

One in Deeds

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Derek asked for a little update on things at Leith. We've been, as Derek mentioned, we're probably more a church than a church plant now. We first began, it'll be seven years ago, this December when my wife, Rosin, and I moved to Leith to start work on planting the church.

And for about the last five years, we've been meeting in the YMCA down just off Great Junction Street. And we're thankful to God for all that he's been doing there. We've been privileged to see some people come to know Jesus and see the church grow over that time. Where we're at currently, things you could be remembering. We're actually at a point now where it's a good problem to have, but the church is getting close to outgrowing the building capacity that we meet in. So we're not exactly sure the solution to that at the moment, but we'd appreciate prayer for the right opening to come with that as to what we do about a meeting space.

Also, another good problem to have, there's a lot of children. The number of children in the church has doubled in the last year, and the vast majority of them are under the age of six.

[1 : 15] So that creates a few different issues. A lot of tired young parents and also we're stretched in terms of our children's work. So it's a good problem to have growth problems, but we're also just practically having to think through how we handle those.

So prayer for that as well. And just as well, what Derek mentioned, prayer that the devil wouldn't get in and distract and cause division. That's something that just we've been thankful that the church has been a generally peaceful, united community over the time that it's been planted and we just pray.

We know many people do pray for that unity and so we'd ask for that continued prayer as well. We'd appreciate that. Thank you. If you'd like to open up at Ephesians, if you've got that passage in front of you either in the notices or in your Bible, and we're going to be looking there at Ephesians 4 verse 17 to 24.

And as we do that, let's pray and ask for God's help. Gracious heavenly Father, we thank you for this time to gather round your word and we pray that as we do that, your spirit would be at work in our hearts.

You would open our eyes to see you, teach us what you have to teach us today. May we understand more of who you are and what you've done and what it means to live in the light of this changed life that you give through Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

[2 : 51] Well, it is a privileged open God's word with you. Normally our church meets at 4pm in the afternoon. So preaching in the morning for me is not something I do often, but I took a strong coffee with me today.

So hopefully that'll help. But we're just going to go through this section. I understand you've been going through Ephesians over the last little while. It's a great place to go in the Bible if you want to get a handle on how someone becomes a Christian and what it then looks like to live as a Christian. As I'm sure you're aware, it can be divided. The book roughly can be divided into two main sections. Chapter chapters one to three, focus on all that God has done to save a people for himself. It really focuses on the theme of grace. And chapters four to six really focus on what it looks like to live as God's people. And sometimes the summary of that section is the word peace. What does it look like to live at peace with one another? Ephesians really is an amazing letter. When you think of those first three chapters, you have this incredible picture of God's past, present and future plan of grace.

[4 : 06] There are chapters that speak really of the eternal purposes of God. How before the foundation of the world, he called a people to himself. He brought them from death to new life.

And then he gathered them together to form a community that gives the world a foretaste of his future kingdom. There's some pretty big themes in those first three chapters.

And then in the second half of the letter, what you have is extremely practical advice as Paul gets down to the nitty gritty of what it looks like to live this new life that these Christians have been given. But before he he fleshes that out in the second half of the letter, we have this section in chapter four where Paul focuses in on the Christian mind.

See how we think affects how we live. I have a brother who's involved in football management and he would say that that getting inside his players heads and making sure that they are ready for the game is absolutely key to what comes next.

[5 : 19] If their heads aren't in gear, then the game is lost before they even step out of the dressing room. So he has some interesting techniques and how he gets them to visualize and focus on what they're about to do.

What we think affects how we play in sport and what we think affects how we live the Christian life. And that's very much what we see in this passage, the importance of having a right understanding of what it means to be saved by grace and to live in the light of that understanding.

And for Paul, he's clear that a life transformed by God's grace will have a huge impact on our outlook and on our behavior. When we become Christians, we are given new minds, which means that we leave our past behind us as we take hold of our new lives in Jesus Christ.

And that's what Paul urges these Ephesians to do in these verses. And really, I just want to highlight two main areas in this passage, two big points. First of all, we see Paul's call to leave the past behind us.

And then he turns to urge the Ephesians to embrace the new life that they now live. So those are the two main areas that we're going to think about this morning. So first of all, he tells the Ephesians to leave the past behind.

[6 : 38] He writes verse 17. Now this I say and testify in the Lord. In the first three chapters of the letter, there is only one occasion where Paul asks the Ephesians to do anything just one time.

And that is to remember what they once were so that they can delight in God's grace even more. It's there in chapter two, verse 11. But in the second half of the letter, Paul gives all sorts of exhortations, all sorts of commands and instructions.

Lots of dues. And this is such a key point when it comes to to live in the Christian life. If you hear nothing else today, then hear this.

