**How To Change: An Old Life/A New Life**

4 Ephesians 17 to 24 Discussion Guide 26 February 2017

In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul insists that Gentile believers who live in a pagan culture must set aside their old way of life. Specifically, he names ‘futile’ thinking, darkened understanding, and hardness of heart.

4:17 *“Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the* ***futility*** *of their thoughts.”* ‘Put off the old self’ was done for us at our salvation, but Paul’s concern is that we be continuously alert to our bent to return to our old habits, our old life. This is always at issue.

* If ‘futile’ thinking is useless or pointless, then what sort of useless thinking have you heard? What kind of futile thinking would be appealing? What part of a heart is appealed to by useless thought? Could you identify a kind of ‘futile’ thinking that you have struggled with?
* ‘Darkened’ understanding can be ‘dizzy’ or ‘blind.’ This implies confused thinking, the sort of thinking that leads to poor decisions. As part of the old clothing Paul wants us to remove, how would you take this off? What’s the cure for a darkened mind? This is usually easier to spot in someone else; have you ever given anyone permission to point out this sort of thing in you? Did they? How did that work out?
* The description culminates in ‘hardness of heart.’ The most prominent example of that in the Old Testament comes from Pharaoh, in the Book of Exodus (4:21, etc.). Hardness of heart may be the most difficult trait to overcome in the list. How could you know that your heart had become hard? Have you ever sensed that it was hardened towards God? Did that come internally or did someone else point that out? How would you deal with hardness of heart? How should one deal with their hardness? How can you ‘soften’ your heart?
* A ‘calloused’ heart may be a clearer image than a hard heart. What develops such a heart? How could you know that you no longer feel guilty, that your conscience is not functioning? Is that something a person would stumble onto without outside help?

Living out impure desires can be difficult to end. As a believer, we listen to Jesus, because we have learned from Jesus by hearing the Word read and explained, by placing that Word about Jesus next to our thoughts and behaviours. Dealing with those impure desires can face several challenges…

* We can merely ignore the impurity of our desires. That’s little problem for an unbeliever, but tends to be a continuously deepening problem for a disciple with a Spirit-fired conscience. We have struggled with this. What has helped you?
* We can attempt to squelch that desire. Have you been able to do that?
* We can attempt to manage the desire by keeping it private. Which leads to what?
* We can reorder our desires, replacing these destructive passions with a passion for Him, the one who satisfies.

John Piper, in the introduction to his book, *Future Grace*, provides stark contrasts with our misplaced desires…

“…covetousness is turning away from God, usually to find satisfaction in things. …lust is turning away from God to find satisfaction in sex. …bitterness is turning away from God to find satisfaction in revenge …Impatience is turning away from God to find satisfaction in your own uninterrupted plan of action. Anxiety, misplaced shame and despondency are various conditions of the heart when these efforts of unbelief miscarry. But deeper than all these forms of unbelief is the unbelief of pride, because self-determination and self-exaltation lie behind all these other sinful dispositions. Every turning from God—for anything—presumes a kind of autonomy or independence that is the essence of pride. Turning from God assumes that one knows better than God. Thus pride lies at the root of every turning from God. It is the root of every act of distrust toward God. Or, more accurately, pnde is not so much the root as it is the essence of unbelief, and it’s remedy is faith in future grace [the trust that the God who intervened for you at the Cross and in your past will also intervene for you later today and tomorrow].

THE NEW SELF: The rest of Ephesians unpacks what it means to “put on the new self.” Tell us what you think this means. How does one seek to reflect ‘God’s likeness?’ We know what self-righteousness looks like, how do we recognize true righteousness? How do you understand the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? What do we do to take those on, to live those out? What is the Spirit’s role in this? Have you ever had the sense that you were ‘walking with the Spirit?’ Would you want to? Can you describe that?

**Big Idea** Our lives are redesigned by our relationship with Jesus. That new design gives us a new identity in Him. This happens as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our thinking, our desires and our choices into the likeness of Jesus. Where are we in the ‘redesign’ process?