy? First, walking not as other Gentiles walk. Now, the “therefore,” then, I think picks up all of verse 1 to 16. It’s a debate about what the “therefore” applies to; I think it applies to the whole thing, because of the vocation to which you’re called, because it is humility that God is after, and meekness, and lowliness of mind. Because of the truth that we are one in every way, because the Lord Jesus Christ has gifted us uniquely as members of His body, because He has given to the church the principle of maturity, and growth, and edification, and speaking the truth in love. Because of all of these things, therefore you are to walk.

It’s as if he’s saying God has created a marvelous entity in the world known as the church, and because of this unique creation, with a unique lifestyle of humility, with a unique unity, with a unique empowerment by gifts and gifted men, with a unique destiny of being edified in love, because of the marvelous uniqueness of this miracle creation called the church, this is how you are to walk. You see the totality of what the church is designed to be – now here, you as an individual are to behave in this manner. So he moves from the general to the specific. You say, “All right, I’m a part of this church. I know the gifted men are to do what they’re to do and perfect the saints, and the saints do the work of the ministry. I know You’ve given me spiritual gifts. I know I’m to know this unity and this oneness. I know I’m to be humble and meek. Now how do I work it out in my daily life? How do I live it in the world?

Principle number one: you don’t walk like the rest of the world walks. It’s a different life, it’s unique. You are a unique group. You are the church of Jesus Christ. The world is proud, you’re humble. The world is fragmented, you’re united. The world is impotent, you’re gifted. The world is hateful, you’re full of love. The world doesn’t know the truth, you do. Because of all these things, and because of the design of your uniqueness, this is how you walk, different; different than the world walks. You cannot accomplish the glorious goals of Christ by living the way the world lives. You know, living like the world lives would be imitating the dead. It doesn’t make a lot of sense, not much point.

You see, Christianity – and I think it’s important to realize this – is like a third race. There were Jews and Gentiles, and now there are Christians. We have a new seed, a spiritual seed, an incorruptible seed, and we’ve got to have a corresponding lifestyle. We are new creations, we are already suited for an eternal existence, we are already righteous and holy in terms of that new nature, and we might as well throw off that old smelly lifestyle. And yet, isn’t it tragic that instead of the church conforming the world to the principles of Christ, the world winds up shoving us into its own mold? The word Gentiles – look at it for a moment in verse 17 – *ethnos*.

We get the word “ethnic” from it; it is a word that means nations, peoples, heathen, pagans, sometimes translated, or Gentiles. It is simply an ethnic term, and it is used in the New Testament, when it is used in terms of races, to speak of non-Jews, and that is its nationalistic meaning. But further than that, it has a religious meaning, and if you want to know what the religious meaning, is

you need only to look at 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, and verse 5, because it says there this – 1 Thessalonians 4:5: “Not in the lust of evil desire, as the *ethnos* who know not God.” On the one hand, then, *ethnos*, or Gentile, refers to an ethnic group of non-Jews racially. On the other hand, religiously it speaks of people who know not whom? God – God, who know not God.

So the point is you do not walk – and walk, by the way, speaks of daily manner of life – you do not live your daily manner of life like people who don’t know God. It’s that simple; you know God. The believers in the ancient world found that difficult. The pagan life all around them; and the deeds of the pagans were constantly in front of them, and it was very difficult to live a different life, just as it is today. We have a terrible problem in our own age. The church in America, the church around the world today, but particularly in America, because of its affluence and because of its media inundation of evil, constantly has a difficult time affecting the world.

You know, our problem isn’t getting the world to live like Christians; our problem is getting Christians to stop living like the world. That’s the real issue; very difficult because of the tremendous impact of our society. Let me just tell you about Ephesus a little bit, and you can draw some parallels to our own day. Ephesus was one of the most dissolute and evil of all the cities; in fact some felt it was the evil city of all in Asia Minor. It was really a religious center. There were multiple temples, and idols, and all of that kind of thing, but it was particularly focused on the temple of Diana – Diana, and another name for Diana is Artemis.

