

## Living for Christ (Ephesians 4:17-5:20)

### Part 1: Rags, Rags and more Rags

Live Sermon: <http://www.mckeesfamily.com/>

Note: Come dressed in rags for a sermon illustration.

The message is all about living for Christ 24/7. By giving you my own conversion story I am going to invite you to remember your own story as well – for we all approach the cross pitiful, poor, blind, and naked! After having remembered where you came from, like Paul I implore you to not return to your former ways! Being reconciled unto God means living a holy life that is an honorable sacrifice. While many rags remain may Christ see His blood flowing throughout our lives in all that we do. I will begin by giving part of my conversion story.

#### **Conversion Story**

**I had a very loving family.** We did not have much but had the basics of life. I remember my mom searching and counting out pennies so that she could buy some milk for our cereal. I don't remember ever getting new clothes – being the middle child most of my clothing was hand downs. However, I do remember how much my parents loved each other and their children. My mom when I was in university worked night and day so that she could not only support a family of seven but also to give me some spending money to come home and visit from university!

**I had a loving church.** Unlike many of the children you hear about today – I was fortunate and was brought up in the church. I remember reading an article when I was working on my masters that intrigued and uplifted my spirits. The author started out by stating that 9 out of 10 are not saved. He explained how Christianity had fallen as the centre of society to the periphery of our modern day age. Just when I started to get depressed with his article he changed his focus and said that this was a great time to live! You don't have to go to Africa to find a mission field – it is right here! The stories of Bible characters that I took for granite knowing I get to tell for the first time to many hearers!

**Rocks of my Heart.** It was like my life was one in which I lived on a rocky beach. Living for this world kept my heart like a stone. No matter how hard I tried I just could not get to those living waters that my family and church was experiencing! My life while pristine based on so many worldly standards but at the same time was absolutely full of jagged rocks of sin. I would hear my family or my Sunday School teachers talk about God and the unspeakable joy He gave them but for me God was just intellectual and not spiritual. Many times I would avoid singing in church and to my shame (I am a pastor now) would sleep during the sermons.

#### **Ephesians 4:17-19**

I want to go to Ephesians 4:17-19 to explain how we all approached God when we got saved. There are four great rags of sin that I want to focus on from Paul's teaching:

- 1) Futile thinking
- 2) Darkened mind

- 3) Hardened heart
- 4) Sensual being

### **Rag 1: A Futile Mind**

A futile mind is one that thinks happiness is attainable through one's own ability when in reality our plans are like dust chasing after dust. Psalms 146:3-4 states "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans become nothing." I looked at the world and those who appeared to be the happiest were the rich, famous and power people. Satan told me I could be like them ... I just had to work hard and follow their footsteps. I thought I had a better plan than God had for me. I thought I could seek out and find happiness on my own. If I was to be a nerd I wanted to be a famous and very rich one! Chasing after the things of this world is like dust chasing after dust. How futile I was ... after all 1 Corinthians 3:19 states the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. Proverbs 19:21 states: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." Who has not thought about their future? Who has not planned for careers, family, homes, vacations and retirement? It is not just the bigger decisions that we make plans for it is also the smaller ones as well. For instance, every Saturday and Sunday night I leave free to spend time with my family. We make plans to watch TV, go to a movie, visit friends ... But since chance happens to everyone (Ecclesiastes 9:11) then I have no guarantee my plans will result in a better, career, home vacation or retirement. If human effort always led to success in achieving our goals, then God's plans would always have to take a back seat! How futile it is to think that happiness is attainable by one's own ability – are not our plans merely dust chasing after dust?

### **Rag 2: A Darkened Mind**

A darkened mind is one that does not understand one's own identity can only be known through an intimate relationship with the Creator! Romans 1:20 states "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. God has left two undeniable footprints that He exists – the universe and the human body. Both of these are infinitely complex and testify to God who holds them together. While I knew this to be true intellectually my mind was so polluted with sin that I became blind to this truth and what it really meant! Both the universe and the human body are glimpses of God's existence but only to the extent they are acknowledged as such. To be just God gives all people, even His enemies, glimpses of His glory! For Christians it is easier to see a glimpse of God because the Holy Spirit inside of them leaps for joy. For unbelievers who walk in darkness it is very hard to recognize anything that can only be seen in the light. **Illustration:** have two people come volunteer for a game. Have two tables with various items on each one. For the first contestant reveal the contents of the table and let them study them for a minute. Ask him/her to choose one item from the table. For the second contestant reveal the contents of the table for a mere second. Cover up the table. Then ask him/her to choose a specific item from the table. Which one got it right? You see for a Christian we still sin and according to Paul we only see dimly now (1 Corinthians 13:12). If we try we can see glimpses of God while living our daily lives. Let me explain what is happening to the non-Christian. John 3:19-21 tells us that the world hates

