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Understanding The True Battle

Ephesians 4:17-24

PowerPoint Presentation: None

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SermonAudio blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. If you don't understand what is the problem then you likely will never know how to approach it, much less resolve it. The better you understand a problem the better you can address it.
 - 1. This is what is at the core of our section today in Ephesians. Understanding the true battle. Read 4:17-24.
 - 2. We need to jump right into this passage because there is a lot here that we need to take in. The better you understand this section the better you will understand the sermons to follow almost to the end of Ephesians.
- B. Paul now fully transitions to the practical outworking and consequences of the blessings and truths he unfolded in chapters 1-3.
 - 1. Paul again takes up the idea of our "walk" as Christians. This speaks to our life, our decisions, our values and our conduct.
 - 2. In vss 17-19 he speaks of the walk of the non-Christian, thus reminding them of what they once were and from what they had been saved out of. Very similar to 2:1-3.
 - 3. Then in 20-21 he gives them a bit of a challenge and wake-up call. He reminds them that their former life is not what they learned when they heard and believed the gospel.
 - a. What they did learn was that to come to Jesus and to be a Christian means that you turn from one lifestyle to another.
 - b. But the reason you turn from that one lifestyle to the other is that you were transferred from one reality and one age to a different one, one that is defined by Jesus Christ.
- C. This then, is a passage that helps us understand what cannot be ours in our time here on earth and what should be ours instead. It is a challenge to take the truths we

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have learned and begin to map out our lives together as the body of Jesus Christ and the Temple of God.

- D. And to do this requires that we realize that everyday there is a spiritual battle in which we are engaged. It is a battle not just for truth in concept but a battle for truth in living.
- E. He connects this backward to what he had just taught in vss 1-16 in his "so this I say...."
 - 1. We are called to be preserving the unity we have in the Spirit and through these gifted leaders we are to be growing into a unity of the faith—truth and sound doctrine established on the foundation of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. This means we all are to be actively pursuing spiritual maturity as we work out our service in the Church.
 - 3. Notice in vs 13 where he speaks of us becoming a mature man. Remember that he is not speaking to us individually but as a whole, as a church. We are the Body of Jesus Christ (12c). This is important because this man he refers to is vitally connected to the "old self" and "new self" in vss 22 and 24.
 - 4. So we grow in our doctrine and become solidly grounded in the faith. And this is done in a very practical manner.

II. Reject the pressure to conform to this world (17-19).

- A. What Paul commands is not optional for a Christian (17).
 - 1. We are NOT to be a people who walk like those who do to know or trust in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Notice how he doesn't just "say" but he also "affirms" or "testifies" with the Lord. It is a way of reminding them of his apostolic authority. That word for "affirms" is a very solemn one and here it is essentially being used to put all of us on notice that what follows is to be obeyed.
 - a. He is not offering advice. He is giving a command.
 - b. And for us this is paramount to spiritual growth. Until this reality clicks there will be very little real transformation in our lives.
 - c. So I am asking you to be sober minded today and hear these words and own them, for it is optional to do anything else if you wish to call yourself a Christian.
- B. What is not optional is to continue to live a life that is more consistent with your former life as a non-Christian.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

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1. He speaks of "Gentiles" here but understand it is simply a way of describing non-Christians.
 2. Here he is reminding them again from where they came and what God the Father has accomplished through Jesus Christ.
 3. What he is describing is simply this: that these realities belonged to them once because they belonged to this fallen age and were under the dominion of these powers and principalities we talk so much about.
 4. But not now. Now they have been transferred to the kingdom of Christ. They are now raised and seated with Christ in the heavens far above these powers and rulers.
 5. But the hard reality is that if we are doing what he says in vs 23 then it is very easy to slip back into a conformity to this age.
- C. You can break down his point in four problems for those who do to trust in Jesus Christ:
1. First, their thinking is futile.
 - a. Why? Because all of their reasoning, rationale, wisdom and such is not founded upon a true knowledge of God.
 - b. As he writes in Romans 1 because humanity would not acknowledge God their thinking became futile.
 - c. This futility speaks of emptiness. It is used elsewhere to speak of the futility of worshiping idols. To what end? They don't exist so no matter what one does it ultimately ends up futile.
 - d. I think of the essence of atheism. For so many it makes sense and is comfortable. If there is no God then there is nothing after this life. Pursue what is desired for it really doesn't matter. And then you die and you discover you cannot wish Him away.
 - e. Without a right relationship with your Creator you are left with trivial pursuits and side roads that lead no where.
 - f. Only when we are true worshipers of the true God through Jesus Christ can we have a sure foundation of knowledge and truth. It grounds you and without it you and I are merely broken compasses that never point to true North.
 - g. Romans 8:5-8. This is futility!
 2. Second, is that their understanding is darkened (18a).

