

Ephesians 4:17-24

Ephesians
Live Like You're Alive!

"I'm here to say that I deny the Holy Spirit and I deny the existence of God. I'm here to say that mankind needs to accept the truth that humans are nothing special and that we're just a product of evolution. Society's going to be great as long as we can move forward in a rational and logical manner. This does not include the existence of God."

With that 16 second submission to YouTube Chris joined hundreds of others in a challenge put out by the atheist web site RationalResponders.com.

It's called The Blasphemy Challenge and it's based on Mark 3 in the Bible where Jesus says there is eternal condemnation for those who commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Deny the Holy Spirit on camera and they'll send you a free copy of the atheist DVD "The God Who Wasn't There."

Actually, Mark 3 refers to those who physically saw Jesus' miracles and attributed His powers to Satan. We would say the unpardonable sin is unbelief.

Once a person believes in Christ they're forgiven of all things so just saying the words "I deny the Holy Spirit" doesn't guarantee eternal damnation.

Southern Baptist leader Richard Land, who had a PhD from Oxford, commented on the whole thing this way; "My response would be to pray for them Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

To which atheist Michael Lawson replied, "I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm daring God to send me to hell. We want to show what we mean when we say we don't believe a word in the Bible."

I read that and wonder two things.

First, I wonder how many of the mostly white young males who put up their videos has ever taken the time to investigate the superabundance of solid historical, scientific, and prophetic evidence for the reliability of the Bible.

The second thing I question is, what good has atheism ever done a failing marriage, a grieving parent, a dying child, a struggling alcoholic, a drug addicted young adult, or a depressed mother.

What substance can atheism offer that changes a life for the better?

What rocks my world is to see God do in other people what He did in me. He turned my life around. He rescued me from hopelessness and despair.

As the Bible puts it, He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. Psalm 40:2.

The Bible is a life-changing book because it's God's Word. It's alive and powerful because the Holy Spirit takes it's spiritual truths and applies them to our life. At least if we open ourselves up to Him.

The Bible is a book of truth to be learned but it's also the words of life to be lived out.

Our study of Ephesians has brought us to the "How to live" part of the book.

Chapters 1 through 3 explained the riches we have in Christ. Election, predestination, redemption, the sealing of the Holy Spirit. God has worked in our lives and continues to work with the same resurrection power that brought Christ up out of the grave and set him in the heavenlies.

The first 3 chapters tell us what we have, and are in Christ. The last 3 chapters tell us how to use our riches and be what God wants us to be.

As we come into chapter 4 we find the author, Paul saying "Now that you know what Christ has done for you. Now in light of this, here is what you ought to do for Christ."

The Bible says we're to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Open your Bible to Ephesians 4, pg 1040

We're going to pick up this morning in verse 17. This is the life which is worthy of the call of God.

The beginning of this chapter talked about unity. There's unity among all Christians on a spiritual level.

What we saw in the past few studies was, on the every day practical level that unity often fails. Our emotions get in the way. Our feelings, our pride, our selfishness bring conflict into our day by day relationships with one another.

That's where we need to rely on our spiritual resources and power. As we prioritize Christ and allow him to live out His life through us we can begin to see the our relationships grow stronger.

Now, the very same process takes place with the concept of holiness.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior we're forgiven of our sins and made holy in Christ. we're called "saints" because we're placed into Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit and so His holiness becomes ours.

The Bible says that we're found in Him not having our own righteousness, but that which is through faith in Christ.

I Corinthians 1:30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

II Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Positionally, we're in Christ and that is the only way that a Holy God could even accept us.

But, then here's the problem. What we're positionally can often be a far cry from what we're practically. Positionally, in Christ we're holy. Practically, our day by day lives vary in our purity. Again, there's the emotions, the feelings, the selfishness that pushes us.

And so just as the Bible has to exhort us to live up to our oneness in Christ it has to challenge us to live up to our holiness in Christ.

The whole concept of becoming a Christian is not described in the Bible as a reformation.

It's so absolutely radical it's called a new birth. There's a new creation of God that takes place the instant you put your trust in Christ as Savior.

God's principle for a holy life is put off the old way, and put on the new. Strip off the old habits, thought patterns and attitudes and replace them with God's way of life. Live up to what you truly are now in Christ through the power of Christ which you have in you.

There is always this double-sided aspect to the concept of holiness.

There's the negative side. There are some clear "don'ts" in the Christian life, things we as Christians shouldn't do that have nothing to do with legalism, they're just not fitting for a child of God to participate in.

