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Ephesians 4:17-32

We Need Grace:

Think Differently

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Have you ever met your **doppelgänger**? A doppelgänger is someone who looks like you but isn't related to you. This is an example of a doppelgänger. A **wedding photographer** met his doppelgänger flying from **Ireland to Scotland**.¹ I met my doppelgänger when I lived in **Falls Church VA**. We attended the same church and people would walk up to him and say, "Hi Jonathan." His name is **Russell**.

In Ephesians Paul calls the **church** the **body of Christ** (Eph 4:15-16).² So my **question** for us today is who does our church body look like? **Who** is our church's doppelgänger? There are **only two options**: the **world** or **Christ**. If we look like the world we will look and act like the **non-believers** we see around us every day. We will **talk** like them and **think** like them and **value** the things they value. We will **mirror** their lives. Or, we will talk and think like Christ who looks **completely different** than the world.

The **Apostle Paul** who wrote the **letter to the Ephesians** is asking the church at Ephesus the same thing. **Who** do you look like? Do you look like the world or do you look different, like **Jesus**?

Here's **what's at stake... Everything**. If we claim to be **Christians** but the world is our doppelgänger, we look and talk and act like non-Christians, we might **not** be real Christians at all. But if our doppelgänger is **Christ**, if we're becoming **more like him over time** in our thoughts and actions, then we are on the **right path**. Let's take an **honest assessment** of ourselves today. Let's **get real**. If we look like Christ, wonderful, **praise** God. But if there are ways we look like the world, **let's repent** and **return** to following Jesus.

What does the world look like? (Eph 4:17-19, 22)

In the **first three chapters** of Ephesians Paul talks about all the **grace** God has given **believers**. For **example**, if you are a believer, God has **forgiven** you of your sins (Eph 1:7); he has **adopted** you into his heavenly family (Eph 1:5); and he will treat you with **grace** and **kindness** forever (Eph 2:7). Now in the **second half** of the letter Paul gives a **playbook** for how God's grace **should change** our lives. And he does this **partially** by **contrasting** us with how non-believers think and behave.

Thinking: ignorant/hard-hearted, selfish/deceived (v17-19, 22)³

17 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. **18** They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (NIV®)

Something about the way non-Christians think is **wrong**. Right now the Bible is saying that anyone not saved by Christ thinks **incorrectly** or **foolishly**. Their **minds** are darkened. They are **blinded** to the truth. Their **worldview** is wrong. To be **quite frank** this is **incredibly offensive**. But just because something is offensive doesn't mean it's **not true**.

Why do people think this way? Paul gives us **two reasons** in verse 18.

- 1) **Ignorance** - They don't know the truth of the **Bible** and **Jesus** (Acts 3:17, 17:30). Gentiles in our passage really means **non-believers**. But does that mean they're **off the hook**?

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

- 2) **Hard-hearted** - They are **willfully** hardening their own hearts. They **don't want to know** the truth. **Romans 1:20-23** says all people can see God's power in **creation** but they **reject** him anyways.⁴

In our **Discipleship Class**, Grace/Truth 2.0, the author **Preston Sprinkle** writes:

Dr. Jonathan Haidt is a world-renowned social psychologist who specializes in moral theory. Put simply, he looks at why people believe the things they do. After years of looking at why good people disagree on core moral and political issues, he learned that people typically believe certain things because they first want to believe them. In other words, *desire precedes belief*. Then, after believing it, they find rational reasons to support their belief. But the thing that anchors the belief is not primarily rational arguments. It's the desire to believe the thing in the first place.⁵

Non-believers believe the wrong thing because they **want** to believe the wrong thing ("desire precedes belief"). But **how** does Paul say non-believers think?

19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed."

- 1) **Selfish** - The world is **greedy** for more. My good is the ultimate good. My happiness matters most. **Individualism** and self prioritization are as high as ever. It doesn't matter if it hurts others. Me first.

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (NIV®)

- 2) **Deceived** - The world repeats their truth until it becomes fact. There's no ultimate truth, just individual truth. Their minds deceive them.

What does wrong-thinking **lead to**? Impure actions.

Actions: impure (v19b)

Verse 19b says "they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity..." We are living in the midst of an **ongoing sexual revolution** that is **redefining marriage, sexuality, and gender** from what God designed each of these things to be. But Paul is actually saying this is **nothing new**. When we don't have Christ we don't desire to live lives of **holiness** or **purity** but **self-fulfillment**, which the world often searches for in **romance** and **sexuality**. What's **the outcome**?

Outcome: separation from the life-giving God (v18b)

Verse 18a says "They are [...] separated from the life of God..." *A mind that rejects Christ leads to a life rejecting Christ leads to a rejection of eternal life in Christ.* The end result is **disaster**, eternal separation from God's grace. The **mind** is **incredibly important**. What we think and how we think **really matters**.