And by the way, if you’re thinking of some beautiful looking thing, of course we’ve told you before Artemis was a big, black, ugly thing, that looked like something between a cow and a wolf – horrible looking thing. It supposedly fell out of heaven, and so they worshiped this big black thing. But the temple of Diana was the 7th wonder of the world; it was an art museum with few equals. They had their collections of great works of art. It was an asylum for criminals. One quarter mile around the circumference of the temple of Diana was king’s x for any criminal, so you can imagine the crowd they collected there. It was the greatest bank in the world.

A sacred temple like this was a good place for a bank, because in those days, security was very difficult to come by. The locks were very primitive, et cetera, et cetera, and the best place to put a bank was in the middle of a temple, because people would be fearful to get in there and do anything because of the reprisal of the gods, which they lived in fear of. So they made temples into banks, so it was a place where there was a lot of money. It was a business also. Pilgrims, by the thousands, came to this place, and the worship that went on there was orgiastic, and so it was very popular. All you have to do is invent a religion where sex is the key thing, and you’ll have a whole bunch of people signing up right on the dotted line to get involved, and that’s exactly what they did.

It was a big business, and of course they sold these little idols. You remember about the revolt of the silversmiths – the terrible riots that broke out when they ruined the business there. The apostles came

in and shut down all the business, people couldn't sell their little gods, had a problem. They used to take their gods and they used to place them in their homes, these little things. And they also, interestingly enough, I read they hung them around their necks; religious jewelry around their wrists, around their ankles, and they put them on the front of their chariot. I don't know if they had a dashboard on their chariot, but that's the idea. So it was a big business.

The goddess of Ephesus, Diana, was worshiped as a sex goddess. The place was packed with eunuchs, who were made eunuchs in order to accommodate that kind of activity, and there were thousands of priestesses and temple prostitutes, singers, dancers, and a whole great big orgy occurred. One writer says the worship was a kind of hysteria, where the people with shouts and music worked themselves into frenzies of shameless sexual activity, including mutilation, self-mutilation. Heraclitus said the temple was, quote, "The darkness of vileness. The morals were lower than animals, and the inhabitants of Ephesus were fit only to be drowned," end quote. Some kind of place.

The little church in Ephesus was an island in a cesspool. It was a vile, sinful world for those early Christians to live in, and so the apostle Paul says to them right off the bat in verse 17, "You've got to be different. You've got to be different. You can't walk like they walk; you can't do what they do." Living the new life is tough, but living the new life is necessary. You've got to put off that old man, that old lifestyle. By the way, they took good people and fed them to hungry animals, apparently. Starved lions, starved wolves, starved dogs, they'd throw good people to them. Do you remember Paul himself even said that he had to fight beasts at Ephesus? That was really a bad place, and here were the believers there, and Paul says, "You've got to be different.

"Don't get sucked into this immorality; don't get sucked into this old pagan lifestyle." Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter, chapter 4, and verse 3, great word he says: "For the time past of our life may suffice us." In other words, look, the past life is enough of that stuff, that's sufficient. "We wrought the will of the pagans," the *ethnos*. "We walked in lasciviousness, in lusts, excess of wine, wild parties, carousing, abominable idolatries." And he says, "We did that, but the time past of our life should suffice for that stuff." That's over, that's over. On the basis of all of this, and of what we are in Christ, of all that God has purposed, and all that God has designed, and all that God has desired of the believer and the body, we are to be unique. We are to be different, not like the rest of the world.

John said this in 1 John 2:15: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For the world passeth away, and the lust of it" – it's a fading thing, it's going to self-destruct; we have no part with that. Society is hostile to godliness because it is dominated by carnal ambition, it is dominated by pride, it is dominated by selfishness, it is dominated by greed, and lust, and desire for evil. Its opinions are wrong, its aims are selfish, its pleasures are sinful, its influence is destructive, its politics are corrupt, its honors are empty, its smiles are phony, and its love is fickle. We have no part with that. We're different; we don't live that way, not like society lives.

