

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 18)

Ephesians 4:17-24

Pastor Edward Cheng

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As we consider what to do with this year's summer retreat, I'm reminded of fond childhood memories of church retreats, when we would play games like Snaps, where some know the secret rules and others have to guess. When those who are in the dark finally figure it out, there is an incredible sense that their eyes have been opened and they see things in a new way. This is what Christian life is supposed to be like. We were once in the dark, but when the eyes of our heart have been opened to the truth of the gospel (Ephesians 1:18), we see things and live our lives in a new way. Knowing Jesus is supposed to be transformative like that!

In today's passage Paul compares those who are still in the dark to those who can now see. In this context, when he talks about "Gentiles" in 4:17-18 he isn't referring to the Gentiles who are united together with the Jews in Christ (discussed in chapter 2), but rather those pagan Gentiles who still remain outside the kingdom of God and are still spiritually blind. Paul uses four phrases to describe them. First they live in the "futility of their mind." Their thinking is spiritually empty and they have a worldly perspective that values temporal things with no eternal value. Second, they are "darkened in their understanding." The eyes of their hearts are blinded and they can't see spiritual truth. Third, they are "ignorant" and therefore alienated from God. Lastly their "hearts are hardened" and calloused with unbelief. All of these descriptions point to people who do not know Jesus. They may know some facts about Him, but they do not follow Him. They lack the personal intimate knowledge of Jesus that comes from a trusting relationship with Him by faith.

The result of this ignorance is that they have given themselves up to sensuality, greed, and impurity (v. 19). We recognize that this lifestyle is less prominent in some unbelievers and more obvious in others, and we Christians shouldn't sit in judgment upon them because they don't know any better. They behave like this not because they are bad people, for all of us are bad, but they live this way because their eyes are blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4). Without knowledge of Jesus, why wouldn't they live in a worldly manner gratifying their own desires? On the golf course when I play with unbelieving strangers and they swear, I don't insist that they conform to Christian behavior because they don't even know Jesus. Why should we hold them to our standards or expect them to be like someone they don't even know? Without knowledge of

spiritual truth it is only natural to live the way they do. And we who know Jesus even struggle with the same sins because this is who we once were. But because of Jesus we are gradually becoming less like our old selves and more like Jesus.

In vv. 20-21 Paul describes those who have a new life in Christ. In contrast to the ignorance of the unbelievers, he uses four phrases to describe our enlightenment. We have “learned” the right way, we have “heard about Christ,” we were “taught in Him,” and we know the “truth” that is in Jesus. We live differently because we know Jesus. Our eyes are opened to the truth and so we live according to it. Those transformed by the truth become more like Jesus, and serve as examples for others. At my home church there were several exemplary young adults who influenced me. I don’t remember the specifics of what they taught, but I remember how knowledge of Jesus influenced how they lived their lives, devoted to Jesus and to the service of their brothers and sisters. This is how I learned what a transformed life looks like.

Paul goes on in vv. 22-24 to describe three ways in which knowing Jesus changes us. First in v. 22, those in Christ take off their old selves, like an old dirty garment. This is a continual process of growth where we abandon our old ways, our anger, our unwholesome speech, and our self-centered thinking. Second, we are constantly renewed in the “spirit of our minds” (v. 23), in contrast to those who are living in the futility of their minds. Our minds should be full of spiritual things, not empty worldly things. We must be regularly renewed through meeting, praying, and studying God’s word together. Third, we put on our new self (v. 24). We follow Jesus and become more like Him, not just because it is our duty to the King who is worthy, but because He is so admirable and exemplary. We should want to be like Him. When we truly see the light of Christ, we will want to walk towards it, and it changes us. It’s easy to understand but hard to put into practice. So let us continue to engage in spiritual activities regularly and rely on Jesus. Let us be committed to the process of renewal and let us follow Jesus together, encouraging each other as we all strive to be like Him.