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- a. How many times have you heard a new Christian talk about how everything changed when they became a Christian? How things just made sense? Perhaps that was you.
 - b. It is interesting that Paul starts this description with two mental/perceptive problems. In other words, it is not external but internal that is the problem. Or, a person is not a sinner because they sin, they sin because at their core they are a sinner.
 - c. This speaks of the reasoning process. It is darkness.
 - d. Why? Without the work of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and to guide there is at best groping that occurs.
 - e. This is the terrible state that all are in before the grace of God is experienced in being made alive in Christ Jesus. Until that happens you don't know that you don't know.
3. Third, we are excluded/alienated from God (18v).
- a. Here we get into the non-Christian's position before their Creator.
 - b. Notice first that it is not just separated from God, but from the life of God.
 - (1) Remember what I have taught in the past about the idea of eternal life. It is not just living forever, it is experiencing the life that is God's.
 - (2) This is what happened in 2:4 where having listed the terrible state we all once were in Paul then wrote "But God . . . rich in mercy and love, made us alive together with Christ. . . ."
 - (3) This life is not something separate or distinct from God, it cannot in anyway be separated from Him. As it says in Colossians 3, "Christ, who is our life."
 - c. Why are they alienated? Two reasons:
 - (1) Their ignorance.
 - (a) To "know" God is not merely to accept facts. Even real good, true facts.
 - (b) To know God is to obey Him. It is to orient our lives around Him and because of Him. It is to live our lives in awareness of His presence and His character.

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- (c) To be ignorant is not merely lack of knowledge, it is a lack of care for God. It is to ignore Him, to say "no."
 - (d) This is not a mark of a Christian, but it can be a mark of a religious person.
 - (2) Their hard hearts.
 - (a) This is subordinate to the first reason.
 - (b) Because of the ignorance and refusal to honor God as God their hearts don't soften, they calcify. So hard that only the work of the Holy Spirit can break the heart of stone that is there.
- 4. Fourth, out of that hard heart, they give themselves over to the fulness of sin (19).
 - a. This manifests itself in many different ways, but it all flows from that callous heart toward God.
 - b. Sensuality here speaks acting out in such a manner that is shameless.
 - (1) It carries the idea of living your life pursuing whatever you desire to indulge is as if it is your absolute right to do so.
 - (2) It is used in history to describe one man who struck another with his fist for no reason other than the fun of creating a public outcry.
 - (3) This is magnified in his use of "with greediness." It never satisfies so it just pushes a person deeper and deeper into whatever is his idol. Always wanting more and never finding the fulfillment that is desired.
 - (4) This is the climax of his point. The vicious circle of futility that all without Jesus Christ are caught in.
- 5. The life of a non-Christian is, in reality, is one where there is no real finish-line nor one that has a goal. It is a life of futility for in the end, no matter what joys or accomplishments are attained, the reality is the eternal wrath of God in His righteous judgment.

III. Embrace your new identity in Jesus (20-24).

- A. What Paul just described may have been true of us before we heard and believed the gospel found in Christ Jesus, but not now.

