

• *The gospel message applied – first – unity of the worldwide fellowship*

Paul is dealing now with putting the gospel-message into practice and letting it influence our lives. Because this letter has a special interest in the unity between Jewish and gentile Christians he has first urged them to keep the unity of the worldwide fellowship <sup>¶1</sup>. Although I said above that ‘Ephesians 4:1 is the major turning-point in the letter’ it is also true that Ephesians 4:1–16 had a very close connection with the theme of unity in 1:11–14, 2:11–22 and 3:6, and was <sup>¶2</sup> following up those passages in an appeal for the unity of the Christians. It is only now that Paul turns to a more **general** appeal for godly living. The following sections may be set out as follows.

¶1 4:1-16

¶2 in 4: 1-16

• *Next Godly living in general and then in particular details*

- In 4:17–24, he calls them to holiness in general terms, negatively and positively, what they must not be <sup>¶1</sup> and what they should be <sup>¶2</sup>.
- In 4:25–5:7 he deals with some details: telling the truth <sup>¶3</sup> anger <sup>¶4</sup>, stealing <sup>¶5</sup>, talk <sup>¶6</sup>, kindness <sup>¶7</sup>, and the common sins of the ancient world<sup>¶8</sup>.

¶1 4:17-19

¶2 4:20-24

¶3 4:25

¶4 4:26-27

¶5 4:28

¶6 4:29-30

¶7 4:31-5:5:2

¶8 5:3-7

¶9 4:17

*‘This therefore I say and testify in the Lord: you must no longer live as the gentiles live, in the futility of their minds’* <sup>¶9</sup>.

• *Ethics rooted in a life changed by the truth of the gospel*

As always the word ‘therefore’ is very significant because it signals to us the New Testament way of preaching holiness. It means ‘in the light of what I have said’. The New Testament way of preaching holiness is to put before us the truth of the gospel and then ask us to work out what we know and what has happened to us. The Bible has no ‘ethics’ for the un-saved! The nearest to it is the Mosaic law over Israel, and the appeals to the pagan consciousness (without the Mosaic law) of right and wrong – as for example in Amos 1:3–2:5. The New Testament call for godliness is addressed only to Christians. If we know the exceeding greatness of God’s power (as Ephesians 1–3 has been saying we do), then Paul ‘therefore’ asks us to show it in newness of life. Paul ‘testifies’. It is as if he is in God’s law-court. God the Judge is watching. Paul is speaking God’s truth before the Judge of the universe. He is in fellowship with Jesus as he writes. Paul’s main point is: ‘you must no longer live as the gentiles live’. A radical change must come in the lives of these Christians at Ephesus.

*Leaving behind the old life – futility of mind*

Then Paul goes on to say what was wrong with them before they came to salvation, as it still is what is wrong with the rest of the world. Before they had lived ‘in the futility of their minds’. In this line ‘the mind’ refers to the whole inner **attitude** and disposition. It is not purely the intellect (for that is mentioned next); it is rather the attitude. What is wrong with the gentiles is that sin grips their entire inner life. What is needed in them is not just a little bit of information or advice. They need a new heart, a new nature, a new inner mentality. The pagan mentality is futile: there was no success in godliness, no satisfaction, no ability to cope with life and certainly no ability to cope with death. With all their philosophical debate, the end was useless. Moral filth and suicidal negativism filled the ancient pagan world, as it does those parts of the world

• *A new inner mentality is needed*

today which are without Christ.

Verses 18–19 develop the point further. ‘They are darkened in understanding, having become alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them on account of the hardness of their hearts <sup>Ⓜ1</sup>. Having become insensitive they have given themselves over in loose-living, to the working of all uncleanness with covetousness <sup>Ⓜ2</sup>.

Ⓜ1 4:18

Ⓜ2 4:19

**1. Darkened understanding**

1. First Paul looks at the **intellect**. ‘They are darkened in understanding...’. Even very clever people are totally dim-witted when it comes to the things of God.

**2. Spiritual death**

2. Then Paul looks at the **spiritual death** that is involved. ‘They are darkened in understanding, having become alienated from the life of God...’ They are no longer alive to God. Men and women were created with the life of God in them, but it was lost in the original fall of the human race. Now they are without liveliness towards God. They are like a corpse in the matter of spiritual sensitivity.

**3. Wickedness of the heart**

3. Thirdly, Paul mentions something even deeper, **the wickedness of the heart**. They are ‘darkened’ and ‘alienated’ ‘through the ignorance that is in them, on account of the hardness of their hearts...’. It is the heart that has gone wrong. Men and women do not need just a little bit of help. Their entire inner personality is perverse. They need a new heart. Christian conversion is a matter of having a new heart, a new and right spirit created within us by God.



**4. Loose living**

4. Fourthly, there are the **results in the way men and women live**. Having become ‘insensitive’ – a phrase that summarises the hardness and deadness he has just mentioned – they have given themselves over in loose-living to the working of all uncleanness with covetousness <sup>Ⓜ1</sup>. Their actual lives are full of uncleanness and greed, and they do nothing to oppose or resist the wickedness within them.

Ⓜ1 4:19

**• God calls his people to do an about-turn**

Paul is mentioning all this because he is calling the Ephesians to be ‘no longer’ what they were before. They are to hate all this, the blindness, the deadness, the uncleanness, the greed. They are to do a total about-turn and walk in the opposite direction. Instead of blindness they must seek illumination, instead of deadness, sensitivity to God. Instead of uncleanness, there must be purity; instead of greed, contentment. ‘You must no longer live as the gentiles live’.

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