

Maple Springs Baptist Church

Series: Searching for a Better Life

Week 2: NEW

INTRO: Aren't we all looking for a better life?

In Ephesians 4:25–32, Paul gives a list of behaviors the Ephesians should be practicing. 4:25—Tell the truth, 4:26—don't lose your temper, 4:28—don't steal, get a job 4:32—be kind

Just about every religion in the world tells you those things. So, people say, "All religions are basically the same... the point of all them is **Be Good.**" **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**

Ephesians 4:17, 19. The language of craving. Greedy: I have to have ... hungry for them; I need them. Enslaved to their desires.

Paul says the heart of sin is **epithumia**: "soul lust ... a craving, a yearning, a greedy desire." "I have to have that because without that, I can't imagine life being OK. Without that, I might as well be dead." Not just "lust" for bad things ... it's **anything you feel you just have to have for life to be good. What is the one thing you feel like you have to have for life to be good?**

This is the condition of people apart from God: craving, greedy hearts. And where do these cravings come from? **Ephesians 4:18a**

These **cravings arise from the absence of God from our lives.** We are created for God, When we are one w/ God, our hearts are satisfied. When we rejected God, we lost that essential, life-giving, soul satisfying relationship. Our souls were starving; we felt naked. We're missing something. We may not even realize what it is, but we know we're searching for something.

Where does this come from? **Ephesians 4:18b.** We stay alienated from God because we are ignorant of Him. And what causes that ignorance? **Ephesians 4:18c**

It's not that God is not there or can't be seen, it's that their hearts were too hard even to see Him. **Whether or not we see God has nothing to do with the quality of the evidence, but the state of our hearts.**

Problem: **Because the human heart is alienated from God, it craves sin. We don't know it's God we're looking for. We can't see or sense or know Him because it is too hardened & blackened & deadened by sin.**

Ephesians 4:24 What God is after is true righteousness & holiness. People who do righteousness for the reasons God does it. God does righteousness not because someone is making Him, or because it is a means to an end... but because it is His nature, because He loves it!

PROBLEM: we have an ignorant, dead heart that doesn't really want God. The solution according to Paul is found in 2 things:

- (1) **A new knowledge of God** (so we're not ignorant of Him) **Ephesians 4:21**
- (2) **A renewed mind/heart to delight in that knowledge** (so we are able to receive that knowledge). **Ephesians 4:23**

Where does these come from? **Ephesians 4:21.** When Paul refers to Jesus Christ, he almost always uses the term, "Christ." When Paul uses the term, "Jesus," he is referring specifically to Jesus as he lived on earth.

In other words, **(1) the new knowledge of God comes to us through the STORY of Jesus.** In the story of Jesus, we see the beauty of God. In seeing the beauty of God revealed in the story of Jesus, we are changed. It is by being swept up into the story that everything changes. **It's a story with such beauty and drama in it that when you get swept up into that changes your life!** Not by just correcting things but by changing you fundamentally.

Our ignorance is overcome by encountering the beauty of God through the story of Jesus. But there is something else we need. **Ephesians 4:23.** We need spiritual renewal. **(2) Our minds/hearts perceive the new knowledge by renewal of the Spirit.**

Biblical change: The Spirit of God using the Story of God to make the Beauty of God come alive in our hearts. Only after saturating yourself in the Gospel and only after the Spirit of God has renewed your heart, will your heart see & know God and change.

Which brings us to the truths in **Ephesians 4:25-32:**

1. **Gospel change is primarily a change of desire.** You do truth because you love truth. One substitute for true Gospel-change is "moralism." Teaching people that external behavior matters more than internal character. Moralism is motivated by fear. The Gospel creates in our hearts a love for truth.
2. **Gospel changes begins with Certainty.** The Gospel isn't simply the prayer you pray to begin your relationship with God. It is the way you grow up in Jesus. **Ephesians 4:21-22.** The Gospel is how you start off with God; but it's also how you grow deep with God. It doesn't just save us from the penalty of our past sins and take us to heaven in the future, it empowers us to say NO to temptation in our present.
3. **Gospel change is a response to grace and not an attempt to earn God's favor.** Paul reminds that God has forgiven them and made them His children through the sacrifice of Christ. **God gives His righteousness as a gift, not as something you earn.** As long as your acceptance by God is tied to how good you are, you'll always have a self-interest in being good. When you think that being good & doing good makes you better in the eyes of God and that you'll be more accepted by God when you are good, you'll always be self-interested. The Gospel changes us by telling us of God's love and acceptance of us first, & then invites us to love Him in return.
4. **Gospel change is intimately connected to a person.** **Ephesians 4:30.** We do good in response to God who poured out Himself for us. We do good in response to God's Spirit because He lives in us & we love His presence and friendship in our hearts.
5. **Gospel change is more powerful than religious change.** Gospel change produces deeper, more genuine, sacrificial love, than simply resolving to do better. **Example: Ephesians 4:32.** Not just "forgive." When you are saturated by the love of Christ you can actually start to forgive others & love others like you have been forgiven. **Example: Ephesians 4:26.** He doesn't just say "Don't be angry." (Moralism). He commands be angry in a loving way. Like Jesus." **A total transformation so that even emotions like anger originate in love!**
6. **Gospel change is total change.** Paul talks about areas like communication, emotions, relationships, sexuality, materialism, time-management, humor, care for the poor, theft, families, employer-employee relationships, marriage ... not one part of you is unaffected. The point he is making is that **the result of encountering Jesus is that all of you changes.** If you're Christian life is compartmentalized, whatever is happening in you is not Gospel change. You are religious, but Jesus has never changed you. The result of being filled with Jesus is total change.

So, what do you do? EMBRACE THE GOSPEL

As a Christian ... Admit: "I have parts of my life that are not right. I want to experience this change." Look to Jesus, not religion. Ask Him to help you apply the Gospel to various areas.

For those who are not Christ-followers ...The invitation is not for you to come and be like us... but for you to experience the Jesus we've experienced and let Him change your life.