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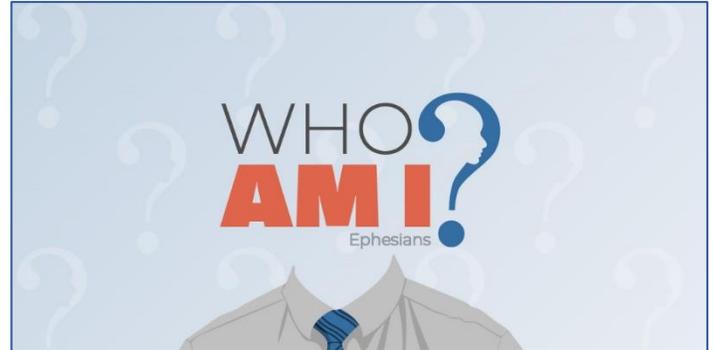
It's the Moment of Truth

WHO AM I?

Ephesians 4:17–24

Tim Badal | March 12, 2023

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. We're going to wipe the sleep out of our eyes and forget that we lost an hour last night. We're in the book of Ephesians, having been studying it for the last handful of months. We're now in Ephesians 4:17–24.



For those who haven't been with us, this book was written by the apostle Paul to a group of believers who had started a church. Paul had started the church and then handed it off to his protégé, Timothy. Paul has now spent a couple years away from Ephesus. He loves this church he helped start and now writes this letter to them, reminding them of who they are in Christ, their position and privileges and the great purpose for living they have because of Christ.

But then problems came because these people weren't living in a Christian vacuum. Life in first-century Ephesus wasn't much different than it is for us living in the Fox Valley area in the 21st century. If you were to go to modern-day Turkey, where Ephesus was located, you would find the town of Selcuk. Today the city has a population of about 40,000. It has lots of tourism because many of the ruins of Ephesus are still there. As you tour those ruins, you can see that the world the Ephesians lived in wasn't much different from ours. They were known for their commerce, even having had one of the first shopping malls. There was food, household items, jewelry, fine linens; anything you wanted was available in Ephesus. They were also a center for sports and entertainment. The ruins of one of the largest ancient colosseums is in Ephesus. They liked athletic and other events as much as we do here in America.

It was also a culture that emphasized sensuality and sexuality. They had a temple dedicated to Diana, also known as Artemis, depending on whether you were Greek or Roman. The edifice of that incredible structure is still there, which of course attracts many tourists. It was one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World.

So overall Ephesus was mixture of great commerce and great debauchery. The fledgling church was trying to live according to the precepts of Scripture and in submission to Jesus Christ, their new-found Savior and Lord. Paul was challenging them in this letter to walk in a manner worthy of the calling they had received. Of course, that was easier said than done. They were in the middle of a world that was not walking in a manner worthy of the calling of God. Their culture was living in sensuality and selfishness. They were pursuing everything except God. It was hard for this little group of believers to live counterculturally in their city. They were swimming against the flow of the current.

Maybe this morning, half a globe away and 20 centuries apart from the people this letter was written to, you may well be finding yourself in the same place. You're trying to live for Christ and walk in a manner that's worthy of the One Who called you out of darkness and brought you into light. Whether it's your friends, coworkers or neighbors—whoever it is—they're telling you that the way you're living is foolish. Even your body and mind are saying, "Maybe this isn't the right way to go," so you are tempted to turn away from Christ and follow the ways of the world.

Paul moves from urging them to walk in a manner worthy of the calling they received to something even more substantial and significant. He begins by encouraging them, but now he's saying, "Listen. To do anything else but what I'm telling you to do is futile and foolish."

In our text today, Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul will be laying forth what I'm going to call "a moment of truth." He's going to say to every man, woman and child that a decision needs to be made. It's a moment of reckoning. It's the moment when we have to stop and take stock of our lives, asking ourselves some hard questions. Paul says, "What you do with these instructions will determine what you will do with the rest of your life" —if you're part of this church, what you'll do with the rest of this book.

