

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

"The Gentile Walk"

Ephesians 4:17-19

Introduction

1. Ephesians pulsates with a double desire: a. That believers might have a fuller comprehension of what God, in Christ, is doing in and for them. b. That believers' lives might in some measure correspond to His work of grace.

2. The earlier part of this chapter (vv. 1-16) considers the responsibilities which pertain to relationships in the body. Now the responsibilities which pertain to believers and the world are considered (vv. 17-32).

3. There is a basic appeal here: to walk conversely to what the Ephesians walked (cf. v. 1). That previous walk was as Gentiles. This suggests that most of the Ephesian believers were Gentiles by birth. Paul's appeal is very strong. The two verbs "say" (λέγω lego), and "testify" (μαρτύρομαι marturomai which means to witness as a martyr) support this. Moreover His appeal carries divine authority for it is "in the Lord" (ἐν Κυρίῳ en Kurio).

4. There are certain salient features of the former pagan life with which Paul ἀππεαλσ for a break. Here they are:

1. PAGAN CONSIDERATION vv.17, 18

a. Vain Mind v. 17

The whole reason, including emotions, are meant by "mind" (νοῦς nous)). Paul qualifies it as "vain" (ματαιότητι mataioteti). It is but an illusion. The reason is beclouded, empty, futile. There is no real meaning or goal involved. The Gentile mind was filled with things which lead to nothing. Paul, therefore, calls for a converted reason.

b. Darkened Understanding v. 18 This is reason in action, but it is darkened, that is, incapable of distinguishing right and wrong (ἐσκοτισμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ eskotismenoi te dianoiia }, Intelligence is in view here as opposed to feelings.

Note: Paul' s argument here is that Gentile (unsaved) thought processes are diverse from Christian (saved) thought processes. An entirely new thought process or mind set is expected.

2. PAGAN ALIENATION v. 18

Gentiles were alienated from the life of which God is the author. This means they are held in the grip of spiritual death (Ro. 5:12). This is a horrible

condition (cf. 2:12). This alienation is set as the perfect passive verb connotes (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι apellotriomenoi). Linked to this alienation is:

a. Ignorance

The darkened and vain mind effects the ignorance noted here. This ignorance is "in them." They are thus alienated from God' s life.

b. Hardness

The Greek word (πώρωσιν porosin) here is better rendered "hardness" rather than "blindness." It denotes failure of sensation in general. It is loss of sensibility of the inner heart or being. This obduracy of heart is why there is alienation from God' s life.

3. PAGAN EXPRESSION v. 19

To be "past feeling" (ἀπηλγηγκότες apelyekotes) is to be apathetic. This carries over the idea of hardness. It speaks of reckless abandonment where one ceases to care, no longer feels the reproaches of conscience. The visible evidence of this is noted by the verb "give over" (παρέδωκαν paredokan). This is the verb elsewhere rendered "betray" (Mt. 26:16). There is a note of treachery here.

a. Wantonness

This is what the KJV means by "lasciviousness" (ἀσελγεία aselgeia). The scorn of all moral restraint is gone. Lewd and wanton conduct which shocks public decency is meant. There is no attempt to hide sin, for there is no care about it. There is only gratification of desire, but no shame. It is horrible (cf. Ro. 1:21-32)

b. Greediness

Here greed is linked with every sort of unclean act (ἐν πλεονξία en pleonxia). While greed is normally associated with material things and covetousness, here it is linked to sexual aberrations. The pursuit of evil becomes a trade. It is a business like one seeks gold.

Conclusion The link between this dreadful section (vv. 17-19) and the next (vv. 21-24) is verse 20. It is a sharp contrast with the past and a blessed introduction to the new life. To learn Christ is not to condone the old pagan habits. Rather learning Him means renunciation of pagan vices and the cultivation of true holiness (vv. 21-24). Amen.