Dec 1, 2018

**Ephesians 4:17-32**

**We Need Grace:**

**Think Differently**

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Have you ever met your *doppelgänger*? A doppelgänger is someone who looks like you but isn’t related to you. This is an example of a doppelgänger. A wedding photographer met his doppelgänger flying from Ireland to Scotland.¹ I met my doppelgänger when I lived in Falls Church VA. We attended the same church and people would walk up to him and say, “Hi Jonathan.” His name is Russell.

In Ephesians Paul calls the church the *body of Christ* (Eph 4:15-16).² So my *question* for us today is who does our church body look like? *Who* is our church’s doppelgänger? There are only two options: the *world* or Christ. If we look like the world we will look and act like the *non-believers* we see around us every day. We will *talk* like them and *think* like them and *value* the things they value. We will *mirror* their lives. Or, we will talk and think like Christ who looks *completely different* than the world.

The Apostle Paul who wrote the *letter to the Ephesians* is asking the church at Ephesus the same thing. *Who* do you look like? Do you look like the world or do you look different, like Jesus?

Here’s what’s at stake... **Everything.** If we claim to be Christians but the world is our doppelgänger, we look and talk and act like non-Christians, we might not be real Christians at all. But if our doppelgänger is Christ, if we’re becoming *more like him over time* in our thoughts and actions, then we are on the right path. Let’s take an honest assessment of ourselves today. Let’s get real. If we look like Christ, wonderful, *praise* God. But if there are ways we look like the world, let’s *repent* and return to following Jesus.

**What does the world look like? (Eph 4:17-19, 22)**

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul talks about all the *grace* God has given *believers*. For example, if you are a believer, God has *forgiven* you of your sins (Eph 1:7); he has *adopted* you into his heavenly family (Eph 1:5); and he will treat you with *grace* and *kindness* forever (Eph 2:7). Now in the second half of the letter Paul gives a *playbook* for how God’s grace *should change* our lives. And he does this partially by contrasting us with how non-believers think and behave.

**Thinking: ignorant/hard-hearted, selfish/deceived (v17-19, 22)³**

> 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. 18 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. (NIV®)

Something about the way non-Christians think is wrong. Right now the Bible is saying that anyone not saved by Christ thinks incorrectly or foolishly. Their minds are darkened. They are blinded to the truth. Their *worldview* is wrong. To be quite frank this is incredibly offensive. But just because something is offensive doesn’t mean it’s not true.

**Why** do people think this way? Paul gives us two reasons in verse 18.

1) **Ignorance** - They don’t know the truth of the *Bible* and *Jesus* (Acts 3:17, 17:30). Gentiles in our passage really means *non-believers*. But does that mean they’re off the hook?

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.
2) **Hard-hearted** - They are *willfully* hardening their own hearts. They *don’t want to know* the truth. Romans 1:20-23 says all people can see God’s power in *creation* but they *reject* him anyways.4

In our **Discipleship Class**, **Grace/Truth 2.0**, the author **Preston Sprinkle** writes:

Dr. Jonathan Haidt is a world-renowned social psychologist who specializes in moral theory. Put simply, he looks at why people believe the things they do. After years of looking at why good people disagree on core moral and political issues, he learned that people typically believe certain things because they first want to believe them. In other words, *desire precedes belief*. Then, after believing it, they find rational reasons to support their belief. But the thing that anchors the belief is not primarily rational arguments. It’s the desire to believe the thing in the first place.5

Non-believers believe the wrong thing because they *want* to believe the wrong thing (“desire precedes belief”). But **how** does Paul say non-believers think?

19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.”

1) **Selfish** - The world is *greedy* for more. My good is the ultimate good. My happiness matters most. **Individualism** and self prioritization are as high as ever. It doesn’t matter if it hurts others. Me first.

22 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; (NIV®)

2) **Deceived** - The world repeats their truth until it becomes fact. There’s no ultimate truth, just individual truth. Their minds deceive them.

