
This next passage that we are going to study was one of the major parts of scripture that helped me understand just how much I did not understand in terms of what it meant to live as a son of God instead of a cultural Christian. For years and years I strived to be good, I strived to do it right, I worked hard, I lived with the guilt of my failure and desperately sought to be on good terms with God after I had blown it again and again. I knew I had been forgiven—I understood what it said—but still being forgiven seemed as a something that was part of my future hope and not as a current reality.

What was so strange to me is that no matter how much I thought I wanted God and wanted to “do” it right, I often found myself confused and my understanding about God darkened. As I came across certain passages in the Bible I found that I often would have to either just skip over them not understanding how they fit or allegorize them because I could not figure out how to practically experience what was being said. I wanted to experience it, I asked for it, but still nothing seemed to happen. And all of that was hard for me because I thought that if God went through all that much trouble to give us His word that it should be understandable and something that we were to personally experience. So I just convinced myself that God is God and I am not so I would have to just trust Him and move on even though I was very unsatisfied intellectually, emotionally, and experientially.

And then came my struggle with what in the “Christian” culture we call sin. Why was it such a problem? Why did I not have victory? Did I need more discipline, did I need to memorize more scripture, did I need more accountability, or was the Christian life on earth going to be a perpetual struggle with my flesh?

It all seemed so tragic, frustrating, disappointing, and the guilt was ridiculous. I knew that something had to be wrong, but I had no idea what. I just thought that it must be me; but then again what I experienced seemed to be the same for practically everyone I knew—it's just some people were better at hiding it than others. But one thing that was clear to me is that we all had a huge problem.

Sadly, there were many people that I knew who could not act as if this “problem” was just an isolated experience, and they just threw in the towel and gave themselves over to the things of this world. It is not that they did not want it to have worked, but they just could not figure out how to make it all work and they had a hard time living in a ruse.

But our passage tonight gives us illumination. It brings the light which penetrates our darkness and gives us understanding of what is actually so obvious and right in front of our faces. It teaches us the futility of continually trying to do it right and trying to be good and it reminds us that it is only God in us that is good. It is only what He has created and instilled within our being that allows us to experience all that He said we should experience in Him. It speaks to us of the marvel and mystery of living from the *New Creation*.

Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 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. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 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.

First of all, I want you to notice the harrowing truth: a believer can, and often does, choose to live just like a Gentile. The fact that you have been born-again does not guarantee that you will live as a son of God. Now if you have been born-again, you are a son of God (nothing can alter that fact); but you can still choose to live in the futility of your mind like one who does not know God.

Now before we go further, I want to stop and clear up a misconception that might be running through your mind at this moment as I know it always runs through my mind when I read this passage. My knee jerk reaction when I read this opening phrase is to think, “Oh, that’s not talking about me because I am not doing anything as lurid or evil as the Gentiles.” So I take this phrase and I make it about “bad” people doing “bad” things. But that is not what the Spirit is addressing. He does not just list a bunch of serious sinful offenses; rather, He goes on to address the battle in the “mind/soul” of a believer—the battle between belief and unbelief—and the territory that is either controlled by Jesus and full of light or controlled by the enemy and is full of darkness.

What does it mean to live in the futility of one’s mind? The word “futility” literally means uselessness. So the Spirit is saying do not walk like unbeliever’s

depending upon your own wisdom and own understanding, for it is utterly worthless when it comes to living as a son of God.

It is amazing how many people I have run into who place so much power and authority and trust in their own ability to figure things out. They believe that God gave them this incredible mind and they are to just use it (asking God, of course) and figure out how they are to live and what they are to do. But such foolish thinking flies totally in the face of the word of God and those individuals place a higher authority on their own wisdom than they do on the wisdom of God. Now, they might not say that if you ask them, but that is indeed how they live when they depend on their ability to manage and control their own lives.

This passage once again speaks to the absolute and total dependence we are to have on God. Others can depend upon their own wisdom—good luck to them—but we are to have the mind of Christ (**1 Corinthians 2:7, 12-14, 16**) and depend upon the wisdom of God for our lives. That is why we need Jesus to take up residence in every area of our soul so that we have unfettered access to His wisdom for our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-8

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; **fear the Lord** and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.

Is there anything unclear or confusing about this verse? The very first thing it says is that we are to trust the Lord with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding. This is why we have spent so much time talking about the doors in the corridor of our souls that must be opened to Jesus. Every shut door represents our rejection of God and the embracing of our own useless wisdom.