And by the way, if you think this is just Paul talking, look at verse 17: "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord." "By the way," he says, "I'm passing on this information from the Lord. I testify in the Lord, He is speaking. This is the divine lifestyle. This is God's standard, not mine. This is His, basic for the believer." Now, having introduced that verse, we're going to see a contrast here, in verses 17 through 24, between the old walk and the new walk, the old man or lifestyle and the new man or lifestyle. First, the old walk, and he gives four characteristics, and then next week we'll go to the new walk, four corresponding characteristics; they are contrasting characteristics.

Verses 17 to 19 is the old walk. And by the way, as I finished all of this, and I began to read it over again – I had all my thoughts ready, my notes all taken, and something struck me. I read through the passage, and I was struck with the fact that the issue here is the mind. And I had never really keyed in on that, although it was there – that the whole issue here, frankly, people, is how you think. Look, for example, at verse 17; it ends with "the mind." Verse 18 begins, "the understanding;" verse 18 also talks about ignorance. Then as you come down to verse 20, you have the word "learned," and in verse 21, you have the word "taught," and in verse 23, the word "mind" again.

In other words, this whole thing of learning, and teaching, and mind, and knowing, as opposed to ignorance – the mind is the issue. The point being this – now, here's the key: Christians think different than pagans, "and as a man thinketh in his heart" – what's the rest – "so is he." So is he. We've got to think different, and when we think different we will act different. Salvation, beloved – and I just remind you of this – salvation first of all is a change of mind. It is a change of mind; it is a new thinking process. Unsaved people can't think right. Salvation is a change of mind, a new thinking process. He says it in verse 20: "You have not so learned Christ." And we have told you enough about that so you understand that Christianity is cognitive before it's experiential.

It is a thinking that draws us to God. We think different about our sin than we used to think, we think different about God than we used to think, we think different about Christ than we used to think, we think different about what we ought to do with our life than we used to think, and a new thinking process brings us to salvation, and salvation is a change of mind. That's really what the word repentance means, to change your mind; new thinking process. So the pagan thinks one way, and we think another way. Now, how does a pagan think? Well, he's got some problems. He shows us four elements of pagan thinking.

First is self-centeredness, and you could also call it useless thinking, but let's call it self-centered. Verse 17 says: "That you not walk as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind." Their mind is the big deal; their thinking, their desires, their whims. In other words, they chase the bubbles that they blow. They run in the circle they made. They sleep in the bed of their own device. Their mind is everything. I tell you, this is a great cover-all for the whole area of human opinion: "Well, I think," "Well, it's my opinion," "Well, I." Whatever you think, whatever you want, that's what governs your

behavior.

In the second chapter of Ephesians, almost the same thing is said when it says, in verse 3, that the unbelieving people have their manner of life in the lusts of the flesh, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the” – what – “mind.” They function based on their own mind. But he says here their self-centeredness is vanity. Now, vanity is not like we think of it – we think of vanity as, you know, fixing your hair, because they have little things called a vanity. But vanity is an interesting word in the Greek, *mataiots*, and it means that which is empty, futile, useless, vain. It’s useless is the best word for it. Pagan thinking is useless. Do you know why? It goes nowhere, it accomplishes nothing, it performs nothing, it gains nothing, it is useless.

I think of Edna St. Vincent Millay who said, “Life must go on. I just forget why.” Or the main character in *After The Fall*, where the wife says to Quentin, “Life isn’t worth living. It’s deteriorated to how many miles we get on our Volkswagen.” It’s futile. The whole of the pagan man’s life – have you ever noticed this – is bound up in a constant thinking and acting in an area of trivia. Nothing ever really matters. And they consume themselves to buy stuff that ends up on the junk pile. It’s trivia, it’s useless, it’s futile, chasing bubbles and shadows, and never knowing the reality. Everything in the life of the old unregenerate life is – it’s empty, it’s useless, there’s really nothing there at all.

In Romans 8:20, Paul says, “For the creation was made subject to uselessness.” The whole thing is just subject to uselessness. Nothing matters. You get up every day, and look in the mirror, and repair whatever is reparable, off you go, do your routine, come back, the same thing, same thing, same thing, day after day after day. As G.B. Hardy says, until you finally have your candle blown out, and it’s boxing day, and they put you in the pine box, and you’re gone, and that’s it. Useless – for what purpose? A perfect illustration of this can be seen in the book of Ecclesiastes. The wisest man, the richest man, the man with the most women, the man with the most prestige, sums it all up and opens up his book this way, “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.”