Sadly, if you respond negatively to the things Paul brings up—and I bring up in the message this morning—then the rest of this book will make no earthly sense to you. It will be of no value. But if you say yes, it will be one step after another in the wise life God has called His people to live. So this is a moment of truth. It's a moment when a decision has to be made that will impact the rest of our lives.

We have these moments in our lives in other contexts. A young man gets down on one knee and asks the girl he loves if she will marry him. The response she gives in that moment of truth—yes, no or maybe later—will determine the trajectory of both their lives. Or maybe a few years later when the young couple is signing the documents to purchase their first home. Did they buy the right home? Is it in the right neighborhood? Is it a sound structure? Are they going to be able to afford the payments? They look at the principle and interest—and the decades it will take to pay off this house. It's in this moment of truth, when they sign the mortgage papers, that determines the trajectory of their lives.

How about when bad news comes? Perhaps it comes in the medical office, through hearing of the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job. Hard news comes to you, so in that moment, you have a decision to make. It's a moment of truth. Will this trial make you bitter or make you better? Is this going to send you down the path of despondency, or a path of delighting in God's goodness and grace.

In those moments of truth, we all makes decisions that will determine our path going forward. In our text today, Paul brings us to a moment of truth. He tells us we have a decision to make that will dictate the next steps in our lives. He begins by saying this:

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.

There's a decision to be made. Paul is asking if we are going to live like Christ or going to live like the Gentiles? Now, that word 'Gentiles' can mean unbelievers, as in pagans, people who don't follow Jesus Christ. It's not an ethnic issue; the thinking they represent, not wanting to be in covenant relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Are you going to live for self or are you going to live for a Savior? Are you going to live for the things of this world or eternity? A decision has to be made. Paul says this is of utter importance. It doesn't mean that everything he's said up to this point is not important. Notice, he says, "Now this...." In other translations it may say, "Therefore..." or "So..." It's what we call a *hina* clause. In light of all that's been shared before it, this is what follows. Paul says, "In light of all I've shared about your calling, about your position in Christ, about how God has seated you in the highest places in the heavenly realms and gifted you with every gift under heaven—because He's given you His Holy Spirit, because He has given you an inheritance that is beyond words and beyond imagination, because He will do far more than you could ever ask for or imagine—in light of this, because of this, you have a decision to make."

Paul continues, "In light of all I've said, I say and testify..." When a Bible author uses two words that seem to be saying the same thing, you need to ask why he's doing this. Both 'say' and 'testify' refer to speaking. But he uses both to emphasize that the next thing he'll say is very important, so much so that he will "testify" to it.

That word in the Greek is a courtroom word. It's like Paul is taking the stand, under oath, under the laws of perjury, so what he's going to say is therefore ironclad. It's of utter importance. Then he "sweetens the deal," if you will. He says, "I'm going to take the stand, under oath; I cannot lie, yet I will stand as a liar if this doesn't prove to be true."

then he goes even further and says, "I testify as a witness in the Lord." In other words, he's saying, "I'm telling you what the Lord would tell you. I'm saying this with God as my Judge. I'm saying this as if the Lord is right here. Listen up, my friends. Listen up, church. What I'm going to declare to you is of utter importance." He then says, "*That you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*" He's saying, "The first way you can decide to live is like a pagan." He's saying this to a group of people who have professed Christ, who are living in the light of the Spirit, who are living in relationship with Jesus Christ. He's saying, "I want you to know something. As you profess Christ, as you practice the things of Christ, you will be tempted to walk away from Him. You will be tempted to go the way of the world." So he's saying, "Today you must make a decision. Today you must determine which way you're going to walk. Will you walk like the world or walk like Christ?"

This is the decision that is before us as well. These moments of truth, these decisions we must make are seen throughout the Bible. God's people often have to make decisions. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had to make a decision and they chose rebellion, preferring their own way to that of God and His goodness.

I think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three Hebrew boys, who made an important decision. While all the people in the nation chose to bow down to the king's statue, they said, "We cannot do this. In order to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we've received means we do not bow to any other god but Jehovah God Himself, Yahweh. If that means we have to die, then we die. If God doesn't protect us, even as we stand up for Him, that's okay."

