

The Anatomy of the Unworthy Walk

Ephesians 4:17-19 - NCBC, September 11, 2022

Main Point: **Humanity's root problem is the pursuit of happiness by way of rejecting God.**

- A **Hard/Callous Heart**: determined to remain in sin and desensitized to its death (18d-19a)
- **Leads to Ignorance**: deliberate refusal to know God (18c)
- **Leads to Alienation from God**: opposed to God and excluded from salvation (18b)
- **Leads to darkened understanding**: unable to perceive Jesus' beauty (18a)
- **Leads to a futile mind**: useless thinking in pursuit of personal happiness (17b)
- **Which pursues sensuality**: unrestrained cravings for self-indulgence (19b)
- **Which practices impurity**: all kinds of moral uncleanness & sexual sin (19d)
- **Out of greed**: deceived into believing happiness comes from just a little more (19c, 22)

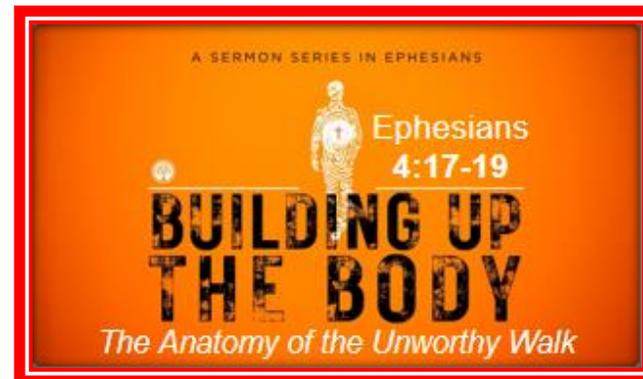
Application: **Pray for God's Spirit to renew your and your loved ones' minds.**

Opening Announcements:

- Today we get to vote to affirm our elders' decision to call Pastor Josh Gerber to serve as our Associate Pastor of Care and Discipleship. A "yes" vote communicates your excitement to Pastor Josh to receive him as one of our church's pastor-elders.

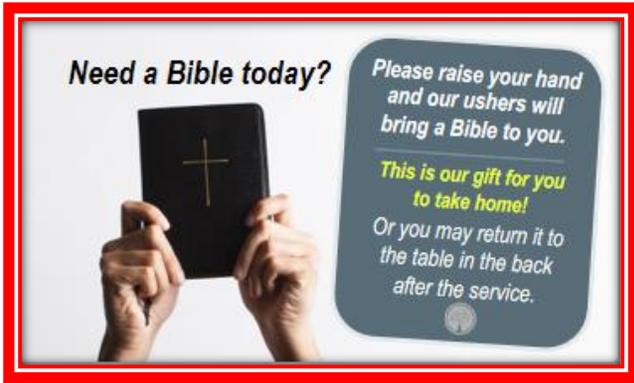
You may use one of the paper ballots provided in your Worship Folder, or text "vote" to **(309) 886-9136** and answer "yes" or "no" to the two prompted questions.

<<Christ is Mine Forevermore>>

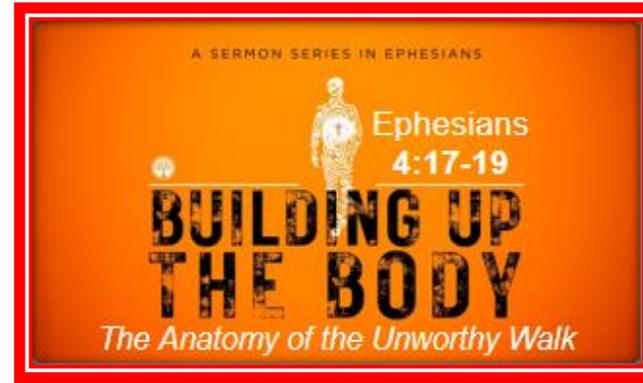


Jesus changes everything, doesn't He? I pray your soul is encouraged today by the Gospel love of Jesus for sinners like all of us.

Please continue your worship now by opening your copy of God's Word to **Ephesians chapter 4.**



If you do not have a Bible with you, simply raise your hand, as we'd gladly give you a Bible to use today or take home as a gift.



Today our focus will mostly be on the sinful character and conduct of the world that Christians are called to put off. But I'm going to read through **verse 24** which appropriately completes Paul's contrast, and provides the gospel solution for hardened and deceived minds.

So if you're able, please stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word, as I read **Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17-24**, from the ESV translation:

17 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. 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. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the

Paul's Letter to the EPHESIANS			BUILDING UP THE BODY			
Focus	Calling			Conduct		
	What God has Done			How We Should Live		
CH.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Topics	Spiritual Blessings & Prayer	Our Position in Christ	"Mystery" Revealed & Prayer	Walk in Unity & Holiness	Walk in Love & Wisdom	Stand against Evil
<i>God has united us in grace so that we may live in love together ...all to the praise of His glory!</i>						

Last Sunday Pastor Scott taught us how “every member is essential to building up the body of Christ” from **verses 11-16, of chapter 4**. Remember, **chapters 4, 5, and 6** call us to walk or live in a manner that is consistent with our calling that was revealed in **chapters 1-3**. So the first 16 verses of **chapter 4** calls Christians to walk in unity, and then the second half of **chapter 4**, which we begin studying today, calls Christians to walk in holiness.

new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This is the reading of God's Word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.



Today I want to invite you into the biblical laboratory of **Ephesians 4 verses 17-19** as we seek to peel back the layers of human morality and expose the biblical anatomy of worldly unbelief. So put on your rubber gloves, and prepare yourself for that distinct odor of theological formaldehyde as we take this hour to dissect the inner desires and outer behaviors of an ungodly walk.

