



## MAIN POINT

Godless thinking influences all of our lives, therefore, we must look to Christ to renew our minds.

## THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

- 1. Ask those in the group who feel comfortable to share one of the most foolish decisions they have ever made. What was your thought process leading up to that decision?**
- 2. What did you learn from that experience? How would you think through a similar situation differently now?**

**Leader:** Apart from Christ, our minds are set on the flesh (Rom. 8:5) and every thought and intention of our hearts is bent toward evil (Gen. 6:5). In other words, the reason we make foolish decisions is because our minds are corrupted by sin (Rom. 1:21). According to Romans 1, we all know that there is a God who is eternal and holy and yet we all deliberately choose to live as if God does not exist. At times, we can even make choices in an attempt to honor God that still prove to be foolish. Therefore, if we hope to make decisions that truly honor God and focus our lives on His glory, we need God to renew our minds.

## DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:17-19.**

**Leader:** In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul challenged the Ephesian believers to live worthy of their calling as disciples of Christ. Because of God's purpose that we grow to full Christian maturity (4:13-15), he called on them to change their manner of living. In so doing, Paul stressed the importance of examining our thoughts. Paul appealed to them in the Lord not to think and consequently live as the Gentiles around them think and lived. Here the word "Gentiles" essentially means "non-Christians."

- 3. What was the purpose of the Gentiles' lives? What did they live for? How should we, as followers of Christ, be different from the people described in these verses?**
- 4. What was wrong with the "Gentiles" thinking (vv. 17-18)? What were they ignorant of? What kinds of attitudes and actions did their thinking produce (v. 19)?**

**Leader:** The Gentiles or nonbelievers Paul spoke of lived lives characterized by darkness. Their minds were closed and their hearts hardened to the things of God. The minds of the people were on themselves and what could serve them best, not God. How a person thinks affects his or her choices and behaviors. The lives of the Gentiles in the first century are not too different from the world today, where we so easily become focused on lusts and impurity, worshiping them as idols.

**5. In what ways have you seen people's hearts hardened or people darkened in their understanding? Does anyone feel comfortable sharing a personal example of what your life was like this before coming to know Jesus?**

**6. In what ways are we still like the "Gentiles" Paul speaks of in these verses? In what situations or circumstances are you most prone to godless thinking?**

**Leader:** Paul described Gentiles as "darkened in their understanding." Their worship of idols showed that. Because they failed to worship God as He is, they were "separated from the life of God." This separation from God, resulting in a totally wrong "understanding" of spiritual and moral reality, was caused by two factors. The first was "ignorance." They had no accurate knowledge of God because they rejected God's revelation of Himself in nature, history, Scripture, and finally in Christ. The second factor that separated unbelievers from God was the "hardening" of their hearts. The word for "hardening" originally meant "being petrified" and was later used by physicians to describe numbness, a loss of sensitivity. Those who reject God's truth take a path that leads farther from Him and that compounds their "ignorance and hardening."

As Christians, we must recognize that our sin nature has not yet been done away with completely. Therefore, we are still prone to godless thinking. The renewal of our minds in Christ begins the moment we believe but it is not a one time event. As we continue in Ephesians 4, we will see that believers are called to continually look to Christ to transform their thinking such that they might begin honoring Him with their actions (see also Rom. 12:1-2).

> **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:20-24.**

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**7. What was Paul trying to help the members of the church at Ephesus to understand about themselves in these verses? According to Paul, where does transformation start for a believer?**

**Leader:** Paul's instructions for believers was blunt and to the point. He wanted the Ephesians to know that the lives of the nonbelievers were not acceptable for someone who trusted in the Lord. Transformation begins with Jesus and the truth that comes from Him. This truth pushes believers to take off the old sinful nature, and put on the new nature. Both cannot be worn at the same time, one must take off the old to put on the new.

**8. What does it mean "to put off your old self"? To "put on your new self"? What does that tell you about the old nature and new nature?**

**9. As a believer, what are the things in the world that are the hardest to take off? How do those things hurt transformation?**

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

**Leader:** Part of their early teaching was about putting off their futile manner of life as though they were taking off an old, worn out garment. "Put off your old self" is literally "put off the old man." Each believer was to put off the old ways of thinking and acting as one takes off an old garment. That old lost humanity was constantly "being corrupted by its deceitful desires." Those sensual and materialistic desires had deceived their unbelieving minds. They had thought they were pursuing happiness when actually they were working toward their own destruction and condemning themselves to the wrath of God.