When I say we're to be holy, isn't that what you automatically think of? God's going to tell me what I shouldn't do.

But see God always follows up the don'ts with the positive. He wants us to put off the old but then he wants us to put on the new.

Have you ever known anyone who was always centered on what they shouldn't do, without the corresponding balance of what they should do?

They end up being very negative, very critical of others, and usually ultimately become discouraged. God's solution is take off the old. Stay far away from unrighteousness, but then put on the new. Have a positive goal of holiness.

In other words, don't center all your thoughts on what you can't do. That's what Satan had Eve do in the garden and she sinned because her mind became obsessed with the fruit.

What Eve should have done when Satan asked, "Has God said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden" is say "Oh yeah, God said we shouldn't eat from that one right there in the middle of the garden, but that's OK because we have all these others to eat from instead."

God wants us to be aware of what we should do, as well as what we shouldn't do, and then we'll have a balanced, proportioned Christian life.

I. To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Stop Imitating The Culture

Read vs 17

There are some things we're not supposed to do and here is one of them. "Walk not as other Gentiles walk."

The word translated "walk" literally means to "walk around." The New Testament consistently uses this word to mean our life style.

A Christian's life style is not to imitate the life of all the people around him.

Paul writes, "I testify in the Lord." In other words, "I didn't dream this stuff up myself. This isn't my personal opinion that you have the option of regarding or disregarding. I'm speaking in the Lord. I'm telling you what God says, and so my words come with all the weight of divine authority."

"Don't live like people who don't have a clue. Don't live like the people around you who are dead in trespasses and sins. Take off your burial clothes."

Now isn't it striking that an apostle would have to write something like this to a group of Christians? Isn't it strange that after all he's said to them about being "saints" and "in Christ" and "children of God" with their inheritance as all the riches of heaven. That he would feel compelled to say stop living like non-Christians. But that's the big problem isn't it?

We need to stop thinking like the culture with it's distorted value system.

And so Paul begins with a very practical command. "From now on don't walk as other Gentiles walk."

But then, just what are we to put off through the power of Christ?

Read vs. 18

Now, the Bible's description of a person who doesn't know God is far from complimentary. In fact, it sounds downright harsh to us. It seems to fit some people but certainly not all. There are atheists who are very moral and very gracious.

But remember, just like Romans chapter 3, and Ephesians chapter 2 this is God's perspective on the human race.

Psalms 14 describes God looking down from heaven upon the children of men and his comment is *They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.*

That's intense. We kind of recoil from a verse like that and say, "Wait a minute. I know non-religious people who have done some really good things for other people.

But, think about this. Someone might devote their entire life to helping other people and sacrificing for them because it makes them feel good or because they receive some recognition from what they do.

That can be one of the most deceptive forms of selfishness because it's not something that would ever be criticized.

It appears good to everyone else.

Someone else might devote their life to joining a religious order and serving God in some way and yet never see their need of a Savior. For a person to try to work their way to heaven is the most blasphemous thing they could possibly do because God has made the way through giving His only begotten Son. To not trust in God's Son for forgiveness is to flatly reject God.

you don't have to put a video on YouTube. Just trust in your religion instead of the person of Jesus and you've rejected God.

So then in actuality every one without Christ, no matter how moral or religious they might seem fits this description.

Verses 17 through 19 outlines in a sequential way the characteristics of a person without God.

It starts off at the end of verse 17 by saying those alienated from God walk in the futility of their minds. As we go through here I want you to see how much of a stress God puts on the thinking processes.

Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks upon the heart. We get all caught up with what someone does, God can zero in on how they think.

The word “futility” could be translated purposelessness.

If there is anything that characterizes this age in which we live it's the attitude of purposelessness. It strikes everyone from the unemployed factory worker to the guy whose climbed his way to the top of the corporate ladder.

Sooner or later men and women turn and ask “Why am I here? What have I accomplished? Some day I'm headed for that inescapable end of human existence as we know it, called the grave, and when I'm dead and gone who's going to notice? I'll die and a couple a generation or two later there won't be a handful of people who will even remember my name.”

We have all kinds of unique phenomena as a result of purposeless that's griped our generation. Men have mid-life crisis now. They get to be 45 or so, look at their life and say “What's the purpose?” So they find a younger woman, leave their wife and kids, and go off to “find themselves.”

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, The average age at which Americans begin drinking regularly is 15.9 years old.

Purposelessness is the scourge of our age. But now where does this purposeless, this aimlessness, that can't seem to get a foothold in life, come from?

