

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 5, 2018**

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

Ephesians 4:17-24 (NIV)

**So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. (18) They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (19) Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. (20) That, however, is not the way of life you learned (21) when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. (22) **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (23) to be made new in the attitude of your minds; (24) and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.****

Friends in Christ,

You've heard the phrase, "Ignorance is bliss." Sometimes when I've done or said something that is really silly or doesn't make sense, I'll jokingly say, "You know what they say, 'ignorance is bliss' and I'm really happy!" But all kidding aside when it comes to spiritual things and our life with God ignorance is not bliss!

The apostle Paul understood that when it comes to spiritual affairs the more you know the better off you will be. He wrote his letter to the people in the church at Ephesus to broaden their understanding of God's gracious plan of salvation for them and for all people. It was his desire that they would come to greater appreciation of God's goals for his people by reminding them of the fact that they had been saved by grace through faith. He was convinced that those who have experienced the grace of God in their lives will seek to show their appreciation for the free gift of forgiveness and eternal salvation by living a life of thanks to Jesus, their Savior.

As God's spokesman, the Apostle Paul reminds us that by God's grace we have been called out of sin and into the family of God. In this chapter, he urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. (cf. Eph. 4:1) In our text, Paul contrasts the way of ignorance and unbelief with our new life of enlightenment and faith.

**Theme:** Ignorance Is Not Bliss

1. It results from hardened hearts (vs. 18)
2. It separates souls from God (vs. 18)
3. It leads to a life of lust (vss. 17, 19)
4. Its cure is knowing Christ (vss. 20-24)

**So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. (18) They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**

At one time, many of the believers in Ephesus had been Gentiles – unbelievers who were separated from God's family. They had been conceived and born in sin (cf. Ps. 51:5) just like you and me. Their hearts had been hardened against God because for all too long they had ignored their natural knowledge of God and the testimony of their consciences. Their thoughts became totally corrupted by sin. But all of that changed when they were called to faith in Christ Jesus.

Now they had been set free from their futile empty way of thinking that still engulfed their unbelieving relatives, friends, and neighbors. These people were not only living in ignorance but sadly, they remained separated from God – cut off from his blessings and destined to eternal punishment. They stubbornly resisted any knowledge of God. Instead, they sought their own path to happiness. Paul describes them as a people who had **lost all sensitivity, [and who] have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity.** He said **they are full of greed.**

Those who continue to live in spiritual ignorance seek their happiness in their attempts to indulge their sinful nature. They go from one sin to another seeking to satisfy their cravings but their pleasure is short lived. True and lasting satisfaction is a fleeting dream. They are left lusting for more – and often this lust drives them to the point of despair.

Ironically, the unbeliever's darkened understanding of happiness ultimately ends in sadness and misery. Already in this life, the unbeliever experiences the consequences of living apart from God. He has no escape from his guilt. He is not at peace with God and he has no true hope of eternal life. Unless the unbeliever is called to faith in Christ, physical death will result in an eternal separation from God and unending misery and suffering.

Paul has outlined for us the tragic results of living in Spiritual darkness and ignorance so that you and I who have been called to faith in Christ Jesus will no longer live like this. Paul use strong words as he warns us against a life of ignorance. **So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.**

And the reason that Paul insists on this is because we like the believers in Ephesus have been called to faith in Christ. **That, however, is not the way of life you learned (21) when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.**

To know Christ isn't just having a knowledge of who Jesus is and what he has done. It's embracing what he has done. It's trusting that he lived, died and rose again to set us free from our sins and the futile life of spiritual ignorance that is the result of hardened hearts. When we learned of Jesus we were called away from sin. We were separated from those who were living a life separate from God.

As Paul wrote, **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...**

We cannot serve Christ by living as if nothing is different in our lives. Those who have been called to faith in Christ have been set apart by God from sin. The acts of our sinful nature and our insatiable desire for evil no longer condemn us because Jesus has taken the guilt of those sins away from us by suffering the punishment we deserved. The Bible speaks of those who have been called to faith as being a people who have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Our sins have been washed away we have been cleansed and purified.

Now it is our desire to stay away from the dirt and filth of sin. In this regard we need to understand that our sinful nature is a constant threat to our salvation because it can never be changed or reformed. He is continually being corrupted – going from bad to worse. That is why we have been taught to put off our sinful nature – to drown our old self with daily contrition and repentance.

But dear friends this takes effort. Our sinful natures are all too willing to be lead astray by deceitful desires. Satan stirs up those desires with his lies and half-truths. He points to sin as a path to pleasure without acknowledging the consequences of sin and the destruction to which it leads.

Sometimes Satan even convinces Christians to believe that they can do whatever they want – that God will overlook their sins because they are believers. But faith is not a license to sin. God does not overlook sin. He forgives sin. There is a difference. God forgives sin because Jesus was punished for sin.

A former Secretary General of the United Nations once said: “You cannot play with the animal in you without becoming wholly animal, play with falsehood without forfeiting your right to truth, play with cruelty without losing your sensitivity of mind. He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn’t reserve a plot for weeds.”

Paul’s warning about our sinful nature encourages us to ask ourselves, “Am I reserving a plot for weeds?” When we see our weed beds of sin, let’s not try to “protect them.” Let’s bring them out into the open – confessing them to the Lord with the confidence that we have God’s forgiveness for Christ’s sake. And then let us seek God’s strength to resist sin and to live a new life for him. That’s the putting off the old self and putting on the new that Paul spoke of in our text.

**[You were taught] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; (24) and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

Because we have been born again through faith, Christians have a new mind and a new man. This new mind and new man is a gift of God created by him to serve him. We will love what is good and right just as God does. Christ has rescued us from Spiritual ignorance.

We can put off the old self and put on the new because God has brought us to the knowledge of Jesus and called us to faith in him. Through Christ God has given us spiritual life and strength so that we can serve, honor, and thank him for his gracious gifts of enlightenment, forgiveness and life.

#### Spiritual Ignorance Is Not Bliss

1. It results from hardened hearts
2. It separates souls from God
3. It leads to a life of lust
4. Its cure is knowing Christ

By the grace of God, you and I have experienced the cure for Spiritual ignorance. Now let’s continue to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we will no longer live as the Gentiles do. This growth will take place as we continue to use and study the Scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation in Christ Jesus.

Since Christ gave his life for all – we can’t just be content to keep our knowledge to ourselves. We been cured from spiritual ignorance – let’s share the cure with others so they too may know the blessings of life with God. Amen.