The imperatives of the gospel always come after the indicatives. Or if you're a Hibbs fan, the dues of the Christian life always come after the done.

We live the Christian life, we obey God because He has already made us His. We do not obey Him in order to become His. So we obey God because He has already made us His.

[7 : 52] We don't obey Him in order to become His. Paul says in chapter one that we have been adopted as God's children. If you're a parent, then you know, don't you?

Our children do not earn our love through their obedience. They already have our love, however good or bad they are. And as God's beloved child, the Christian is loved by God because they are His.

Not because of their performance. So we do because of what God has already done. And here at the beginning of this section, Paul issues an emphatic do.

It's clear that he is not messing about here. He uses emphatic language. He says, now this I say and testify. Paul wants to be clear what he's about to say is of paramount importance.

He goes on, now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. And when Paul uses that term walk, he is talking there about a general direction of life.

[9 : 00] And so he's telling the Ephesians that they are not to follow the Gentile way of life. But who are the Gentiles that he is speaking about?

Well, well, the term Gentile was a way of describing a non Jew. And in fact, the Ephesian churches were in a non Jewish region, which means that they would have been predominantly made up of Gentiles.

But when Paul is referring to Gentiles here, he is not talking about the Ephesian Christians themselves. He is talking about the people that they live amongst. He's talking about their non

Christian neighbors, their, their workmates, their friends and their, their family. And he's telling them that they must not live like them. Now that might sound a bit harsh. What was so bad about the way that the non Christians around them lived? Well, that's what he goes on to explain. He says verse 17 that they walk in the futility of their minds. And he's highlighting a common theme there in the Bible that without God, our existence is ultimately futile.

[10:12] There's a whole book in the Old Testament devoted to that theme, the book of Ecclesiastes. And what Paul and the book of Ecclesiastes are saying is that our lives are brief.

We live for such a short time in the grand scope of world history. And what we do while we're here, it ultimately means nothing if this life is all there is.

The 2016 seems to be the year of celebrity deaths. Seems to be almost every day we're hearing about another celebrity who is passed away.

And we get the five minute sound bite from the BBC with a few quotes and a few things about someone's life. You know, someone who's lived maybe an incredibly significant life. Someone who has received wealth and fame and adulation. And then their whole lives are summed up in five minutes. And then we move on. We're here and then we're gone and sooner or later we're forgotten.

[11:10] Without God, our lives have a deep sense of futility. And then Paul goes on verse 18 and verse 19 to speak of two aspects of that futile, that gentile way of life.

He goes on to speak of their mind and their actions. He says they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart.

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. And that's a pretty damning verdict, isn't it?

To say that Paul's description of the non-Christian is uncomplimentary would be to put it lightly. Now, what would happen if tomorrow morning you were to go into your office and to just announce to your work colleagues that you lot are ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, sensual and greedy to practice every kind of impurity?

I don't know, maybe that's your normal Monday morning conversation. Today there is a big pressure on the church, both within and outside, to be more appealing to the surrounding culture, to be more affirming of the values of our world, to be a church that appeals more to society.

[12:39] Well, Paul's description of the average non-Christian here is hardly going to win him any friends, is it? But for Paul, what he's saying here, remember, is of paramount importance. He doesn't want the Ephesians to miss what he's telling them.

So while it's tempting for us to kind of brush over those words and move on so that we don't offend anyone, it's really important that we hear what he is saying, that we are clear on exactly what he means.

So if we unpack them a bit, first of all, he uses words like futility, darkened and ignorance to describe the way that non-Christians think.

Now, what does he mean by that? In what sense can a non-Christian mind be described like this? If you're not a Christian, maybe you find that extremely offensive. Well, certainly Paul is not talking about intellectual ability.

You do not have to be a Christian to have a brilliant mind. In fact, many brilliant minds would describe Christians the very way that Paul describes non-Christians here.

[13:42] We live in a very tolerant society, but the reality is that when you scratch beneath the surface, many people that we meet and rub shoulders with will think that to follow Jesus, you need to leave your brain at the door.

So when Paul speaks about the non-Christian mind, he is not talking about intellectual ability here. He's talking about the mind in a different sense.

He's talking about a mindset which is unable to know God and to have a relationship with Him. He's talking about the mind in a spiritual sense.

It's similar to the description he gives of the non-Christian in chapter 2 verse 1, where he describes them as spiritually dead before the grace of God makes them alive.

Now, the average person you meet would say that their reasons for not believing in Jesus are intellectual ones. If you're not a Christian, then the chances are that that's how you understand it.

[14:43] You might be interested in checking things out, but intellectually, you are not convinced. You approach the whole thing on that intellectual level. But what Paul is saying here is that below that layer of intellectual reasoning, there is a deeper layer of consciousness.