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1. The "you" is being emphasized here. To translate it in an effort to give that sense you could say, "but you—not so did you learn Christ!"
 2. This phrase, "learn Christ" is found only here. It is not just believing in Jesus. It starts there but then it grows.
 3. Here we see the connection back to the prior verses from last week. Through sound teaching we are kept safe from false teachers who corrupt us. We grow into conformity with our Lord and we begin to reflect Him all the better.
 4. This again reflects the basics of the command of our Lord in Matthew 28. ". . . teaching them to obey all that I have commanded."
 5. It reminds us that when we talk to people about trusting in Jesus it must also always involve telling them to turn from their sin. To explain to them that this is not some mental assent, it is the giving oneself to an entirely different way of living and thinking.
 6. This carries the idea of repenting. That concept of changing one's mind and one's life from one direction to another. This is why the gospel separates people.
 7. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. (1John 2:17)
 - a. The first part of that verse describes the futility of this age.
 - b. The second describes what it looks like to "learn Christ." It is a refusal to allow the values and passions of this fallen age to define and conform us.
- B. Then Paul challenges them as to if they truly did learn and trust in Christ.
1. Here is one of those gut check moments. Here we are challenged to say either "yes" or "no." 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 John 5:13; John 3:36.
 2. This is the question posed, did the readers, did you and I learn Christ in this way? Were we instructed to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14).
 3. In other words, it is contradictory to walk in darkness while claiming to believe the light of the gospel.

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- C. So what was taught to them? Vss 22-24 lays that out for us.
1. First, that they must be actively and consistently stripping off the old man.
 - a. This takes us back to 2:15 (explain).
 - b. Before God saved us we belonged to the old man, the old humanity that is futile and lost.
 - c. Think Romans 5 and there being to men.
 - d. When we were saved we were transferred to the new Man, Jesus Christ. We now belong to the "new." But we live in a world that is in the "old."
 - e. And so we must always stripping off the effects of living in this fallen, broken, and dead age.
 - f. And this is where the spiritual battle is really at. It is understanding that the rulers of this age cannot touch Jesus.
 - g. Ephesians 1:20-21 coupled with 2:4-5.
 - h. And it is right there that the enemy presses in on us. These rulers and powers of darkness tempt and try us. They market this age and the life and passions of this age as a better option.
 - i. And we must constantly resist.
 - (1) That is how you strip off the old man. To remember and to remind one another that you are now in Christ and the old man is dead to you.
 - (2) It is to renew our minds daily. Feeding on the Word of God and conforming our minds to the mind of God. It is growing in respect to the faith, becoming sound and grounded in the bible.
 - (3) Romans 6:8-11. It starts with "considering" (the first command since chapter 4). Only then does it move to vss 12-13.
 - j. This is why we need one another and not seek to go at this alone. These powers will always seek to tempt the Church to reflect this present age and forget the horizon where Jesus returns and all things are made new and all in Christ Jesus live in that newness.
 2. And that is his second point, daily putting on the reality of who we are in Jesus (24).

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- a. It is daily reminding ourselves and one another that we are to live in righteousness and holiness.
- b. We are not to chuckle at one another's sin. Nor are we to look the other way figuring we should just mind our business.
- c. On the contrary we are to come alongside one another and encourage, exhort, correct and rebuke as is necessary in this comic battle.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. And as we do this then we fight the real battle in the right manner.
- B. We, together, lift up our fists in holy rebellion, refusing to be conformed to this age. We remind each other of the coming of the Lord that we might be found in Him pure and holy.
- C. We do this in the power of God through His Spirit. And even in the midst of great weakness we stand strong not because of our strength but the new creation strength flows in us.
- D. And in all of this God's triumph in Christ is displayed to these powers and rulers through His Church.
- E. And as they rage against the Body of Christ it continues to grow and spread and shine forth in darkness announcing to these forces that their day of judgment is near and is inevitable.

Community Group Questions

- **I would like the groups to consider the serious nature of the gospel call. That we are not allowed to walk in the former reality. How do you fight this in your own lives? Where does MDF come into the picture? How do you make yourself available to both strengthen the brethren and to be strengthened by them?**