Now I realize that my approach today begs explanation. Why take a whole sermon to focus on the problem of sin, when the Scripture goes on to give such gospel hope in the following verses? Wouldn't we be better off to focus more on the positive "put-ons", than the negative "put-offs"? After all, today's my 45th birthday! So isn't there a

happier topic to preach on September 11th than what's wrong with the world?

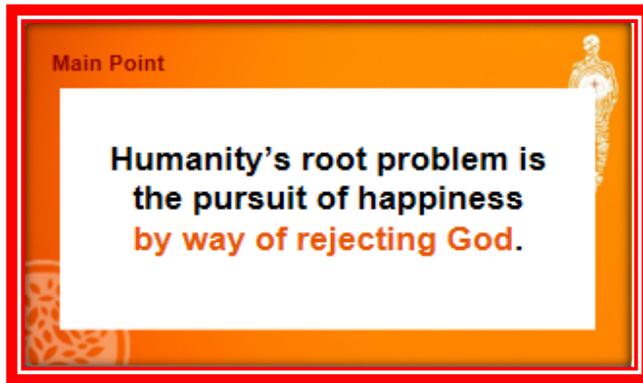
Well yes, Scripture does put more emphasis on the "put-ons" than the "put-offs." Christians should always be known more for what we are for, than what we are against.

But the profound biblical insight of **verses 17-19** deserves our careful attention. After all, we all live in the midst of an unbelieving world. And don't you ever find yourself asking, "What's wrong with people today?" "Why is our world so messed up?"

How you answer these questions is really important. After all, how you define the problem will determine how you define the cure. How you understand the real problems of our world today will ultimately determine where you look for solutions to these problems.

Many believe that the root problem of humanity is economic or environmental or educational. If we can just get people the right resources, in the right environment, then they will thrive. Others popularly believe people's root problems are biological. So our solution lies in some medicinal balance of our biochemistry. Frankly there's an endless supply of psychological theories about the ultimate cause of this world's problems.

But the God who created every person and this entire world is not silent about what's ultimately wrong with the world. Today our Bibles are open to **Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17-19** which clearly teach that,



Humanity's root problem is the pursuit of happiness by way of rejecting God. Now don't be turned off by the offensive odor of this theological formaldehyde. Listen carefully: The root problem of all sinners is that they want to be happy ...apart from God.

The pursuit of happiness sounds so innocent doesn't it? But whenever desires for personal happiness are combined with a willful rejection of God, humanity's most foundational purpose is sabotaged. This is the root problem of all unbelief: seeking to find happiness through the rejection of God.

So look at **verse 17**:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord... meaning I'm insisting with the intensity of Jesus' own authority: You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do.

¹ They are still Gentiles "in the flesh" (Ephesians 2:11) but they are no longer separated from Christ (Ephesians 2:12-22; 3:6). As Christians their

Christianity is not merely an intellectual philosophy for you to add to your library of mental ideals. Christianity is a practical way of living!

I know you Ephesians are living in Ephesus where there is raging wickedness and sexual perversion all twisted together in the worship of Diana and other false gods.

And I know you are ethnically Gentiles ... so I'm not calling you to change your racial loyalties...but I am calling you to change your *moral* loyalties.¹

Now that you are in Christ, you should no longer walk, or live, like the unbelievers you used to be! The "worthy walk" ... the way of living that is most suitable and fitting with the Gospel realities of **Ephesians chapters 1 to 3**... is a lifestyle of holiness that is radically different from the lifestyle of unbelievers.

Then notice what Paul does. Starting in the middle of **verse 17**, Paul begins to peel off one layer after another layer of sin's consequences on the human mind. He's digging at the root of all sinful living, seeking to ultimately reveal the most basic and fundamental problem of the "unworthy walk."

The logical sequence of Paul's argument isn't always clear in our English translations, so it can help to insert the word "because" between each of the various phrases if no other connecting word is supplied. And this way you won't miss Paul's implied logic.

lifestyle must differ from that of both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who "do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:5).

He starts in **verse 17** by stating that unbelievers live in *the futility of their minds*. Because, *they are darkened in their understanding*. And their understanding is darkened because they are *alienated from the life of God*. And they are alienated *because of the ignorance that is in them*. And unbelievers are spiritually ignorant, *due to their hardness of heart*.

So pause and notice: the root problem of sin is not ignorance, but hardness of heart. This is the deepest part of sin's root in people. Hard hearts. Or **verse 19** says, *they have become callous* – that's another way to describe the spiritual hardness of the unbeliever.

Then **verse 19** switches direction to describe how this inner root of hard-heartedness expresses itself outwardly in human behavior. All these inner layers from futility to hardness now produce an external conduct of *sensuality*, and that sensuality leads to *practicing every kind of impurity*, which is all done out of *greed* or covetousness.

So here's how we're going to approach these verses today: We're going to walk through this paragraph in reverse – actually using its *logical* sequence – starting at the very bottom or root cause of all sin, and then carefully examining each layer until we fully understand why this world lives how it lives.

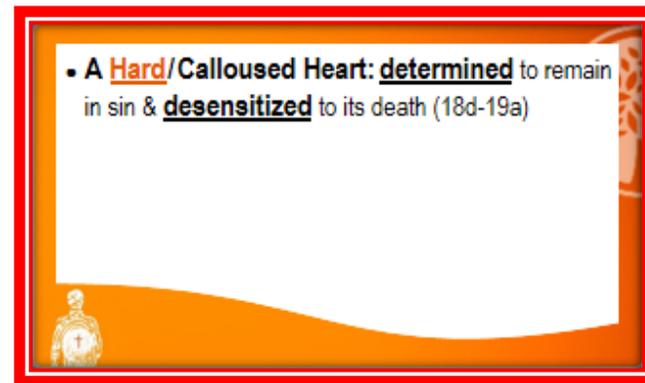
Then after we've briefly considered every part of the biblical anatomy of unbelief, we'll close today's sermon with one practical application for how Christians should

² Romans 5:12, c.f. 5:18-21

respond to this biblical description of humanity's root problem.