Merely to stop practicing a former way of life is not enough. Life in Christ is about new life, God's quality of life. The object of being in Christ is continually to be made new "in the attitude of your mind." The verb tense indicates an ongoing action. It is opposite "being corrupted" and moves in the direction of holiness.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**10. What does it look like to "be made new in the attitude of your mind"? How has the way you think changed since coming to Christ? In what ways does your thinking still need to be conformed to Christ?**

**11. What are some practical measures you could take this week to renew your mind?**

**12. Is there anything you are particularly struggling to "put off" from your former way of life? How can our group encourage you in that effort?**

### PRAYER

Finish your time in prayer, praying that God would be constantly transforming you and your group. Pray that He would reveal places in your lives where we have given into godless thinking and help us to put off the old self and on the new self. Pray that God would help each of you to continually experience transformation on a daily basis. Pray that the people of Okotoks would live in a way that reflects our new identity.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **What is one old way of thinking that you can turn from this week?**
  - **Who is someone in your life who you can encourage as he or she turns from the old self toward God? How?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Ephesians 4:22-24.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

4:17. Paul's word "therefore" could be paraphrased: "in light of your calling as a Christian." He typically used the verb "testify" to introduce a solemn pronouncement (see Acts 20:26; Gal. 5:3). Because the apostle lived in the Lord, he could urge others to live this way as well. The letter was written mainly to those who by background were Gentiles; but by grace they had become different. They used to walk "according to this worldly age" (2:2); now they were to "walk worthy" (4:1). Their former identity was to be put aside now that they were in Christ.

4:18. The terms "understanding" and "ignorance" also highlight the intellectual issues involved with living contrary to God's standards. When people's minds have become darkened, they will deliberately reject the light of God's truth. Yet this mental darkness is preceded by a willful rejection of what people know as morally right. Unbelievers' hardness of heart (rejection of what their conscience tells them is moral) causes them to become increasingly blind to spiritual things.

4:19. The sad outcome of hardened spiritual blindness is often moral recklessness. To be callous is to be unfeeling, insensitive to right and wrong. Such people may lose self-control and give in to extreme forms of sexual immorality (promiscuity). They may give themselves over to every kind of impurity (such as violence). And when persons are occupied with sinful behaviors, they may end up with a desire for more and more sin.

4:20-21. If part of the problem nonbelievers have is intellectual, then part of the solution is for their minds to be enlightened with truth. Christian discipleship includes replacing bad information with the biblical teachings that you "learned ... heard ... and were taught." The truth that the Ephesians had embraced was not abstract; it was personal. It focused on the Messiah.

4:22. Paul was describing changes that God brought about at the time of a believer's conversion (you took off your former way of life ... "you are being renewed" ... "you put on the new man"). "The old man" refers to the sinful self that we were before we were saved. This is the behavior described in 2:1-3 and 4:17-19, summarized by the phrase "corrupted by deceitful desires."

4:23. Saved persons have intentionally laid aside their old self and put on the new self. As a result their minds are being renewed. This process is something God Himself accomplishes, for the renewal is done to us. Once we embrace that the truth is in Jesus (4:21), then we are in a position for the Spirit to give us an attitude (spirit) in our minds that will result in a lifestyle different than we had before.

4:24. If at conversion we deliberately took off our old way of living, then when we believed we also put on the "new man." Paul was referring to the new creation that we became at conversion (2 Cor. 5:17). The only other place Paul used the exact phrase translated new man is Ephesians 2:15, a reference to the entire church as the "new man" that God has created from two formerly alienated groups—Jews and Gentiles. If it took a miracle for God to create the "new man," the church, it also took a miracle for Him to take the old corrupted selves we used to be and make us brand new. The nature of the new man is according to God's likeness. Mankind in the beginning was created in God's image, which sin marred. Now in salvation, with new life created by God, we can grow in becoming like Him morally. Paul specified this by naming two such qualities: "righteousness" (acting right toward our fellow humans) and "purity" (holiness, acting right toward God).