

UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT

PART 10: EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Let me begin our lesson this morning with a statement followed by a question.

The statement is this: We become followers of Jesus Christ, Christians, we are saved, by grace through faith in Christ alone, right?

That is the statement. Here is the question I have: Given that, is Christianity merely believing the right stuff or is there more to it than that?

[Class correctly responded that there is more to it than that]

As you read through the book of Ephesians and the rest of the New Testament it becomes obvious that we Christians are different from the rest of the world.

We will start with what Paul says just in Ephesians.

Chapter 1: God the Father chose us *“before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him”* (Ephesians 1:4).

That is not like the rest of the world. Chapter 2: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

Different from the world. That is for sure. Chapter 3 says that we are *“rooted and grounded in love”* (Ephesians 3:17).

Again, not like the rest of the world, right? We are different.

And that is just Ephesians. Then you go to Paul’s other letters and he says things like this...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We are a new creation!

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed [that is a great word that describes us] by the renewal of your mind...” (Romans 12:2).

“...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation [that certainly describes our world], among whom you [believers] shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

Clearly there is a difference between us and the world, right?

And then the Apostle Peter. Let’s not forget him. He says...

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” [KJV says, “a peculiar people” ... and here is our mission...] “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...” (1 Peter 2:5).

And then there is the Apostle John who says, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world...” (1 John 2:15).*

Clearly, we are different.

And then Jesus, let's not forget what He says in the Sermon on the Mount.

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14).

He is talking to believers, His followers. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).*

Throughout the New Testament it is clear that there is something different about us Christians.

We stand out from the vast majority of people in the world (or at least we should).

As I read my Bible, God clearly views those of us who make up His church, who call ourselves Christians as being different, unique, and set apart.

I think back to when I first got saved. I was in the 5th Grade.

Even back then, I began to feel this tension between how I knew (with what limited knowledge I had) God wanted me to behave and the desire to be accepted by my friends – the strong desire for acceptance.

That tension never really went away, even as I got older.

Now, as I got into my adult years, I began to care less and less what other people thought about me.

But I still cared to some degree. I did not want to be considered weird, right?

When I was going through tech school in the Air Force, I was in my late 20's.

I was the only one who would go to church on Sundays.

Everybody [else] would sleep in and take advantage of their day off.

One Sunday morning I was going to church and this guy saw me in the dorm there and he asked me where I was going.

I had my Bible. I told him I was catching a ride to church. He just looked at me funny.

He never really said anything. Just *“hmmm.”* I have never wanted to be thought of as being strange or weird.

But the fact is that, if we are living our lives the way Christ wants us to, we are going to be considered by some as strange, as abnormal, as different.

And I am here to tell you, that is OK.

As we are going to see in our lesson this morning, there is more to being a Christian than just believing the right stuff.

It starts there for sure and then it proceeds to permeate all areas of our life.

So, let's begin this morning in Ephesians Chapter 4 and v 17...

READ Ephesians 4:17-19

The word "*Gentiles*" here refers to the unsaved people around you.

The sin we see in our world today is really nothing new, is it?

Paul has just described generally the way of the world.

Most of these Ephesian believers – you need to understand this – they were saved as adults.

So, they had lived their entire lives in a pagan, idolatrous environment filled with immorality.

Now, by contrast, most of us (I have heard your testimony), but not all of us, were fortunate to be raised in a Christian environment.

But nonetheless, we were and still are surrounded by many lost people who do not believe like we do and who live ungodly lives, which they think is perfectly normal.

They do not think they are living ungodly lives. They think, "*This is how it is.*"

Paul says, "*Don't live like you used to -- before you were saved.*"

V 17 says that the unsaved people around you operate, "*in the futility of their minds.*"

The rational thought processes of an unsaved person are distorted by sin and the result is that lost people are basically self-centered.

"*It is all about me. I deserve this.*" Just watch the commercials on TV.

In v 18 it says that unsaved people "*are darkened in their understanding,*" Earlier in Ephesians Paul described lost people as being spiritually DEAD.

They do not have godly understanding. In 2 Corinthians Paul says that "*Satan, who is the god of this world, [little g god] has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are UNABLE to see the glorious light of the Good News*" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The minds of unsaved people are distorted by sin and blinded by Satan.

They may intellectually be very smart (I have known a lot of really smart unsaved people), but they are unable to understand spiritual truths.

That is what the Bible says. It does not compute for them.

The things of God make no sense to them. V 18 goes on to say that they are *“alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.”*

They do not know, they do not believe or follow God’s truth. They have a different standard than we have.

They do not follow this [In class I held up the Bible] . Everybody has a standard.

This is ours.

Just a reminder, all that being said, that was us before we got saved.

