

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Deconstruction/Reconstruction of the Disciples' Life Pt 2

Ephesians 4:17-19 Pt 2

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 01.23-24.10

That's the power of God's Word just simply spoken. Let's just spend a moment thanking our Father for the Word of God. Bow together. Father, this morning we have come to worship you. We've done so with our voice, the very essence of who we are in worship and singing. Now we turn to your Word and we thank you for it. We thank you that it has the ability to tell us what we really are and that also the guidance to lead us to what we should be. I pray that you would enlighten our minds through the spirit that we might understand it and that we might have the tenacity then to walk out of here, to stand against unrighteousness and to do it. We pray these things in Jesus name, Amen.

Let's take our Bibles together and let's open to that passage that was just quoted to us. Ephesians chapter 4. If you don't have a bible there is one provided for you in the chair back. If you turn to page 977 you will be there. You will be at Ephesians 4. While you're turning there think with me for a moment. When you start a remodeling project in your home one particular room say, or a bathroom or maybe or a kitchen what do you do? How do you start? Do you start immediately with the construction phase? No. It's a remodeling. So, what do you do? You have to start with some deconstruction. Sometimes the walls need plumbed or maybe the floors need leveled. Or maybe you need to take the room right back down to its bones, you know, strip the drywall off. You get to where the wiring is. See the HVAC and then you start. But it starts with deconstruction before you start with reconstruction. The same is true in the Christian life.

Let me remind you what we're learning. Last week we learned that a remodeling project started in our lives before the foundations of the world was laid; when God was calling us to Himself as sons and daughters. We started our study not in Ephesians 4:17 but rather we backed up to Ephesians 4:1. Remember what Paul wrote? He said, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Now, think back about what you learned about that passage. What is the anchor word of the text? If you're thinking the anchor word is the verb walk, something we do then you missed what we were talking about last week. We said, really, the key word, the anchor word is not what we do but rather what God does; His calling to us. We talked specifically about our salvation. We can walk in Christ. We can avoid unrighteousness. We can grow in Christ-likeness because of our calling. 2 Corinthians 5:7, we are new creation. The old has passed away. The new is come. That's what we learned last week. We learned that it was not by willpower that we change or that we become Christ-like but by the power that He gives us at salvation. Now, does that mean we're not going to struggle? Does that mean that were not going to war against the, flesh that unredeemed aspect of our humanness? No. We learn that there are parallel natures at work here. That we have a new nature. Everything about you is new. Your desires are new. Your loves are new. Your mind is new. Your heart is new but we still war against the flesh. In other words, Christ-likeness is not instantaneous like your salvation. It's synergistic. It take work. You work along with the Spirit so that you become, you are sanctified, you are growing in Christ. It's not instantaneous. There is some deconstruction that needs to be done in our own life before there is reconstruction. In fact, that's the name of the series. Deconstruction / Reconstruction of the Disciples'

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Life. And what we're going to be learning today as we launch into our primary text, Ephesians 4:17 all the way to 5:21. We're going to be, I have no idea, probably months. We're going to look at detail of what it is that we must do to become like Christ; what we must take out of our life and then in turn what we must put into our life. So, we're going to launch off into verse 17 this morning and we're just not going to get to far, maybe three verses or so. Follow along as I read Paul's word.

He says, 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. 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 they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every type of impurity. Alright, let's stop right there. If we're going to walk in a manner worthy of our calling look what Paul starts with in the deconstruction phase. He says we can no longer walk as the Gentiles. We can longer have the characteristics of the Gentiles. This is the central phrase. This is the central admonishment. This is the deconstruction. So, what does it mean? If this an important phrase to understand we have to then understand it. What does it mean to no longer walk as the Gentiles? Look, this word has both a narrow meaning and a broad meaning. The narrow meaning for a word like Gentiles in the scriptures would be anyone who would be non-Jews; those who are outside of Judaism but that's not how Paul is using it here in our text. You need to catch this. What he is saying is that anyone who is a Gentile, basically are those who are unregenerate; those who have not come to a saving knowledge of Christ. He uses this in 1 Thessalonians 4:5. He says, the Gentiles, that's a category, he says, the Gentiles who do not know God. And so, there it is. You can look at it the same way in this text. You must no longer walk as those who do not know God. That's our primary admonishment.

