

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 4:18-19 - Don't Walk Like the Gentiles - Part 2

Last week we saw that this section in Ephesians is both very practical and very sober.

It's practical because Paul is going to teach us how we get sin out of our lives. The section we're looking at today and last week is all about the devastating reality of sin in the lives of unbelievers. Whether we want to hear about it or not, our state before salvation was a dire one. And the spiritual state of those outside of Jesus right now is bad,

Which is why we need good news, that's what the gospel is: good news. And part of the good news is preaching repentance. The gospel message that has been preached since Jesus and the apostles is that salvation is entirely by faith in the grace of God sending his Son Jesus to die on the cross in our place for our sins.

There is no element of works that saves us. Jesus plus anything ruins everything. Salvation is not Jesus plus baptism, not Jesus plus tithing, Jesus plus circumcision, Jesus plus being nice to your rude neighbor. Salvation is through faith alone in the risen Jesus.

But part of the gospel message is the call to repent from our sins.

The very first time we see Jesus talking in the gospel of Mark he says, "Repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:15

In **Acts 20:21** Paul testified to Greeks and Jews of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther, in the very first of his 95 theses, said that when the Lord Jesus calls a man to repent, he intends the whole of life to be a life of repentance.

Repentance is part and parcel of the gospel message. It has to be part of the message we preach to others when we tell them about Jesus. And it has to be part of the message we believe ourselves.

The gospel call is never just acknowledge Jesus, say that he's saved you and then go about your life in the same manner and somehow you'll end up in heaven. It's not some bucket list box you check and then go about your merry way.

No, it's a call to believe in a God who will utterly change everything about you from the inside out. That change that happens in our lives is what we refer to as repentance.

But this is important: Repentance is not a work that we perform. The actual word for repentance - metanoia - literally means to change your mind. It's a change of mind that is so strong your actions also change as well.

When you're driving down the road and you glance over and see a state trooper and immediately you realize you're going 10 over and you tap the brakes. What happened there? Your mind changed, and then your actions changed.

It's not enough for just you to acknowledge. "Boy, I am going fast...oh well." "I'm living with my girlfriend...oh well." That's not repentance.

It's not even repentance to realize the sin and then slow down just a little. No true repentance is acknowledging the sin, there should be a sorrowful attitude because you've offended God, a stopping of the action, and then making it right as best as you possibly can to honor the Lord.

And get this: even repentance is granted from God. That's what the apostles concluded after Peter told them about Cornelius's conversion in **Acts 11:18**: The to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

2 Tim 2:25: we're gentle with unbelievers because God might perhaps grant them repentance.

So we preach it, but it's not something we conjure up. It's something God has to do in us at salvation.

But it needs to be preached. When we're telling people the gospel: they need to repent from their sin as well as believe in Jesus. They need to forsake their idols, as well as worship the Son of God. Repentance and faith are 2 sides of the same coin.

And we're reminded of that here in Ephesians because Paul says that we are not to walk like the Gentiles walk. **Read 17** Don't walk like unbelievers - that's the big picture. And then what he does is go on to describe the spiritual state of unbelievers.

We've seen 4 of these descriptions so far:

1. We saw that they walk in their sin - this is their lifestyle and habit.
2. We saw that they are futile in their thinking - sin affects peoples' minds.
3. We saw that unbelievers are darkened - it's a like a spiritual blindness that persists until God opens their eyes.
4. And we saw that alienated from the life of God - there is no true spiritual life outside of faith in Jesus. There's no alternate way to eternal life.

This morning we continue through Paul's list of the plight of unbelievers. This was our condition as well before we were saved. And it is still the same condition all unbelievers face even now.

5) Ignorance. They just don't know God. **Read 18**

Something we need to keep in mind with many unbelievers is they simply don't know much about God. Especially if you've been in the faith for years, or were raised in a Christian home, you probably take for granted how much information about the Bible you have. You know there are 66 books of the Bible. You know 39 books in the OT, 27 book in the NT. You can probably find Zephaniah, you can probably recite passages you memorized, and have a decent understanding of theology. Even some of the basic teachings of the Bible are very familiar to you.

Sometimes as Christians we live in a little bit of a bubble with how much we know about the Bible and theology and forget that people don't know all these things.

Side: Sometimes believers really don't know much either. That's expected for those who are new to the faith, but believers who have been in the faith a while are expected by God to grow in their understanding.

Ligonier Ministries puts out a "State of Theology" report every so often. It's a survey of self-proclaimed evangelicals and what they believe. And I'll just tell you the results are almost always depressing. Really depressing. Self-proclaimed evangelical have a horrible track record for biblical understanding.

Many deny the Trinity, deny the deity of Christ, deny that Christianity is the only way of salvation, deny the Bible is divinely inspired. Much of it because they don't learn and grow.

We have to read our Bible. We have to actually pick up a theology book. We have to read through our doctrinal statement, confessions of faith. If you've been in the faith for a few years you should be able to teach someone else through the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. If you can't, come talk to me and let's talk about how to get you there.