God says He loves us and wants to have total control of our lives; we say we don't believe Him and would rather stay tucked inside our rooms, hands clenched, scrambling to stay in control. But we are admonished not to rely on our own understanding in anything; and despite what we may think we cannot trust the Lord with all our heart until we open up those doors to His love—there is just no way around it. Besides, by definition, trusting Jesus is about letting Him into all the chambers of your soul and giving up control of your life so He can make your paths straight.

This passage also says that we are to ***fear the Lord*** and turn away from evil which I believe is synonymous with trusting the Lord with all your heart and refusing to lean on your own understanding. Let me explain. ***Proverbs 2*** tells us that if we seek the Lord, treasure His instruction, tune our ears to His wisdom, concentrate on understanding, cry out for insight and understanding and search for them as we would for lost money or hidden treasure, then we will understand what it means ***to fear the Lord*** and we will gain knowledge of God (which as we studied in ***2 Peter 1:2-8*** last week is the key to experiencing the wonderful promises of Jesus).

In addition, ***Proverbs 8:13*** says that the fear of the Lord is to hate all evil. So let's put these concepts together. We are to hate everything and anything that

does not come from God and His holiness (remember, only God is good) and then turn away from such evil. Thus, we are to hate even the way that in the futility of our mind, in our own useless wisdom, we play god and believe that we can do a better job of protecting, defending, and leading our lives than He can. We are to turn from such evil by opening the doors and letting Him in to do His thing. It is all tied together and there is no way around it.

He wants us to trust Him with our whole heart for He knows what is best for us. Besides, this is the pathway to healing and it will bring refreshment into our souls. Can you imagine living without all the worry, stress, darkness, and all the fear that currently eats away at your body and your soul? Can you imagine all of that being removed and replaced with the gentleness of His love, His peace and the surety that the God who created all things and holds all things together—your God—will work all things according to the kind intention of His will? Well, that is exactly what He wants to happen, but we have to decide that we will no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of our minds by the worthlessness of our own so called wisdom.

It is all a ruse anyway; our own wisdom has never really helped us and it has never ever led us to peace. So let's get rid of it; let's hate evil and turn from it. And don't forget how inclusive and absolute the Spirit is being, you cannot make exceptions for this area or that area of your life. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. In all your ways acknowledge Him. Do not lean on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes.

The Spirit wants us to go "all in" and bet everything on Jesus. This is why He makes this strong contrast between how a son of God is to live and how Gentiles

live. A son of God has the right to access the wisdom of God; whereas a Gentile has no access and must trust the uselessness of their own mind, for they have nothing else. But you do! As a son of God you have access to the mind of God (**1 Corinthians 2:7, 10, 12 16**) and to the wisdom of God—but it comes with Him as He is the wisdom of God (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). As such, His wisdom will be accessible to you from every room where you allow Him to take up residence in your soul.

Now, just to tie the bow on the knot, the pouring out of His wisdom in your life, according to **Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 2, and Proverbs 9:10**, is one of the benefits of **fearing the Lord**. Again, it's all tied together.

Ephesians 4:18

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.

Now like the Gentiles, when you live depending upon the uselessness of your own wisdom, you will find that darkness overtakes you and before you know it you will experience a separation in the wonderful fellowship that you once were able to enjoy with God.

Interestingly, “darkened in their understanding” is in the passive tense which means that it is a product of trusting in yourself—of relying on your own wisdom. You see, the Spirit brings us light and brings us illumination—or understanding of God (**John 16:12-15**)—but if the heart is hard due to unbelief, and therefore the

Spirit has limited access to our soul, we will stagger around in confusion always wondering why the Bible is so difficult to understand and why the Christian life is so difficult to practically live. This is why the passage does not say that we will be darkened in our knowledge, but in our understanding. In this place, all our Biblical knowledge is really of little practical use when it comes to living.

Being darkened in our understanding of God and alienated from the life of God is the natural result of unbelief. Let me explain. The word translated here as “ignorance” is the Greek word “*agnoian*,” which is where we get our word agnostic, which defines someone who is doubtful and noncommittal about something; in this case God. In other words, when we live as the Gentiles do, trusting the futility of our own minds, the true knowledge of Jesus does not rest within our souls—we are literally ignorant of Him—and we become filled with doubt. The root, however, is the hardness of the heart—the doors that are shut, locked, and sealed tight preventing Jesus access.