Now the Ephesians church had a living, life illustration for them when Paul wrote this. They would immediately have understood what he was talking about because, for one thing Ephesus was one of the most licentious, filthy, vilest places in the Roman Empire. It was, for one a place of great commerce, great cultural city but nonetheless, at the very center was a temple, a temple called Artemis. Some say it was the Temple of Diana and there people would stream in to worship at the Temple of Artemis. They would come from all over Asia Minor. They would come to Ephesus.

In fact, we have a picture of the ruins of the Temple of Artemis. That's what it looks like today. Ephesus is in modern Turkey. But, here's an artistic rendering of what it possibly could have looked like in Paul's day. It was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And, inside that was the idol herself. There she is – Artemis or Diana. She's not the most attractive thing. Nonetheless, she was a goddess of sexuality. She was a sex god. In fact, thousands of both male and female prostitutes were employed at the temple and how you worshipped here was that you went to the temple and you involved yourself in the sexual intercourse as an act of worship to the goddess Artemis. This is

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what was going on. This was the living reality of the Ephesian church. They were living in that kind of environment. In fact, Heraclitus, a 5th Century Greek philosopher who himself lived in Ephesus wrote about Ephesus. He say, the darkness of vileness. The morals were lower than animals and the inhabitants of Ephesus were fitting only to be drown. Can you imagine that being said about your city? What's the moniker for Mansfield? You come in, you see the sign. It's sunny Mansfield, the funcenter of Ohio, right? I always laugh. I was thinking who in the world wrote that? They must not have lived here. I haven't seen the sun in Mansfield in two weeks. But it's better than Ephesus. For crying out loud. Look at their sign – the darkness of vileness. Can you imagine that as that's the description of your city? But you've got to remember what was going on here. You have to place what you now know about Ephesus in the context of what Paul is saying. Paul's saying look, you don't walk like them anymore. You don't worship at the temple of Artemis anymore. That's not you. But that does not mean that they would have any less of temptation than you and I would have in what we deal with.

These people in the Ephesian church would have still walked by that temple. They would have been reminded of days when they were themselves practicing idol worshippers there. They would have thought of times where this was a part of there weekly, possibly daily activity. Their friends could still be involved. I mean, can you imagine going to an office party and having someone say, hey I haven't seen you around the temple lately. What's going on in your life? And you know, you've stripped your household of all its idols. You've gotten rid of them. There was a total change but you still have to live under the influence of that being in your city. You better believe there would have been times of temptation to go back to that lifestyle and so what does Paul say? Don't walk like the Gentiles any longer. Don't walk like those who do not know God. You know God. God has changed you. You have been totally transformed.

Now, before you can stop something you have to know what not to do and so Paul gives us four characteristics of being Gentile-like in these three verses, 17, 18 and 19. If you're taking notes there are four characteristics of being Gentile-like. Let's look at them.

The first, he says is their thinking. Their thinking. Their thinking is different than yours. There's a futility in their thinking, in their minds. Verse 17, now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility, circle that word, futility of their minds. What's that mean? Futility means, in essence a fail to produce; emptiness; vain; void of substance. Do you hear that? Do you hear what Paul is saying about those that do not know God? That they have a thinking issue that's void of substance. What Paul is saying is that believers and unbelievers think differently. You have been renewed in your mind. You no longer think, you don't think like you used to. You do not think like those who do not know God. You need to understand this is why scripture places such a high priority on the mind.

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Now, hold your place in Ephesians for me. Come with me over to Romans, chapter 12. I want you to see this. This is by all means a parallel passage to what we're reading but I want you to look at the importance that God's Word places on our mind, how we think. Romans, chapter 12. We're going to land in verse 2 but let's back up and look at verse 1. Starting in verse 1, Paul writes, I appeal to you, therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship. This is, by the way what you do. This is how you live. Now it's as if Paul backs up and he says, but first, it's generated from you think, your mind, he says, so do not be conformed to this world. What does that sound like? Sounds like you must no longer walk as the Gentiles, doesn't it? He says, do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your what? Of your mind. That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, what is acceptable, what is perfect. Isn't that what we want – what is good, acceptable and perfect? Paul says it starts in the mind.

