

Ephesians 4:17-32

Pray with me as we begin,

Lord God,

We thank you again for the grace that you offer to us. Give us open hands and open hearts to accept it.

We thank you for the peace that you offer to us. Give us open hands and open hearts to accept it.

Continue to be here as you have already been this morning

Continue to speak, lead, guide and teach us this morning.

Be with the words as they are spoken and with those who hear it as they listen and digest what is said.

Amen

Ephesians is this really beautiful letter written from Paul to the church of Ephesus. We've been looking at this book over the last few weeks. This morning we continue with it by looking at the sixteen verses from the end of chapter 4.

Paul has just finished talking about unity within the body of Christ in Ephesians 4:1-16 where the believers in Ephesus are urged to live with one another in maturity and in unity. Ian led us in looking at that passage last week In 4:17-32, our verses for this morning Paul continues to talk to the Ephesians about what it means to live mature lives that are in Christ.

This morning as we talk about these sixteen verses I want to talk about a few things and I hope that we can gain a few truths from Ephesians 4.

This morning I want to talk about babies, paths, shalom, baptism, and mirrors.

Then we'll close off by talking about lists and grace.

First, Babies.

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Whenever a new baby arrives, there is the inevitable speculation about who the child looks like.

She has her mother's nose.

He has his fathers ears (poor boy)

He or she doesn't look like anyone in our family, his/her looks must come from the other side

He's a red head, how on earth did that happen (with the innuendo regarding the actual father)

There is quite a clear reason for differences of family similarities due to repressed & dominate genes in each generation. In basic DNA, there are 23 X & Y genes being male & female. If there are more X than Y, the child will be a male etc. A male's X genes will come down through the mother's line. So, I am very

similar in looks to my maternal uncle. Through represses & dominant genes, my son is the spitting image of me, and son on.

But enough of that thesis on genetics. We are here to look at Ephesians Chapter 4.

Our text, Ephesians 4:17-32 is a section of this beautiful letter where I think Paul is basically asking the same question to the church in Ephesus.

Who do you look like?

I want to ask us this same question this morning.

Who do you look like?

As I let you think about that question and as we get into the text for this morning I want to give us a basic structure of Ephesians 4:17-32:

V 17-19- This is where you were (the way of the Gentiles/the way away from God)

V 20-24- Remember who you met/ how you were transformed by Jesus Christ

*V24-created to be like God in Christ

V 25-32- Life in Christ

This structure gives you a basic idea of where we're going this morning.

Next we look at paths.

There are two distinct paths that Paul points toward in Ephesians 4. Walking the way of the Gentiles versus walking in the way of Christ.

When Paul says 'Gentile' here what he means everyone who is walking in the path that leads away from God.

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There are many comparisons within the text between the way of the Gentiles and the way of Christ.

The Way of the Gentiles vs. The Way of Christ

Decaying vs. being renewed

Walking like the Gentiles vs. imitating God

walking in love as Christ vs.

Who have given themselves up to every unclean work who gave himself up for us

Alienated from the life of God vs. forgiven and loved children of God

Empty mind vs. Renewed in the Spirit

The lie vs. The truth

Every evil vs. the good

Stealing vs. working with one's hands

Rotten language vs. truthful and grace filled language

Being Bitter, angry and wrangling vs. Kind, compassionate and forgiving

When I look at these comparisons that Paul makes I know what path I want to choose. Paul makes the choice very obvious by comparing one with the other. Once you walked in this way that was away from God; now with Christ you walk toward him.

A lot of us walk for exercise. For a walker this imagery of paths and walking is a beautiful and powerful one.

The act of walking relaxes you. It can also build up energy if I let it and then it becomes this really cool motivating thing. It helps cure headaches, and ails stomach aches. It is a way of getting away and also a way of being able to digest things that are going on in your life and in your mind.

One of the things that I've noticed when I walk is that: when I don't have a destination I have a tendency to simply wander.

