

A Noticeable Change

Ephesians 4: 17-24

This has been an informative and challenging study as we have considered the instruction Paul delivered within the fourth chapter of Ephesians. He has dealt with unity within the church, the need for diversity in the midst of unity, and offered valuable insight to maintaining a healthy environment within the body of Christ. Each of these elements are essential if the body is to glorify Christ and function in a way that pleases our Lord.

Paul was well aware of the transformation that takes place when one receives the gospel message and is saved by the grace of God. Such a transformation produces radical change in the life of the new believer. While the battle with the flesh continues as long as one lives, those who have been transformed by the gospel will display a change that is evident for all to see. One cannot come to Christ in salvation apart from this transformation – the old man of sin is crucified and the new believer is resurrected a new creation in Christ; the old has passed away and the new has sprung forth into eternal life.

Our text today deals with the evident contrasts between unbelievers and those who are born again in Christ. As we examine these [contrasts](#), I want to consider: [A Noticeable Change](#).

I. The Reality of the Unbeliever (17-19) – I realize we now live in a “politically correct” society – one where those who hold a different point of view than the main-stream are pressured to conform to the norms of the majority. Paul’s words may not be politically correct by today’s standards, but they are nonetheless theologically sound. He reveals the reality of the unbeliever. He spoke of:

A. Their Emptiness (17) – [This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.](#) As Paul challenged the church to walk differently than other Gentiles (referring to unbelievers,) he revealed their first reality, which stands in contrast to believers. [These walk in the vanity of their mind.](#) The word “vain” means *empty, futile, senseless, aimless, unsuccessful, worthless.*¹ Paul realized these walked within the emptiness of this life in contrast to believers who live in the fullness and anticipation of the future.

- It is evident that believers think and reason differently than unbelievers. Our behavior is typically a reaction to the desires of the mind. Mankind tends to act out that which is developed in the mind. [Gen.6:5 – And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.](#) What man devised in his heart and mind was carried out in action by the body. The unbeliever does not think on the spiritual and eternal; he dwells on the carnal and temporal – seeking to please the flesh in that moment.

B. Their Blindness (18a, c) – **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.** The unbeliever lacks spiritual understanding due to the blindness of his heart. *The Greek word behind **being darkened** is a perfect participle, indicating a continuing condition of spiritual darkness. This darkness implies both ignorance and immorality.*ⁱⁱ These have not been enlightened to the truth of the gospel, or have and rejected its truth, living in spiritual darkness, apart from God. Because of the condition of their heart, lacking spiritual discernment and godly desires, these live in willful sin, determined to satisfy their lustful cravings at all costs.

- Unfortunately, we see many each day living in spiritual blindness. They choose their sinful lifestyle, because of the blindness of their heart. The only hope for those whose hearts are blinded to truth is for the Holy Spirit to enlighten them with the truth of the gospel, while willfully turning from their sin and embracing the truth. It is dangerous to neglect the tender pleading of the Spirit. Many have denied and rejected the truth so long that their conscience has been seared and the Lord has turned them over to a reprobate mind.

C. Their Woefulness (18b) – **being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.** Paul declared these are alienated from God due to the ignorance that is in them. These are estranged from God, totally and utterly alienated from Him. These do not commune with God; they have no fellowship with Him; their lives are not filled with the Holy Spirit; thus, they have no guide to lead them; they live according to the desires of the flesh rather than the direction of God and the dictates of Scripture.

- I remember this woeful state of existence – living life apart from the direction of God and the tenderness of His grace. I walked about in darkness, having no hope or assurance of life eternal, void of the peace and comfort found in Christ. Such is the state of many today. They are in desperate need of the gospel light, being adopted into the family of God through Christ the Son.

D. Their Callousness (19) – **Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.** Paul reveals the perilous condition of those apart from Christ. Clearly, these have been exposed to truth, but made a willful decision to reject it. They have moved past the feeling of conviction, their hearts becoming hard and calloused to the Spirit's pleading. Such callousness has resulted in their lasciviousness (*debauchery, immorality, lack of restraint, an insatiable desire for pleasure,*) and uncleanness along with greed. Their lives are lived in service to the god of pleasure, being bound in the depravity of their sin.

