

“Election Special,” part nine “Elected to change” study notes

Introduction

Paul has been building on how the Ephesians should live now that they have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They are a new people, division between Jews and gentile no longer exists, they are united in the One Spirit, the Holy Spirit whose presence is in their lives is both the proof of their new identity and the promise of their inheritance.

But what should this new life look like? What changes need to occur, not to earn God’s salvation but in response to the gift they have received. Paul lays out in these verses some of the change that he thinks should occur in the “new life.”

Verse by verse study

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

Note:

Paul has talked about unity and diversity in the preceding text, but the temptation is always to go back to what we knew before. The Gentiles/pagans live a futile life because they don't know any better but Christ followers have had the eyes of their hearts enlightened to a new way of life, the way of reconciliation. Even in the ethical field, it is implied, the most strenuous efforts of pagans are vain, because they lack the inner power to enable them to live up to their highest ideals.

In what ways are our thoughts outside of Christ “futile?” How did you used to think that way? Are you still tempted to think that way?

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.

Note:

They are separated from God, and therefore do not have the light of understanding which comes only from the life of God, and instead of hearts of flesh they have hearts of stone. The more they hold out against God the harder their hearts become, and the greater their alienation from God becomes. Consciousness of wrongdoing becomes duller and duller the more sin is committed. Our minds precede our actions, so if our minds are out of tune with God and have no understanding of light, then our actions will quickly follow down the same path as our minds. Ignorance is not however a legitimate defence.

How is someone’s understanding darkened? How can that be reversed?

¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Note:

Callousness is a lack of sensitivity, and what they lack sensitivity to are the ways of God, and so they throw themselves into the ways of the world. Callouses are a good thing on the bottom of your feet as they prevent you from feeling pain and keep the foot from being over sensitive to every step but it is a bad thing on your heart.

How does a heart continue to grow harder and harder? How does it effect relationships with God and others?

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—

Note:

The Christians in Ephesus have learned something different about how to do life; the Gospel throws life into an entirely new and different light. Christ is the model, if we want to know how to do life on earth, how our lives should be changed we need to look no further than the way we have been taught about how Jesus lived.

How well do you know how Jesus lived His life? How does the way you live your life measure up to His?

²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

Note:

Paul isn't just talking about theology here, he is not asking if they have got some Bible verses memorised, but if they have really understood the implications of the Gospel by translating it into the way they live their lives.

Name one thing in your life that has changed that would indicate you have understood the Gospel.

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

Note:

The Ephesians former way of life was deceptive; it offered a lot but in the end delivered nothing except corruption. That is what the desires of the world give us, a corrupt view of what God created.

How do the things we desire in the world and we expect from them contrast from the way God made them to be used?

²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

Note:

Learning is consistently putting into practice what we know, the moment we stop putting it into practice we cease to grow and indeed go backwards. A changed life can only come about through transformation of our thoughts.

How can you continue to have the “spirit” of your mind renewed?

²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Which clothes do you find the most comfortable, your old way of life or the Gospel way? How hard do you find change? What area of your life is most resistant to Gospel change?

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.

Note:

In verse 15 Paul had talked about speaking the truth in love, truth needs to be spoken to one another, but truth always involves love, if there is no love involved in the motivation it doesn't matter how truthful it might be it's not the Gospel. On the flip side if there is no truth involved and it is all just “love,” then that is not the Gospel either. When Paul says we should speak to one another he is talking about members of the church, but the same principle should be applied to everyone outside the church as well. The way the church is built is through speaking truth in love.

In what ways do we not speak the truth to one another? In what ways do we speak the truth but without love? How can we do both?

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

Note:

Does Paul say it is ok to get angry but only up to a point? There is after all such a thing as righteous anger, and Jesus Himself got angry. Paul's concern though is our anger isn't usually righteous, and even when it is it can quickly turn into unrighteousness, and allows the devil to use it to bring disunity. Paul recognises we will have situations and people in our lives which reveal anger in us, but we deal with the cause quickly.

Does our anger stem from things outside us, or do circumstances merely reveal what is inside of us? If anger comes from within and is a heart issue, how can we use the Gospel to change our hearts? If you feel angry about a situation or person what are you to do before the sunsets?

²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

Note:

Unresolved anger leads to bitterness, resentment, and it breaks fellowship and unity, and ultimately is exactly what the devil wants. He wants calloused hearts and anything that can lead to that is fine with him.

How does anger give the devil opportunity to break unity in relationships?

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Note:

It is telling here that Paul urges the one who is capable of work but has in effect been stealing to work, not for his/her own ends but so they can contribute to the needs of the community. The diversity of gifts should result in keeping unity when the Gospel is clearly understood. The motive for work is not individual profit but rather communal well-being.

What in your past is inconsistent with the Gospel life? How did your “old” life steal from God?

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Talk is easy, but Paul says we should only speak as fits the need, because the trouble with talking a lot leads to a greater chance of some of our words being less than beneficial, and even damaging. The goal is always building up, it is always to encourage, even when we have to hold someone accountable we are to do so in a way which is encouraging not discouraging. We are grace dispensers, and one of the primary ways we can dispense grace is with our words, as we remember that grace (what God gives us what we don't deserve) is what we have received in unlimited measure.

What constitutes “corrupting talk?” What is the difference between using words to build up rather than tear down? How does the Gospel build us?

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Note:

The Holy Spirit is grieved when we act or speak in a way that does not reflect the new life He has given us, when it doesn't show the grace we have been given by the work of Christ, and when it doesn't point to the grace filled kingdom and family we

now belong to. The Holy Spirit is a person not a force, and we can that clearly here as it only possible to grieve people not inanimate objects.

What things do believers do which grieve the Holy Spirit? Why is it a bad thing to grieve the Holy Spirit? How does the Spirit help us grow and change?

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Note:

Again Paul lists things that belong to the old man that should not be found in the new man, that is the old clothing, but the Christ follower must wear the new clothing of the Gospel. All these things lead to disunity, and they lead to the Gospel being marred, and our witness of it discredited. All these things are done with “malice,” that is ill will, and so the motivation is definitely not Gospel centred but rather self-centred.

How do these things lead to disunity? What do we have to do in order to change?

³² Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Note:

The new life of being kind, tender hearted, and forgiving can only come from us appreciating and resting in what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Christ followers are to forgive each other, without limit or reservation.

What is the fundamental change that must take place for us to change to have this reaction to people around us? Read Matthew 18:21-35 and talk about how a changed life reveals a changed heart.