**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Mind of God in You**

**Ephesians 4:17 - 24**

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

The previous verses in Ephesians tell us that with the active use of God’s spiritual gifts operating in our hearts and minds, with love, we are to a large degree insulated from the attacks of the Devil. Additionally, we are not led astray by every wind of popular culture.

We live in a fallen world that is bombarding us constantly with spiritual tests to redirect our lives away from God and His plan.

With this said, Paul moves to comparing and contrasting personal character traits. Paul reminds his friends in Ephesus of the life they previously lived without God guiding their lives and points to the truth in Jesus as the way to walk. He uses very sharp words to define those who have not chosen to surrender to God.

**17** So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord,

that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk,

in the **futility** (*vanity, emptiness*) of their mind,

**18** being **darkened** in their understanding,

**excluded** from the life of God

because of the **ignorance** that is in them,

because of the **hardness (***blindness***)** of their heart;

**19** and they, having become **callous**, (cease feeling others pain)

have given themselves over to **sensuality for the** **practice**

of every kind of **impurity with greediness.**

From reading this description, we receive an explanation of why we clearly see the fallen world imploding around us via daily media reports. The Bible, God’s Word, is accurate in highlighting the source of evil in the world. The only possible explanation of why godless things take place in our world is the absence of God and His love operating in the hearts and minds of people. We see this in all levels of society, from the individual on the street to the highest political and religious offices in the land. The list is long containing the evil that is operating all around us. From Abortion-on-Demand (including partial birth abortion) to a lawless presidential election, the same evil is behind these demonic works. The people that we see committing these atrocities. . . are the *faces* of the posterchildren of Satan’s evil. They walk in the futility of their mind. Are their minds not empty of God? We see they choose to be excluded from God. Therefore, their understanding is darkened, and they operate in ignorance. The whole world sees this in political and religious leaders who have a hard-heart and are callous in their decisions. They are narcissistic in applying their policies. They are incapable of feeling the pain they inflict upon society. Through their polices and life-styles they encourage every kind of sensual evil that is aimed at destroying God’s plan for family.

In the sharpest contrast, God has another way, another plan for life and not death and destruction (Job 33:4). The above description defines death in operation all around us. Those that choose to exclude God from their life. . . their soul. . . are the *walking dead* and will take their deadness with them to an eternal life. Death can be defined as the absence of God. We need not be confused that death is only physical. Remember the Word of God.

**Matthew 10:28** "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

However, God’s plan defeats sin and death here in this fallen world and transcends us to our eternal life. We see this in the visible mission of God as Jesus in the Incarnation. God, born into this world, like us, lived in this fallen world, yet chose not to sin. We are all given this same opportunity. This is illustrated to us in Jesus’ prayer before He goes to the Cross. . . “*Lord your will not mine*” (Luke 22:42). Jesus’ statement directly points to the mission of the Cross, but is there not an application to our daily lives? We can review the same question/statement “*Lord Your will not mine*” in applying our life-decisions. With this in mind, we receive Paul’s words.

**20** But you did not learn Christ in this way,

**21** if indeed you have **heard** Him and have been **taught** in Him,

just as **truth** is in Jesus,

**In verses 20,21** we can see by the words Paul uses he challenges his audience to be sure they have learned Christ correctly. Paul calls this “truth in Jesus”. We, too, need to be accurate in our teaching and be sure we receive what we are taught is the truth. So many are taught about God/Christ through the institutional religious traditions. This leads to misunderstandings like Paul is addressing in his letter to the Ephesians.

**In verse 22**, Paul appeals to his recipient’s previous life, in that they are to stop those life practices in which they participated before they surrendered to God.

22 that, in reference to your former manner of life,

you lay aside the old self,

which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

This highlights the reality that some Believers are in a constant transition from their previous life without God - to their new life in God. Many people make a profession of faith in God and still carry with them their old practices. Paul, reminds them that they are to progress toward the life God has planned for them. Paul correctly labels their former corrupted life as being controlled by the “lust of deceit”. This means that the evil they practiced, before they surrendered to God, lied to them. . . in that they were led to believe they needed to do those life practices to be fulfilled. This is seen in drug addicts and alcoholics who make a profession of faith and are saved but may relapse from time to time to their former habit.

**Believer’s Transitioning to a Newness not Oldness**

**God’s Overhaul?**

**23** and that you be **renewed in the spirit of your mind,**

**24** and **put on the new self,**

which in the likeness of God has been created

in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

**Verses 23 and 24** make it more apparent that Paul sees the Believers in Ephesus as *transitioning* to a new life in God. They are struggling to find their way. What does Paul see to be holding them back? They were trying to improve their old self when they really needed a whole new mind, a whole new self.