So are you ready?

Let's start at the bottom – at the deepest root cause for all worldliness and sin, which we find listed at the end of **verse 18** and the beginning of **verse 19**:



A Hard or Calloused Heart. This world's most fundamental problem is a spiritual hardness of heart that is determined to remain in sin and is desensitized to its death.

Ever since Adam's fall in the garden,² every person is sinfully determined and desensitized. Hardened and Calloused in the heart – which is the biblical word for the true self, the entire inner person.³

Make no mistake – this is the deepest and most foundational problem of every person who ever lives

³ Matthew 12:34-35, 15:18-20; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 6:45

apart from God's grace. We've cut right to the core of human motivation by starting here.

The ultimate reason sinners sin is because they are determined to sin. If you've ever tried to convince a non-Christian to stop sinning, then you're already fully aware of this truth, aren't you?

Sinners by nature refuse to be convinced to turn away from their sin.⁴ Apart from God's help, the human heart is rock hard. Literally the word refers to "petrification," like petrified wood. The controlling center of every person is rebellious, stubborn, completely obstinate and fatally close-minded to God and His ways.

The word "calloused" gives the idea that sin ultimately desensitizes a person...so that they lose all spiritual feeling. The conscience becomes seared.⁵ The sinner becomes morally uncaring and spiritually paralyzed to recognize that their ruling desires are voluntarily leading to spiritual death.⁶

The hard-hearted sinner still makes his own responsible choices. In fact he is ruled by the cauldron of burning desires that is within him – completely blinded by the lusts of deceit and Satan's lies.⁷ But at his core, the sinner refuses to acknowledge God⁸ and honor⁹ God. And what does a hard and calloused heart lead to?

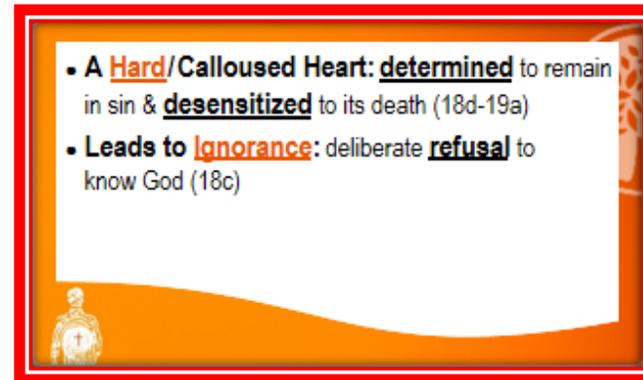
⁴ Proverbs 27:22; Isaiah 1:5; Jeremiah 5:3, 13:23; Hosea 5:4; John 12:37-40
"Because they would not believe, they could not believe." C.f. Rev. 22:11a

⁵ 1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15; c.f. Hebrews 10:22

⁶ Romans 1:32

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 2:26

Well, if you follow Paul's logic in **verse 18**, hardness of heart,



Leads to spiritual Ignorance. Now don't be confused. This ignorance is not innocent but sinful, since this is the heart's deliberate refusal to know God.¹⁰

Notice **verse 18** says this is the ignorance that is "within them" – meaning it's a responsible consequence of their hardened heart, not a result of some failure outside of them.

This describes how every unbeliever exercises a flagrant refusal to know God and His will – a willful and responsible rejection of God's truth. **Romans 1 verse 18** describes how all sinners are without excuse¹¹ since all sinners, *Suppress the truth in their unrighteousness*.

⁸ Romans 1:28

⁹ Romans 1:21

¹⁰ Psalm 14:1-3; c.f. Romans 3:11-18

¹¹ Romans 1:20, 2:1

Have you ever tried to hold a beach ball under water, while trying to convince your friend that there's not a beach ball in the pool? This is a picture of what spiritual ignorance looks like.

Sinners purposefully try to hide and deny the very knowledge of God and His will – all due to their hard-hearted determination to worship self rather than their true Creator.

Now lay down your dissecting tools for a moment, and think about this:

Once you reject the knowledge of God and His truth, that means there's no longer any absolute truth or morality. Every person now defines their own truth,¹² so that what is true for you is not necessarily true for me.

Can you see how our world is floating in this sea of moral relativism and spiritual ignorance?

This world believes that deliberate ignorance of God and His transcendent truth is woke and progressive...but **Romans 1 verse 27** clearly says that *while they claimed to become wise, they really became fools.*¹³

Also – think about this: do you remember how Jesus described eternal life in **John 17**? Jesus said,

*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*¹⁴

So knowing God is what brings true life to the soul!¹⁵ Therefore, as we keep tracing Paul's logic through this text, it should not be surprising to learn that a deliberate refusal to know God actually,



Leads to Alienation from God. Now alienation doesn't mean that we turn into little green monsters that are called aliens. It's just a big word that means we are **opposed to God and excluded from God's salvation.**

The flow of Paul's argument here makes it clear: the reason sinners are disconnected from eternal life, and without hope and God in this world,¹⁶ is because of their willful spiritual ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart.