Now if you think Paul is being **tough on non-believers** you're right. But let's **not forget the point** of this passage. In verse 17 Paul says to the Christians "you must no longer live as the Gentiles do." Paul is writing to **new converts** in Ephesus and explaining to them how God's grace should **change** their lives (and ours) in **real** and **tangible** ways.

As believers, **how's** our thinking? **Have we** learned the **whole truth of God's word** or are we **actually ignorant** of what it says? Have we ever **hardened** our hearts to ways we should be **listening** and **obeying God**? Have we ever **selfishly** put "**me first**" or "**my favorites first**" or "**my family first**" or even "**my church first**"? Have we ever **lied**? I don't mean an outright lie, but just a **slight changing** of what **really**

happened to make **me look better** than I should and the other person **look worse** than they should? I think if we're **honest** with ourselves as a church we'll see **we've done all these things**. But what's the **alternative**?

What should believers look like? (Eph 4:20-32)

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned

As Christians we are supposed to look and think differently. Maybe some of you are familiar with **IBM**. They have an office in **Littleton** just past **Kimball Farm**. Did you know that for a long time their slogan has been "Think"? This is why they call their laptops *ThinkPads*. They want to "take everything into consideration."⁶ So you know what **Apple** did in the late 90s to differentiate themselves from IBM? They came up with the slogan, "**Think different.**" This slogan actually helped turn Apple into the **huge success** it is today.⁷ **Apple** wanted to **stand out** against its **competitor**, not blend in. **As Christians**, we have to stand out against those who don't follow Christ. We have to think and act differently than them. **Our slogan** wouldn't be "think different" it would be "*think differently in Christ.*" Our thinking comes from...

Thinking: Christ's teachings, renewed attitudes/minds (v21-23)

21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.
22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **23** to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

What is the **primary** way we as Christians **change** the way we **think**? By **focusing** on the **teachings of Christ Jesus**. By **reading** and **studying** and **being taught God's word**, the **Bible**. As we learn the teachings of Christ we **re-learn** how to **think** and **navigate life**. Thom Rainer writes in *Who Moved My Pulpit?*:

...too many leaders do not take time to read the Bible daily. Brad Waggoner, in his book *The Shape of Faith to Come*, presents a fascinating study about spiritual maturity. The essence of the study is that the most mature Christians have one common trait: they read the Bible daily.⁸

This is why our **By-Laws** say that both our **Elders** and **Deacons** "are to practice **personal times of devotion and prayer.**"⁹ A love for the **Bible** can't just be one of our **core values** in **name** but in **practice**, and it has to **start at the top with our leadership**. As part of his **interview process** for Elder we asked **Bari** how often **Mark** reads his Bible and prays and she said "**every morning.**" But this shouldn't just be an Elder thing. This should be an **everyone** thing. We all need to spend time in God's word and prayer every day.

If everyone at Cornerstone, the Elders, the Deacons, every member and attender **started reading the Bible and praying daily** (or most days), we as a church would **grow spiritually**, we would be much more **unified**, and many of our **conflicts** and **squabbles** would disappear. God's word renews our attitudes and minds. It helps us *think differently in Christ*. **As** our thinking is renewed **how** does that **change** our **actions**?

Actions: repentance and transformation (v25-32)

As we encounter God's word and the **conviction** of the Holy Spirit we begin to **recognize** our own sins and to **confess** them to God. Repentance is both a **turning away from sin** and a **turning to God** (Acts 3:19). It's both **negative** (stopping the bad) and **positive** (starting the good). Instead of reading the passage for us again I've gone through **verses 25-32** and pulled out the **traits** of the **old self** Paul calls us to **stop** and the traits of the **new self** (the positives) Paul calls us to **begin**. The old self is **the person we were** before Christ got a hold of our hearts and the new self is **who I am becoming in Christ**.

Old Self	New Self	Verses
falsehood	speak truthfully	25
sinful anger	sinless/brief anger	26
stealing	work and share	28
unwholesome talk	talk that builds others up	29
bitterness rage anger brawling slander malice	kind compassionate forgiving	31-32

- **Falsehood vs speaking truthfully** - Our old self would be okay with speaking **partial truths** that make me **look good** and the **other person bad**. But the new self, who I am “in Christ,” isn’t afraid to **speak truth** even if it makes **me look bad**.
- **Sinful anger vs sinless anger** - The old self uses **anger** to **get its way** but the new self is angered by the things that anger God (unholiness, sin, injustice). Righteous anger is **rare** and it is **brief**. It **ends at sunset**.
- **Stealing vs sharing** - The old self **takes advantage of others** to get ahead. The new self **works honestly** and **hard** and **shares what it has** with those in need.
- **Unwholesome talk vs talk that builds others up** - The old self **tears others down**. The old self can’t wait to tell others what “**that person**” **said** or **did**. The old self makes excuses for this, “I was just **venting**” or “I was **getting advice** about **how to handle the situation**.” But in our heart we know it’s **gossip**. The new self works hard to speak **positively** about others. The new self goes above and beyond to **lift others up** with words. Even if those words involve **correction** they are **spoken in love**.
- **Bitterness vs kind, compassionate, and forgiving** - The old self gets **bitter** and **resentful** and all the rest when life doesn’t go its way. But the new self is **kind**, and **compassionate**, and **forgiving** even when others **don’t deserve it**, even when it’s **not fair**, even when it **doesn’t make sense**.

