## Opening Words

In our day, we are plagued with many false gospels such as – "receive Christ and you'll have all your problems solved." Well, yes, eventually all our problems will be solved, but coming to Christ does not mean all your problems are solved at once.

## 167 Eph The True Way of Christ

I have shared with you the glorious news about one of the most significant words in the Bible. Do you remember what that word is? It is the word, "but". When we were in Ephesians 2 we saw Paul's description of us outside Christ. We walked according to the spirit of the age, we were influenced by the evil one, and we indulged the desires of the flesh and of the mind. And then, Paul used this glorious word, "but." He said, "You were this way, but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ."

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians 4. He gives a seven-fold description of the lost-ness of paganism beginning in verse 17 with the phrase "futility of mind" and ending in verse 19 with the statement that such people give themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. Then, Paul uses our glorious word, "But!" He is saying, "this is the way many in the pagan world have lived. This is the way you lived, BUT something happened to you." Christ intervened in the pagan world. Christ shone his light in the darkness. Christ intercepted the downward spiral of some and set them on an upward spiral. And he did this through Paul, through the other apostles, and through all God's people who shared their new faith and their new life with others living in darkness.

Let's look at a few verses on this theme before we jump back into Ephesians 4. In Acts 26, Paul was defending the faith before Agrippa. He said that his message was the same message that the prophets and Moses talked about, namely, that Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

Did you catch that? Christ is proclaiming light to the Jews and Gentiles. Christ is shining his light into the darkness of the pagan world. How does Christ do this? Through his appointed leaders and all his people. When Christ commissioned Paul he said, "I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God…." Peter said this to the believers in the first century in 1 Peter 2:9, "God has chosen you to proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

This is why Paul can write to the Ephesian Christians and say, "here is how the pagan world lives and this is the world in which you used to live, but Christ has intervened in your behalf." How glorious! Let's look at our text for today, Ephesians 4:20-24.

> But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside

> the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

I want to point out something that is significant, not just theologically, but significant for the times in which we live. I find it in the first phrase of verse 20. Paul says, "you did not learn Christ *in this way*." In other words, when you learned about Christ, when you heard about him, it was not just an interesting philosophy to think about to be tacked on to your hedonistic lifestyle. When you learned about Christ, you learned who he was and what he did and you learned about the kind of life that he was calling you into which was a life away from the paganism and hedonism of the day and into a new life of righteous living.

Unfortunately, in that day, and in our own, people learn Christ in different ways. People heard about Christ in a false way then. They heard, for example, that you could receive Christ and continue living as you were living. This is what John deals with in his first epistle, the idea that you can receive Christ and continue living an unrighteous, unchanged life and you are OK with God because he doesn't care about what you do with your body. John says that is a false Christ you learned and heard about. No one who is born of God continues in sin in this way.

In our day, we are plagued with this kind of gospel – "receive Christ and you'll have all your problems solved." Well, yes, eventually all our problems will be solved, but coming to Christ does not mean all your problems are solved at once. Coming to Christ means your guilt problem is solved once for all, but your personal problems take time to solve as you grow in your daily relationship with Jesus.

Here's another false idea – "come to Christ and you will be healthy, happy, and rich." Do I even need to talk about the lunacy of such a statement? In the first centuries during seasons of persecution faithful preachers were saying, "come to Christ and prepare to die!"

Here is one we most often hear, "come to Christ and you will go to heaven when you die." You might ask, "what's wrong with that?" And my answer is "nothing," and "everything." It is true that those who come to Christ do go to heaven when they die. I know I headed there, and that is a glorious truth. But that is not all the good news. And the problem with this incomplete message is that some pray a prayer and think, "well, I've checked that box. I know where I am going when I die," and they never learn that Christ wants to lead them every day until they die. And so, thinking that they have taken care of eternity, they go their merry way in this life continuing to live in their old life never giving any thought to what Christ says to them now about living for him here and now.

But Paul says, "you did not learn Christ **in this way**." When you learned Christ, you learned who he was, what he did on the cross, that he rose for you and that he lives today as your Lord and leads you into a new life of righteousness. You learned that Christ was calling you out of the darkness of paganism and into the light of his kingdom.

What I want to do now is to contrast the seven phrases of darkness in Ephesians 4:17-19 with the new life that Christ offers. This is important for us today, where people, especially young people

hear about the God of love and Jesus and going to heaven, but they are not embracing the new life into which he calls us. I want to show you what he calls us into.

In paganism, we have futility of mind. Paul speaks of this in 4:17. But in Christ we are to transform our minds so that we can make right choices. As Paul says in Romans 12:2 be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you can choose that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. In paganism, we have futility. In Christ, we have a new mind with purpose and meaning.

In paganism, our understanding is darkened. In Christ, we receive increasing light and begin to understand all things about life. This is why Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." We receive light, not just about salvation, but about everything as we embrace a biblical worldview.

In paganism, we are excluded from the life of God. We become dried up, old prunes with no life, no energy, and no lasting fruit. In Christ, we are energized by the life of God. We receive his power and as Paul says in Colossians 1 we can bear fruit in every good work. Jesus said in John 15, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

In paganism, we have ignorance. We do unbelievably stupid things. We can pass laws to save the eggs of baby eagles, but at the same time pass laws saying it is OK to kill baby humans. In my home town, the city spent millions of dollars to improve a highway, but a worker discovered one small spider on an endangered species list and the whole project was halted! One spider! The worker said, "I should have stepped on it." In Christ, we have wisdom and learn to see things from a bigger picture and not make such foolish decisions.

In paganism, we have hardness of heart. But in Christ, our heart is renewed and becomes soft. The prophet Ezekiel gave a beautiful word picture in Ezekiel 36 when he said that God would take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. As we walk with Christ our heart becomes more tender toward the things of God. We become conformed to the image of Christ and begin to think like him, choose like him, and feel like him. This may include a heart of compassion for the hurting. It may be a heart of indignation toward injustice.

In paganism, we have a callous growing over us. This is another way of speaking of hardness of heart. In Christ, the oil of the Spirit is applied to the callouses of our heart, and softens them so that they become new, fresh and sensitive to touch.

In paganism, because of this inability to feel the things of the Spirit of God, men and women give themselves over to the only things they can feel, fleshly desires. They take their legitimate, God given sexual desires and express them with anyone and everyone, but they find that their desires are never satisfied and they must have more of them with greater variety. As Paul says, they practice every kind of impurity with greediness. But in Christ, we learn the proper expression of these God given sexual desires. We learn to control them and to express them within the bounds of marriage between a man and woman.

It's quite a contrast, isn't it – the life of paganism and the life of following Jesus. Christ Jesus came into the world to shine his light into the darkness that we might escape that darkness and enter a new creation, a new life for his glory. This is the way that we learned to follow Christ.