¹² Judges 21:25

¹³ Romans 1:27; c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁴ John 17:3

¹⁵ Philippians 3:8; 1 John 5:20

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:12

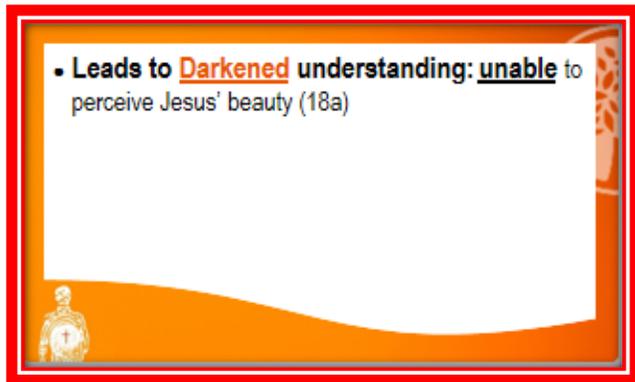
The verb “*alienated*” implies hostility. Like **Colossians 1:21** says, *You were once alienated and hostile in mind...*

So all sinners are excluded or separated from eternal life. In other words, just as **Ephesians 2** made clear, every sinner is spiritually dead.¹⁷ Every sinner is an eternally responsible enemy of God who is opposed to God and outside of His saving promises.¹⁸

These are quite the guts of unbelief, aren't they?

A person's hardened determination to remain in sin – regardless of what it costs leads to his deliberate refusal to know God, which makes him fundamentally opposed to God and forever excluded from eternal life and God's salvation.

This fixed state¹⁹ of separation from God then,



¹⁷ Ephesians 2:1-3

¹⁸ Romans 5:8, 10

Leads to darkened understanding, where the spiritually dead soul is unable to perceive Jesus' beauty.

Paul says this at the beginning of **verse 18**:

They are darkened in their understanding.

Again there are so many parallels between our passage in **Ephesians 4** and what Paul wrote in **Romans 1**, but in **Romans 1 verse 21** Paul teaches that *their foolish hearts were darkened because they did not honor God or give thanks to Him.*

In **1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14**, Paul writes,

The natural person – referring to an unbeliever – does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

In other words, listen carefully:

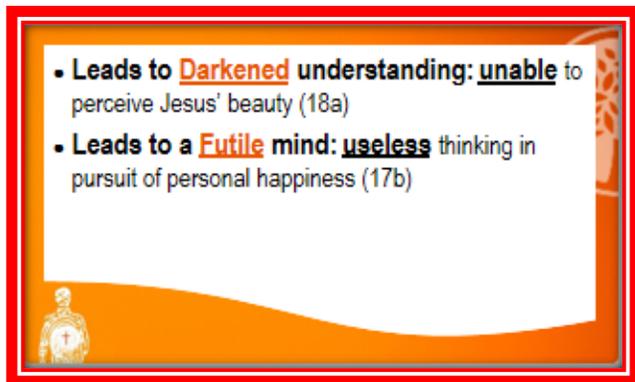
The result of being alienated from the life of God is a moral darkness, or a corruption of moral reasoning, so

¹⁹ The perfect tense of the verb “alienated” stresses a completed action with continuing results.

that the sinner is unable to perceive the beauty of Jesus or the goodness of God.²⁰

Sinners can be really smart, and have great intellects. But regardless of their IQ, sinners will never be able to understand gospel realities. Sinners will always love spiritual darkness and hate the light of Jesus.²¹ When they read the Gospel of Jesus, it will seem like a foolish wives' tale.²²

And all of these consequences of sin on the human soul,



Leads to a **futile** mind. **Verse 17** teaches that this is the stinking thinking that creates the losing living of sinners. “Futile” just means failing or pointless or useless. So a futile mind is useless thinking that pursues personal happiness or satisfaction in all the wrong places. It’s futile

²⁰ C.f. 2 Corinthians 3:14, 4:3-4

²¹ John 3:19-20

²² 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14

²³ Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 3:20-21; 1 Peter 4:11; Revelation 4:11

because it doesn’t work. Futile thinking fails to accomplish or achieve what it’s seeking.

Now this is fascinating. Come up for air for a moment.

Why did God create you? For His glory, right?²³ All people were created in the image of God – to reflect God’s likeness in this world and increase the fame of His Name among all people.²⁴ Ok, good.

Now, why did God give you a mind?

The human mind is the part of us that experiences and desires satisfaction and happiness. God therefore created all people with a mind so that we could have the joyful ability of knowing Him and experiencing His glory forever! So that we would love Him with all our heart, soul, and *mind*.²⁵

The human mind is created by God to know and delight in the supremacy of Christ.²⁶ In fact our minds are created to be particularly responsive to our knowledge of His glory.²⁷ So don’t miss this: God created you with a mind so you could be forever happy in Jesus!

But notice now from our text, sin so corrupts the human mind that our minds no longer work right. Because of our spiritual darkness that comes from spiritual alienation that

²⁴ Genesis 1:26-27

²⁵ Matthew 22:37; c.f. Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:7-8

²⁶ Ephesians 3:17-19; Philippians 3:10

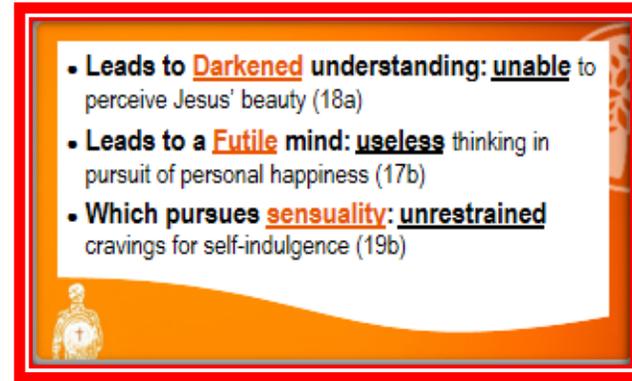
²⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:17-19, 4:6; c.f. Acts 26:18

comes our spiritual ignorance that comes from spiritual hardness... the unbelieving mind now only seeks satisfaction outside of Jesus. Sin literally puts us out of our minds. Sin distorts a person's thinking and recenters all their desires and values on self-serving emptiness.

