

The Different Life

Ephesians 4:17-24

Introduction

Have you ever felt like someone was watching you? If you haven't, let me assure you of something: you are being watched. Consider this excerpt from the February edition of National Geographic

In 1949, an American company released the first commercially available CCTV system. Two years later, in 1951, Kodak introduced its Brownie portable movie camera to an awestruck public.

Today more than 2.5 trillion images are shared or stored on the Internet annually—to say nothing of the billions more photographs and videos people keep to themselves. By 2020, one telecommunications company estimates, 6.1 billion people will have phones with picture-taking capabilities. Meanwhile, in a single year an estimated 106 million new surveillance cameras are sold. More than three million ATMs around the planet stare back at their customers. Tens of thousands of cameras known as automatic number plate recognition devices, or ANPRs, hover over roadways—to catch speeding motorists or suspected criminals. Proliferating as well are personal monitoring devices—dash cams, cyclist helmet cameras to record collisions, doorbells equipped with lenses to catch package thieves—that are fast becoming part of daily life. Then there are the billions of images of unsuspecting citizens captured by facial-recognition technology and stored in law enforcement and private-sector databases over which our control is practically nonexistent.

There's even more. Presently the skies are cluttered with drones—2.5 million of which were purchased in 2016 by American hobbyists and businesses. That figure doesn't include the fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles used by the US government. Nor does it include the many thousands of airborne spying devices employed by other countries—among them Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

We're being watched from the heavens as well. More than 1,700 satellites monitor our planet. From a distance of about 300 miles, some of them can discern a herd of buffalo or the stages of a forest fire. From outer space, a camera clicks and a detailed image of the block where we work can be acquired by a total stranger.

Whether it is our government or our smart phones or our social media profiles or our internet service providers or our neighbors or our co-workers or our enemies or just pure strangers, someone or something has their eyes on you. Some are interested in your shopping habits. Others are interested in your hobbies. And others are simply observing you, looking to see if and how you might be different from them. Which leads me to another question, if someone was tracking your every move, knew your every thought, and heard your every word, would they conclude that your life was fundamentally different from their life? What would they conclude about your character? About your values? About your priorities? What would they say about who you are? About your identity?

Up to this point in our study of the book of Ephesians, we have seen the apostle Paul attempting to shape and form the identity of his audience. As the church, Paul wanted his audience to remember who they were in Christ. They were the Spirit-filled, Temple. The Dwelling place of the most High God. They were God's chosen people. They were God's elect, and with this election came the purpose of glorifying God in the world that others might see His glory. The church exists to glorify God. That is the purpose of the peoples' election. That by being the people of God, the glory of His grace would be made known in their salvation. This is the end to which God ordained the church – to glorify Him!

So, having explained to his audience the details of their identity in Christ, in these latter portions of his letter, Paul goes on to teach them more about their conduct as God's people. For those who are familiar with the story of the people of Israel, this should not surprise us too much. When God called Israel out of Egypt and constituted them as His holy, chosen people, God also gave them His law through Moses. The intention of the law was not to save them, but rather, to set them apart from the nations so that they might fulfill their purpose of being a blessing to the nations. Through obedience to God's law, the Israelites would fulfill their distinct purpose in the world.

In a parallel way, the church takes on the same responsibility. As the holy, chosen people, those who have trusted in Christ, God's people should obey the law of Christ and thus fulfill its purpose of glorifying God in the world, which brings me to the main point that I want you to see this morning...

M.P.S. – If God's people are going to fulfill their purpose, then they must live differently in the world.

As God's people, our lives should be distinct from the lives of those in the world. If someone was to observe the lives of God's people, they should conclude that their lives are different. They should be able to say, "It is obvious that these people have a different hope. They have different priorities. They are guided by different principles. They believe differently."

This is the Christian's goal in the world – to live distinctly different lives in the world so that others would take notice of God's glory

Ephesians 4:17-24

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

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Exposition - So, what does it look like to live differently in the world for the sake of the glory of God? The different life consists of at least four aspects, and the first is...