This is what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we've received. It's the decision the disciples made when Jesus came to them and said, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." At that moment, they dropped everything, the Bible says, and they followed Him. It is in this moment that a decision needs to be made. Who will we live like? Who will we think like? Who will we act like? Paul says we need to ask some questions about ourselves in order to determine the answers.

What defines me?

The first question we ask ourselves is "what defines me?" Paul says the decision must begin in our minds. He focuses on our brains. You'll see twice in our text—once at the beginning and once at the end—where Paul uses the word "minds." Then he uses other words that relate to thinking: understanding, ignorance, learned, teaching, or taught. These are all thinking words.

This leads us to understand how Paul is honing in on our thoughts. He's saying that our minds are the epicenter, the command center, for everything we do. We don't need to look at our actions; we need to first look at our thoughts.

Our thinking is what leads to our actions. Our thoughts have the power to paralyze us or motivate us, to thrust us into depths of despair or propel us to the heights of celebration. Our thoughts are what lead us to truth or error. Our thoughts send us on the trajectory of a downward spiral or an upward climb to see God in His glory and grace. The Bible says our human thinking is flawed at best. We can be led to think that good is evil and evil is good. So we have a problem. One of the gifts and privileges that our position in Christ provides is that we have been given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). That means if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, if you have invited Christ into your life, one of the gifts that comes with salvation, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is that Christ gives you a mind like His.

Right away, if you think that's going to help on your test tomorrow, high school student, you're wrong. It's not that kind of mind. It's not that we are omniscient and know all things as Christ does. What it means is that we have what the rest of the world does not have. In Christ, we have the supernatural, spiritual ability to look at our lives through the eyes of Jesus. We are able to look at the details and moments of our life, not through our own fleshly thinking, but through the eyes of almighty God.

So we have to ask are we doing this? As a Christ follower, what this means is, first and foremost, I need to understand that who I am, all that I am, is defined by and identified by Jesus Christ. Not me, not the world, not culture, not society, not my friends. When I understand that I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), that God has made me for a purpose—when I set my mind on that and see myself through that lens—then I don't believe the lies of the devil who says I'm ugly or worthless or a waste of

space. Rather, I should see myself as one who has been created in the image of God with infinite and immeasurable good, for His purpose. Although I'm marred by my sin and my foolishness, God, through the work of Jesus Christ, can redeem me and use my life for things of eternal worth.

When we start thinking with God's mind—with the mind of Christ—then all the lies of the devil, all the lies of the world, fall to the wayside. The problem is we do not see ourselves through Christ's eyes, through Christ's lens, through Christ's mind. We have bought into,, part and parcel, the messaging of the world that we are something God says we're not. So we have to change our minds. We have to stop conforming to the things of this world and be transformed through the renewing of our minds to know who we are and what God has called us to.

When this happens, I will get up every morning, look at my life marriage, children, job, leisure time, money and other relationships, not through my eyes, but through His. It will radically change how I treat Amanda. If I treat her through my eyes, I will fail her. As nice as you think she is, she fails. She doesn't live up to my expectations; my kids don't either. If I'm living by my mind, then I will think, "I don't need to love you until you live my way, until you do what I want you to do, when I want it and how I want it." But when I put on the mind of Christ, it says, "Tim, you must love your wife as Christ loved the church. Lay down your life for her. It doesn't matter what she does. Love and care for others as you care for your own body. Provide for your kids."

You might say my kids are good for nothing. It doesn't matter; that's the mind of self. The mind of Christ says, "You provide for them as your heavenly Father provides for you." You might go to work, thinking, "I work for imbeciles. I work for jerks. For the next eight hours, I'm going to be amongst a bunch of morons." That's the mind of self.

The mind of Christ says, "I'm at this job for a purpose. And you know who my boss is? It's Jesus Christ. I serve Him and honor Him. Whether eyes are looking at me or not, I'm going to do the best job I can with the gifts and abilities I have, whether I think I'm making enough or not, because Jesus is my employer." This is putting off the mind of yourself and putting on the mind of Christ. It will transform your day.