According to **Romans 8**, the human mind under sin's control is now hostile to God and cannot submit to God's law or please God.²⁸ The mind of unbelief is futile – no longer working according to God's creative intent – but now consumed by pure selfishness, seeking satisfaction in the ever-diminishing pleasures of sin.

Which then takes us back to **verse 19** of **Ephesians 4**, right? Because now that we've dissected the internal character of unbelief, **verse 19** reveals the external conduct of unbelief.

According to **verse 19**, the warped and futile mind of sin now seeks its pleasure,



In sensuality, rather than the supremacy of Christ.

Sensuality is a broad word that means unrestrained cravings for self-indulgence. Sensuality includes all sexual excesses, but it is not limited to sexual desires. Sensuality simply describes all that a human mind desires apart from God. It is human desire minus God. In the words of our main point today, sensuality is the pursuit of happiness by way of rejecting God. Sensuality throws off all moral restraint, and gives oneself over to the self-centered burning passions of a warped mind.

Now did you notice how **verse 19** says the character of unbelief *gives itself up to sensuality*?

That's profound. Because one of the ways God judges sinners is by simply giving sinners over to what sinners want. In **Romans 1** God gives sinners up to the lusts of impurity,²⁹ dishonorable passions,³⁰ and to a debased

²⁸ Romans 8:7-8

²⁹ Romans 1:24

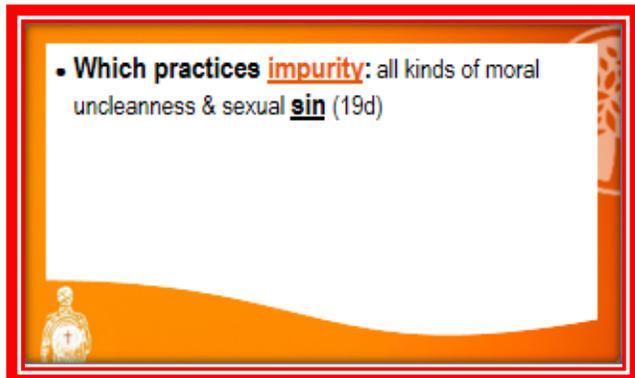
³⁰ Romans 1:26

mind to do what ought not to be done.³¹ In other words, sin itself is one of the punishments of unbelief!³²

Certainly we see this kind of suicidal self-indulgence all over the unbelieving world, right?

If it feels good, do it! Do whatever will make you happy! The sinful world has no regard for public decency or what God thinks...but only lives to gratify their ever-increasing lusts for happiness by pursuing those ever-diminishing returns of sin.

And according to the end of **verse 19**, the pursuit of sensuality always leads to,



The practice of every kind of **impurity**, meaning all kinds of moral uncleanness & sexual **sin**.

Now unfortunately time doesn't permit me to teach God's good design for human sexuality as opposed to how the world thinks about sex. But I've included an appendix in

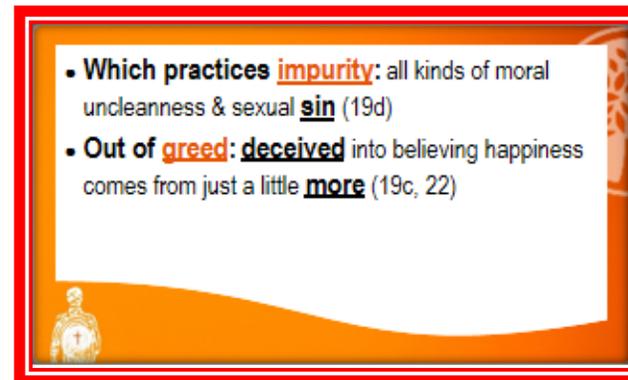
³¹ Romans 1:28

today's sermon manuscript that you can pick up in the back of the room, which will be posted online with this sermon next week, for your further study.

But for now, doesn't **verse 19** help us understand why the world acts the way it does? Why sex sells? Why pornography and homosexuality and all kinds of sexual perversion are raging through this world like terminal cancer?

The word for *practice* in **verse 19** is a strong word. It means that the behavior of unbelief is often so preoccupied with moral and sexual perversion it's as if impurity was now our full-time job.

And according to **verse 19**, all of these sensual and impure behaviors are,



Out of **greed** or covetousness. After all the human mind that is warped by sin is **deceived** into believing happiness

³² Proverbs 13:15b, 21a; 14:12

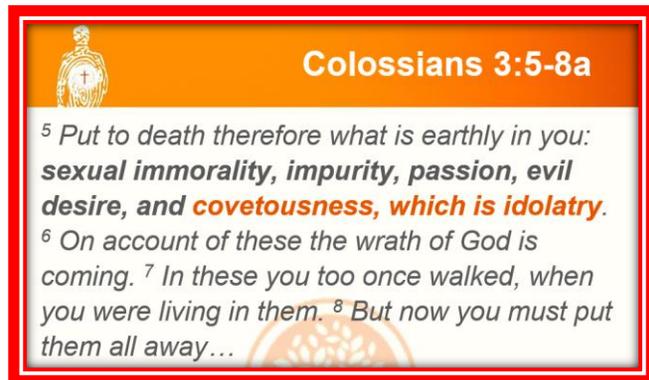
comes from just a little bit more. If I could just have more of what someone else has... then I'd finally be happy.