**What** does wrong-thinking **lead to**? Impure actions.

**Actions: impure (v19b)**

Verse 19b says “they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity…” We are living in the midst of an ongoing sexual revolution that is *redefining marriage, sexuality*, and *gender* from what God designed each of these things to be. But Paul is actually saying this is **nothing new**. When we don’t have Christ we don’t desire to live lives of *holiness* or *purity* but self-fulfillment, which the world often searches for in *romance* and *sexuality*. What’s the **outcome**?

**Outcome: separation from the life-giving God (v18b)**

Verse 18a says “They are […] separated from the life of God…” A **mind that rejects Christ leads to a life rejecting Christ leads to a rejection of eternal life in Christ.** The end result is **disaster**, eternal separation from God’s grace. The **mind** is *incredibly important*. What we think and how we think really **matters**.

Now if you think Paul is being **tough on non-believers** you’re right. But let’s **not forget the point** of this passage. In verse 17 Paul says to the Christians “you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.” Paul is writing to **new converts** in Ephesus and explaining to them how God’s grace should **change** their lives (and ours) in **real** and **tangible** ways.

As believers, **how’s** our thinking? **Have we** learned the **whole truth of God’s word** or are we actually **ignorant** of what it says? **Have we** ever **hardened** our hearts to ways we should be **listening** and **obeying God**? **Have we** ever **selfishly** put “**me first**” or “**my favorites first**” or “**my family first**” or even “**my church first**”? **Have we** ever **lied**? I don’t mean an outright lie, but just a slight changing of what really
happened to make me look better than I should and the other person look worse than they should? I think if we’re honest with ourselves as a church we’ll see we’ve done all these things. But what’s the alternative?

What should believers look like? (Eph 4:20-32)

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned

As Christians we are supposed to look and think differently. Maybe some of you are familiar with IBM. They have an office in Littleton just past Kimball Farm. Did you know that for a long time their slogan has been “Think”? This is why they call their laptops ThinkPads. They want to “take everything into consideration.” So you know what Apple did in the late 90s to differentiate themselves from IBM? They came up with the slogan, “Think different.” This slogan actually helped turn Apple into the huge success it is today. Apple wanted to stand out against its competitor, not blend in. As Christians, we have to stand out against those who don’t follow Christ. We have to think and act differently than them. Our slogan wouldn’t be “think different” it would be “think differently in Christ.” Our thinking comes from...

Thinking: Christ’s teachings, renewed attitudes/minds (v21-23)

21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.
22 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;

What is the primary way we as Christians change the way we think? By focusing on the teachings of Christ Jesus. By reading and studying and being taught God’s word, the Bible. As we learn the teachings of Christ we re-learn how to think and navigate life. Thom Rainer writes in Who Moved My Pulpit?:

…too many leaders do not take time to read the Bible daily. Brad Waggoner, in his book The Shape of Faith to Come, presents a fascinating study about spiritual maturity. The essence of the study is that the most mature Christians have one common trait: they read the Bible daily. 8

This is why our By-Laws say that both our Elders and Deacons “are to practice personal times of devotion and prayer.” A love for the Bible can’t just be one of our core values in name but in practice, and it has to start at the top with our leadership. As part of his interview process for Elder we asked Bari how often Mark reads his Bible and prays and she said “every morning.” But this shouldn’t just be an Elder thing. This should be an everyone thing. We all need to spend time in God’s word and prayer every day.

If everyone at Cornerstone, the Elders, the Deacons, every member and attender started reading the Bible and praying daily (or most days), we as a church would grow spiritually, we would be much more unified, and many of our conflicts and squabbles would disappear. God’s word renews our attitudes and minds. It helps us think differently in Christ. As our thinking is renewed how does that change our actions?

Actions: repentance and transformation (v25-32)

As we encounter God’s word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit we begin to recognize our own sins and to confess them to God. Repentance is both a turning away from sin and a turning to God (Acts 3:19). It’s both negative (stopping the bad) and positive (starting the good). Instead of reading the passage for us again I’ve gone through verses 25-32 and pulled out the traits of the old self Paul calls us to stop and the traits of the new self (the positives) Paul calls us to begin. The old self is the person we were before Christ got a hold of our hearts and the new self is who I am becoming in Christ.
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- **Falsehood vs speaking truthfully** - Our old self would be okay with speaking partial truths that make me look good and the other person bad. But the new self, who I am “in Christ,” isn’t afraid to speak truth even if it makes me look bad.

