

Bible Basics Conference 2009: "Walk Worthy of the Calling!"

Part 9

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[00:00:00] Well, we're continuing chapter 4 of Ephesians, and if we just take it a couple of verses at a time, the next section are these two verses, three verses, 17, 18 and 19.

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them to the blindness of their heart, who, being past fit, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

It's always a little worrying when one of the speakers that's preceded you has made one or two comments that you intended to say, but I take heart because, you know, if something's [00:01:07] worth saying, it's worth repeating, and our brother Simon, he mentioned what I was going to make my opening remarks, and that's when we see this little word, therefore, we must ask ourselves what it's there for, and I noticed, actually, in previous chapters, we have a similar expression, and it's this.

In chapter 3, verse 1, Paul says, for this cause, and, or for this reason, and, again, in verse 14 of chapter 3, for this cause, or for this reason, and, in verse 13, wherefore, again, the opening verse of chapter 4, I, therefore, and then in this verse, which starts [00:02:02] my section, this I say, therefore, and it's very important for us to realise this, that the scriptures work on the basis of setting before us truth and principles, and the desire is, the intention is that we should fully grasp, that we should fully understand these things first, and having done so, we then go on and we put them into practice. So I want to emphasise this, that what we've had, particularly this morning, in the earlier sessions, was establishing the truth, the principles that God would have us grasp, and now, in these afternoon sessions, we're taking up what is our response, what do we do practically in consequence of what the Apostle has established.

Well, the Apostle was writing to these Ephesian believers, and as we saw in the first session, [00:03:08] Michael showed us that Ephesus, that place in Turkey, geographically, socially, the Ephesians were Gentiles, primarily, and they were of the nations, and so Paul was able to say to them, now, I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles, as the other Gentiles. These Ephesian believers were well aware of what it was to be a Gentile, they were well aware, by their own experience, what it meant to be a Gentile, and to be associated with all those characteristics which were given, and he said, one of the things that characterizes [00:04:06]

these Gentiles is that they walk in futility or vanity of their mind, their understanding is darkened, and they're alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Now, if we go back to chapter two, our brother Mark covered this, and it's a very, it makes very sorry reading, doesn't it, when we read this, particularly acknowledging that this described what we once were.

You, the Apostle writes, being dead in your offenses and sins, in which ye once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom we also all once had our conversation [00:05:02] in the lusts of our flesh, doing what the flesh and the thoughts will to do, and were children by nature of wrath, even as the rest.

So we have a very dark and sad picture painted for us, and you know, today we're surrounded by this mindset, these characteristics of the nations.

Brother Simon has already mentioned this great lie which deceives so many today, this so-called theory of evolution, and you know, there's this fellow Dawkins, he knows so much about it, it seems that he has this mission, he's desperate to disprove the existence of God, he's absolutely desperate to show the futility of believing in creation, and you know what? [00:06:05] One has to ask oneself what is the point? If he's right, if everything is a big accident, if there's no author of life, if there's no purpose to life, if there's no reason for our being here, does it really matter if we believe in a God?

Does it matter? Does it make any difference at the end of the day? The answer is of course it doesn't. So why is it that he's so intense on pushing home this thought that there's no such thing as God, there's no such thing as creation, and evolution is a decided fact? You know, it's because he and everyone who follows him is deluded, it's this futility of mind, and it's the mindset that affects so many in this world, and what's the source of it?

We read about it in our verses, in chapter 2, it's according to the ruler of the authority [00:07:05] of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. It's that old serpent, the devil, that one of whom we read in the opening chapters of our Bible, that old serpent that deceived Eve, and what did he say?

He lied.

He said, has God said?

And you know, this is the source of this futility of mind.

It's a satanic darkening, it's ignorance, it's blindness, and such were these Ephesians.

And so it's a very, very sorry situation that's painted.

And you know, if one has such a mindset, if one is given to delusion, and it's not just [00:08:01] in regard to evolution, it's in regard to every facet of our lives, it's regard to morality, it's in regard to what motivates us, it's in regard to what enjoyment and pleasure we get out of life.

If we listen to the lie of Satan, then our whole course of life is one delusion.

We're diverted from the true course of God, and this is that which characterizes those of the Gentiles.

Understanding darkened, alienated from the life of God, and what does this lead to in practice?

So, I don't really need to say it, we all know it of ourselves, but practicing sin results in a hardening of our hearts. It results in a searing of our conscience.

The first time we commit a sin, you know, there's perhaps a hesitation. [00:09:05] We give in to temptation, or perhaps we follow the goading of our peers. And afterwards, there's that pricking of our conscience, there's regret. But if we persist, you know, time and time again, those effects diminish over time. There's less hesitation, there's less regret, and people in this world, as they go on through life, because they practice sin, the consequence is a hardening of their hearts.