Look down at **verse 22**:

Put off your old self – referring to this Gentile way of unbelief and sin – *which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.*

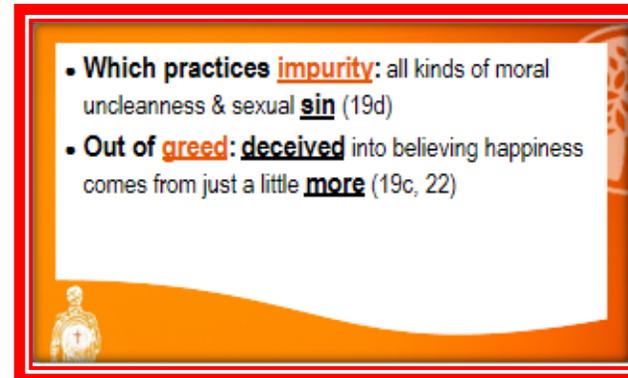
Did you catch the end of **verse 22**? The lifestyle of an unbeliever is corrupted or ruined by the lusts of deceit. Lying desires of greed and covetousness... which are actually just the worship-disorder of idolatry.

Colossians 3:5 makes this explicit,³³



Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

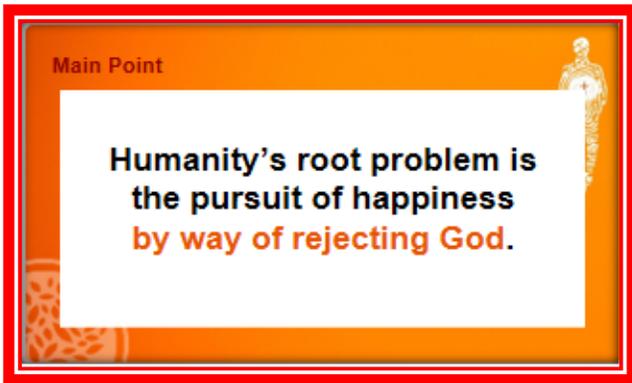
Sensuality and moral impurity actually reflect greed or false worship of covetousness! For whenever I allow my mind to be controlled by my own selfish desires, and I put whatever I want at the center of my life as the “god” whom I expect will satisfy me, I’m worshipping my desires more than God! Nothing matters anymore except that I get what I want, how I want it, when I want it, in the manner that I want it! My ruthless appetite for more must be satisfied for me to be happy – at least that’s the lie that sin uses to continually deceive the mind that has been so hardened by sin.



So then covetousness or idolatry is what all desire eventually becomes without God.

This is the biblical anatomy of unbelief.

³³ C.f. Ephesians 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19



Humanity's root problem is the pursuit of happiness by way of rejecting God. The entire unbelieving world is driven by idolatrous greed, making a living out of impurity and sensuality, that reflects the selfish cravings of a non-working mind, whose moral understanding has been darkened because of being alienated from the life of God because of their spiritual ignorance due to their hardened and calloused hearts.

This is what's wrong with the world from God's perspective. No wonder then, **verse 17** is so strong when Paul insists that Christians are not to keep living like unbelievers! The world's character and conduct is obviously not suitable for Christ-followers!

Next Sunday we will focus in on the positive call to holiness found in **verses 20-24**, but for today, how should we respond in light of what we've learned about the anatomy of sin, and the full biblical extent of sin's corruption on the human condition?

³⁴ Romans 3:10ff; Psalm 14:1-3; c.f. John 6:44, 65, 10:26



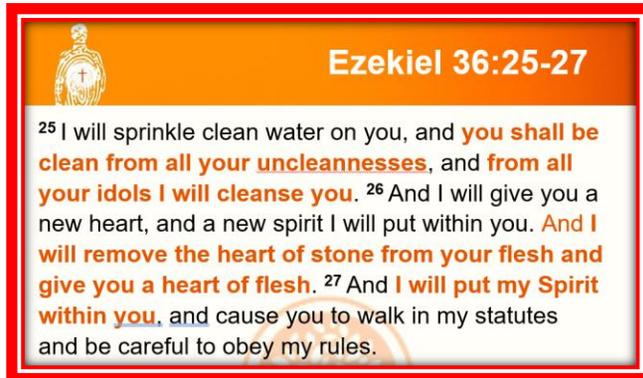
Now that we understand the hard-hearted deceptive slavery that sin has on every unbeliever, I believe we must pray. You must pray for God's Spirit to renew your and your loved ones' minds.

After all, the voluntary slavery of hard-heartedness is not something that we have the ability to change, right? Adam's sin has cast the entire human race into the inevitable death of sin's deceptive suicide.

All who repent and believe in Jesus will be saved, but sin's affect on the human mind is such that no one will seek for God.³⁴ No one will desire God. No sinner will ever perceive Jesus as beautiful. All sinners are spiritually dead, spiritual blind, and spiritually unable to understand the very cross of Christ that is able to set them free from sin's slavery. Stony hearts will never change... unless God's people pray, and God Himself renews the sinful mind!

So church, listen to the glorious hope of these verses now and let your soul soar with praise to our God of salvation!

In **Ezekiel 36** God gives these salvation promises,



I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

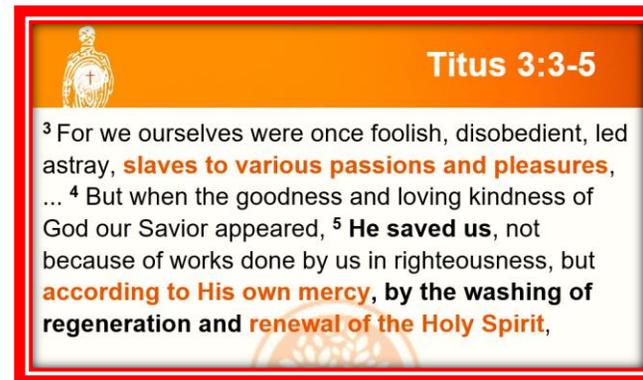
Now listen ...

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

O celebrate the miracle of God's salvation of sinners, church! Christianity isn't just adding a bit of religion to your life. Christianity isn't about reformation. Christianity is about resurrection! New life! New heart! A brand-new

mind of Christ, that now seeks its happiness and satisfaction in knowing God and walking in His ways!