I. Submission to Christ (Vss. 17a)

Though Paul is the one writing the letter to the Ephesians, it is Jesus Christ Himself by the work of the Holy Spirit in Paul, who is delivering a message to the church regarding the need for their life to be different. Notice how Paul declares that he is “speaking and testifying” in the Lord to the church in Ephesus.

For many of us, we do not spend much time reflecting on the word, “Lord.” It simply become part of Jesus’ name to us. We take it for granted, but Paul does not. Paul wants his audience to know that his call to them to “no longer walk as the Gentiles,” that is, “to no longer live like the nations that do not know or acknowledge the true God,” it comes with the full authority of Jesus Himself. Thus, to listen to and obey Paul’s instructions is to listen to and obey Jesus. It is to submit oneself to Christ who is Lord as someone who belongs to the people of God. Isn’t it interesting that Paul tells these people who were physical Gentiles that they were no longer to live like Gentiles? Obviously, Paul believes that believing Gentiles were now a part of the people of God. He is calling them to live as the people of God, even though their physical, earthly heritage was not Jewish. But because they had confessed Jesus as Lord, they were now a people who belonged to God?

But what does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord? Furthermore, what does it mean to submit ourselves to Him? Simply put, the declaration of “Jesus as Lord,” means that He is the ultimate authority. It means that God the Father, excluding Himself, has put all things under His dominion because of what Jesus accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. Well, what did Jesus accomplish in His life, death, and resurrection? Well, you have to understand something about God and something about yourself to understand what Jesus accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. You see, God is holy and perfect. He made all things for the sake of His glory and He called those things good. Man and woman were a part of that good creation, but tragically, they disobeyed God, which resulted in their alienation from Him. The fellowship of God and mankind was broken because of sin, but God would not allow the brokenness to win.

Eventually, after centuries of revealing Himself and preparing the hearts of His people, God sent his Son into the world. His name was Jesus. And unlike the first man and women who disobeyed God and broke all of humanity’s fellowship with God, Jesus perfectly obeyed His Father and fulfilled His purpose. And though perfect in God’s eyes, Jesus willingly died on a cross under His Father’s judgment so that everyone who would believe in Jesus would no longer be condemned for their sin and might have their fellowship with God restored. But Jesus didn’t simply die for sin, He also rose from the dead, conquering the power of death over humanity, so that those who trust in Him would not only have forgiveness and fellowship with God, but that they would have eternal life now and forever. And because Jesus fulfilled the work that God the Father gave him, Jesus is now the reigning Lord over all, who is working in the world to subject all things to His power, until the day that He returns again to draw His people home and to judge those who have rejected Him.

This is why Jesus is Lord! And according to Philippians 2, one day, every knee on heaven and on earth, will bow to Jesus. One day, everyone will submit to the authority of Christ. So, the question is not a matter of if you will be submissive to Christ, but rather, when you will be submissive to Christ. And the “when” is very important.

Here and now, God is calling you to submit to the Lordship of Jesus in your life. For now, there is still time to escape His judgment. There is still time to know the salvation and forgiveness of His grace and mercy. You can know Him now as both Lord and Savior. But if you reject Him now, in the future, you will only know Him as the sovereign King of the universe who rules over you and judges you for all eternity because of your rejection of Him now.

Have you submitted to Christ as Lord of your life? I realize that some of you probably do not like the idea of having to submit to the authority of someone else, but make no mistake, you will submit to Jesus one day. All of us will. So, why not today? Why wait until He makes you when it is too late? Why not bend the knee to Jesus today? Why not start following Jesus at this very moment? Why not pray and ask Him to forgive you and reconcile you to Himself?

We are called to live in submission to Christ. This is the first aspect of the “different life” that we are to be living in the world.

T.S. – So, if we are called to live in submission to Jesus and no longer to live like the world, what is the world like? What must we reject in order to not be “like the Gentiles?” What is the second aspect of this “different life” that believers are called to live? Well, we have already seen that the different life consists of submission to Christ. Now we see that it consists of a...

II. Rejection of Foolishness (Vss. 17b-21)

We will start by looking at the end of verse 17 where Paul describes what it means to live “like the Gentiles.” The first comment we see is that the Gentiles walk, that is, live, “in the futility of their minds.” This statement harkens back to Romans 1, where Paul described the pagans who refused to worship God.