He closes the second chapter of his book, “Everything is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Nothing means anything to me. Shakespeare put it this way: “Life is full of sound and fury, signifying” – what – “nothing” – nothing. The best man can do is entertain himself with his toys, and they don’t mean anything – they don’t mean anything. Never ceases to amaze me how people will blow their money, blow their bodies, blow their minds, and sometimes blow their head off, trying to find something that’s never, ever, ever there. He says their thinking is empty, useless; goes nowhere, produces nothing. And it’s, in other words, what Jesus said: “Without me, ye can do” – what – “nothing” – nothing.

There’s a second thing that characterizes a pagan lifestyle and the old man. Not only do they function in their own heads, doing their own thing that they dream up – and by the way, that’s in contrast to us, isn’t it? We function in response to God’s thinking, and His will, and His purposes, and there’s purpose and meaning. But the second thing is they’re ignorant of the truth; not only self-centered and

empty, but ignorant of the truth. Look at verse 18: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Not only are they self-centered and useless, but they are ignorant.

Now, you know you can't really face people in our world who don't know Christ and tell them they're ignorant as a general rule, because we're such an educated society that people take that as an insult. And no society in history has ever been much more educated than we have. But we're drowning in college graduates; we don't even know what to do with them all. We've got all kinds of people with quote, unquote, education. But as the apostle Paul said, they are “ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Men have a natural inability to understand the things of God; they just can't. They have a useless mind, and a useless mind can't gain truth. In Romans 1:21, it says they have “vain imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” And “they thought they were wise, but they were fools,” see.

So men in the world without God are not only self-centered and useless in their thinking, but they are ignorant. By the way, the word darkened here is a most interesting perfect participle. “Having the understanding darkened,” a perfect participle, it simply means to make blind. And a perfect participle means something that happened in the past with always continuing results. So they were darkened in their blindness and ignorance, and it's been that way all since. It's a continuing problem. But there's a kind of a pall that hangs over this verse that I want to point out to you. It's kind of a circular picture: they have their understanding darkened. Well, when did that happen? When did they get it darkened with continuing result?

Oh – it's almost the feeling of judicial acting of God; it's almost as if God did it. It's almost as if God is the acting subject, acting on them. I think that's true. Why? Being alienated from the life of God, they were cut off from God's life, “ignorant in their hearts, and blind” – and a better word is hardness of heart. Now watch – because man willfully is alienated from God, willfully ignorant, and willfully hardens his heart, he gets his understanding darkened judicially by a sovereign God. In other words, it's God affirming forever the choice that man makes. It's a serious thing. It is judicial blindness, enacted upon one who willfully chooses to live without God.

It's kind of illustrated with Pharaoh; you read in the story of the Exodus. And Pharaoh hardened his heart, and Pharaoh hardened his heart, and Pharaoh hardened his heart, and all of a sudden, like a thunderbolt, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. If you choose a certain lifestyle and are confirmed in that lifestyle, God judicially and sovereignly acts to keep that lifestyle a permanent thing; the perfect participle, blinded with permanent results. It's serious. Look again at verse 18; the problem is that this is an individual alienated from the life of God. God is the truth; Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And if you are alienated from God, you can't know the truth. You can't know it because you're dead to God's dimension; you're like a corpse.

A corpse doesn't hear a conversation in a mortuary, nor does a spiritually dead individual hear God. That's something you can't comprehend – there's just no connection in those dimensions. And so it is that being alienated from the life of God, there's no life of God in them. And in their deadness, they are ignorant, and they pursue it, and they get harder, and harder, and harder, and then they have their understanding darkened. This is Romans 1 – what happened in Romans 1? “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. And thinking themselves to be wise, they were fools.”

And then it says, “And God gave them over” – God gave them over, and God gave them up. In other words, they chose the way to go, and God confirmed them in the choice. God, judicially acting upon those who choose to live a life alienated from Him.