Not only are their minds distorted by sin. Not only is Satan blinding them.

Not only are they ignorant of the truth. On top of all of that, what little light they do have, they willfully reject.

V 18 ends with, *“due to the hardness of their heart.”*

They hear all that stuff about Jesus (there are all sorts of Christian programs on the airwaves) and how He loves them and wants to save them as foolishness or just a big waste of time.

In v 19 Paul says, *“They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”*

Such is the life of an unsaved person. They are running along the path of sin and headed for destruction.

So, Paul here in these verses is painting a pretty bleak picture of a person’s mindset, their life before they get saved.

As I read this again this week, the thought crossed my mind, *“Given all of this, how does such a person ever get saved?”*

The cards are stacked against them. Well, it takes divine intervention.

The Holy Spirit must convict them of their sin and of righteousness and judgment.

And only then will they be able to respond in faith and believe.

Left to their own imaginations and devices, they will never believe. Salvation is indeed a miracle of God!

That was your old way of life. That was you way back when. But something changed, right? Something changed.

And that change is described beginning in v 20. By the way, what we are about to read is typical Paul – this is all one long sentence.

READ Ephesians 4:20-24

Paul says, “*Something happened that altered the course of your life – you learned the truth about Jesus.*”

You got saved and it changed your entire destiny. It transformed you. It put you on a whole new path.

V 22-24 talk about putting off your old self and putting on the new self.

And here Paul contrasts our new self in Christ to our old self apart from Christ.

The language that Paul uses, “*putting off*” the old and “*putting on*” the new implies that we must DO something.

There is some action involved on our part. Now, you all know me and you know my theology.

I am big on the sovereignty of God and I see a lot of things in life as ordained by God.

He has a clear direction He is taking us, right?

However, clearly the Bible teaches that we humans can make choices.

We can exercise our own will to do what we want to do. And this part of Ephesians emphasizes that.

How do we put off our old self and put on the new self?

V 23, “*be renewed in the spirit of your minds.*”

This gets back to the heart of Paul’s prayer in Chapter 3 (which I reiterated several times) that we “*may be filled with all the fullness of God.*”

We willfully, daily, submit, we turn over control of our mind, our will, our emotions, our ambitions, our plans, our life to the Holy Spirit.

It is a daily renewal. It is a conscious action on our part. I call this a “*spiritual discipline.*”

It involves (it depends on your schedule) spending some time in His word and spending some time in prayer;

worship of the Lord – He loves to hear us worship Him; confession of sin;

bringing our petitions before God (for ourselves and for others). It is a daily action.

It is something that we must do regularly. And why?

Because our old self, our sin nature (which we still have, it is still there) is grabbing for the steering wheel of our life and trying to [seize] control.

It is trying to say, “*I am going to control it.*” And so, it is a constant battle!

That last phrase in v 24, “*created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*” describes Jesus.

When Jesus was here in the flesh He displayed the likeness of God for us.

Jesus told Philip in John 14:9, “*Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.*”

His life was truly righteous and holy.

What does all of this (that we just read here) look like practically?

We have a word for the process of becoming like Christ over time and that word is “*sanctification*.”

I think about it like this... The day I got saved I behaved a lot like the old unsaved me.

I am just being honest. I was not radically changed. Some people are. Not me. I was ten years old!

So, I was just like the old unsaved me, maybe a little bit better.

I fast forward 50 plus years later, I look less like the old me and more like Jesus.

Not completely like Jesus. I am not there yet. But more like Him than the old unsaved Chris.

Let me stop here and just emphasize something again. We don't do any of this in order to somehow maintain our salvation.

We do these things motivated by our LOVE for our Lord.

We have a strong desire to please Him because we have a relationship with Him.

A marriage relationship is a great picture of our relationship with Christ.

[At this point I shared a picture of my wife and I that was taken on our wedding day] .

I got permission from [my wife] to share this picture with you.

My wife and I love each other very much. We are getting ready to celebrate our 25th anniversary this year.

We tell each other all the time that we love each other.

And it never gets old hearing it come from her. I love to hear that.

I assume she loves to hear me tell her that.

And we don't do that, we don't say all those things, try to do really nice things, making each other happy – we don't do those things in order to sort of check off a box.

“I did my husbandly duty for the day. I told my wife I love her, check. I gave hers some flowers, check. I kissed her, check.”

We want to make each other happy. That is truly our goal, our desire. That is our intention.

I do those things because I love her not because I have to do it.

I really love her and I wish I could do more.

So, it is not like we are trying to just maintain the relationship so that we don't get a divorce.

We are really expressing how we really feel. We really love each other and want to do nice things for each other.

We are motivated by our love.

The same goes for the Christian life and our relationship with Christ.