But most unbelievers don't know any Christian theology. They might have some vague ideas about God but they just don't know. They are ignorant.

This is why Jesus commands us to go out and make disciples. The word disciple is matheteis which literally means a learner. To some extent what it means to become a Christian is to become a lifelong learner of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to grow in knowledge, grow in grace, grow in obedience.

You remember those What Would Jesus Do bracelets everyone wore in the 90s? I found one in a box a month ago. Those weren't the worst things in the world. If Jesus calls us to follow him, we should probably be asking: what would he do - or have me do - in this situation?

I am constantly learning about the Lord through the word, through reading theology, through reading about biblical issues. You should be doing the same. And our goal in bringing others to faith in Jesus is to teach them the ways of the Lord as well.

Now, something we need to keep in mind is that this ignorance isn't just a simple "I didn't know those things." It can be that, but usually it's more. Let's look at a 6th thing about unbelievers:

6) Hardened Heart. Read 18

Do you notice the connection that Paul makes? Unbelievers are ignorant, but they're ignorant about the things of God for a reason. What's the reason? Their hearts are hard. Usually unbelievers aren't just ignorant because they're ignorant. There's a moral component to ignorance.

Have you ever put off going to the doctor because you didn't want to hear the bad news? You kind of knew what he was going to say and didn't want to hear it? You didn't want to have to change your diet or exercise or take the medicine. What's happening there? You're ignorant - you don't want to know - because you don't want to change. Your heart is hard.

Or maybe your car is making a weird sound. You know something's up, but you don't want to go to the mechanic because you know it'll cost money. It's intentional ignorance.

That's how unbelievers often are with God. They don't want to know about God because then they'll have to change.

Have you ever had an unbeliever make some half-baked claim about the Bible? I don't know how many times I've heard unbelievers tell me I'm ridiculous because if I really read the Bible I wouldn't be able to eat pork, or wear polyester. You can't actually have a reasonable conversation with them about logic and truth because their hearts are hard.

Remember this when your family and friends and people online are trolling you. Remember that when the snide remarks come. They don't actually want to have a real conversation. They're not looking for reasonable explanations. These people are like Pharaoh.

Remember Pharaoh in the Exodus? Plague after plague after plague and the guy just wouldn't get a clue. Why? It's because his heart was hard.

This was our heart before coming to faith in Jesus. That's why Jeremiah talks about salvation in Jesus as being heart surgery. Where God takes out a heart of stone and puts in what? A heart of flesh. We all had hardened hearts before God saved us. Salvation is literally a changing of our heart to be soft to God.

So unbelievers are ignorant, hard hearted.

7) Unbelievers are Sensual Read 19

As we go on in this list, some of these descriptions begin overlapping so I'm not going to unpack every single word. Callous and hard hearted are really the same kind of description.

But I think this one is huge. Unbelievers are sensual. What does that mean?

Older translations called this licentiousness. Which is a long confusing word. But you hear the word license in there. So how I remember it is that someone who is licentious is someone who thinks they have a license to do whatever they want to do.

A driver's license let's you drive.

A hunting license let's you hunt.

A moral license let's you do whatever you want to do.

That's how unbelievers live. "I can do whatever I want to do." They can get drunk, smoke whatever, eat whatever, do whatever. "You have no right to tell me what to do."

One of the biggest mantras of unbelievers is "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone."

Nowhere does the Bible teach that. This word - sensual or licentious - means that they always push the bounds of what is socially acceptable. (BDAG in summary).

Unbelievers are constantly pushing the envelope of social norms. Everything is more edgy, more allowable, less restraint, more sin. And if they're not doing that, then they are often giving cover for those who are. They're applauding the efforts of those who are pushing the bounds. Those people are "brave, true to themselves, not afraid of what people think of them."

I don't know if you heard about the best selling country song called Walk My Walk? It's by Breaking Rust. It's completely AI based music. The song was made by AI, the singer is AI - nothing is real. The whole song is a magic recipe for musical success. Catchy beat, and lyrics that are all about how this guy just does what he wants to do and won't change for anyone.

And it occurred to me that it's basically the gelled down version of half the country songs out there, and other genres too. I don't care what you think, I'm not going to change who I am, you can kick rocks, and then there's the hat tip to God: The Lord knows the man I am.

God knows me. God's on my side. It's like the unbelievers playbook all wrapped up in a catchy beat. It's licentiousness. And that license to sin leads to 8:

8) Greedy to practice impurity. Read 19

So they push moral boundaries - sensuality - **because** they are greedy to practice impurity. Why do people excuse sin in themselves and others? Because they want the sin. They desire sinfulness.

Did you hear about that pastor this week who apparently married a second wife? The story was making the rounds on social media. This is nothing new with polygamy. Every so often you'll see a guy - it's almost always a guy - and he starts "asking questions" about polygamy? "Is this really wrong?" "There's no command prohibiting it," "David was a man of God and had multiple wives" "Solomon, Abraham, Jacob. And everyone's weirded out by this. He's just "asking questions" and then it usually comes out that he's got a side piece. He's having sex with the nanny or whoever. Why was he trying to give license to polygamy? Cause he wanted it.