Again listen to,



Titus 3 verses 3-5,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures...

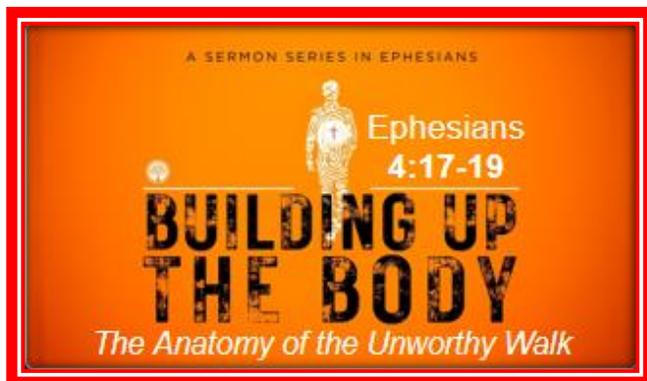
Yep that pretty much sums up **Ephesians 4:17-19** doesn't it?

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

O dear friend. We must rely on the miraculous renewal of God's Spirit if we are to ever truly know God. So pray for God's Spirit to renew you in the spirit of your mind – as **Ephesians 4:23** will teach us next week.

We all need the miracle of spiritual renewal of our mind in order to be delivered from sin's hard-hearted and deceptive entrapment.

So who could you pray for this week, church? Write down their name now, and then fervently ask God to *open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith alone in the death and resurrection of Jesus.*³⁵

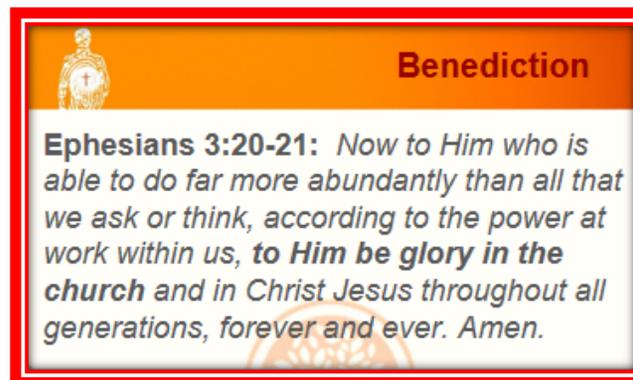


Let's pray.

<<All I Have Is Christ>>

<<**AFTER 1st Service: Reminder of Kris Mettelmann Ordination Service today at 9:30a in Family Center. All invited!>>**

³⁵ Acts 26:18



Let's pray aloud our benediction from **Ephesians 3:20-21:**

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



Recommended Resources on Ephesians 4:17-19:

- Isaiah 44:18-20
- Romans 1:18-29; 8:7
- 1 Corinthians 2:14
- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- Ephesians 2:1-3
- Colossians 1:21; 2:18
- 1 Thessalonians 4:5
- 2 Timothy 3:6-9, 13
- Titus 1:15
- 1 Peter 4:3-4
- 2 Peter 2:10-12
- 1 John 2:15-17

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/the-deepest-problem-of-humanity>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/why-new-clothes-in-christ>

- *Think*, John Piper
- *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age*, J.M. Boice
- *In the Arena of the Mind*, John Vandegriff

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Compare Romans 1:18-32 and Ephesians 4:17-19. What similar themes or parallel thoughts can you identify in both passages? What do both passages teach is the root problem in the world?
2. Compare Ephesians 2:1-3 and 4:17-19 and 4:22. How do you describe your own lifestyle before Christ saved you? Are these qualities of character and conduct necessarily experienced by all unbelievers? Explain.
3. Read Ephesians 4:17-18, 22-23. Identify all of the “thinking” words (related to our minds). How significant is a person’s thinking to their living? How do the desires of self-love deceive and ruin us?
4. Read Colossians 3:5-6. What is the relationship between greed (or covetousness) and idolatry? What happens to all human desire when it is untethered from God? Is there any desire that you have that regularly competes with your worship of God?
5. Read Titus 3:5, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, and Ephesians 1:16-18, 4:23-24. What hope exists for futile hardened hearts living apart from God’s life according to their deceitful self-loving desires?
6. How does a biblical understanding of the anatomy of unbelief affect how you pray for your lost friends? What are your favorite biblical prayers to pray for your unsaved friends? (i.e. Isaiah 55:6-9; Acts 26:18; Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 1:16-23, 3:14-21; Hebrews 13:20-21; others?) Take time together to pray for God’s miraculous renewal of our minds.

God's Good Design for Human Sexuality

The following thoughts are taken from the highly recommended resource: Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor. You can download this excellent book for free at <https://www.desiringgod.org/books/sex-and-the-supremacy-of-christ>.

Sex within marriage is pure and holy (Genesis 1:27-31, 2:18-25) even after sin entered the world (Hebrews 13:4). Contrary to the world's practice, God's design for sex is always others-centered (C.f. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Ephesians 5:25; Luke 9:23-24; Acts 20:35) and always has as its primary goal the satisfaction of one's spouse (1 Corinthians 7:3-4). Therefore the primary goal of sex within marriage according to God's design is not procreation (pregnancy isn't even mentioned in the Song of Solomon) or receiving pleasure (contra pornography), but the giving of pleasure in the safe and loving context of a covenant-faithful marriage relationship.

“God's gift of sexuality is inherently designed to pull us out of ourselves and toward our spouse. ... this means that marriage calls us out of our self-focused concern for genital pleasure and toward the totality of the sex act within the marriage relationship.”