I'll confess that many times I've found myself in a place that I've never been before in my life because I've simply been wandering while lost in thoughts and digesting my thoughts. I'll look up and come out of a thought and realize...um I've never really been here before. I had no destination, I had nothing I was walking toward and so I found myself lost for awhile.

This leads me to a question:

Do you have a destination to the walk of your life?

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Let me bring it back to the image that Paul uses in Ephesians:

Are you walking the way of Christ? Are you walking on the path that leads to the heavenly father?

In verses 20-24 Paul tells the Ephesians that they have been transformed by God's truth and by the presence of Jesus. He tells them that Christ has renewed their minds and made them into different people.

Then in verse 24, which is the central verse of this passage Paul tells them that in Christ they are 'created to be like God'

Does this phrase Paul uses stand out to anyone when they read this passage?

‘Created to be like God’

I’m blown away by it. Really, I’m being made to be like God of the universe? That’s massive! How is that even possible?

As I think about this phrase that Paul uses in verse 24: ‘created to be like God’, I’m reminded of the phrase ‘made in the image and likeness of God’ from the Genesis creation poem.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

I think Paul is being intentional in this connection. He wants our minds to be brought to the Genesis account so that we could know what Christ does for creation.

In Christ God’s creation is brought back to shalom.

Now, shalom is a Jewish concept taken from the Old Testament which traditionally means peace. To this day the Jewish person will use ‘shalom’ as a greeting. Instead of hello or goodbye, they might say ‘shalom’ as a way of wishing peace on the person that they come in contact with.

Actually shalom itself means so much more than just peace. It means harmony or completeness within every aspect of creation. The concept of shalom is said to be most fully realized after God has created in the Genesis account. That when God says: ‘it is good’ in Genesis, he is expressing that all of creation is in a state of shalom or wholeness. It is when sin enters the world in Genesis chapter 2; that shalom, that peace is broken.

In Ephesians 4 Paul is saying that in Christ the creation is being brought back to shalom.

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Christ’s intention is to bring this world back to the original creation that God intended. In Christ the world and its people are being transformed back to the shalom it was created with. We are being brought to a place where we could be made to be like God.

That is such fantastic news we could say ‘amen’ and we could go home happy right now. But there is so much more beauty in this passage that I have to continue.

As I mentioned earlier verse 24 is the central or main verse of the section.

Paul talks about the way of the Gentiles in verses 17-19, then he reminds the Ephesians of how they met Jesus and he changed who they are in verses 20-24. And he ends in verse 25-32 by telling them what life looks like when they are in Christ.

Verse 24 says: put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. This is the main thought that all of the sixteen verses flow around.

If we're honest we could get a little uncomfortable with the imagery that Paul uses here. When he says 'put on the new self' it makes it seem like he's comparing the life of the Christian to the act of putting on a piece of clothing.

Comparing the life of the Christ follower to the act of putting on clothes seems really superficial and frankly it doesn't seem to fit with the rest of Ephesians. Throughout Ephesians Paul talks about walking in a new way, he talks about learning of the ways of Christ, and about being transformed to be like God from the inside out. This metaphor of putting on Christ like you would an article of clothing doesn't seem to work with the rest of the letter.

It also leads me wonder: Are we to expect to take off the article of clothing at some point in the day like we would a jacket when we come in from the rain?

Ewe all could struggle with this clothes imagery. What do you do when you come across imagery in the bible that you don't like?

I tend to do more reading, more thinking and more praying until some sort of understanding opens up to me.

As I was reading on 4:24 I read about the baptism ritual that would have happened in churches that Paul planted. Those being baptized would take off their old clothes to symbolize leaving the old way of being human behind. They were then immersed as a symbol of their participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. As they would emerge from the watery grave, they would put on new clothes symbolizing their new identity as the new human who is created to be like God.

This is the meaning of the clothes metaphor that Paul is using in Ephesians 4:24. You have become a new person just like you symbolized when you emerged from the waters of baptism and you put on your new baptism clothes. So when he says put on the way of Christ it has much deeper of a meaning then simply putting on an article of clothing.