The battleground for us as a church, for us a people, for us as a nation, for us as a world, begins and ends with how we think. Paul says, "You cannot think like you used to. You cannot think that you are a god." What defines you? Or maybe a better question is who defines you?

What drives you?

You need to understand that Paul is also saying your thinking leads to action. Belief always leads to behavior. Behavior never comes before belief and actions never come before thoughts. Your head always leads your body. Your beliefs lead how you behave.

Paul says, "You cannot live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They have darkened their understanding, then as a result they are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts." Their thinking has affected their hearts, which has now affected their actions. *"They have become calloused and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."*

In other words, Paul says, "They're living for themselves," and a great many people live this way. But where does that lead them? It leads them to say to God, "You don't exist." When you have your mind instead of the mind of Christ, you feed your ego. Do you know what 'ego' stands for? Edging God out. So if you're following your ego, all you're doing is edging God out.

The only person in all this world who should have an ego is God. God deserves His ego. We worship God because He is God. He's the only One Who can legitimately have an ego. But when we as created beings, fragile and futile creatures, have an ego, we push God off His throne, saying, "No, God, You're not in charge. I'm in charge. My day is not about You; it's about me. Other people are not about You; they're about me. So I'm going to treat them as if they are lesser than me, that their needs are lesser than mine." Notice what happens. Because we're ignorant and alienated from the life of God, due the hardness of sin in our heart, we become callous toward people. We don't care because we've given ourselves up to sensuality and whatever makes us feel good.

Is what drives you this morning what makes you feel good? Is it what makes you feel happy? Well, then, you're living in the old self, based on the old way of thinking. If you're all about yourself, it causes you to be greedy. Not so much greedy for money, but "*greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*" The picture here is being greedy to do everything that goes against God.

Why is everything you do going against God? Here's why. If God is not in His proper place, even the good things in this world are sinful. If you're edging God out of your life, even your church attendance is a problem. Your worship is a problem. Even your giving to the church is a problem. Attending small groups is a problem. It's all a problem because you have made it about you instead of making it about God. Paul says, "This is not who we are. This is not the way you learn Christ."

Notice at the end of verse 20 there's an exclamation point and a line after 'Christ.' It's a pause. This is not how we learn Christ! This is not the Jesus we've learned. This is not the way of life He's called us to live. We have been called to live differently. The calling we've received is a different calling than pursuing all manner of sensuality and edging God out. It's about living for Him, not for ourselves. It's about putting on His mind, not our own. So he says, "You've been taught in Him, so the truth is found in Jesus."

Then notice in verse 22 that the desires we long for when we make it about ourselves are not truthful desires; they're deceitful. You might be thinking, "You're telling me, Tim, that when we put on the mind of ourselves, when it's about us, the very desires we have in our being are lying to us?" Paul says yes. Your body, yourself, is lying to you. It's telling you things that aren't true and here's why. If I'm going to put on the mind of Christ, it will send me one way. If I put on the mind of self, it's going to lead me another way. What does it lead me to? Where does this decision lead me?

Paul says the decision to follow Christ—to put on Christ and renew the spirit of our minds—leads us to true righteousness and holiness. It leads us to where God wants us to be. But what if we live for self? This isn't just for the church; this is for anybody who's here today, who has never bowed the knee to Jesus. God is saying to you today that living life apart from Him means futility. See this word Paul uses to describe your destination in verse 17?. For those who have been part of our church, this word is well-known to us. Not in the Greek, but in the Hebrew. When we looked at this word in our last sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes, this word in the Hebrew was there 36 times. When we studied the life of Solomon, Solomon told us that looking for the good life in this world is futility, vanity, meaninglessness. He told us 36 times that we'd never find the good life in this world. The word in both Hebrew and Greek speaks of something frail, transitory, lacking in substance. It's something that's there for a moment and then gone.

Back in that sermon series, I told you that living a futile life is like driving in circles in a cul-de-sac. You'll never get to where you want to go; you're just living your life in circles. The word futility in the Greek has an added measure of meaning.