And as time goes on, they're affected less and less by the consequences of their wrongdoing. This is the logical and natural consequences of the outworking of the natural heart. And these verses says that they're past feeling.

And we see this all around us, carelessness, a lack of compassion, greed, where if we want [00:10:07] to get on in society, we get on by treading on the toes of everyone else.

It's all wrapped up in this terrible attitude of heart.

And so these are some features which are listed for us in these verses from 17, 18, and 19.

But I've made a little list, I don't know how well you can see it on the slides, but this is a summary of what characterizes the rest of the nation.

It's really a description of what relates to the world.

Those that do not believe in the Lord Jesus, the world, are characterized by these things. [00:11:04] But, the apostle says to the Ephesians, and he says to us, but you have not so learned Christ.

If you have heard him, verses 20 to 24, and have been taught by him according as the truth is in Jesus. Namely, you're having put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and being renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you're having put on the new man, which after or according to God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

So now the apostle is able to take up something of a positive tone. And he says, but you have not so learned Christ, if you have heard him. Now I want to say at the outset that I'm sure this if is not an if of doubt, it's an if [00:12:04] of consequence. He's saying that you have heard him, you have been taught him, now what's the consequence of that?

Well the consequence is you're having put off concerning the former conversation, the old man.

Now in the notes under session eight, there's a second bullet point asks this question. Putting off the old and putting on the new, how and when did this happen? Well I should say that our otherwise

excellent authorized version is perhaps a little bit unhelpful in this section where it says in verse 22 that ye put off.

In Mr Darby's translation it's clearer and it says having put off.

[00:13:04] Now go back to chapter two, those verses we looked at which gave us a very dark picture of what the Ephesian saints once were.

And now we take up verse four, but God being rich in mercy because of his great love wherewith he loved us, we too being dead in offences, has quickened us with the Christ, ye are saved by grace, and has raised us up together and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

So I suggest that this is the answer to that question, how and when did this happen? How did it happen?

It was a work of God. God rich in mercy and because of his great love has quickened us.

So the answer to the question is when did we put off the old man, when did we put on [00:14:02] the new?

It's a work of Christ and it happened at the beginning of our Christian pathway. Without going into controversial areas, let us say that it's a work that God does when we're born again.

Now we would say well that's what's true of us positionally.

We were once characterised by the old man, that's what we were naturally as children descendants of Adam.

But the old man has been crucified and when God did that work in us he gave us, he made us a new creation.

So it's what we are positionally and I go back to what I said at the beginning that God wants us to understand what is true in principle. He wants us to grasp it and then to go on in practice.

[00:15:05] And we must get a hold of this that we have put off.

It was what God has done in us. It's a truth that we must grasp.

Now having grasped that we can go on in a practical way and make it a reality and go on in the good of it. But unless we grasp this, the danger is that we think it's something that we have done or that we must do and we go on in trying in the power of our own strength.

And we have to say by way of warning that if we are trying to do it in our own strength we will utterly fail.

We will be disappointed. We will come crashing down. And this is where many dear Christians go amiss because they haven't grasped this wonderful truth that in Christ we have put off the old man, we are a new creation and we don't need [00:16:07] to try and do it in our own strength and it'll end in

tears if we do. It'll end in failure. So I hope we've grasped this. You have not so learned Christ, your having put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, all those things that we spoke of were true of the other nations, they were true of us, they were true of you and me before we were converted to the Lord Jesus.

Having put on the new man which according to God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

And then verses 25 to 28, wherefore, there it is again, having put away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour for we are members one of another.

[00:17:01] Now this goes back really to what our brother Simon has brought before us, this wonderful truth of the unity of the one body.

And we might ask ourselves why is it important, why when we're considering our testimony in the world, why is it that the spirit connects our testimony to the world without being members one of another?

Well I suggest it's because of consistency.

If and I'm not saying this by any way of doubt but as a consequence, if we are members one of another, if there is one body of which every true believer is part, how would it look if on the one hand we had believers acting as we think believers should and then on the other hand we have some believers carrying on with those characteristics of the old man, [00:18:01] lying and so on.

It would be inconsistent, wouldn't it? It would bring the testimony of the work of the Lord into disrepute and so I believe the spirit here introduces this thought that having been made one, having been brought into unity, being members one of another, there's this testimony to the world and it's important that outwardly we show these characteristics which are consistent with the new nature. Can we get this verse, be angry but sin not.

Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Perhaps some of us have had difficulty with this little verse, be angry, it doesn't sound like a Christian characteristic but you know there are occasions in the scripture where God is angry and with God it's a righteous wrath, it's a righteous anger and I don't [00:19:05] think it's inconsistent for the believer to be angry if it's a righteous anger.