I mean, the Bible is clear: marriage is between one man and one woman til death. And every instance of polygamy in the Bible is a train wreck.

But the justification happens because people are greedy to sin themselves. They're greedy for impurity. Impurity literally means moral corruption. It's moral filth. And unbelievers are greedy for it. They don't want to dabble. They are greedy. That's how we were.

We wanted to fuel our senses. The highest pleasure for unbelievers is physical pleasure in the here and now. And usually the way they find that pleasure is through sinful means.

Impurity often refers to sexual immorality. That's probably the most common means. Sexual sin is rampant among the pagans and it always has been. Whether it's prostitution, adultery, fornication, pornography, homosexuality...on and on.

The irony is that God created sex to be thoroughly enjoyed within the marriage covenant. That's why God commands spouses to be intimate with each other on a regular basis. He designed us with these desires. Sexual desire is not bad in itself. There's a God-given outlet for them within marriage.

Men you need to be intimate with your wife, and wives you need to be intimate with your husband. We are commanded to enjoy each other in the proper bounds of covenant marriage.

But the world skips all that. They become greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Whatever feels good right now is what they want.

The world also uses drugs. Sometimes drugs heighten senses, sometimes they dull the pain. People abuse opioids, prescription drugs, marijuana, cocaine, alcohol, meth, fentanyl. On and on. What are they doing?

They are controlling their senses. They are either dulling the bad feelings or trying to heighten senses to make themselves feel good.

You can be sensual by food you eat. People talk about food therapy- emotional eating. You just want to feel better so you down a tub of ice cream. Retail therapy: you want to feel better so you go buy \$200 in jeans.

In all of these things there's an element of goodness. Wine does cheer the heart. It's okay to enjoy some good food. It's okay to take medication to dull your headache.

But notice the description. **Read 19**

They have given themselves up to this. There is a giving over to this that's happened. Their senses are in complete control of their lives. They are greedy for it. They have to have this sensual pleasure. They can't stop, there's a compulsion to keep feeling good. It's literally addiction to sensory perception at any cost.

Believers know that God has given us good things to see, taste, touch, feel and listen to. But he's given it to us in a context. When we're greedy for things, greedy for sensuality it's actually a sign that we're driven by the flesh, not by the Spirit.

9) Alright, last one and then we'll kind of put this section back together. Unbelievers are controlled by deceitful desires. **Read 19-23**

Sin is often very deceitful. We excuse sin, we cover sin, we ignore sin.

Turn to Jer. 17. I want to show you a couple of passages that we need to be familiar with. Sin has a way of deceiving us. Well, it's our sinful hearts that deceive us. And we don't even know it.

While you're turning, I remember watching a movie called A Beautiful Mind with Russel Crowe. And it's about a brilliant mathematician who eventually begins to hallucinate about the world around him and it basically destroys his life as he chases non-existent conspiracy theories.

But he doesn't know these are hallucinations. That's the hard part about hallucinations: you don't know they're not real. Eventually he comes to himself. And there's this scene at the end of the movie where he's a professor and he comes out of a classroom and someone greets him. And he looks at one of his students and asks: is there someone real talking to me?

And it's humorous because he's been deceived by hallucinations all his life so he doesn't trust himself. He doesn't trust his perception of reality.

That's kind of how we need to be with our desires. Sin and satan and our heart are deceitful. Sneaky and deceptive. **Read 7-11**

The verse we're probably know is **Vs. 9** the heart is deceitful above all things. Your heart, my heart, every heart is deceitful. Even for those who are in Christ, who have a new heart and new desires we have to be so careful that our hearts are constantly in line with the Word of God.

We twist things, desire things that if we're not careful will lead us to down dark paths. **Look back at Rom. 7:7-12**

Here Paul is talking about the goodness of the Law of God. When we think of the OC, specifically the 10 commandments, we need to understand that they are really, really good. The problem is us. We are sinful. And so we'll often take the law and twist it. Some people think this is how we were before we were saved, others think that this is our life after salvation. I think it's after salvation. We have to guard ourselves. **Read 7-8**

What's he saying? He's saying that sin is so sneaky that we can take a simple command from God and begin twisting it and desiring it.

Have you ever been walking somewhere and seen a "Do not pass sign?" If you're like me you're thinking "What's over there that they don't want us to see?"

And because we're sinful our minds take the Law of God and make it menu for how we can sin. **Read 8-12**

Isn't that crazy? The Law is good and righteous. What's the problem? Our sin. Look at what he says down in **Vss. 21-25**

What's the solution? The solution is to delight in the Gospel of God which has freed me from sin and death. Thanks be to God.

And the solution is the command we saw in Ephesians: don't go back to acting like Gentiles. Don't go back to our sinful ways.

Delight in the gospel of God, Delight in the good God who forgave us and gave us repentance for our good and his glory.

We'll look at how to do that more next week.

Pray