There is a thought, too, at the end of verse 18; the word blindness is an interesting word, *prsis*. And it was used in medical terms for the kind of callus that forms around a broken bone, which is harder than the bone itself. It has reference to something that is hard, paralyzing. It is even also used in some extra-biblical medical source to refer to the kind of thing that forms in joints, like calcium forms, so that the joint ceases to function. It is an interruptive kind of hardening; it is a negative kind of hardening. That's what a pagan man's life is like, it's just like he just every time he acts against God, every time he takes another step of willful rejection, he pours more concrete into the hardening of his heart.

The process is obvious. It's a petrifying effect, a man's sin, a woman's sins, and they face guilt. Like LeRoy Aden of Chicago University says, we try to keep our lions in cardboard boxes. And when we sin, we know it's the lion there, but we've got to do more than keep it in a cardboard box, because it's right there on the surface, and it's going to burst out and consume us. So we begin to build a better box, and by psychological game-playing, or by rationalization, or by self-justification, or by transferring the blame, or by denying sin, or by eliminating morality altogether, one way or another, we try to get rid of the lion of guilt. And the more we do it, and the more we do it, and the more we do it, the less remorse we feel, and the less guilt we feel, and finally real guilt is pushed so far down it isn't felt at all.

And the Bible says our conscience becomes seared, as with a hot iron, and there is a petrified heart that is insensitive, and when it gets to that point, then it says their understanding is darkened. Judicially, God moves in, in response to a constant act of the will. And you can see this distinction clearly by looking at John, for example, chapter 12, verse 37, and you'll see him quoting from the record of Isaiah in verse 37, John 12: “Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.” They had sufficient information, but they chose to be alienated from the life of God, they chose to be ignorant, they chose to petrify their hearts with constant rejection.

“That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘Lord, who hath believed our report? To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ Therefore, they could not believe.” Did you see that? In verse 37, they would not believe; in verse 39, “they” – what – “could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, ‘He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.’” Listen, Satan knows that Christianity and the truth of God is an issue of the mind; he knows it’s the mind, it’s the thinking.

And so in 2 Corinthians 4, it says, “The god of this world has blinded the” – what – “the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.” Satan blinds the mind, and as man goes on willfully acquiescing to the activity of Satan, he gets to the place where God blinds his mind. That becomes the permanent state of having the understanding darkened. You wonder why people in our society don’t ever seem to get the message; in many cases they’ve got a petrified heart. Well, they are not only ignorant, and self-centered, and useless in their thinking, but there’s a third characteristic, and this one we could talk about a lot, but it doesn’t really need it. It’s simple enough you can fill in the illustrations.

They are shameless. One thing about pagans, when they continue in sin, and they turn themselves off from the life of God, they will become shameless. Verse 19: “Who being past feeling” – let me stop right there, past feeling. They just don’t feel anymore – apathetic, insensitive, they don’t care. There are no standards. They don’t care what the consequences are. They don’t mind shocking people. Their whole processes of thought are just destroyed. According to an old story, a Spartan youth stole a fox, ran into the man who owned the fox, and didn’t want to betray that he’d stolen the little fox. So he had the little fox under his tunic, and he stood without moving a muscle while the fox tore out his vital organs.

Our society is so smug, and it stands there with all of its sin while it just eats it out; but it’s so good at wearing the mask for so long that pretty soon, it just doesn’t care anymore, and there’s nothing more to hide, and off comes the tunic, and who cares? Shameless, past feeling. They don’t even feel anything. You get so petrified that you just – you don’t even feel it anymore; the conscience is seared. What kind of a life is this? Self-centered and useless, ignorant of the truth, so it just plays with error, shameless, so there’s no morality, there’s no code, there’s no ethics, there’s no standards, nothing – which finally results in what we could call, borrowing a term from Romans 1, a reprobate mind.

