Opening Words

Recently a pop star who was famous in the 1980s died. He had wealth. He had fame. He had pleasure. His last words on earth were, "So much wasted time!"

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We are engaged in a holy war, a war not fought with bullets and bombs but a war fought with patience, love, mercy, forgiveness, and kindness. And though the war rages in heavenly places, it is raging on earth as well as the darkness and light collide, but we have the assurance and the good news that as the light shines in the darkness the darkness cannot prevail against the light. Jesus told the apostles that the gates of Hell will not be able to stand against the onslaughts of God's people who pray and speak his word.

We are in Ephesians 4:17-19. In our previous broadcast, we looked at how the seven phrases of darkness and sin work together. We saw how a futile life comes from an ignorant mind but at the root of it all is a choice to turn away from God. What I want to do today is go through these phrases one by one and explain them a little more fully to you so that we have a thorough description of the lost world. And the reason I want to do this is that Paul, speaking with apostolic authority is telling us not to be this way, not to live this way. He is not just giving a description of pagans and saying, "aren't they awful." Paul is warning us, admonishing us and saying that he is speaking with Jesus in this matter! Did you notice in verse 17 that he said, "This I say (as an apostle) and affirm together *with the Lord*." Paul is saying that Jesus is commanding us not to slip into this downward spiral.

When I meditated upon that fact, that Jesus is commanding us to avoid this kind of life, I bowed my head, felt sorrow for the times I have slipped, and told Jesus that I loved him and wanted to please him. I did not want to bring disappointment and sorrow to his heart. I wanted to obey him. And so, Jesus and Paul are both speaking here and describing the pagan world but doing it in such a way that they are telling us not to go down this path. That was our life at one time. No longer let it be that way. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:3, "the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries."

In other words, you have had enough of that in your life. Now it is time to pursue Christ with all your heart. In Romans 13 Paul said, "11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

And I wonder right now if someone is listening, a follower of Jesus or perhaps a seeker and you have been going back and forth between a life of serving Christ and serving yourself, and you are tired of it and you are ready for a break with the past and a fresh start with Christ. I pray that you

will make that fresh start right now. Let me pray for you. "Heavenly Father, for those who are listening and struggling with sin and deciding which way to go in life, grant them grace to choose what is right. Give them a break with the past. Give them a fresh start. Give them new life. Help them to lay aside the old and embrace the new. I ask it in the name of Jesus who calls us to follow him. Amen."

Let's look at these seven phrases. I think by looking at them it will motivate us to turn away from sin. Here is phrase number one,

1. Don't walk or live as the pagans do in the futility of their mind. Futility of mind. How many of us want futility? How many of us like futile days? You know what a futile day is like. We all do. A futile day is one of those days where nothing seems to work. Everything we schedule doesn't happen. It seems like we are blocked every step of the way. We get to the end of the day with emotional exhaustion and frustration because of the day's futility and say, "I just want to go to bed and start over tomorrow." You know what I'm talking about. Those days are awful, but imagine a life that way. Imagine a life where nothing works. Imagine getting to the end of life, and you realize that it was wasted. Recently a pop star who was famous in the 1980s died. His last words were, "So much wasted time!" That's what sin does. It brings futility. Paul, affirming with Jesus says, "leave that path completely because it is a path of futility, and walk in my purpose."
2. Darkened in understanding – have you ever encountered a problem in your life, and no matter how much counsel you get, how much thinking you put into it, you can't figure out the solution? It's a knotty problem and the knot is so tight that you can't even begin to unravel it. You don't know what to do. Neither does anyone else. Your understanding is darkened. We have all encountered this from time to time. Imagine an entire life this way. Think of the millions of people who say, "I really don't know what life is about." Imagine getting to the end of life and saying, "I never figured out why I was here." That's what sin does. It brings darkness of understanding. Paul, affirming with Jesus says, "leave that path completely. Leave the darkness and walk in my light."
3. Excluded from the life of God – have you ever had a day where you felt wrung out, that every drop of energy was squeezed out of you. We've all had those days. Imagine an entire life where people get to the end and they are drained. You can see it in their bodies and in their faces and in their attitudes. That is because they do not have the life of God in them energizing them. That's what sin does. It excludes people from the life of God. Paul, affirming with Jesus says, "leave that path completely, and walk in my power."
4. Ignorance – I was on a flight earlier this year and someone in the back of the plane became sick. We were told when the plane landed to remain in our seats to allow medical personnel to reach the back of the plane quickly. But one person wasn't paying attention and when the plane landed and the door opened he got up and while talking on his cell phone walked down the aisle of the plane blocking the way of the medical personnel. Everyone looked in astonishment at this ignorant person. Friends, the darkness is ignorant and people live a lifestyle of ignorance where they do unthinkable things because of sin. Sin brings ignorance and ignorant behavior. Paul, affirming Jesus, said, "leave that path completely. Leave the ignorance and walk in the wisdom that God provides.

5. Hardness of heart – the Greek word refers to marble. It was used in the medical world to refer to a callous or to a bony formation on the joints. The verb means to petrify, to become hard and insensible. It was also applied to vision and thus became an expression for blindness. As we saw in our previous broadcast, hardness of heart is at the root of the disaster of paganism. It is not just a lack of education. It is a lack of a soft heart toward God. God was there at the beginning. God was present at the starting point, speaking, loving, leading, guiding. But people said, "No, I don't want your voice. I don't want your love. I don't want your leadership. I want to do things my way. I want to be in charge," and as a result of turning away from the voice of God, their hearts became hard which led to ignorance which led to exclusion from the power of God which led to darkness which led to futility.

   Let me give you a real-life illustration of this. In a village children were dying of diseases that were easily preventable. The mothers were told that they must protect their homes from the evil spirits that were causing the deaths of their children. But when followers of Jesus found out what was happening, they instructed them in areas of hygiene and clean water, and the deaths stopped. Simple procedures that came from sharp minds and understanding about how life works saved the lives of precious children. There's the contrast. There's the two sides – futility and darkness and ignorance on one side inherited from an ancestry of rebellion to God, or clarity, purpose, light, knowledge and life that come from the truth of Jesus. Every person and every nation is at a crossroads. We must choose carefully the path that leads to light and life.

6. Callousness – this is a synonym for hardness of heart. When I was about 12, I became interested in playing guitar. It seemed so fun. I learned a few chords very quickly. But after a couple of days my fingers were so sore from pressing on the strings. I went through a couple of weeks of pain until my skin became calloused and I could not feel the pain of pressing the strings anymore. This is what happens when a person hardens his heart toward God. Every choice against God brings the pain of conviction, but eventually, a spiritual callous grows over the conscience so that it feels less and less of the conviction of shame from sinning against God.

7. They give themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. Having lost a sensitivity to the Spirit of God, people look for satisfaction, feeling, gratification, and they usually try to fill that void through the lusts of the flesh.

What kind of life do we want? Paul says, "I say to you and affirm what Jesus said, 'don't walk this path that leads to unfeeling and destruction. That was your life. That is no longer your life. When you met Jesus, you embarked on a new path. And when we resume our study, we will start exploring the path of following Jesus. I hope you'll join us for it.