– Al Mohler

Like all other aspects of Christian marriage, the instincts for the marriage bed are not natural, but supernatural (Galatians 2:20, 5:22-24). By the power of God's Spirit, the marriage bed can be blessed with regular (1 Corinthians 7:5) mutual pleasure (Proverbs 5:18-19) to the glory of God.

Why Did God Make Humans Sexual?

Understanding that sexual sin is so tempting (Proverbs 5:3, 6:24-25; 1 Corinthians 7:9) and destructive (Proverbs 5:4-23, 6:26-35; 1 Corinthians 6:18), why did God even create us as sexual beings?

I appreciate how the following excerpts from Pastor John Piper in the above-referenced book help to answer this question:

- “God created us in his image, male and female, with personhood and sexual passions, so that when he comes to us in this world there would be these powerful words and images to describe the promises and pleasures of our covenant relationship with him through Christ.”
- “God created us with sexual passion so that there would be language to describe what it means to cleave to him in love and what it means to turn away from him to others.” (c.f. Ezekiel 16; Hosea)
- “The ultimate reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable.”
- “We were created to comprehend—as much as a creature can—the supremacy of Christ. And the knowing we were made to experience is not the knowing of disinterested awareness...but the knowing of admiration and wonder and awe and intimacy and ecstasy and embrace.”
- “Knowing someone in the fullest biblical sense is defined by sexual imagery. (Genesis 4:1) Knowing here refers to sexual intercourse. In Matthew 1:24-25 he “knew her not” means he did not have sexual relations with her. Now I don't mean that every time the word “know” is used in the Bible there are sexual connotations. That's not true. But what I do mean is that sexual language in the Bible for our covenant relationship to God does lead us to think of knowing God on the analogy of sexual intimacy and ecstasy. I don't mean that we somehow have sexual relations with God or he with man. That's a pagan thought. It's not Christian. But I do mean that the intimacy and ecstasy of sexual relations points to what knowing God is meant to be.” (Hos 2:14-20)
- “We were given the power to know each other sexually so that we might have some hint of what it will be like to know Christ supremely.”

- “Every thought of God and every act of God toward me in Christ Jesus is mercy. The way is open to know him and all the beautiful supremacy of his Son. The cross of Christ has made the supremacy of God knowable.”
- “The best gift of the gospel is not the forgiveness of sins. The best gift of the gospel is not the imputed righteousness of Christ. The best gift of the gospel is not eternal life. The best gift of the gospel is seeing and savoring the supremacy of Christ himself. The greatest reward of the cross is knowing the supremacy of Christ.”
- “Knowing the supremacy of Christ enlarges the soul so that sex and its thrills become as small as they really are. Little souls make little lusts have great power. The soul, as it were, expands to encompass the magnitude of its treasure. The soul was made to see and savor the supremacy of Christ. Nothing else is big enough to enlarge the soul as God intended and make little lusts lose their power.”
- “Our lives are intellectually and emotionally disconnected from the infinite, soul-staggering grandeur for which we were made. Inside and outside the church Western culture is drowning in a sea of triviality, pettiness, banality, and silliness. ... It is inevitable that the human heart, which was made to be staggered with the supremacy of Christ, but instead is drowning in a sea of banal entertainment, will reach for the best natural buzz that life can give: sex.”
- “Knowing the supremacy of Christ saves our sexuality from sin by empowering us to suffer. We must suffer in order to be sexually pure.”

Further, here are two helpful quotes from Pastor Ben Patterson in the same above-mentioned book as well:

- “Pleasure is God’s idea, and God is the devil’s Enemy. The devil actually hates pleasure, because he hates the God of pleasure.”

- “Satan’s plan is to promote and encourage ‘an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure.’ (C.S. Lewis *The Screwtape Letters*, 112.) The gigantic secret of the joy of sex is this: Sex is good because the God who created sex is good. And God is glorified greatly when we receive his gift with thanksgiving—for the gift points back to the God who gave it—and enjoy it the way he meant for it to be enjoyed.”

Of course one of the secondary purposes of the marriage bed is for procreation (Malachi 2:15). However procreation does not seem to be the ultimate purpose for our sexuality according to the full weight of Scripture.

God’s creative design for human sexuality is ultimately for the glory of God.

Therefore, for the married, the marriage bed is a God-given gift and responsibility to help your spouse worship God through your own sacrificial death to self.

For the non-married, abstaining from sexual sin provides practical opportunities to say “yes” to Jesus and His holiness (Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8) and see the sufficiency of God’s Spirit in deeper ways (Matthew 5:8; 1 Corinthians 6:17-20). Overcoming temptation by God’s faithful grace serves to strengthen and mature our faith in ways that could not be possible apart from such God-given suffering (1 Corinthians 10:13-14; James 1:2-4, 12).

And in all of this, God is never to be blamed for tempting us (James 1:13-17), but His goodness and grace are ever put on display through His creative design for His image-bearers (Romans 11:33-36).

“The Anatomy of the Unworthy Walk”

Ephesians 4:17-19 - *Pastor Kevin Sauder*

Main Point: **Humanity's root problem is the pursuit of happiness by way of rejecting God.**

- **A _____/Callous Heart:** _____ to remain in sin and _____ to its death (18d-19a)

- **Leads to _____:** deliberate _____ to know God (18c)

- **Leads to _____ from God:** opposed to God and _____ from salvation (18b)

- **Leads to _____ understanding:** _____ to perceive Jesus' beauty (18a)

- **Leads to a _____ mind:** - _____ thinking in pursuit of personal happiness (17b)

- **Which pursues - _____:** _____ cravings for self-indulgence (19b)

- **Which practices _____:** all kinds of moral uncleanness & sexual _____ (19d)

- **Out of _____:** _____ into believing happiness comes from just a little _____ (19c, 22)

Application: **Pray for God's Spirit to renew your and your loved ones' minds.**

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