Verse 18 tells us its the direct result of darkness. People walk in the futility of their mind because they're understanding is darkened.

But where this darkness come from? It comes from *being alienated from the life of God*.

The source of this darkness is the consequence of being separated from the life of God. God is light and God is life. And if an individual is separated from the life of God then no matter how moral or cultured they might appear their understanding is clouded over.

Then we ask, why this alienation? Why this separation from God? The Bible answers that one for us too by saying that they're separated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.

We live in an education oriented society. Education is a great thing. But the fact is that someone can have all the degrees in the world but without Christ God says they're ignorant.

And then finally, we want to know just what it is that has caused this ignorance. The answer's given to us at the end of verse 18. It's because of the blindness of their heart.

The word *porosis* which translated "blindness" literally means "a covering with a callous."

In reality, the thing that lies at the root of this sequence is an insensitivity, a callousness, to the things of God.

This downward slide toward purposelessness starts with a wilful refusal and rejection of God.

So, first of all a person is insensitive to the things of God. This might be through many different means:

1. Education - We're too smart to believe the Bible
2. Religion - "I have my religion, I'm not interested in what the Bible has to say." That's being hardened through religion.
3. It can be through sin. People become totally hardened because they've built up layer after layer of rejection of the Word of God.

So the insensitivity leads to ignorance, the ignorance leads to separation from God, the separation from God leads to darkness and the darkness has its fruit in purposelessness.

This helps me to really understand where people are in our culture.

People are going through life like kids grabbing for soap bubbles. Every time you think you have what you want it's gone. And so our society is crying out, "What's it all about?"

And you know what? This is nothing new. A thousand years before Christ, Solomon, King of Israel wrote: "There's nothing new under the sun."

Solomon developed insensitivity toward God and tried to find satisfaction in the stuff of this life. His comment on all that he did was summed up in 5 words - "futility, futility, all is futility."

Solomon discovered the same thing we're reading about here. A callousness toward God ultimately leads to a meaningless life.

But then it doesn't stop with purposelessness. The sequence really climaxes in verse 19.

Read Verse 19

This was certainly a description of the city of Ephesus, where these people lived. The temple of Diana was at its center with religious prostitutes. Bacchus, the god of wine was worshipped.

One historian wrote, "This city was a moral bog, a sink of pollution, filled with all corruption, and reeking with vileness. It was a second Sodom. Vice stalked abroad everywhere and was honored and worshiped."

Purposeless, if its allowed to go on long enough, leads to apathy. It destroys the conscience. It leads people past feelings and many end up going the route of immorality and a total abandonment to sin.

This is a very harsh, but a realistic, picture of how many people without God live. This is what makes them tick. This is why our society is in such turmoil, why some in the media, the courts, medical profession, public education can't seem to figure out which end is up.

Hypocrisy has just invaded every facet of our society because of futility, ignorance and hardness of heart.

But now, see this is what *we're* to put off. Unfortunately just because someone receives Jesus Christ as Savior doesn't mean that they can't have many of these same ungodly attitudes.

Like it or not, this is a fact of life we all have to face. Christian marriages break up. Believers have problems with alcohol and drugs. Christians, even well known ones like Ted Haggard, can struggle with immorality.

There are Christian people who are literally living purposeless lives.

I. To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Stop Imitating The Culture

II. To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Take Off the Attitude Of Death

Read verse 20

This is a very emphatic little statement. To really capture the thrust of the Greek here you'd need to put an exclamation point at the end.

But you, you have not so learned Christ!

And notice it doesn't say "learned about Christ." There's plenty of people who know all about Jesus Christ but they don't know Him. To know Christ is to have a personal relationship with Him.

We can know about men like Mohammed, Buddha, Zoroaster, but we can't know them. They're dead and gone and all that's left is their teachings.

But it isn't that way with Jesus Christ.

Read vs 21

In the Greek language there are several different ways of stating conditions. Normally our English Bibles translate these various conditions by the word "if."

The Ephesians reading this in their own language, would quickly recognize that this was a condition of reality. Paul isn't raising any doubts about whether they had heard and had been taught. He's put this in such a way that it's assumed to be true from his perspective.

His real point is to remind them of the unquestionable fact that they had heard and they had learned.

You could almost translate this “since” you have heard Him and have been taught by Him.

They not only knew Christ (by faith) but they had also been taught by Christ as Paul and then the elders of the church at Ephesus taught the word of God.

And every thing they and been taught about Christ and by Christ, that led them to know Christ stands in total opposition to the old life.

