

"The Life of the Mind" Ephesians 4:17-24

Introduction

- CECL conference where I had the opportunity to take assessment of my life, of ministry here, of my family. CECL is about change in the pastor's life. Deep change. I am excited about CECL because I know the pastor I will become through this process of deep change.
- But how does change come about? How do we become people we are called to be? How do we become holy? How do we please God with our lives? As we sit here this morning, if we were to change anything at all about ourselves, what would it be? Scripture teaches us that deep change, ultimately, can only come about if it reaches the arena of our minds.

Proposition

- **If you could change one thing about your life change the way you think**

Transition

If you change the way you think about those things in your life that displease God, genuine change will come about. The battle for holiness takes place in the arena of the Mind. The life of the mind is so critical. Critical because the way we think determines how we will act. Let's face it, the only thing that makes Christians different than non-Christians is how they think. Our thinking, the life of the mind, is where behavior is formed. You show me a Christian who thinks no differently than a non-Christian and I'll show you a Christian who lives no differently than a non-Christian. The way we think must change. Most of us undertake the change process the wrong way. We fail to let the change process enter the arena of our minds.

Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 4:17-24 describes two contrasts; the contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian mind**

Transition

Why? Because Paul, the writer of Ephesians knows the importance of the life of the mind in bringing about deep change. He knows that where the mind goes, the body will follow. And so he paints for us the picture of two kinds of people. He contrasts two kinds of minds in Ephesians 4. Why? Because he is concerned about the purity of the church. And purity, holiness, a life that pleases God begins with the way one thinks about the world.

Background and Setting

- In the context of Ephesians, we have been talking about the church. Remember, this series is entitled God's great purposes for his church. Three Sundays ago, we examined the unity of the church and the church's maturity. But God also has a great interest in seeing that his church is pure. What good is unity in the body without purity? If you've got a white linen table cloth without holes in it, without frayed edges, if there is unity within the fabric, you've got a good tablecloth, right? Unless of course, there are black coffee stains everywhere.

What good is unity without purity? God's great purpose for his church, for this church is that we lead lives of purity. This begins by changing the way we think.

Transition

Let's take a look now at the first contrasting element. Paul, in verses 17-19 paints the picture of mind of the person without Christ. The first thing that is contrasted is a darkened mind that leads to sin. That's the first point on your outline.

Main Points

I. A darkened mind leads to sin (4:17-19)

A) Validation

i) The way we think determines our behavior. Without Christ the life of the mind is doomed.

B) Explanation

i) Right away, Paul makes a connection between how one lives and the way one thinks.

Verse 17. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. The command is to not fall back into old patterns of thinking before Christ. Why? Because thinking drives behavior. And according to God's word, the mind that operates apart from Christ is spinning its wheels at best. In actuality, the non-Christian way of thinking about life is futile. It's languishing. It's vain. It's aimless. It leads nowhere. It is thinking that has lost touch with reality.

ii) At best the mind without Christ is darkened. I think the [New Living Translation](#) hits it right on the head by translating [verse 18](#) as such. *Their closed minds are hopelessly confused.* Why? Because people have hardened their hearts regarding the truth of God. The person who denies God exists, who denies that Christ lived and died and rose again, the person who has hardened his heart as to what God's word says about this world and how to live, that person's thinking has become clouded. That way of thinking about life does no less than separate a person from a life with God. *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.* And so the mind without Christ, the mind that has become hardened to seeing the truth about God, no longer has the ability to feel shame or embarrassment. The crystallized mind does not have the ability to determine right from wrong.

iii) And so as [verse 19](#) says, they have lost all sensitivity. *Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.* A hardened heart, leads to a callous, insensitive mind, unable to determine what is right from wrong, true or untrue, good or bad. It leads to sensuality and everything impure. And the sensual life continually lusts for more, it is greedy, never satisfied. As [John Stott](#) says, "Thus hardness of heart leads first to darkness of mind, then to deadness of soul under the judgment of God, and finally to recklessness of life. Having lost all sensitivity, people lose all self-control."¹

Romans 1:21 describes this same process. *For although they knew God, they neither*

¹ Stott, p. 177.

glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. A darkened mind leads to a sin.

C) Illustration

- i) Have you heard the story of the three old men who went to the doctor for a memory test? They arrive at the doctor and the doctor says to the first old man, "What is one plus one?" "Two hundred seventy-four," he replied. The doctor said to the second man, "It's your turn. What is one plus one?" "Tuesday," replied the second man. The doctor said to the third man, "Okay, your turn. What's one plus one?" "Two," said the third man. "That's great!" said the doctor. "How did you get that?" "Simple," said the third man. "I subtracted 274 from Tuesday."²
- ii) There is a clouded mind that comes not from age or senility but from the lack of Christ. You chuckle at the story, but the mind without Christ operates on an equally confused basis.