coming into the light because it exposes their evil deeds. For the non Christian in the illustration he/she only got a quick glimpse of the items on the table. Non Christians are not offered shorter glimpses of God's glory that shines all around us through creation but they choose to limit any glimpse of God in their lives. You see a glimpse of the glory of God always means identification of sin and a demand for change. For the Christian this is a moment of joy for when God enables one to remove sin and obey one can expect to surrender more of one's life and get closer to God. For the non Christian this exposure of sin makes them scared to know the truth that they are not living good lives and all they have accomplished is merely dust chasing after dust. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18) on the broad path of destruction (Matthew 7:13). They feel that they have a better way to live their lives (after all sin is pleasurable) and unlike Paul (1 Corinthians 6:12) they are not willing to give up their freedom chose and submit to God.

### **Rag 3: A hardened Heart**

A hardened heart is one that no longer accepts the blood of Christ within one's life! A physical heart is one of the most active muscles in the body. It allows blood into its chambers and then contracts and sends blood throughout the body. The heart must be soft and elastic to accept and push the blood. If the heart was to ever become so hard that it could not move then there would be no contractions, no blood flow and no life in the mortal body. A spiritual heart is one that functions in a similar manner. First, for the heart to be soft enough to accept the light that demands change, one simply must be born again. Without the Holy Spirit the glimpses of God remain just that glimpses. For a non Christian their spiritual hearts have become like stone. Their insatiable desire to make their own choices to satisfy their lustful desires has hardened their heart and has kept them from accepting the gospel message. According to the parable of the sower, seed that falls on the rocky soil is soon scorched in the light (Matthew 13)! According to Romans 1:20-21, the non Christian has exchanged the glory of God for the glory of their own being! They would rather satisfy their insatiable desire to sin on that broad path than to bow their knee to their own Creator. The warning to the non Christian is that keeping their futile thinking and darkened understanding of the first two rags can lead to God giving them over to the hardening of their hearts (Romans 1:24). **Illustration:** Luke 16 talks about the rich man and Lazarus. Rich man was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury all his life. Lazarus, begged all his life for food and it states the dogs licked his soars – now that is one unhappy existence! One day the rich man dies and so does Lazarus. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side – in heaven and the rich man was buried and went to Hades. The rich man then made two requests. First, that Lazarus would dip the tip of his finger in water and place it on his tongue. How ironic that the rich one in life would beg for relief in eternity. Abraham forbids this for there is a divide between Abraham's side and Hades that cannot be crossed. Physical death of one who has rejected God means spiritual death continues into eternity! The second request that the rich man made was to send Lazarus to his family and warn them of what had happened to him so that they might not go to Hades. This is what Abraham said: they would not believe even if someone rose from the dead and told them! Time was up! If you are saved you have chosen to be Lazarus in this story.

### **Rag 4: Sensual Being**

A hardened heart is one that is given over to sensuality to indulge in every kind of impurity. Having lost all sensitivity to the light – not surprising due to their hardened hearts and blind consciousness - they could no longer see glimpses of God. The more they sinned the more they lusted after sin. Created in the image of God means we each have an inborn desire to love God with all our hearts. When we fail to do so it leaves a hole in our hearts that must be filled to be satisfied. We seek happiness from this world. The problem is that no matter how much we sin the best we can receive is temporary contentment (Hebrews 11:25). When it seems like a person has exhausted all possible ways of being happy Satan offers them a new way and the cycle of living a darkened life continues. We cannot receive the unspeakable joy of knowing Christ by living as this world does! While non Christians fit the description of being happy by this world's definition .... what they seek is illusive because true joy is only received in the presence of our Creator!

### **Closing**

Paul in Ephesians 4:17-19 insisted that the church of Ephesus no longer live with the above rags! They are no longer to be futile in their thinking, darkened in their understanding, hardened in their hearts and indulging in every kind of sensuality. The light that pointed out their sin and used to offend them was now to be seen as living waters that sustains them! Through the power of Christ, they were set free from their bondage to sin and were now to live as children of the light.! After having remembered where you came from, like Paul I implore you to not return to your former ways! Next sermon I am going to talk about how one removes these remaining rags from one's life.