It is not *“If I don’t do this, then God won’t bless me.”*

You are looking at it wrong if that is what you think.

No, I do things I know will please God because I love Him. I want to please Him.

That is my motivation. That is why marriage is such a great picture of our relationship with Christ.

READ Ephesians 4:25

“Therefore [given what Paul has just said, given all that, there is something we need to do], having put away falsehood [in other words, we don’t lie any more like the rest of the world does], let each one of you [you believers, you that have been changed by Christ] speak the truth with his neighbor [we learned in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbor is any person that we come in contact with], for we are members one of another [we are all part of the body of Christ].”

READ Ephesians 4:26-27

“Be angry and do not sin...” Anger and sin are two different things.

There are some things we as Christians should be angry about, right?

Injustice, the senseless murders of innocent people, fraud, being sacrilegious toward the things of God and Christ, and so forth.

Those are the things that ought to make us angry. But too often our anger is sinful.

For example, when we take personal offense at something. Anger produced by pride or a desire for revenge is sinful.

Paul says in the verses that follow that sinful anger must be dealt with immediately.

It says, *“Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.”* That is pretty quick. That same day.

So, if you have become angry at somebody and you know that person and can contact them, you might want to say, *“Hey, I was wrong.”*

Just confess that you were wrong and should not have let that happen.

You need to take care of it quickly.

And then Paul says, *“And give no opportunity to the devil,”* v 27. What does that mean?

Nelson’s Commentary explains it this way: *“Satan waits for an opportunity to get his foot in the door. Uncontrolled anger is an open door and an invitation for Satan to enter in – to disrupt and corrupt the body.”*

That is pretty good. Now, our anger can hurt our witness, especially when people around us know we are Christians.

“See, they are no different than anyone else. Look at them. Look at the way they act.”

Our anger can negatively impact human relationships. How many of you all know people who have been angry for decades over stupid little things.

Silly stuff! And they stay angry and relationships are ruined over it. Our actions really do matter.

I have a rule that I have adopted for myself the last few years (just so you all know).

Whenever I feel the urge to react negatively, I give myself 15 seconds. I stop, catch myself. I step back.

I say a short prayer and consider the consequences of what I might say. Fifteen seconds.

That way I avoid having to do damage control later. That is no fun, right?

And usually, it takes years to actually undo things. And I have never regretted NOT saying something.

READ Ephesians 4:28

The old me and the me that sometimes operates in the flesh tends to take from others what does not belong to me.

The new me, the one controlled by the Holy Spirit gives away to others what belongs to me.

It is called generosity. Apart from Christ we are selfish and self-centered. That is just the way we are.

Controlled by Christ, we look for opportunities to help and serve others.

READ Ephesians 4:29

The old me and the me that sometimes operates in the flesh have a tendency to criticize and tear others down.

The new me, the one controlled by the Holy Spirit, looks for ways to build others up and encourage them, say nice things to them.

I had the opportunity to tell somebody when we were on our trip to [Dallas Baptist University] the other day that a song that they sang really blessed me.

I had never told them that before and so I went up to the table and told her that.

And I think she appreciated that. So, I like to build people up and encourage them.

There is nothing new here, is there? You have all heard this before, right? It is good to be reminded.

So here we go. We will wrap up Ephesians Chapter 4. This is one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible

READ Ephesians 4:30-32

Christians ought to be the most forgiving people in the world. After all, we have been forgiven so much. Agreed?

Do you all remember the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant?

In that parable (just to give you a reminder) a servant owed the king 10,000 talents (in today's economy that would be millions or billions of dollars, more than he could ever pay in his lifetime).

The king threatens to throw him and his entire family into prison.

Well, the servant begs and pleads for mercy and the king felt compassion and gave him a full pardon.

But then that same servant goes out and he finds one of his fellow servants who owes him 100 denarii (several thousand dollars today).

He demands payment immediately. Well, the servant begs him to have patience and he will repay him.

Now, you would think that the servant, having been forgiven his mountain of debt by the king, would himself be forgiving.

You would think that, wouldn't you? Not so. He is unwilling to forgive his fellow servant and has him thrown into prison.

The story continues from there. But the main point that Jesus is emphasizing in that parable is that we, His followers, ought to forgive others over and over and over and over again, no matter how many times we are wronged.

It goes against human nature, doesn't it? We want to hold grudges.

Jesus says that you forgive because you have been forgiven much.

So, today's lesson, we will wrap this up – there is no heavy doctrine here.

The question that we have to ask ourselves, having heard all this, is *"How are we doing?"*

This is all practical application. *"Do I need to work on some things?"* Ask yourself that.

Like I said, nothing I said this morning was new. You've heard it all before.

I think that sometimes we just need to be reminded of what God expects from us, as Christians, and why.