**God is not looking to overhaul your heart and mind. God wants to replace your heart and mind with His. (Rebirth of Spirit – John 3)**

From these words, Paul writes. He evidently sees the Ephesian Believers had made a profession of faith but misunderstood the spiritual transformation to which God had called them. They were not to improve their *old mind*. . . they were to seek a *new mind, heart, spirit* from God. God wants us to ask Him to give us a *new self*. God will give us a new *mind, heart, spirit,* if we ask Him. We see this when God spoke through His prophet Ezekiel to the Hebrew people.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27**

**26** "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

**27** "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

. . .

**Ezekiel 36: 37** 'Thus says the Lord GOD,

"This also I will let the house of Israel **ask Me** to do for them

King David prayed to God for confession of sin and asked God to give him a **clean heart**. David had failed in his relationship with Bathsheba with the heart that he had. He knew that he needed a new **clean heart**, or he knew he could repeat his sin.

**Psalm 51:10** Create in me a clean heart,

O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Paul is consistent with God’s call for us to become a *new being*, putting on a *new self* with the *true knowledge* of Him at work in us. He writes to the Believers in Corinth and Colossae the same message.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

**Colossians 3:10** and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

**What do we learn from Paul’s writing in this context?**

**1.** A person can make a profession of faith surrendering to God but struggle with their day-to-day choices. Why?

**2.** There is a distinct difference between salvation and living the life God has planned for each Believer (Ephesians 2:10). Many Believers struggle in life never fulfilling the plans God had for their life because they never ask God to renew their minds and hearts with His Spirit. There is a difference between allowing God’s Spirit to reside in you and allowing God’s Spirit to function in you. The fact that God’s Spirit is present in a person mitigates the effects of the fallen world.

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

**3.** Believers can live life never reaching God’s intended goals for them.

**4.** Once saved, God calls us to a sanctification process that starts with a new mind and heart. We know that salvation requires the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God (Romans 8:9). So, all Believers possess God’s Spirit. It is up to us to ask God to function for us. God desires for us to call upon His Spirit to function in a new heart and mind - not our old heart and mind. This is the newness Paul is explaining. It is no longer us at work but God in us.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

This leads us to a most often misquoted text of Scripture that is commonly cited out-of-context as proof that a person must meritoriously earn their salvation.

**Philippians 2:12-13**

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

The key words here are “*for it is God who is at work in you*”. It is not you at work; it is God at work. It is not your works; it is God’s works that are produced. Therefore, your works do not exist to earn salvation. For us - it goes without saying, but for those that struggle with the issue. . . salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned (Ephesians 2:8).

Considering God’s goal is to be at work in us. . . we see that for our lives to fulfill the plans and goals God has set for each individual Believer, we need to move out of the way and allow God to make our decisions. What does this look like? How does this happen?

**1.** Through prayer, we seek the mind and heart of God.

**2.** Through reading God’s Word, we learn how God works in the hearts and minds of people.

**3.** Through interaction with other Believers and experiencing God at work in the lives of others, we receive guidance in our own lives. Other Believers can assist in confirming God’s plan for our lives. As long as we do not make things complicated, we can receive a clear path forward.

Jesus illustrated God’s working in people as children. Notice Jesus says . . . *unless you are converted and become like children*. And . . . *Whoever humbles himself as this child*.” From my experience working with children, they tend **not** to over analyze things. Adults, tend to weigh-out their options. Adults tend to live-out their options to see which one works the best. We teach the children the words of Jesus.

**Matthew 18:1** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,

3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

When I was a child, my father gave me this advice:

**If you are not there, it cannot happen to you!**

**Whatever you do. . . do not let it cost you the rest of your life!**

As a teenager going through high school, I did not over analyze my father’s advice. Therefore, I went through my school years staying out of trouble. I followed his advice. These were simple rules by which to live. My child-like faith in following my father’s advice paid-off. Many of my classmates took recreational illegal drugs. I never did and did not hangout with those that did. When I took the polygraph test in the application process with the Houston Police Department - I passed with flying colors.

God has a basic simple plan for us by which to live. We are the ones who complicate things. I was in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Highschool. Guest speakers would come and give us their testimonies. Sometimes their personal testimony was an account of a life filled with drug addiction and violence before they converted to Christianity. As a teenager, with little experience in life, after listening to a few of these testimonies – I said to myself, I think I will skip the violent drug addicted life and become a Christian. I did not like their path to salvation. Again, I saw the simpler way to God.

**Mark 10:14-15**

14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

15 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

**AMEN**