There is a deeper spiritual level, our heart knowledge, if you like. And deep down what we believe in our hearts, it impacts our heads.

We essentially reason in our heads what our hearts believe to be true. And what Paul is saying is that before you experience God's grace, your heart is darkened.

It is hardened by sin. You don't want to believe in God. You don't want to follow Him. And that's then reflected on an intellectual level where you reason away the message of the Gospel.

You want to believe anything before believing the Gospel message. Because your spiritual mind is hard to the things of God, you are tuned to a rejection of Him.

[15:56] You do not come to the table as a completely objective being. Now to illustrate this, you just need to look at the popularity of TV programs or films or books that discredit the message of Jesus.

Why is it that a book like the Da Vinci Code gained such popularity about a decade ago? And I think that part of the reason for that at least was because it tuned into that heart rejection of Jesus.

By seeking to discredit Jesus and claiming to undermine the message of the Gospel, it fed the desire in the human heart to reject God, to suppress the knowledge of Him.

Paul says in Romans in chapter 1, verse 18, that by nature we suppress the truth. So Paul is saying that before someone knows Jesus, their minds are tuned to rejecting Him.

So in verse 18, Paul is essentially charting the downward spiral of our spiritual minds before we experience God's grace. As someone rejects the truth of God, their hearts are hardened.

[17:08] Through their hard-heartedness, they ignore God. They choose to say no to His rule in their lives. And through that ignorance, they become darkened in their understanding.

They become blind to the truth of the Gospel. And as people with darkened minds, they are alienated from God. They are separated from Him. So that's what Paul is saying in verse 18.

And then he's saying that the non-Christian mind is not objective. That it is influenced by this deep spiritual desire to reject God, to harden your heart against Him. And that way of thinking then leads to a certain way of living.

And that's what Paul turns to in verse 19. And he's getting there at the fact that wrong thinking leads to wrong behavior. He says that someone with a hard heart becomes callous.

In other words, they become desensitized to living in obedience to God's will. Rather than living in a way that pleases God, they live to please themselves.

[18:07] And Paul says that the life they choose to live is characterized by sensuality and impurity. Now is that a fair description of the average non-Christian?

If you're not a Christian, are you really meant to take Paul seriously here? You know, as we look around us and we think of our friends and our non-Christian family members, we probably wouldn't describe them as greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Paul seems to be describing Hugh Hefner on steroids here. It's hardly a fair description of the average non-Christian, is it? Well, what Paul is describing is the human condition in comparison to the holiness of God.

See, as a rule, people tend to operate in line with what is acceptable in our society. So as long as they are not stepping outside of the bounds of what's acceptable, then they would see themselves as good people.

But that doesn't take into account their position before a holy God. When the Bible speaks about God's holiness, it's describing his utter goodness, his purity, his total perfection.

[19:23] And compared to a holy God, the actions of someone in rebellion against him are seen exactly as Paul describes them here. Rejecting God is so serious because of who the offense is committed against.

That's the key. Sin is of infinite seriousness because God is of infinite perfection. Not only that, God sees everything.

He knows the deepest secrets of our heart. He knows our deepest thoughts and motivations. And if the sinful thoughts of our hearts were exposed, they'd be shown to be totally corrupt.

Compared to this holiness. When you look at the sermon on the Mount and you see Jesus teaching, going through the commandments, he goes beyond the surface level of the commands

and he goes to the deepest thoughts and attitudes of the hearts.

That's what God sees. Ultimately, what Paul is saying here is that the non-Christian mind will pursue anything before it pursues God. It will seek satisfaction anywhere other than God.

[20 : 27] It will pursue the creation rather than the Creator. Paul is saying that belief leads to behavior. A denial of God in our hearts leads to a denial of Him in our lives.

And when people deny God, they look to all sorts of different things to find meaning and purpose, to comfort and pleasure and wealth and success. The gods that are our world cherishes, but which ultimately are futile.

They fail to satisfy. And it's that denial of God both in their minds and their behavior that Paul is warning the Ephesians against. But not only does he warn them away from wrong thinking and that old way of life.

He urges them to embrace the new life that they now have by remembering what or rather who they have learned. And that brings us to the second thing I want us to see.

This call to embrace this new way of life. So after summing up the non-Christian mind, Paul writes verse 20, but that is not the way you learned Christ.

[21 : 35] Assuming that you have heard about Him and we're taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus. It's another emphatic statement. Verse 20 introduces a totally different way of life to the one that Paul's just been describing.

The mind that denies God is not the mind that the Ephesians now have. Christians are a people who have learned Christ. That's what he says. That's a bit of a strange way of putting it, isn't it? Normally we learn a subject. We don't learn a person. We might learn about them. But that's not what Paul is saying. He says we learn Christ.