Imagine, Jesus tells us He loves us. He tells us that we are His sons. He tells us that we are these magnificent creations, that we can participate in His divine nature, and that He always has good purposes for our lives. He has spoken so many amazing things over us, as we studied in **Chapters 1-3**, but we still refuse to believe that so much of what He said is true and therefore we refuse to live as if it is true—we are ignorant because of our unbelief.

Sure, we can speak of His love, mercy, grace and forgiveness, but too often it is theoretical and we have not internalized or personalized all that He has said about us. So we remain hard, unconvinced, and the darkness creeps in and our fellowship with God is hindered as we are alienated from the life of God. You know

what that feels like; each and every one of us has lived this way; it's horrible.

Remember, His life comes with Him. If He is in those rooms you will have His life, but if He is stuck roaming the hallways, you will be largely alienated from His life. Now, any alienation which you experience in your fellowship with Jesus has nothing to do with your salvation. You are a son of God and nothing will change that. It also does not impact the availability of the amazing promises spoken over your life. It's just that as you restrict access to parts of your soul to Jesus, you will be unable (in those places) to enjoy those rich and wonderful promises He has said are yours. Inversely, as you soften your heart and open the doors and invite Jesus in, He will bring into each room His peace, His joy, His wisdom, His love and His life—it's all for you (**2 Peter 1:2-8**) and it all comes with Him.

I want you to understand that this process whereby we become darkened in our understanding, alienated from the life of God, and so on, can happen any time. I have experienced this far too often. Things may be going well and my fellowship with God is tight, but then something in my circumstances change (or they don't change when I want them to) and I get freaked. So I escort Jesus out of some rooms and re-establish my own rule because quite frankly, based on my immediate circumstances, I don't think He is doing a good enough job. I go back to relying on the futility of my mind and suddenly I feel alone, separated from God, totally frustrated, unable to find my way back, and that place is miserable. I hate it; I just wished I hated it enough to never go there again.

Ephesians 4:19

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Now it is time for honesty. When we feel separated from God what do we tend to do? Do we instantly run to Him and in repentance start to trust ourselves to Him? Usually not; usually we run further from Him. It's stupid but that is what we do because our minds have been darkened. Running away from Him usually plays itself out in a couple of ways; one is religious and the other is "fleshy," but both indicate callousness within our hearts.

Now the word we have translated here as "sensuality" is not to be understood as "sexuality" (which is where our minds instantly go), but it literally means insolent or licentious—lacking any kind of restraint—which often does lead to the lack of sexual restraint so that is why our minds go there; but the word includes so much more.

Before we get to what it looks like and how it plays out in our lives, the result of the hardening of our hearts in unbelief leads us to become callus—literally without grieving or without pain of mind. In other words, when we find that we are alienated from the life of God and we become exhausted in our search to find Him, so to speak, we run the danger of just shutting down toward God. In shutting down, we create even a larger problem for as we kick Jesus out of those rooms (or put another layer of protection over our locked doors), we start to feel the emptiness of not having Him in our hearts and our soul starts to make a lot of

noise as it yearns to be satisfied. As a result, we turn to sensuality as a way to fill the gaping holes within our soul.

First, the religious face of sensuality. When we feel alienated, we think we must have “done” something wrong and so we obsess on how to “do” things right and we get caged in that foolish battle where we filter everything in our lives through our boxes of what we think is “right” and what we think is “wrong.” We waste so much emotional and mental energy trying to figure it out (whatever “it” is) and we spin and spin and all the while Jesus is standing there waiting for us to once again acknowledge Him and simply trust ourselves to Him. He just wants us to turn to Him and say, “Oh, there you are right next to me—where you’ve always been. I’m sorry; I’ve been rude and focused on myself again and have ignored you. Let’s hang out and have some fun.” I’m serious. That is exactly what He wants and all that He requires of us. What I just described is true repentance; we just need to stop what we were foolishly doing and once again start living in relationship with Jesus.

However, in our darkness we don’t see Jesus as a person to enjoy and experience. We see Him as this far away God of holiness that requires us to do it “right” in order to earn His favor. Hence we become obsessed with thinking about what we must “do” as “doing” is the heartbeat of religion and it is an unrelenting cage of never ending striving and disappointment. But it is a way that we give ourselves over to sensuality and once again make our Christian walk about us and what we can do in our flesh to be right with God. And the more we focus on “doing” it right, or our having done it “wrong,” the more we indulge the desires of our religious flesh that desperately strives to be like God—which is the ultimate

form of impurity.