In Romans 1:21-23, Paul writes, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” The passage in Romans looks a lot like our passage in Ephesians, where in verses 18-19, we read that the Gentiles “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. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” What started as false thinking eventually lead to foolish living.

The Gentiles willful rejection of what can be known about God from creation results in, as Peter O’Brien would be put it, “idolatrous thinking, culpable ignorance of God, and rebellion against him and moving to a further darkened understanding and downward spiral into sin.”

And these Gentile distinctives were not matters of personal or private practice. As one scholar puts it, “Greco-Roman religion has a genuinely public character.” Our Western notions of private individualism are fairly recent in comparison to the more ancient notions of religious expression. The New Testament knows nothing of a purely, private faith. As Luke Timothy Johnson, wrote, “Greeks and Romans lived lives that were public in every sense of the word.” So, when we consider the type of living that Paul is denouncing in verses 17-21, we must remember that Paul has our public life in mind, as well as our private life. It is not just our thoughts. It is also our actions, and as I mentioned earlier, Paul assumed that people are watching.

So, in sum, the foolishness that we are to reject as the people of God is this idea of idolatrous thinking and living. We are called to reject ideas and actions that would suggest that we believe we can find true and lasting joy and satisfaction in created things instead of the Creator Himself. But you may be thinking, “But I’m not idolatrous.” Are you sure? What is an idol? Is it limited only to metal figurines? I really appreciate Tim Keller’s definition of an idol. I have shared it before, but I’m going to share it again.

An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.

So, are you ever prone to idolatry? Do you ever find yourself valuing something else more than God? Do you ever find yourself worshipping something other than God?

You might say, well, you don’t know me, preacher. I don’t really believe in God. Well, you might not believe in the God of Christianity, but make no mistake: you have gods in your life. As the late David Foster Wallace put it,

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism Everybody worships. The only choice we get is *what* to worship. And ... pretty much anything you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.

When we fail to acknowledge and live according to the revelation of God in Christ, we do not become indifferent to spiritual matters. Other things that cannot satisfy us simply take the place that belongs to God. You can see this in the lives of people who are driven to pursue excellence in their field of interest, hoping that they would finally find rest for their soul.

I think about the stories of musicians like **Thom Yorke** from the band, **Radiohead**, who said, “I thought when I got to where I wanted to be, everything would be different. I'd be somewhere else. I thought it'd be all white fluffy clouds. And then I got there. And I'm still here.” When the interviewer asked, “Why, in the end, have you done what you've done?” Yorke replied, “It's filling the hole, that's all anyone does.” The interviewer then asked, “What happens to the hole?” After a long pause, Yorke said, “It's still there.” **Kevin Durant** of the Golden State Warrior said something similar after winning his first NBA Championship. “He said that he expected things to be different, but not much has changed.”

Why? Why did the achievement of these goals not satisfy? Because God has placed eternity in the hearts of all people, and temporal things will never satisfy them. There is a longing for eternal purpose, meaningfulness, and awe in the hearts of all people that cannot be satisfied by the things of this world.

The foolish philosophies and actions of the Gentiles did not lead to greater satisfaction or joy, but rather, a darkened understanding and self-destructive vices. The Gentiles, like ourselves before learning the truth in Christ, by nature are longing for a greater glory. We hunger for it. And as Augustine would say, “our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O' Lord.”

And those of us who belong to God, who have trusted in Christ, like I just mentioned, we should know this! We have heard this from the beginning. One of the reasons that we turned to Christ is because we know that the idols in our lives will never deliver on what they promise. We know that to believe that something other than God would satisfy us is to walk in the foolishness of the Gentiles. We must reject such thinking, which leads to self-destruction, and re-embrace the truth in Jesus. For Jesus wants what is best for us, and because He knows what it is best, he is “relentlessly at work in our lives to undermine all that is not god to make room for the God who has redeemed us.” Why? Because He loves us!

So, for some of you, you are here today, and you have been pursuing things other than God. Maybe you are not miserable yet, but eventually the misery will come, and you will wonder, why has God taken away my joy? This morning, I'm here to tell you that it may very well be that God is not allowing you to find joy and satisfaction in other things because He wants you to find your ultimately joy and satisfaction in Him. And that is love! That is mercy! As we learn in Romans 1, there are some who God gives over to their idolatrous desires. So, for God to restrain us is nothing but pure mercy.