Let me illustrate this for you through what I hope will be a helpful picture, especially for those of you who have been living life apart from God, looking for your significance and purpose without Him. When I was younger, my dad was a grocer and he would occasionally bring home little gifts for us to play with. One of the things he sold in his grocery store were bottles of bubbles with those little plastic wands. We'd pull the wand out of the bottle and begin to blow on it. As three little boys, we loved blowing bubbles. We'd watch them fly into the air. It was amazing what we created with just the vapor of our breath. Then we would try to grab the bubbles.

What do bubbles have to do with what I'm talking about? If you're living your life apart from Christ, if you are living your life for yourself, this is like you and me. This is the world. The world says the bubbles are the totality of our significance, our status, our pleasure, our prestige, our possessions. Grab hold of these bubbles; they're there. Look how beautiful they are. They come in all different shapes and sizes. Whichever one floats your boat, whichever one catches your attention, go after it and grab hold of it. There are so many of us, sadly, in this church—and far too many in the world—who are like kids running after the bubbles of this world.

Now here's where the Greek word 'futility' comes in. We go after these illusive bubbles and right when we think we've got them in our clutches, what happens? The bubble bursts. This is the futility of life apart from God. The devil the world and our flesh say, "Get the bubbles! Collect as many bubbles as you can." The futility is that as soon as you touch them, they're gone. They disappear. They were here today but they're gone today. We then live with the sadness and here's the futility of it. In the callousness and

hardness of our hearts, it doesn't dawn on us that apart from Jesus Christ, we're going to keep going after bubbles that burst. So we fill our lives and the totality of our days by running after these bubbles, seeking to grab hold off them.

This might be a job, a promotion, a different person. "I'll divorce this one. That bubble burst, so I'll go find a new bubble, a better bubble, a bubble that doesn't burst, that doesn't do this, that doesn't do that. This new person will make my life better. I'll get a new house. A new car. I'll change this part of my body. I'll do this new thing; that's the ticket. That's where I'll find significance and the true meaning of life."

In reality, apart from Jesus Christ, all bubbles will burst. So you and I have to make a decision: will we put on that old way of thinking or will we put on Christ? Like putting on a piece of clothing, we make conscious decisions. "This piece of clothing doesn't work, so I'm going to put on this new robe, this new cloth. I'm going to put it on because it works. It fits. It's right."

Paul says, "This garment is Christ. It's the new self, created after the likeness of God, our Creator, so that we might live in true righteousness and holiness." You've got a decision to make. I've got a decision to make. Will I walk in the deceitfulness of my desires and the futility of my mind, or will I live in true righteousness and holiness as I was created for, living in the likeness of God?

So this begs the question how will you live in light of what the Bible says about the futility of living separately from God and focusing on your selfish desires. I hope I've clearly explained this in black and white. This is what God's Word says. Living apart from God in your selfishness, living separate from Him, is futile. It's foolishness. It's a chasing after the wind. Can you say, "I've come to this conclusion by faith. I'm not going to live that way anymore. I'm going to believe in Jesus as my Savior, the only One Who can save me from my sin, the only solution to what I'm looking and longing for. I commit to living in relationship with Him."

This is a moment of truth, my friends. Can you say yes to God, or will you say no? If you're saying yes for the first time, I don't want you to leave this place without telling me or someone else, "I have said yes." We want to help you with this, because the world is a very tempting place. As followings of His, God says He wants to empower and equip us. He wants to grace us with everything we need. To receive that, to feel that empowering, we first need to say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. Fill me now with Your Spirit. Fill me with Your grace. Fill me with what I need. Fill me with Your mind, so that I might not sin against You, so I might not go the way I'm not called to go, that I may follow You."

This moment of truth begs the question: how are you going to build your life? Will you build it on Christ, Who is a strong and secure foundation? Or will you build it upon yourself and the many bubbles that at some point in time will burst, then your dreams, desires and purpose will burst along with them? My prayer and hope is that you will choose Christ, and in doing so, you will see how firm and secure He really is.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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