

# DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

*Verses & Notes January 16, 2008*

*Ephesians 4:17- 21*

- 17: Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord,  
that you must no longer live 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 licentiousness,  
greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.

20: You did not so learn Christ! --

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

**Introduction:** As I mentioned in the last episode of Deep in Scripture, when we look around us today at adjacent street corners in almost any city, in the pages of listings in any phone book, and in the news when we hear of Christians acting anyway but holy or united, we might wonder what ever happened to the unity and diversity of which St. Paul describes in Ephesians? What has gone wrong? In today's passage from Ephesians, we see St. Paul exhorting the newly baptised believers to do the very thing that is necessary to allow this unity within the Church to exist and grow and thrive. But he wasn't just speaking to first century Christians. He was also speaking to us. This is what we'll be discussing today on Deep in Scripture.

## **Discussion:**

- Website, phone nos, book special: "Lift Up Your Hearts," by Bishop Fulton Sheen
- REVIEW: The problem with studying any biblical book, like Ephesians, in such small radio portions over so many weeks is that we can lose the original context and intent. St. Paul was in chains most likely dictating a homily to read in the liturgy at the church in Ephesus to the newly baptized Gentile believers. This seems to make the most sense out of all that is presented in this epistle, and especially makes sense of why St. Paul turns his attention to the topic we find in today's passage.
- In Ephesians 1-3, St. Paul has explained to the newly baptized the three changes that happen in our lives by grace once we have heard, believed, and then been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism:
  - These changes happen by grace in our soul, whether we feel them or not. The Holy Spirit comes into us to dwell within our hearts, freeing us from the stain of original sin, making us children of God, members of the Body of Christ, and endowing us with gifts of grace which enable us, as St. Paul writes in verse 4:1-3, "**to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**"

- Then in verses 4-16, St. Paul describes both the unity and the diversity of the Body of Christ, and how our gifts of grace enable us to work together to, in fact, maintain this unity, so that, as he describes in verses 13-14, we may grow into **“mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.”**
- Then after explaining, in verses 15-16, how all of this depends upon our “speaking the truth in love,” he takes a slightly different tact beginning in verse 17, which we will look at today. In this he addressing a very, very important truth, which could very easily have been missed by these newly baptized / initiated Gentile believers, and I believe continues to be missed today by so many baptized and otherwise faithful believers.

### First, let’s hear the passage, chapter 4:17-21,

17: Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord,  
that you must no longer live 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 licentiousness,  
greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.

20: You did not so learn Christ! --  
21: assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him,  
as the truth is in Jesus.

- **Notice how the first line expresses his change of tone and urgency:**
  - 17: Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord,
    - “affirm” = (Greek) “lego” == “say, speak, tell”
    - “testify” = (Grk) “marturomai” == address solemnly, insist, urge==witness; martyr!
  - Therefore, he is subtly listing before them his chained hands as a witness to the importance of, not only what he is about to say, but everything he has been saying: LISTEN!!!

### Then he warns then not to return to their former way of living:

“...that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...”

- **Why must he actually repeat this warning?** (2:1-3, “And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”)
  - **IMPORTANT:** Because as newly baptized “children of God,” still mere “babes in the faith,” it is far too easy for them to get trapped in the presumption of their power of their baptism:
    - Yes, all these changes have happened by grace!
    - BUT, they must chose to act on them, by grace, or they will fall backwards and be lost!
- **Listen to how all of this is described by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, 6:**
  - 1: What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
  - 2: By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
  - 3: Do you not know that **all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**
  - 4: **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from**

**the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

5: For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

6: **We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.**

7: For he who has died is freed from sin.

8: But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

9: For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

10: The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

11: **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

12: **Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.**

13: **Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.**

▪ **Our new life in Christ after baptism is the opposite of our natural life:**

- In our natural life, we are born, then live, then die;
- In our spiritual life, we die in baptism, then are reborn to eternal life!