Often it rises into a blustery fury (this is the greediness) and we try everything and anything to find satisfaction. We turn to our Bibles and start reading and reading, but then we think we might be doing it “wrong” and doing it just as way to fix things or to get God to be pleased with us (which we know is “wrong”), so then we put it down and refuse to read it. We try and pull out a list of people to pray for, but then we know it is illegitimate and we can’t seem to make the connection to God anyways, so we stop praying altogether. Then we try and hang out with people to see if they can do it for us, but alas that also fails as no mere man or woman can fill the hole; and so we withdraw and isolate ourselves. Then we become angry and we treat others poorly for failing us and then we beat ourselves up because now we know for sure that we are “doing” it wrong. So we feel guilty, bad, and the indulgence of our religious flesh which strives and strives to be good (and yet is always buried under failure), is totally out of control and thriving! Sensuality has its victory and we are given over to every manner of religious impurity.

Second, there is the fleshly face of sensuality. This usually becomes a problem when we get tired of trying to figure out what we must “do” to fix things with God and we become frustrated by the fact that nothing we “do” seems to work. You see there is this need in our heart that is used to being filled by Jesus, but now is just aching and yearning for satisfaction. So we turn from religious indulgences to those of the flesh as our need intensifies and demands to be filled by anything or anyone that will distract us, numb us, and keep us from feeling or dealing with the absence of our fellowship with God since we can’t seem to make that work.

Accordingly, we reach out to our old friend the flesh and indulge our lustful desires seeking the basest form of satisfaction we can find. Like the religious face, this also leads to the greedy practice of every kind of impurity—in other words it leads to the insatiable demand for more and more and more.

For some this looks like throwing themselves at school, work, or hobbies and establishing their validation based on what they do, how much money they can make, or how big of a following they can garnish. For others it's about spending money on things searching for anything that can bring even momentary satisfaction. Still for others it's about eating, or not eating, and obsessing on looks and body image. Then there are those who just give themselves over to sexual pleasures hoping to find someone who will love them.

But this also never satisfies and so we live without peace, without rest and our lives are just like every other person out there who does not know God.

Ephesians 4:20-24

But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 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.

The Spirit is thumping us on the side of the head here saying: “Hello, McFly.”

“That is not the way you learned Christ.” Did you get that? He did not say: “That is not the way you learned how to do it right with Christ.” He said: “It’s not how you learned Christ!” I love this. The Spirit draws us back to the truth: our lives are to be about knowing Christ, experiencing Christ, and being in a relationship with Him as a person—the literal person—of Jesus Christ. It is not about a system, it is not about religion, and it is not about doing it “right,” but it is and has always been about learning to enjoy Jesus as a person!

We learned Christ! We were taught about His character and nature of love, which is why we gave ourselves to Him in the first place. We learned Christ and therefore we know that we can trust ourselves to Him as our friend, as our lover, as our Dad, and as our God! This is what true Christianity is all about.

If you know Jesus, if you have entered into a relationship with Him, then you must understand that the truth is in Jesus. Again, everything is found in Him. Truth is not something to find, truth is a person to love. That is why if you have been seeking the truth you have probably been frustrated; but if you seek the one who is the truth, you will always find Jesus. As Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life (**John 14:6**).

And here is the truth in Jesus; you have put off the old self. When you became a Christian, your old man was put to death and his grip over your life was released. Therefore, you are to keep him off and leave him in the grave (**Romans 6**). Don’t resurrect the old man, for it belongs to your old manner of life, or as it says in the Greek, it was part of that old conversation you used to have—between your mind and the old self. But don’t have that same old conversation any longer for your old self is thoroughly corrupt through deceitful desires, so it can never do you any

good. And it is always out to trick you for its ways are deceit.

The old self tells you that you can be in control. It tells you that you can be good. It tells you that you can be satisfied outside of the truth. It tells you that your cage of insolence is really not so bad; after all, you know it so well and have survived thus far. It tells you that God does not really love you, that He is mad at you, that you will never do it right, that you will never experience His promises, that they are for everyone else but you, and that letting go and trusting an invisible God is crazy—who would do that. Honestly, if you go back to that old conversation, it will tell you anything you need to hear (and make it as “godly” as you need it to be) in order to convince you not to turn back to the person of Jesus Christ.