That’s the fourth point, a reprobate mind. The end of verse 19: “They have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” Shameless thinking, people, leads to shameless action. First of all, center on yourself, that’s where it starts, pagan centers on himself; all his own things, his own attitude. Centering on himself, in his useless, purposeless, pointless existence, he turns God off, and then he begins the hardening process that hardens him against God, and pretty soon he has no sense of shame. He’ll say anything, do anything he can get away with; the

only ethic becomes, can you get away with it? And then he literally is given over to a reprobate mind.

He gives himself to lasciviousness, and he works all uncleanness with greediness. He can't get at it fast enough. He's greedy to do evil. Now, let me tell you a little about the word here, lasciviousness, *aselgeia*, a familiar word in the New Testament. It means shameless wantonness. It means unblushing obscenity, its primary reference being with sexual obscenities. Basil defined it as, quote, "A disposition of the soul incapable of bearing the pain of discipline," end quote. It is an undisciplined obscenity. You know, the bad man some time in his life tries to hide his badness, but the man who has *aselgeia* couldn't care less who he shocks, couldn't care less how indecent he is, as long as he gratifies his own sick, warped mind.

Do you know what a reprobate mind is? Romans 1, a reprobate mind is a mind that is no mind. It is a mind that does not think. It is a mind that is no mind at all. It cannot reason, it cannot produce logic, it cannot receive the truth; it is no mind at all. It is the kind of mind we see in our world today. It is a blown mind. You know you hear about like the other day this fella from The Who named Moon, who is dead in his thirties. You read about Janis Joplin, you read about Jimi Hendrix, these rock people who died so early, with the total destruction of their own body, their own mind. They were so incoherent you could hardly hold a conversation with them – why? They had given themselves over – now, I want you to note this – to a kind of mind that is no mind at all.

You wonder why, in our society, you have so much mental illness? Because we have so much unblushing obscenity; it's a destroying thing. Whenever I think about this in an illustration that people can grab, I always think about rock singers, the incredible, unblushing obscenities. One very well-known one, who relieves himself on his audience; he's not the only, there are several. Unblushing, incredible, indecent obscenity – a person becomes a beast, a mind that is no mind. That's what was going on in Ephesus. That's what's going on in our world. What part in that do we have? What part do we have in listening to those people? What part do we have in accommodating that society? What part do we have in any of this?

What identification do we have with reprobate minds? People who have given themselves up, and God has given them up. You say, "Where does homosexuality come from, and where does lesbianism come from, and where does this kind of orgiastic sexual attraction come from, and where does all of the obscenities of this rock music scene come from, and where do all the evils of our society come from? Isn't there something heredity, isn't there some weakness, isn't this a psychological problem?" I'll tell you what it is, it's as clear as it could be; it tells you what it is right here, verse 19: They have given themselves over to it. It isn't psychological, it isn't sociological, it is personal, and here's the whole point: you choose to make a choice.

You choose to do something evil, and you choose it again, and you choose it again, and you choose it again, and you keep doing that, and you keep pressing the guilt down. You petrify yourself in the

choice, you become unblushing in your commitment to obscenity, and you have a mind that no longer can be a mind for you. It is incapable of thinking. Sinclair Lewis, who wrote against Christianity, and blasted Jesus Christ in the book *Elmer Gantry*, was hailed as a great literary genius. Few people know that he died a slobbering alcoholic in a third rate clinic outside of Rome, with a reprobate mind that was no mind at all. Listen, you choose to drink, and take another drink, and another drink, and another drink, and another drink.

You just keep giving yourself over, and over, and over, to lasciviousness, and your unblushing obscenity, that allows you to do that without fear of shocking anybody, could care less how indecent it is, and that kind of behavior, and pretty soon you have a mind that can't think. Do the same thing with homosexuality, lesbianism, sexual activity, lying, cheating, stealing – anything becomes a way of life to which you commit yourself. By the way, he adds this statement that's interesting: "to work all uncleanness with greediness." The word work is very interesting. *Ergasia* is a word that means business. It can mean actually business. They make a business out of uncleanness.