▪ **So, in Ephesians 4:17ff, St. Paul is warning them to beware:**

- They have been changed spiritually, dead to the stain of original sin;
- But this does not mean that immediately after rising from the water, they have different personalities, different drives, different passions, free from all the past bad habits and lusts of their lives!
- These remain, powered by what has come to be called “concupiscence.”
- St. Paul admits of this struggle within his own life: Romans 7:

15: *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

16: *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.*

17: *So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.*

18: *For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.*

19: *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*

20: *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.*

**After baptism, we must diligently reject the old life we lived and actively live the new life we have been given. This is what St. Paul describes in the following verses, but he begins by discussing their old life, as a warning:**

*“...that you must no longer live 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 licentiousness,  
greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.”*

▪ **Notice, that this is not merely a list of bad habits, but essentially a process of growing in darkness:**

- “Hardness of heart” [18d]
- “Ignorance within them” [18c]
- “Darkened in their understanding” [18a]
- “Alienated from the life of God” [18b]
- “become callous” [19a]
- “given themselves up to licentiousness” [19b]
- “greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness” [19c]

- *This is the opposite process of growing in purity that Jesus gave in His Sermon on the Mount:*
  - 1) "Poor in spirit" (detachment from self-centeredness) [Mt 5:3]
  - 2) "Mourn" (contrition for sinfulness) [5:4]
  - 3) "Meek" (humility) [5:5]
  - 4) "Hunger and thirst for righteousness" [5:6]
  - 5) "Merciful" (respond to all in love as God has loved us) [5:7]
  - 6) "Pure in heart" (growing in fulness of Christ) [5:8]
  - 7) "Peacemakers" (helping others experience this process) [5:9]
  - 8) "Persecuted for righteousness sake" [5:10]
  - 9) "Persecuted on account of Jesus" [5:11]
  
- *Notice, both processes begin with "hardness of heart":*
  - *We either move backwards or forwards, as we respond to grace!*
  
- *Far too many baptized Christians stagnate, stop, or even progress backwards:*
  - *Usually those being received into the Church through adult baptism have progressed (to some extent) through "stages" 1 & 2: they've heard, believed, & repented.*
  - *But growing beyond this, and even continuing to experience stages 1 & 2, requires what St. Paul is demanding in these verses.*
  
  - *For those baptized as infants. parents commit themselves to help their children hear and believe and then progress in this spiritual journey of faith and obedience.*
  
  - *Sometimes baptized believers, especially those who have not extracted themselves from old contacts, quickly digress:*
    - *Their hearts, which are still far from pure, continue in hardness;*
    - *They don't make the effort to inform the "Ignorance within them;"*
    - *Their understanding grows in darkness;*
    - *In time, they become, once again, "Alienated from the life of God";*
    - *They once again "become callous";*
    - *Then eventually they fall and give "themselves up to licentiousness";*
    - *And in time become "greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness";*
  
  - *St. Paul was seeing this already happening in his day; it has continued to happen throughout the history of the Church; and it continues all around us, in every church, on every corner; and most of us know people who, though baptised and once active in the church, have drifted away, even deeply into sin.*
  
  - *In Hebrews 6:4f, the author admits how difficult it is to bring these people back!*
    - 4: For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,*
    - 5: and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,*
    - 6: if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.*
  
  - *That's why, to avoid this, the same author said in the preceding verses:*
    - 1: Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*
    - 2: with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*

**Then St. Paul goes on in verses 20-21 with a very curious but loaded statement:**

*20: You did not so learn Christ! --*

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

- **Too often Christians don't appreciate why St. Paul is saying this because of their soteriology:**
  - When St. Paul said in 2:8f that we are "saved by grace through faith and not by works..." he wasn't only referring to salvation at the end of our lives;
    - but especially to the fact that we were saved out of our previous sinful, darkened lives, out of those dark "works," by grace;
    - we didn't hear and believe in Christ on our own, in our darkness, but grace entered into our hearts and minds, changing us, helping us hear, and we responded with belief.
  - *When he says "assuming that you have heard..."*
    - He probably is expressing a rhetorical question:
    - he has already stated earlier that he has heard of their faith and love;
    - rather, he is getting them to recognize within themselves the truth of what he is saying:
      - they did not learn of Christ on their own!
      - They "heard about him and were taught in him"
        - 2 Thess 2:15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter."*

**Next week, we'll continue to hear St. Paul's instructions on growing into mature manhood.**