So let’s just **take a moment** and **be honest with ourselves**. **How** are we doing at this? As a **church** body do we look more like the old self or the new self, more like the **world** or more like **Christ**?

If we’re **real honest** with ourselves I think we should **admit there has been anger**, and **unwholesome talk**, and **bitterness** and **slander in our church**. Not all the time, but enough for **the word to get around** that **people aren’t happy** either with the **leadership**, or **someone else in the church**, or with the **after-school program**, or you name it, we’ve probably **gotten angry** or **spoken poorly** about it.

The **reason** I’m bringing this up today is because **Paul brings it up** and **I’d rather be a part** of a church that **talks about its issues** in the **daylight** than **whispers about what’s wrong** in the **darkness**. When we shine **Christ’s light** on **our sin** it gives us an **opportunity to repent** and say “We’re sorry. We need grace.” And it also gives us the opportunity to hold each other **accountable**.

If you have a **complaint** with someone, **go talk to them**. If you need **advice** from a **friend**, or an **Elder** or **Deacon**, they should give you advice but then **they are responsible** for **holding you accountable** to **speak directly** with the person you have a problem with. So if someone comes to you and begins to **criticize** or

badmouth someone else in the church, **listen** to them, **pray** with them, and tell them, “Alright, you have **one week** to talk with the person you’re upset with or I’m going to **schedule** the **meeting** between you and them.” We **must** put our **unwholesome talk to death** for the **sake of our church family**.

But I also want to **encourage us** because I also **see the new self too**. I see people **speaking truth** to each other even when it’s hard. I see a lot of people **working really hard** and **sharing** what they have. The recent **re-painting** of the **sanctuary** and the **Market Basket gift card donation** for **Thanksgiving** is a **beautiful example** of hard work and sharing. I see many acts of **kindness** and **compassion** and I **personally** have experienced **forgiveness** for **my mistakes**. I see the new self here, and I know that **through the Holy Spirit the new self will win**. So **what’s** the outcome of a **renewed mind, repentance** and **transformation**?

Outcome: righteousness, holiness, gospel (v24, 32)

24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

When we **confess** our sins and turn once again to Christ he **works on us** and **in us** to produce **righteousness** and **holiness** and **grace**. I’m preaching this **sermon series**, “**We Need Grace**” because that is **exactly what we need**. And that’s **what we have in Jesus**. We **can forgive** because **Christ has forgiven us**. On the **cross** Jesus **paid the penalty** for our sins so that we can live. He died so that we don’t have to die in our sins but through **repentance** and **faith** can receive **eternal life**. On the **cross** Christ **took our old self, crucified and killed it**, and **through his resurrection we have a new self** (Gal 2:20). **Now** we’re just **learning to live** like that new self, learning to show kindness and compassion and to forgive. Every day we’re learning to *think differently in Christ*. And that’s my **closing big idea**. *Think differently in Christ*.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

¹ Man Randomly Finds Doppelgänger Sitting Next to Him on Plane. Youtube. Oct 30, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKNSWcUD0fM> Accessed 12/1/18.

² See also Ephesians 2:21, 4:4, 5:23.

³ Adapted from the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians by Clinton E. Arnold. Kindle location 7885.

⁴ “There is a well-known interplay of texts in Exodus that speak both of Pharaoh hardening his own heart (Exod 8:32; 13:15) and God hardening his heart (e.g., Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1). Exegetical Commentary. Kindle Location 7636

⁵ Sprinkle, Preston. *Grace/Truth 2.0: Five More Conversations Every Thoughtful Christian Should Have About Faith, Sexuality & Gender* (Kindle Locations 624-628). The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Wikipedia contributors. (2018, November 16). Think (IBM). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:46, November 29, 2018, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Think_\(IBM\)&oldid=869185645](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Think_(IBM)&oldid=869185645)

⁷ Greenfield, Rebecca. *The True History of Apple’s ‘Think Different’ Campaign*. The Atlantic. Published December 14, 2011. Accessed November 29, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/12/true-history-apples-think-different-campaign/334256/>

⁸ Rainer, Thom S.. *Who Moved My Pulpit?: Leading Change in the Church* (Kindle Locations 766-769). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Cornerstone Congregational Church By-Laws. July 2017. Elders - Article IV. Section 5. d. (page 2-12) | Deacons - Article V. Section 3. c. (page 2-16)