What does he mean by that? Well, it comes back to this whole idea of our minds being more than just our intellect. There's a spiritual dimension to the kind of learning that Paul is speaking about here.

Both our minds and our hearts are involved in this kind of learning. Now becoming a Christian, of course it involves learning about Jesus, about who He is, about what He's done, what He said.

[22 : 37] The Christian faith is a reasonable faith. But we don't just learn about Him. We actually learn Him on a spiritual level. We place our trust in Him.

We come to love Him. We grow in our knowledge of Him in the deepest sense. That's what Paul prayed for the Ephesians back in chapter 3, verse 18 and 19, that they would have a knowledge of Christ that went beyond simply an academic understanding, a knowledge that drilled deep down into their souls.

A knowledge that would mean that they would experience Him in their lives in a real and tangible way. That kind of learning of Christ is the kind of learning that leads to a transformed life.

Becoming a Christian isn't simply about taking on a new set of ideals and intellectual beliefs. It involves a deep change in our hearts, in our darkened, hardened hearts.

See, the reality is that no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot live in the way that we've been called to live. As Christians, we know how much we struggle to live out this new life on a daily basis.

[23 : 48] But the wonderful news of the Gospel is that there is one who lived the life that we could not live, one who died the death that we deserve to die, one who endured the darkness in our place, one who took the blame for all our sensuality and corruption, one who experienced death so that we might know life.

And because of what Jesus has done, we are freed to live as His people. That old life is gone. We are dead to that life.

We have been made alive in Christ. Christians are a people who do not need to live with guilt or shame about a former life.

And we are people who do not need to live with hearts full of affection for the things of this world, for comfort and pleasure and wealth and success. Instead, we can enjoy a deep love and affection for the one who gave his life to make us his.

And that's exactly what happened to Paul. The guy writing this letter had experienced that transformation. By God's grace, he had gone from hating Jesus to delighting in Him.

[24 : 58] And the very fact that we have this letter is a tangible demonstration of God's power to transform lives, to give someone a deep knowledge of himself that goes beyond intellectual understanding.

You know, we live in a society today, in a city today, where the vast majority of people are either hostile or completely indifferent to the message of the gospel.

And yet here we have a tangible demonstration of the power of the gospel to change lives. And this is where our confidence lies. Go into plant churches or do anything in our context.

From a human level, seems like a crazy thing to do. But the gospel is powerful to transform any life. And it is that transformation that we can have confidence in.

It's a transformed mind that leads to transformed behavior. And that's what Paul goes on to speak about in verse 22. He calls those who have minds that have learned Christ to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[26 : 16] So he urges these believers to leave their old lives behind and to live in a way that honors God. But that's only possible because God has wrought this deep change in their hearts by his spirit.

The evidence of a transformed life will be seen in a new lifestyle. It's a new lifestyle that is born out of a renewed mind, a mind that thinks of itself in a completely new way.

It's a mind that delights in the fact that our past is forgiven, that our future is secure, and we do not need to believe the lie that worldly desires will satisfy us.

We've been given freedom, freedom and joy in the truth of Jesus Christ. Our identity has changed and Paul is saying we are called to live in the light of that identity.

And that new life is one, Paul says, verse 24, that is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Notice the contrast there that we have in this passage.

[27 : 18] The old way of life was characterized by corruption, by decreation, where the image of God was marred. The new life is a recreation where the image of God is restored, where we are recreated after his likeness.

The old was characterized by sensuality and impurity. The new by righteousness and holiness. The old way of life led to death and judgment. The new because of all that Jesus Christ has done leads to forgiveness and eternal life.

The old way of life was a passing shadow, a life with no hope, a life pursuing God's that ultimately led to futility and meaninglessness.

The new way of life belongs to the new creation. It points to a glorious eternal future where all who trust in Jesus Christ will know true and lasting satisfaction and it will never spoil or fade.

And it's as we live out who we are. As a people created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. As a people who have been given these new lives.

[28 : 29] It's as we do that, that God works out his purpose and plan through the church. The world gets to see a community that is like no other.

A community that has Jesus Christ at the center and that is a beautiful thing. That is an attractive thing that draws people to desire the new life that only God by his grace can give.

It's a life of meaning, purpose and hope. An eternal life in Jesus Christ, the one who makes us new. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this tremendous gift of grace. Salvation in Jesus Christ that brings us from death to new life.

We thank you for the gift of your spirit who empowers us to live as you have called us to. We thank you for the reminder that we do not do these things in an effort to obtain your forgiveness.

[29 : 42] We do them as a people who have been forgiven. We pray Lord God that as a forgiven people with new minds, we would live in the light of that. And that many in our city would respond to the good news of Jesus that they might experience that in your life too.

Let me pray these things in his name. Amen.