So, maybe you are listening to this and thinking, why is my life so miserable? And maybe the answer is because God wants you to have something better than what you really think that you need. Maybe God is speaking to you in your misery and telling you that you need to look elsewhere for joy. Joy in Him. Joy forevermore.

T.S. – But what if we have already started walking down the path of the Gentiles? What if we are already on that road? What if we are always living in the futility of the world? What are we to do? This brings us to the third aspect of the “Different Life.” As God’s people, we are not only to submit to Christ and reject foolish thinking, we must also pursue...

III. Repentance from Sinfulness (Vs. 22)

Look at verse 22, which states, “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,” The reason that God calls us to “put off the old self,” that is, repent or turn away from our sin and rebellion, is because sin is inherently deceitful and destructive. Notice how Paul says that our “old self” is “corrupt through deceitful desires.” Sin is self-inflicted destruction. If we do not repent from our sin, our sin will consume us.

Sin is a lot like the story of the sailors who, after their battle cruiser, the USS Indianapolis, was hit by a Japanese torpedo on July 30, 1945, found themselves clinging to life vest in shark-infested waters. Within 12 minutes, 300 of the 1,200 sailors died. For four days and five nights, 900 sailors struggled to survive without food or water under the burning sun of the Pacific Ocean. As the days went on, the thirst became unbearable, but many men began to drink the salt water. As the chief medical officer recorded, “When the hot sun came out, and we were in this crystal-clear ocean, we were so thirsty. You couldn’t believe it wasn’t good enough to drink. I had a hard time convincing the men they shouldn’t drink.” Sin is much like crystal-clear ocean water that promises to quench our thirst but only leaves us thirsting for more and more until eventually, we are dead. Of the 900 men that went overboard, only 316 ultimately survived the lack of water and the sharks.

O’ how we must be diligent in the power of the Holy Spirit to “put off the old self,” to repent, to turn away from the deceitful desires that are designed to destroy us! We must, as one old Puritan put it, “be killing sin or sin will be killing us.” And this is not a one-time action. Turning away from sinfulness is a perpetual work. And it is a work that is empowered by Christ through His Holy Spirit. You cannot do it in your own strength, but by the power of God in Christ, you can resist and turn away from the sin that seeks to destroy you.

Now, I realize that some people might not like to think about repentance. They want the “therapeutic benefits” of religion like a higher “self-esteem,” and the idea of repentance seems to undermine their self-worth. But that could not be further from the truth. Repentance is not simply a turn away from sin. It also includes a turn to something else, something greater.

T.S. – So, if we are to turn away from sinfulness, to repent of it, where are we to turn? We need more than the prohibition from sin. What is God calling us to put on after we have put off the “old self?” We are called to...

IV. Conformity to Christ (Vss. 23-24)

Look with me at these final verses in our passage. Verses 23-24, “be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Let’s consider how these verses represent a contrast with the life of the Gentile. Remember, we are looking at aspects of the “different life,” the life to which we are called as God’s people for the sake of glorifying God in the world.

The Gentile way of life, that is, the world's way of life, consisted of "idolatrous thinking, culpable ignorance of God, and rebellion against him and moving to a further darkened understanding and downward spiral into sin." Contrary to this way of living, the new life, the life that is ours as the people of God, it is a life of a renewed mind and new self, which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." As the Gentiles worshipped the created things instead of the Creator, they became darkened in their understanding and debased in their actions. For the people of God, however, as they worship the true God, their minds are renewed with understanding and their actions are reflect the newness of their life in Christ.