So stop having this conversation with this liar who is best friends with the devil. Just stop it. Start having the conversation with Jesus—this is how your mind gets renewed. “Renewed” is in the present passive tense which means that if you stop having the conversation with your old self and begin to have the conversation with Jesus, He will renew your mind in order that you might trust yourself completely to Him and thereby be able to put on the new self (***Romans 12:2, Colossians 3:10***).

This is one of the reasons I gave you that print out of the marvelous truths that the Spirit spoke over our lives. Let those truths form the conversation you have with yourself, with Christ, and with others. Talk to Him about these things. Oh, and as we discuss last week, speak it. Don’t just try to battle the lies in the quietness of your thoughts, but actually speak the truth with your own voice.

And this brings us back around full circle to the illustration I used of the doors

within the corridors of our mind/soul that we discussed 2 weeks ago in part 1 of ***Ephesians 4:7-16***. Jesus comes knocking on a door and if we choose to open it up and let Him come in and purge the pent up emotion, the anger, bitterness, etc., He will explain to us why this wound was from His loving hand and why it was necessary in our life. Then at that point we will get the choice to believe Him or not. If not, we will likely escort Him back out of the room, shut the door, and once again in that area of our lives dwell in darkness.

But if we choose to believe that it was necessary and according to the kind intention of His will, He will then root us in His love and this room in our mind/soul will have been renewed with the truth. Do you understand how this works? This is how the mind is renewed—one door at a time.

I think for so long we have thought that this was to be some sort of magic process where God snaps His fingers and our mind is instantly renewed. Or else we figure we have to do something other than believe and so we try real hard to memorize scripture or practice ***Philippians 4:8-9*** (to dwell on whatever is honorable, right, pure, lovely, worthy of praise, and so on) and ***Colossians 3:1-3*** (set our minds on things above and not on things of the earth) and it all becomes a matter of striving and not of enjoying Him who is above and is honorable, right, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise.

The renewal of our minds happen one room at a time, as we become convinced that our wisdom is useless and His wisdom is precious, that He is our “I Am” and everything we need and we are horrific gods—simply terrible gods.

As our mind is renewed we can put on the new self. Now “put on” is an interesting phrase since it is clear that we have already received the new man but

we have to be willing to live in this new man (get into his skin)—this is the **active part of faith**. Or as I always say, we must be willing to bet our lives on all that God has said about us and all that He has revealed about Himself and choose to live in it. This is what it means to “put on” or to “own” the reality of our *New Creation*. The renewing of our mind is what gives us the confidence and the assurance that we can live according to the ways of this new man; however, it is when we make choices according to the character and nature of this new man that our faith becomes real. It is then that our faith becomes fused within our being and like Paul we can honestly say that it is no longer I who live but Christ that lives in me and this life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me (***Galatians 2:20***).

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

This new man (which I call the “*New Creation*”) has been created after God in righteousness, and holiness, of the truth. In other words, our New Creation has been made in the image of God which is why it can be (and is) the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Remember, you cannot put new wine (the Holy Spirit) into old wine skins (the old self) for the skins would bust and all would be lost; but new wine must be put into new wine skins (the *New Creation*) thereby preserving both the wine and the skins (***Luke 5:37-39***).

And guess what, if your *New Creation* has been created righteous and holy in the truth and is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, then that means that you can live like He lived. Yes, like Jesus did when He dwelt on earth, we too can enjoy righteousness, holiness, and the truth here and now. This is why the Spirit says:

Galatians 5:25

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Thus, God's righteousness and holiness are not something to be experienced when we die, they are not some spiritualized "positional" thing we have with God which is not practically connected with our life here on earth, and they are not something that we are to strive to obtain. Rather, they are attributes of our new nature in which we get to tuck our mind/soul and in so doing walk in the Spirit of God expressing His righteousness, holiness and the truth to others free from the corruption of our old self (***Galatians 5:16***). It is how we are to live; it is possible.

Now remember, it all starts with the renewal of our minds and in our refusal to go back to that place where we trust in the uselessness of our own wisdom and instead rest solely on the wisdom of God for our lives. So open those doors, let Him in, be rooted in His love, and then "put on" and clothe yourselves with every bit of truth that He has spoken over your life and begin to enjoy the wonderful promises of God that come as you walk in the Spirit of God. It is all for you!

Let's Pray