

The Prison Letters...

Ephesians 4:17–32 LIFE LESSON

If you remember, throughout this letter, Paul has been trying to help the ex-Jews realize the traditional Jewish customs of circumcision or adhering to the Sabbath were no longer required, and that God had enacted a new mysterious plan that included the Gentiles. But Paul was also trying to help the Gentiles understand that their traditional way of living also needed to change, or that they were no longer free to do whatever their sinful nature desired. For instance, here's what Paul wrote...

📖 **Ephesians 4:17-19 (NLT)** *With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.*

➔ **Based on what Paul said, when it came to the minds of the Gentiles being filled with darkness, who was to blame, and what can we learn from this?**

Paul placed the guilt on the Gentiles, or on each individual, for their own confusion, and alluded to the fact that the longer a person lives in darkness the more they will practice sin with no sense of shame. And the truth is, the desire to wander from God's path and plan and onto our own path and plan is embedded into our nature. In fact, one of the most prophetic passages in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, speaks of this...

📖 **Isaiah 53:5-6 (NLT)** *But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.*

➔ **How do you know you're on God's path? Or how do you know you're on your own path?**

All of us have a deep-seeded nature that will require us to constantly choose between following the desires God gives us, or following the desires of our sinful nature. And again, the Gentiles were known for constantly giving into their sinful desires, rather than fighting them, like what we're supposed to do...

➔ **Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT)** *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

➔ **When it comes to all the sinful things Paul mentioned, how is “living that sort of life” different from struggling with these types of sin?**

What Paul was trying to say to the churches in the regions of Ephesus and Galatia, was that following or embracing our sinful nature was no longer an option if we want to inherit the Kingdom of God. Or in other words, to follow the plan or path of God requires a spiritual choice, and an ongoing one at that. And therefore, our lives should reflect that choice regardless of our struggle. For instance, look what Paul went on to write next...

📖 **Ephesians 4:20–24 (NLT)** *But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*

➔ **What's an example of how the Spirit has renewed your thoughts and attitudes about something, or how He's changed your thinking about something?**

➔ **How would you describe to someone what it means to “throw off” our sinful nature?**

Renewed thinking or a change in attitude is what all of us should be aiming at. But to get to a point where our nature is changed, we're going to have to do some “throwing off” as Paul put it. And when we do, here are the things the Spirit will produce in us that will be visible to others...


📖 **Galatians 5:22–26 (NLT)** *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.*

➔ **In order for any tree or plant to produce fruit, what must happen first, and what can we learn from this?**

➔ **A part of the pain of being crucified on a cross was being stripped and publicly exposed. Therefore, when it comes to “nailing our sins to Jesus' cross”, do you think this means we should publicly confess our sins to one another, or expose them? Why or why not?**

➔ **When it comes to conceit, provoking others, or jealousy, how do you safeguard yourself against those things?**

The choice to be guided by the Spirit of God is ours, and the evidence of our choice will be seen in the decrease of our sinful nature, and the increase of Gods nature. But if we're going to nail our sins to a cross, we're going to need to identify them first, which is what Paul went on to essentially talk about next...

 **Ephesians 4:25-29 (NLT)** *So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

➔ **Does it surprise you to hear that people in the church back then were guilty of these types sins? Why or why not?**

Paul had to tell followers of Christ to stop lying, or to stop giving into anger, or to stop stealing, or to stop being lazy, or to stop being stingy, or to stop swearing and cussing. And remind them that everything they said needed to be good and helpful and encouraging to others. It’s almost like he was dealing with his own kids, or parenting them. But when we stop and think about it, it was God who parented the people of the early churches through Paul, and He’s still parenting us through Paul’s words now. So in other words, God, our Father, has always been trying to make us more like Him by parenting us with His Spirit! So if you’re a child of God, let Him parent you! And as any good parent knows, regardless of how many times your kids break your heart through sinful mistakes, you’ll always be their parent. And that’s the same way God feels about us. In fact, to close today, I’d like to suggest that all of us memorize what Paul wrote to conclude chapter four, so that as we grow through this process of identifying sin and nailing it to a cross, that we don’t become overwhelmed by our mistakes and give up...

MEDITATION PASSAGE FOR THE WEEK

And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:30-32 (NLT)

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

LESSON GOAL: Kids will learn how Paul was teaching the Gentiles that as followers of Jesus, it was time to change how they lived and behaved.

MEMORY VERSE:

'You were taught to start living a new life. It is created to be truly good and holy, just as God is.' | **EPHESIANS 4:24 NIV**

HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN

In the first half of chapter 4, Paul taught about how Gentiles were not expected to obey all of the old Jewish laws like circumcision or eating only certain types of animals. Now, he's explaining that even though they don't have to perform certain rituals or follow a special diet, they do still need to change how they live. They (and we) need to give up our selfish, and sinful desires and live differently than the rest of the Gentiles, or the way they used to live before they decided to follow Jesus.

'Here is what I'm telling you. I am speaking for the Lord as I warn you. You must no longer live as the Gentiles do. Their thoughts don't have any purpose. They can't understand the truth. They are separated from the life of God. That's because they don't know him. And they don't know him because their hearts are stubborn. They have lost all feeling for what is right. So they have given themselves over to all kinds of evil pleasures. They take part in every kind of unclean act. And they are full of greed.' | **EPHESIANS 4:17-19 NIRV**

It's really easy for all of us to forget God's command and start to live selfishly - doing only what we want and thinking only of ourselves. That's why we have to pay attention, read our Bibles, pray, spend time at church and with other followers. Choosing to spend time with God helps us change how we think and how we act. It helps us pay attention to when the Holy Spirit is helping us and guiding us toward better choices.

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The same Holy Spirit lives in everyone, of all ages (including kids!), who decides to follow Jesus and he's there to help us be kind, generous, patient, faithful and to have self-control (Galatians 5:22-26). When we ignore the Holy Spirit, it's really easy for us to think only about what we want and to make choices that can hurt others, and even get angry when things don't go our way.

'So each of you must get rid of your lying. Speak the truth to your neighbor. We are all parts of one body. Scripture says, "When you are angry, do not sin." (Psalm 4:4) Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Don't give the devil a chance. Anyone who has been stealing must never steal again. Instead, they must work. They must do something useful with their own hands. Then they will have something to give to people in need. Don't let any evil talk come out of your mouths. Say only what will help to build others up and meet their needs. Then what you say will help those who listen.' | **EPHESIANS 4:25-29 NIRV**

These things that Paul is teaching the Gentiles aren't all that different than what we learn at school, or from our parents. That's because almost everyone can recognize (even people who don't love Jesus) that being selfish hurts others and can make it hard to get along with teachers, bosses, coaches and especially our friends and family.

'Do not make God's Holy Spirit mourn. The Holy Spirit is the proof that you belong to God. And the Spirit is the proof that God will set you completely free. Get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Don't have anything to do with any kind of hatred. Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive one another, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.' | **EPHESIANS 4:30-32 NIRV**

DISCUSSION | REVIEW

- List some of the things that Paul warned the Gentiles not to do. (*Examples: Lie, go to bed angry, give the devil a chance, steal, let evil talk come from our mouths, make the Holy Spirit mourn, hold onto hard feelings, anger and rage, stop fighting, don't hold onto hatred*).
- Read Galatians 5:22-26 together from a kid-friendly Bible (NIV, NIRV, ICB).
 - What are the things we should be displaying toward others instead of lying, hating, stealing, gossiping, etc.?
- What is one thing you learned today that you can share with a friend?