- **Sinful anger vs sinless anger** - The old self uses anger to get its way but the new self is angered by the things that anger God (unholiness, sin, injustice). Righteous anger is rare and it is brief. It ends at sunset.

- **Stealing vs sharing** - The old self takes advantage of others to get ahead. The new self works honestly and hard and shares what it has with those in need.

- **Unwholesome talk vs talk that builds others up** - The old self tears others down. The old self can’t wait to tell others what “that person” said or did. The old self makes excuses for this, “I was just venting” or “I was getting advice about how to handle the situation.” But in our heart we know it’s gossip. The new self works hard to speak positively about others. The new self goes above and beyond to lift others up with words. Even if those words involve correction they are spoken in love.

- **Bitterness vs kind, compassionate, and forgiving** - The old self gets bitter and resentful and all the rest when life doesn’t go its way. But the new self is kind, and compassionate, and forgiving even when others don’t deserve it, even when it’s not fair, even when it doesn’t make sense.

So let’s just **take a moment** and be honest with ourselves. How are we doing at this? As a church body do we look more like the old self or the new self, more like the world or more like Christ?

If we’re real honest with ourselves I think we should admit there has been anger, and unwholesome talk, and bitterness and slander in our church. Not all the time, but enough for the word to get around that people aren’t happy either with the leadership, or someone else in the church, or with the after-school program, or you name it, we’ve probably gotten angry or spoken poorly about it.

The reason I’m bringing this up today is because Paul brings it up and I’d rather be a part of a church that talks about its issues in the daylight than whispers about what’s wrong in the darkness. When we shine Christ’s light on our sin it gives us an opportunity to repent and say “We’re sorry. We need grace.” And it also gives us the opportunity to hold each other accountable.

If you have a complaint with someone, go talk to them. If you need advice from a friend, or an Elder or Deacon, they should give you advice but then they are responsible for holding you accountable to speak directly with the person you have a problem with. So if someone comes to you and begins to criticize or
badmouth someone else in the church, listen to them, pray with them, and tell them, “Alright, you have one week to talk with the person you’re upset with or I’m going to schedule the meeting between you and them.” We must put our unwholesome talk to death for the sake of our church family.

But I also want to encourage us because I also see the new self too. I see people speaking truth to each other even when it’s hard. I see a lot of people working really hard and sharing what they have. The recent re-painting of the sanctuary and the Market Basket gift card donation for Thanksgiving is a beautiful example of hard work and sharing. I see many acts of kindness and compassion and I personally have experienced forgiveness for my mistakes. I see the new self here, and I know that through the Holy Spirit the new self will win. So what’s the outcome of a renewed mind, repentance and transformation?

Outcome: righteousness, holiness, gospel (v24, 32)

24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

When we confess our sins and turn once again to Christ he works on us and in us to produce righteousness and holiness and grace. I’m preaching this sermon series, “We Need Grace” because that is exactly what we need. And that’s what we have in Jesus. We can forgive because Christ has forgiven us. On the cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so that we can live. He died so that we don’t have to die in our sins but through repentance and faith can receive eternal life. On the cross Christ took our old self, crucified and killed it, and through his resurrection we have a new self (Gal 2:20). Now we’re just learning to live like that new self, learning to show kindness and compassion and to forgive. Every day we’re learning to think differently in Christ. And that’s my closing big idea. Think differently in Christ.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

2 See also Ephesians 2:21, 4:4, 5:23.

3 Adapted from the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians by Clinton E. Arnold. Kindle location 7885.

4 “There is a well-known interplay of texts in Exodus that speak both of Pharaoh hardening his own heart (Exod 8:32; 13:15) and God hardening his heart (e.g., Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1). Exegetical Commentary. Kindle Location 7636