- Does not our world, and particularly our nation, reflect the disturbing picture Paul has presented in these verses? There is no moral compass in America today. Like those in Noah's

day, their imaginations are upon evil continually. We have developed the mindset prevalent in the period of the Judges – every man does that which is right in his own eyes. These are in desperate need of faithful believers to consistently live and proclaim the truth of the gospel.

II. The Renewal of the Believer (20-24) – Here, Paul offers the contrast of the believer as compared to the unbeliever. The difference is enormous. He spoke of:

A. The Confirmation (20-21) – *But ye have not so learned Christ; ²¹ If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.* Paul declared the characteristics and reality of the unbeliever is contrary to that of the believer. These behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes are not of Christ. Those who engage in such a lifestyle live in contradiction to the truth and the faith. There must be a clear and evident difference in the life of believers. The world around us ought to clearly see that we are not of this world. No believer should have to argue in defense of their relationship with Christ – it ought to be evident for everyone to see, even if we never spoke a word.

- *During World War II, I lived in a much-bombed industrial town in south Wales. When a bomb damaged a store or commercial enterprise, the dogged proprietor would most likely clear away the worst of the rubble, board up broken windows, clear a space for the merchandise, and put up a sign that read, “Business as usual.” Such a sign said a lot about the commendable determination of the stricken shopkeeper to keep going, but such a sign would be most inappropriate for a Christian life. We are not to conduct “business as usual.” We are to conduct business “under new management,” Phillips.ⁱⁱⁱ*

B. The Expectation (22) – *That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.* Paul further declares the expectation for every believer – we are to **put off** (*literally cast off*) the former **conversation** (*the life, conduct, behavior*) of the old man, knowing the old man is corrupt, being filled with deceitful lusts. Remember the verse we alluded to earlier? *2 Cor.5:17 – Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

- The old man of sin and his desires hold nothing of value for the believer. Being raised in Christ through salvation, the old man of sin has perished and we are a new creation in Christ. We need not return to the cemetery where the old man is buried seeking direction or guidance. We must seek to crucify the flesh daily, walking in communion with the Savior.

C. The Transformation (23) – [And be renewed in the spirit of your mind](#). As he continues the great contrast between believers and unbelievers, Paul reveals the vast difference in mindset between the two. The mind of the believer is no longer focused on the lusts of the flesh and the pleasure of this life. His mind is settled on Christ, seeking those things that are above, being fully submitted to the will and purpose of the Lord.

- As I pondered this verse, I was reminded of Paul's exhortation to the Philippian believers. [Phil.2:5 – Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus](#). He then goes on in the verses that follow to declare the submissive obedience of Christ to the Father as He emptied Himself of the glory He had in heaven, made Himself one of no reputation, taking on the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, the death of the cross. Not that any believer can achieve what Christ did, but that we too must possess such an attitude and frame of mind – being fully obedient to the Lord and His will for our lives.

D. The Sanctification (24) – [And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness](#). Finally, in contrast to the immoral, greedy passions of the unbeliever, the believer, having put on the new man, being resurrected a new creation in Christ, is to strive after righteousness and the truth in holiness. In essence, the believer is to conform to the image of Christ, becoming more and more like the Savior we serve, and resembling less and less the man we were prior to salvation.

- We must bear in mind – sanctification is an on-going process in the life of the believer. We are not what we once were prior to salvation in Christ, but we have not yet arrived either. Daily, we must make a conscious effort to put on the new man in an attempt to walk with the Lord in a way that is pleasing to Him. Regardless of where one is in the Christian journey, there is always room for improvement as we are consistently being conformed to the image of Christ.

Conclusion: Surely, you will agree there is a vast difference in the life of an unbeliever and that of the believer. Where do you stand in your relationship to Christ? Have you embraced the gospel, having repented of sin and received Christ by faith? If not, I urge you to respond today. It is dangerous to reject the pleading of the Spirit. Believer, are you living in such a way that reveals Christ to the world? Are you consistently being conformed to His image?

ⁱ Leadership Ministries Worldwide, [Galatians–Colossians](#), The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), 180

ⁱⁱ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Ephesians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 169.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Phillips, [Exploring Ephesians & Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#), The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Eph 4:21.