D) Application

- i) You see, without Christ, there is no solid foundation on which to base one's decisions. Decision making with a darkened mind produced dark deeds. What we think determines how we behave.
- ii) Do you realize that as Christians, you can slip back into this old way of thinking? Into a way of thinking that does not acknowledge God? And if you resume thinking like this your life will show it? The products of a darkened mind are easy to spot.
- iii) We must remember that there is a battle going on for people's minds. 2 Corinthians 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Transition

I want us to look now at [verses 20-24](#) where we'll find the second contrasting element. The second thing that is contrasted in this passage is the renewed mind, the mind that has Christ. And it's very clear by these verses that a renewed mind leads to holiness. That's the second point on your outline.

II. A renewed mind leads to holiness (4:20-24)

A) Validation

- i) Quite simply, verses 20-24 teach that a mind renewed has the capability to generate virtue. **A renewed mind leads to holiness.**

B) Explanation

- i) Listen to [verses 20 and 21](#). *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.* In other words, Paul is saying, contrasted with the mind that doesn't know Christ, there is another way of thinking. He calls it, literally, *learning Christ*. When you become a Christian, you are schooled by Christ. He is the subject of the teaching and the teacher. The historical Jesus, the Jesus from the pages of scripture, who is the embodiment of truth itself, is the means by which our thinking is renewed. The person who is schooled by Christ, who learns Christ, who thinks like Christ, submits

² Citation: John Fehlen, Stanwood, Washington

himself to the standards by which Jesus lived and taught. If you remember to think like Christ, like the way you were taught when you first came to Christ, it will produce holy living.

- ii) [Verses 22-24](#) state this very clearly. *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* In the words of [Peter O'Brien](#), "The flow of Paul's argument implies that the human mind, apart from divine renewal, is unable to guide or keep us in a way of life that is pleasing to God. 'If the heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds.'"³ And so Paul tells us to throw off, to cast off our old self, like the taking off of old dirty clothes our former way of life, our former way of thinking about life and be renewed in the attitudes of our minds. To be renewed in the attitude of our minds means to daily, continually adjusting the way we think, changing our outlook on life based upon this new position. It means changing the way we think based upon who we have become in Christ. And since we have put on Christ, since we have been clothed with Christ, we will become what were created to be *like God*, as the text says. Our responsibility is to become what we are. To become what we already are in Christ. To take off the old sinful self and put on the new person we were created to be in Christ Jesus. And in doing so, we'll produce a life of righteousness and holiness. **A renewed mind leads to holiness.**

C) Illustration

- i) About every time this year along the shores of Lake Michigan, huge Chinook salmon, aka King salmon, [oncorhynchus tshawytscha](#), move upstream to spawn. What is so interesting is that these behemoth fish, as they swim upstream, move to their death. They spawn, they give life, but they are not renewed, they live to die. And later on in the salmon season, the stream is full of rotting, bloated, decaying fish.

D) Application

- i) When we give ourselves over to thinking like and making decisions apart from Christ we get caught in a stream of life from which there is no return. It leads to death. But, in Christ, we have become something new-a new creature that even though it dies, it lives. We are being renewed inwardly day by day through the person of Jesus Christ who changes everything about us, most notably our thinking, so that our lives produce holiness. Why would we want to evaluate life, make business decisions, lead our families, treat our friends, or our spouse in a manner of life without Christ. That way of life, that way of thinking is corrupted, its dead like a rotting salmon. As one commentator said, "Every trait of the Old Man's behavior is putrid, crumbling, or inflated like rotting waste or cadavers, stinking, ripe for being disposed of and forgotten."⁴ Every decision, every way of thought that is informed, not by Christ, but by the old man, is likewise putrid and rotten.
- ii) What are the things that influence the way you think? What TV programs or magazines or viewing habits have formed in your life to such a degree that they are changing the way you behave because they have changed the way you think? Ask yourself where scripture, God's word, falls in the process of forming your mind?

³ O'Brien, p. 331.

⁴ Reinecker, p. 533.

Have you given time to God's word to form your thinking? The task ahead of each of us is to pray and ask God what part of our old life are we still holding on to. **If you could change anything this morning, change the way you think.** Think like Christ and your life will be the fruit of righteousness.

Conclusion

- The French sculptor [Auguste René Rodin](#), an innovative and sometimes controversial artist, created masterpieces such as *The Man with the Broken Nose*, *St. John the Baptist*, *The Bronze Age*, or the uncompleted *Gates of Hell*. But he is most likely known for his work entitled *The Thinker*.⁵ You've seen it. The unnamed man, seated, hunched over, leaning on his knees, hand on his chin. Contemplating thinking. Art historians believe that Rodin meant to create Adam who was at the moment thinking contemplating the choices of righteousness or sin. We must contemplate as well. For we have a choice like Adam. To give our minds life or death. How will the life of your mind fare? Let's pray.

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