If you have been taught Christ, then you have been taught...

Read vs 22

Take off (like a suit of clothes) your old evil nature. Put off that corrupt desire to disobey God that was the guiding factor in your life before you became a Christian.

The Bible calls the old sin nature, “the old man.” “Man” gives the idea of personality. It’s being “old” suggests two things.

1. Its what we were in the past - our old self. And then 2. The old nature the “old man” what dwells in all of us is *very* old. He’s as old as Adam.

The old man is what we have inherited from Adam as a result of his sin in the Garden of Eden. We are all born with an Adamic, an old nature. That old nature is the desire to sin. It’s the thing that leads us away from God.

Some times that old nature shows itself in outright sin and rebellion against God. Sometimes it shows itself in religious self-righteousness or a humanistic morality but its there in each one of us from birth.

But now we are to put off the old man.

So naturally the question comes up “How am I supposed to do that?” How do I put off this old nature that had such a grip on my life for so many years? How do I stop living like my old self?”

Romans chapter 6 explains that just like Jesus died and rose again, spiritually we die to sin when we put our trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We're raised to a new life.

That's what baptism signifies. that's why we baptize by immersion. It shows death, burial, and resurrection.

It's because the old man is dead that I can put him off.

It's like in John 11 when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He'd been dead for four days. His body had begun to decay. But when Jesus called him out of the tomb the decay was gone. He was alive.

And our Lord gave a command to the people around him. "Loose him and let him go." Take off his burial clothes. Remove the last vestiges of death. Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death.

Why would you walk around wearing burial clothes? Take them off.

Now see the argument? You no longer belong to the old corruption of sin. You belong to the new creation in Christ.

But now here's where most Christians fail. In our relationship with God it's true that our old nature is dead. Positionally we are dead, buried and raised with Christ.

In God's sight all that we were up to the point we were saved is gone. As far as God goes, our life began the day we were born again.

But in every day practice it doesn't seem that way at all.

Because of habit patterns established over the years, practices, lack of knowledge and understanding, ignorance of spiritual power, many of the characteristics of the old man still cling to us, even though we are a new creation in Christ.

So, the Bible says to us, have nothing to do with the old man. Don't go on doing the things that he used to do, because he's dead.

In the language of Roman 6, know that he's dead, consider, or reckon, it to be true in your life personally, and then stop yielding your body to sin's use.

Be what you are in Christ, not what you used to be in Adam.

- I. *To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Stop Imitating The Culture*
- II. *To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Take Off the Attitude Of Death*
- III. *To Live Like You're Alive You Have To Put On The Attitude Of Life*

Read Verse 23

From the very beginning of this section the Bible's stress has been on the mind. The thought process. Before we knew God we were unable to think God's way.

Our minds were futile, darkened and ignorant.

But now we've been born again and given a new capability to think and understand God's truth. Salvation is a once for all action that leads to a process.

Through Christ once-for-all we have been given a new position as his new creation, but day-by-day we have to appropriate what he has given us by faith. The Bible is the agent that renews our mind.

Jesus said in John 17:17. *Sanctify them through your truth, your word is truth.*

As our mind understands the truth of God's Word, it's graciously transformed by the Holy Spirit, and this renewal leads to a changed life.

Physically you are what you eat, but spiritually you are what you think.
Proverbs 23:7 "As a man thinks in his heart so is he."

That's why it's so important for us as Christians to spend time with the Bible.

Then finally, our minds are to be renewed for a purpose. **Read verse 24**

That new man, that new birth that exists within you as a Christian is a creation of God and is perfectly righteous and holy.

Not only have you died to sin, but you are alive unto God. God's very life exists within you.

Take off the grave clothes. Stop thinking like this world system that's blinded and hardened and put on your new clothes.

Romans 13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

You say, "Oh, but it's so hard out there in the world. There's so many temptations, so many things to pull me down."

Jesus said, *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

And this is the bottom line of the argument of Ephesians 4. If we are Christians then Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

To put on the new man is to continually remind ourselves that Jesus Christ lives within us. That we're indwelt with righteousness and true holiness.

It's a conscious yielding of our bodies to God for His use as instruments of righteousness. And it's all done thru the power of Jesus Christ who lives in us.

I'm here to say, I believe in the power of the Bible and I believe in the person of the Holy Spirit and his ability to change lives. He changed mine.

What are you wearing today? How are you dressed? Are you alive in Christ, but still walking around in your filthy burial clothes? Then put them off, you've got the God given power and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.