Now, I hadn't originally planned on taking you here but just come over one other book to 1 Corinthians, chapter 2. 1 Corinthians. I want to show you a dichotomy. I want to show you the opposite, the unrenewed mind. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14. He says, the natural person, in other words the person who does not know God. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they folly, they're futile in other words, they are folly to Him. He is not able to what? Understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things but is himself to be judged by no one, for who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. Did you hear that? You have the mind of Christ at your transformation, at your salvation, at your rebirth. When God called you, predestined you, elected you to salvation He changed the way you think and that's what Paul is saying. He's saying you don't think that way anymore. That's the old you. That's the old mind. That's the Gentile way of thinking. You are new so put away those old ways of thinking. First characteristic of a person who does not know God is their thinking is empty. There's futility in their mind. What follows that, if there's futility in their mind?

Number two – their reasoning. Thinking, reasoning. Reasoning follows thinking and that's what he says. He says they are darkened in their understanding. What happens when you do not understand truth? What happens when you can not understand what is true? Well, you get it all wrong, right? Wrong is right, right is wrong. Everything is backwards. That's what he's saying. Look at the text. It flows out of the text. He says they are darkened. Which, by the way, a little grammar here. That is a perfect, passive participle. When you read a participle, a participle gives you the idea of a continuing condition. He's saying there's a continuing condition of spiritual darkness going on in the mind of those who do not know God. This is their continual thinking pattern. They are darkened. What are the consequences? They do not have, the text says understanding. What does that mean? It means they can not think deeply. They can't think deeply specifically about the things of God. They can not know God like you know God. That's just simple theology. Do you remember what I told you last week that the book of

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Ephesians is divided into two halves? The first half, chapters 1, 2 and 3 – theology. How we should think, what we should know. The second half 4, 5 and 6 – application, implication, how we should live out our life. Do you remember what you used to be like Paul says in Ephesians 2? Ephesians 2:1. He says, you were dead in your trespasses and sin. That's what you were pre-Christ. That's what people are like today pre-Christ. They are dead in their sin. That's simple theology. So what does that mean? That means they can not know God. So what does the scripture say? They are alienated from the life of God, why? Because of their ignorance, their moral blindness is what he's saying. Are you starting to put the package together or how an unredeemed person thinks? The last phrase sums it all up. Due to their hardness of heart. Hardness, *pōrōsin*, carries the idea of being rock hard. It's a medical term actually. It's the idea of calcification around a broken bone. They become immobile. Paralysis has set in, in their mind, in their reasoning. Now, put this all together. If this is the characteristic of those who do not know, if this is what Paul is saying now you do not want to be like then what do you take away from this passage? What do you take away from these verses? There are always consequences to how you think and reason. There are always consequences to what I put in my mind and how I reason them out in my life. I think what Paul is trying to push forward in the mind of the Ephesian church is that you have to be careful what you allow in your mind. You have to, by the way remember that when you're making decision. You have to remember what goes in ultimately impacts how you act.

Michelle and I are constantly telling this to our girls. They're twelve years old. In their minds they're teenagers. In their minds they can drive. In their minds we know nothing. You know how that goes? And so we're constantly saying listen, you've got to be careful what you're listening to. You have to be careful what you're seeing. You have to be careful because it's going to come out in your actions. That's true for us today. You have got to be careful.

I have a friend of mine. It was awhile ago. He said to me. I saw the greatest movie. Really, what was it? He said, ah, yeah, it was a great movie, great, yeah there was some scenes in it, there was some sexual scenes, you have to kind of get past and the language was really bad and you know, if you didn't mind the violence and you could just work through that it was a great movie. And I'm thinking what have we allowed ourselves to slip in to? What have we allowed to just be right in our life when really is so blatantly not right?