And what is this new life that we are to put on or be conformed to like? What is like? "True righteousness and holiness." And what is righteousness and holiness? It is a right and reverent orientation or disposition of obedience to God. And where do we learn this? From the truth in Jesus. That is, the gospel. We learn what it looks like to live in a right and reverent orientation of obedience to God as we look at Christ. Obviously, if we are to be oriented to the truth, we must turn away from falsehood. We are called by God to turn away from our sin, that is, repent from our sin, and turn to Christ, to pursue conformity to Jesus, according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We are told to "put on the new self," which is the essence of the "different life" that God calls us to in the world. It is a life created by God's Spirit. We are a new creation in Christ, which means we don't need to clean up our old life. No! We need God to give us a new life all together! And that what He has done for His people. He has given us a new life and He intends for us to live according to the values of that new and different life in the world. And as we do, God is glorified in our lives and in the church, which is the purpose for which we were created! No more futility. No more darkened understanding. No more captivity to the deceitfulness of sin. Instead, a new creation in Christ, which we are called to reflect in our thoughts and our actions in the world.

Conclusion

To state the main point again: If we, as God's people, are going to fulfill our purpose in this world, which is to glorify God, then they must live differently.

We must live a life marked by submission to Christ, rejection of foolishness, repentance from sin, and conformity to Christ. This is the different life that we are called to as God's people. And this life is ultimately about reflecting God's glory to the world, which is why we and the church exist.

So, how is your life different? How are you fulfilling your purpose in the world by living the "different life?" If the audio clips, pictures, and movies of your thoughts and actions in this world were observed by others, would they conclude that something is different about your life?

Would they see you living in submission to Christ? Would they see you rejecting the foolishness of idolatry? Would they see you repenting of sin and growing in conformity to Christ?

The power to live this "different life" that is marked by submission to Christ, rejection of foolishness, repentance from sin, and conformity of Christ comes only through faith in Jesus.

You must believe in your heart and in your mind that Jesus is who He claims to be. And only after you have trusted Jesus can you ever truly live this “different life.” This “different life” starts with a living faith in a mind that is being renewed by the Holy Spirit and is culminated in actions that reflect the righteousness and holiness of God.

A life of righteousness and holiness in the world begins with the way we think and believe. So, as we apply Ephesians 4:17-24 to our lives, we have to begin by asking God to reveal to our false thinking or beliefs that you hold regarding Him and life in this world. We all have a certain view of the world and reality. We all have convictions about things, but not all of those convictions are rooted in the truth of the gospel. The values of this world are contrary to the values of heaven. We must ask God to search us and know us and expose and destroy the philosophies and idols in our life that are contrary to His truth. This could be painful. We don't like having our idols bothered, but we need our heart and minds renewed lest we continue to sacrifice our joy in God for the trinkets of this world.

What would it look like if God exposed some of our false thinking and idols? Well, it may mean that He will lead you to give more generously from our resources to demonstrate that you are not worshipping your money. It may mean that you resolve to work less overtime so that you can spend more time with your spouse to prove that you are idolizing your job. This may mean cancelling or suspending your social media accounts for a season to free yourself from the bondage of seeking validation and affirmation from others. Whatever it takes, ask God to reveal and remove the idols in your life.

For others, it may mean willfully putting off the old self by fleeing temptation. This may mean you have to put a filter on your internet connection so as to block your access to pornographic material, or cancel some subscriptions that cause you lust, or unfollow certain individuals or organizations on social media that provoke you envy or be ungrateful. It may mean finding a brother or sisters in Christ that will hold you accountable to fleeing the deceitfulness of sin by asking you hard questions in a confidential setting. This may mean that you have to cease doing things that everyone else in your peer group is doing because you cannot do them without falling into temptation. It may take sacrifices, but you must realize that sin leads to death. There is no happy ending with sin.

For some, living this different life will mean taking radical measure to reprioritize the pursuit of Jesus in prayer, participation in the church, and meditation of Scripture. This may mean waking up earlier, staying up later, or skipping a meal occasionally to make the time to do the most important things. For others, it will mean having a hard conversation with a family member or a co-worker or a former friend and admitting that you wronged them and asking them to forgive you so that your relationship with them and God will no longer be hindered by your pride.

For some, it will mean receiving this new, different life for the first time by praying and asking Jesus to have mercy on you and save you. He promises to do so. He promises to forgive you. He promises to reconcile you. All that is required is your turn away from rebellion and confession of your need for Him as your Savior and your King, and He will grant you a new life! However you need to respond to God's call to us to live a distinctly different life in this world for His glory, ask God to give you the strength in Christ as I close us in prayer this morning.