He's talking about the symbol of being a new person that they went through in baptism.

Next I want us to take a look at mirrors.

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When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

When I look in a mirror I am reminded that I'd love to lose a few kilos and also my hairline & my kness tell me that I'm not getting any younger.

I sigh and turn away from the mirror.

Perhaps you can relate to my experience with the mirror.

Here's a question that might require some imagination:

If your inner qualities and characteristics were visible in the mirror

Would you like what you see?

Let me ask you a deeper question: If your inner characteristics and qualities were visible in the mirror...

Would you see Christ, or would you see someone else?

I could go further and ask:

If we looked at our church in the mirror would we see Christ?

Am I being transformed to look like God?

Are we being transformed to look like God?

Does it show?

I want to finish this morning with lists and grace.

Lists

I could give you a long list of do's and don'ts this morning.

If I were to simply look at verses 25-32 I could stand up here and tell you:

-Be more truthful

-Don't sin when you're angry

-Don't steal

-If you have a problem stealing, work with your hands

-Don't speak unwholesome words only things that will build each other up.

-Don't grieve the Holy Spirit

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-Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice

-Be kind and compassionate with one another

-Be forgiving to one another as Christ forgave you.

That's one big long list of do's and don'ts.

Be better. Act better. Live better. Is that it? Is that the message for this morning? Jump higher for Jesus?

Many teachings sound like this: Be better, live better, act better and do it now. I know you've heard messages like that before and I confess that I've given those types of messages before. I know

that some people like hearing messages like that. They give a tangible list of things that people are supposed to work toward. But I'm not quite sure that's what Paul had in mind for us.

Paul has just finished saying to the Ephesian church that they learned Christ. He's told them that Jesus has transformed their lives making it so that they could look closer to God. Then he gives them a 'to do' list. It doesn't seem to fit with the grace filled, gift filled letter that Ephesians has been up until now.

What I think the list in 25-32 is, is a list of what the follower of Christ looks like when they are transformed by him.

When you are in Christ, when you are transformed by him to look like God this (25-32) is what you will look like. This is how you will act.

That's a lot different message than: act better, live better and do it now.

It's a lot different than saying: Jump higher for Jesus

So this morning I want to do something that is simple on the surface, but it has a number of different layers to it. It's a different kind of application then we may be used to hearing.

Go to Jesus. Be transformed by him.

Not: be better. Not: live better. Not: act better

Instead; Go to Jesus. Be transformed by him.

I think for us to look at 25-32 as a moral checklist really misses Paul's point. The approach that says jump higher, act better and do it now.

That's not grace.

Grace instead is this really beautiful thing where God looks at us no matter who we are, no matter where we've been or what we've done and he opens his arms wide open to invite us to himself. Grace isn't a demanding thing. Actually, by its very nature it is free.

Paul tells us to run to the vine and then we will produce good fruit.

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So that is the exhortation for you this morning: Go to Jesus. Go to the vine.

Draw closer to him. Invite his transforming spirit to change your life and then watch as verses 25-32 come to fruition in your life and watch as he changes you to look more like him.

To close I'll give you this illustration:

I look a lot like my uncle. I always have. Since the day I was born there was no doubt what the answer was when people said: who do you think Geoff looks like? The answer was always: Don. Actually the question didn't really have to be asked. People would see me and see my uncle and know right away who I looked like. I still get comments on just how much I look like my Don .

As we close this morning I want to ask you one final question:

Do you look like your heavenly father?

When your inner qualities and characteristics are on display; do you reflect God?

This morning, this week, frankly if this could be the only advice I ever give you:

Run to Jesus. Run to the Vine.

For it is in him that we are transformed to look like our heavenly father.

Pray with me.

Heavenly Father. Thank you for your word. Thank you for how you speak through it. Be with us as we continue to wrestle with it, as we continue to digest it and as we continue to integrate it to our lives.

May the words that come from our mouths always be honoring to you.