The trouble is we get angry about other things and we let it, it seethes and we let it stew and we go to bed and we're still angry and we wake up and we're still angry with that person that's offended us or whatever and so the scripture's very clear that there's a distinction between what is appropriate, righteous anger and probably the anger with which we're more familiar. So there's this injunction, don't let the sun go down upon your wrath, matters should be nipped in the bud and dealt with. These are very practical exhortations, aren't they?

Neither give place to the devil, well you know if we go to bed angry you can be sure the devil is being given a place because when we wake up he's got, it's grist to the mill [00:20:06] and there's work for him to do.

And then it goes on to say let him that stole, steal no more but rather let him labour, working with his

hands things which are good and honest that he may have to give to him that has need.

As unbelievers we're characterised by certain things, we're in bondage to sin and we practise on a regular basis those things which are contrary to God's word.

Now when we're converted to Christ we're forgiven, we're given a new nature and it's no longer true of us that we're bound to live in the same way, we're not, we don't practise as a habitual thing these things, that's not to say that we don't sin, that's not to say [00:21:04] that we don't fail, we do, we know that practically. But for the believer it's not, it's not a matter of course, you know some people they go about their lives and they're inveterate liars, they're deceivers, it's just the way they are.

A Christian isn't like that, sure we slip, we may say things that aren't true but there's a great deal of difference between going out and living with the intention to deceive because everyone else does it, because we have a motivation to get, this is the great distinction. If somebody was a thief and he's converted to Christ then theft is no longer his occupation and so the exhortation is let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labour and the principle here is twofold, that we work honestly not only to supply what our own needs [00:22:10] are, if we don't work we don't eat but that we may have to give to him that has need. Now how different this is in contrast to the things of the world, what is it the spirit of this age, we work, we work, we work because we want more money, because we need these things that everyone else has, it's what we desire for pleasure, it's the only thing that satisfies us, this is the whole mindset of this world especially at this time of the year is all these things that you must have, everyone at school's got them, everyone in your workplace has them, your neighbour has them, you need them, you need to work hard to earn more money so you can buy all these things because without them you won't be happy and it's selfish, it puts us at the centre but the believer isn't like that, the believer [00:23:05] is content with what he has, he works to provide for his needs and so that he may fulfil the needs of others and this isn't something that the world thinks of, the world isn't concerned with the needs of others, it's only this renewed mind that can give us such a motivation.

Verse 29, let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good, so the use of edifying that it may minister grace unto the hearers. So Paul is now bringing out a contrast with all those dark features, lying, deceit, lack of feeling and he's showing that for the believer these things are completely the other way round. Now instead of lying and deceit there's good words but more than this that it is for the use of edifying that [00:24:07] it may minister grace unto the hearers. Now as a result of knowing that the Lord has given gifts for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of believers, what we say is for the benefit of others. And then there's this exhortation, this warning, grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. This is as we've said the stamp or mark of ownership. It's a sign that we have a new nature, that the work of God in us is demonstrated by our being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But now here's a practical point, the Holy Spirit can be grieved, he's a person, only a person can be grieved, a power, an influence can't be grieved but the Holy Spirit can be grieved [00:25:02] or quenched. How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? By giving in to those features of the flesh.

By giving in to what we should reckon dead and it's a very solemn matter that I take to myself as well as speaking a word of exhortation. This Holy Spirit who's in us to work, that there might be an outworking of what is true of us positionally can be grieved, can be quenched and bear in mind it says whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. And it's already been brought out that yes we're still in this world, we're still marked by failure but there's coming a day when those things will no longer be true. When the Lord comes we'll be taken out of this scene, out of this world, all that is true

of us in weakness [00:26:02] and failure will be passed. A day of redemption and we have that before us, it's a wonderful prospect. So the scriptures say let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all manners and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another. All these things are in contrast to that long dark list that we saw and the last question on the sheet says what is the model and measure? Well very briefly because my time's gone, it's Christ. We have that at the end of chapter four. Be ye kind one to another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. He is the model and he is the measure. We think of all the love of God shown out in the work of Christ, unmeasurable, [00:27:02] wonderful love and that's the measure with which we should be kind to one another and so on. So I don't know whether you can see it, perhaps you'll get copies of this later on but here is a contrasting list of what characterises the world, the old man but you and by consequence you and me, we have these new features which are the result of the work of God and the work of the spirit in our hearts. Now for homework I'm going to point you to a parallel passage in Thessalonians 4 and verses 1 to 12. If you read that and you'll see there there's a similar thought mentioning of what was true once of the nations and what's true now of us in Christ. For this is the will of God even your sanctification that you should abstain from fornication and so on, not in the lust of concupiscence even [00:28:01] as the Gentiles which know not God. Well Thessalonians 4, 1 to 12, a little bit of homework for you and I trust with the Lord's help we might appreciate something of our testimony to the world, the end of Ephesians chapter 4.