Now listen, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying in a legalistic form you shouldn't go to movies. I like movies. But you have to be careful what you allow into your mind. You have freedom but not all your freedoms are good. Not all your freedoms are going to move towards purity. See, you have to be wise with what you do, what you read, what you listen to, what you watch. Who are the authors of these things? Are they thinking? Are they coming from an unregenerate mind where the thinking is futile, where the reasoning is darkened in their understanding? What do you think is the outcome if that's

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what their thinking, what they produce is going to be that way? You have to be wise with what you do and what you think with what you expose your mind to.

Paul says, it's not just thinking. It's not just reasoning but it moves to feelings. That we'll see in verse 19. They have become calloused. That means past feelings. They no longer feel what is right or what is wrong. They no longer have that internal conscience mechanism that says I shouldn't be doing this. This is wrong. In fact, 1 Timothy 4:2 says that their conscience are seared by their actions. Do you realize that? You can get so caught up into unrighteousness that you can sear your conscience to the point you can't even sense it anymore. You're so involved in your own sin pattern that you don't call it sin anymore.

John Calvin, who is a 16th Century Protestant reformed theologian, writing about this passage says, unmoved by the approaching judgment of God, whom they offend they go on at their ease and fearlessly indulge without restraint in the pleasures of sin. No shame is felt, no regard to character is maintained. The gnawing of guilty conscience tormented by the dread of the divine judgment may be compared to the porch of hell. Interesting analogy – sitting on the porch. But such hardened security as this and here's the key – is a whirlpool which swallows up and destroys.

In other words, you can fall into a place of such complacency. Your feelings are so calloused. Your past, even understanding any kind of remorse or guilt that it becomes like a whirlpool that will ultimately swallow you up. You can not swim up stream or swim out and destroys you. When I read that I thought, God, I never want to be like this. I never want to get so deep into my own unrighteousness that I ignore you or ignore the Spirit of God. You see, but that is characteristic of someone who does not know God. That's not you. You have been changed. You have a new heart. You have a new desire. You have a new mind. There's a new you. But you have to watch because if you feed unrighteousness what happens? If you feed the flesh the flesh gets strong. If you feed righteousness, if you feed that which is good, you feed the Spirit.

I have people come to me and say – I just don't understand. I can't seem to make this Christian thing work. It seems I'm always falling into sin. I say, well, tell me a little bit about your life. Are you involved in digesting the Word of God on a regular basis? Ah, no. I don't have, I just kind of run out of time. Well, do you spend time in prayer? Do you spend time trying to know God? Ah, I know I should but I just really don't. Do you spend time running away from unrighteousness? No, you know I tend to be in a lot of bad habits. Well, no wonder you're having problems following Christ. Listen, it's synergistic. You have to be involved in your spiritual growth. He's changed you as a person but the flesh is strong and wars against that change.

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So, you have to do some deconstruction. You might have to deconstruct some things you think, the way you reason, sense how you're feeling – this guilt. Is that in there? Is that sense of remorse leading you to repentance?

You know what? It's so cool sometimes working as a team because we had worked out what we were going to sing, what we're going to do but I had no idea that Milo was going to ask us to just shut our eyes, to bring our sin to the center to confess that. Man, that's the spirit working here today. And when I heard that I said yes because this is the church. This is what we should be doing and what do we do when we ask and seek that forgiveness? We repent from it. And what's repent mean? It means you turn around. You go the opposite direction. You don't do that anymore. That's deconstruction so that we're ripe for reconstruction.

But there's one more. It goes from thinking, reasoning, feeling to action. You see it lived out. Middle of verse 19. They had become calloused and have given themselves up. That's a preposition. In other words they're all in. They've given themselves over. They've given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Sensuality. That's sexual sin. Fits, doesn't it? Fits the day. Certainly fit into the Ephesians understanding. Certainly fits into our understanding the idea of unbridled self indulgence and sexual activity. Greedy, it says. All of life is evaluated on material terms, why? So they could practice whatever sinful desires they have. These are characteristics of someone who does not know God. But, you erratically changed. This should no longer be what is named among us. This is not the pattern for those of us who know God. Your thinking, your reasoning, your feelings, your actions should all reflect your change and so you have to ask the question. Are the characteristics of the Gentile-like lifestyle seen in my life? What needs to be deconstructed? What needs to be changed? Why? So that I might walk in a manner worthy of my calling.

Let's pray together.