Now, that's true of our society, you know that? There was a day when dirty business was sort of on the cuff, right? It was sort of hidden, up your sleeve. You know, you had to sneak around a little bit to find the dirty business. Nowadays, it's wholesale. They make a business out of it. We've got it all – filthy dirty movies, and even the quote, unquote, good movies, many of them, imply a filthy thing, implicit rather than explicit, or by innuendo, an evil thing. And so it's a matter of business, filthy books produced constantly, just never-ending. Billy Graham said one time that the books published in America rival the drippings from a broken sewer. Pimps, prostitutes, bars, et cetera – big, big, big business – big business.

Beloved, what part do we have with that; what part do we have with that? They do it with greediness; the Greek word means an unlawful desire for things that belong to others. They're after you. They're after the purity that belongs to you, the sanity that belongs to you, the money that belongs to you, the morality that belongs to you, the character that belongs to you – they want it all. They want it all. What do we have to do with that stuff? Paul looks at the pagan, evil world, and he sees its terrible, self-centered, purposeless, fantasizing, useless thinking, that leads to a darkened understanding and a hard heart, which leads to an insensitivity to any sin, and a shamelessness, which leads to unblushing obscenity.

We tolerate everything, and we make a business out of it to capture people. And he says – I love this – verse 20, look at it: "But you have not so learned Christ." What part do you have in that? Put that smelly, stinking old man off; you don't have any part in that. See verse 22: "Put off concerning the former manner of life the old man." Verse 24: "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." You don't have any part in that stuff; you're different, you're new. You see the whole point of what he's saying. Beloved, you know people say, "Well, you know, it's kind of borderline; should I or shouldn't I do this, I don't really" – listen, you shouldn't even be messing

around on the border. You know, we ought to be so far away from that stuff that we are a light on a hill, right – that we are apart from that.

That's not our life; we have no part with that. And as I said, the tough thing that Christianity faces today is that, you know, we like to play around on the edges with the world. I'm not going to tell you what you can't do and what you can do, but I'll tell you one thing, the Word of God doesn't make specifics. It just tells you to get so far away that nobody will ever, for one moment, miss the point that you're different. You're different, that's the issue. The world has its businesses to sell its product; we don't shop there, we're different. A city that's set on a hill can't be hid. We crawl down with the rest of them, they don't see us, and we've got to stand as light and salt. If we're corrupted by the system, it's useless. Let God speak to your heart.

But I believe for me, I got to be as far away from that stuff as I can possibly be, as far away. As different – I don't want to be odd in my personality, or unloving, or accepting. I just want to be different, unique, and set apart. People say to me sometimes, "Do you believe in separation?" I say, "If you're talking about marriage, no; if you're talking about the world, yes." But I'm not – I don't believe that we should just stand here and say, "Well, you can do this, you can't do this," so forth, make little lists, pretty tough to do, you know. I know a preacher who used to go around and check out all the movies, so he could tell his people which ones they could see and couldn't see. Let's just covenant in our hearts, people, that our blessed Lord Jesus Christ purchased us at the cost of His own blood, right?

Gave us a new nature, which is holy, and undefiled, and sanctified forever, and then He simply says, "Would you live up to that? Would you throw off the old life, and live the new life?" Let's just cut the connections, and let's be so different that we don't even play on the borderline. Let's pray. Next week, Father, we're anxious to see the other side, right thinking, holy thinking made possible by Your Spirit. But thank You for giving us, even though this is a sordid picture, a contrast, because we need that to know what You want of us.

Father, there may be some in our midst this morning who've never given their life to Jesus Christ. They don't know Christ, and so they don't know what it is to have a new nature. They don't know what it is to live a new life, to walk a new walk, to put on a new man, a new lifestyle. Lord, I pray that today would be the day they would open their heart to You. Today would be the day that Your Holy Spirit would convict their lives and draw them to Yourself, before their constant willful choice against You becomes a judicial choice, confirmed forever.

I think of the words of Jesus, who preceded the passage from Isaiah by saying, "You just have the light for a little while, and you'd better respond while the light is here." And Lord, for Christians, for me and for everybody else that knows You and loves You, help us, Father, to cut ourselves off from the things of this life, the things of this world; to put off the smelly old coat of the old former life, and to

adorn the new nature with a new man. And Lord, we do pray that we might so live to bring You praise, in Jesus' name; amen.

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