

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

January 21, 2018

SPEAKER

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SERIES

Grace Unleashed:  
The Book of Ephesians

PART

15

TITLE

Escaping Futility

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:17-24



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Well, it's so good to see you, Providence. Hope you had a great week in the snow. The Lord, and all of his goodness to us to show power, and to show a great picture of the gospel that though sin makes our heart like scarlet, what the Bible says is that God's grace makes us white as snow. Grateful for the snow. Grateful for bread and milk, and for heat, and for everything else that makes these days special. It is good to see you. If you're a guest here with us, we're really glad that you're here. As a church family we are very passionate about one very specific thing, and that's to seek to give God glory in our life by seeking to try with all of our might, with all of our heart to pray, to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and then to grow them up to love and worship him.

If you're a guest here with us and if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, we're really glad you're here. We pray that this time will edify your faith and will encourage you to grow in him. If you don't know him as your Savior and Lord, maybe you're just here to seek or to learn, or you have a friend who is there next to you and they just were very kind to perhaps even invite you to come, our prayer, our hope is that this time would help you to see what Christ has done, who he is and all that he has accomplished for you.

We love the Bible here, and we're in Ephesians chapter four. If you want to turn there if you have one. If you don't, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you. If you don't have one at home, we would love for you to take that Bible home as a gift. We're in an amazing little book. It's called Ephesians. This section here is to pertinent and practical to all of our lives. I want to pray for us even before we get started. Okay? Let's pray.

Father, we love you. We thank you that you love us, and on a day when so many inside and outside of the church, Lord, recall and remember the sanctity of life inside and outside the womb. We pause as a church family to thank you for life. Thank you that you created us in your image. Thank you that you gave us the breath of life. We thank you that through Jesus that you give us life even when we die spiritually because of sin. I pray, God, that you would help us to appreciate our life and the good things that you've done in us. I pray today, Father, as this text speaks very directly to how we change, God, every one of us wants to change things in our life.

There's behaviors and habits and patterns in our life that we wish would go away. We thank you, God, that your word gives us clarity, and what you do and the power that you provide and how you provide it so that we really can change. I pray today that you would give us hope. Father, for the one who has labored and wrestled with one particular sin, maybe for years, maybe even decades, I pray, God, that you would give them encouragement today through your word. Would you just knock over everything in our life that would be an obstacle to our belief in what you have said? Would you give us understanding, help us to know how to practice this? Then, God, give us courage to do so. Would you speak through weakness, I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Well, in February of 2007 a busted underground sewer line began to erode the limestone underneath a really poor neighborhood. You can see what took place. There was a sinkhole that sort of emerged. Guatemala City. It was 100 meters deep. What was interesting about the sinkhole, just like every sinkhole, is it's caused by things that have happened over a long period of time underground. What's tragic is that nobody knows, of course. You had people walking, you had certain people actually been building maybe a home or an apartment or an actual business on that piece of land on this earth, and they didn't know what was taking place underground until it was too late, because when that ground fell five people were standing on top of it and all five perished.

It's a tragedy that speaks to another reality that Paul has on his mind. That reality is the same thing can happen spiritually, that you and I, we have an old nature, a fallen nature. He knows this, Paul knows this. You see, Paul is in prison, but he's really passionate about what's taking place in the hearts and the lives of these Christians and churches around Ephesus. He knows that within our heart there's this sewage line of the old man is what the Bible called, the old self, that old bundle of habits and thoughts and emotions and practices from before we knew Christ.

The fact is what he knows is that if it's not capped in our life is that it's going to lead to a moral sinkhole that people around us, they'll look at and they will be compromised, they will be hurt in the process. Even more so, I think on the heart of Paul is that the name of Jesus Christ, whom we represent, will be maligned. You know this. You've seen this take place in the lives of people that you know, whether they were leaders or not, whether they were pastors or not. You've seen people, and suddenly you look at their life and all the sudden you hear something about a habit or a crime, or maybe their marriage, or something that they did. You and I, we naturally look at the external thing and go, "Wow, can you believe that happened?" What you need to understand is that there was a period of time to where erosion was taking place within. It always takes place this way.

That erosion, if it's not capped, if it's not protected, if it's not healed, if God doesn't work within our hearts, then what takes place is not only do we not grow, but it sets itself up for a day when we fail in a way that's going to malign Christ. He is so passionate about that not happening, which is why for three chapters in Ephesians he tells us what the gospel can do in our life. Then he makes a change. In chapter four, verse one he says, "Now look. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that you and I have received." In other words, represent the authenticity and the dignity and the credibility and the power of the gospel that we say is available through Christ.

What he's going to do next week ... I said what he's going to do, what we're going to look at next week, okay, is he's going to set aside a little section where he's going to talk almost one verse at a time through little or big, it's a list.

It's a list of practical behaviors that he says we need to be careful. He starts with be honest. Then it's like, you know it's really important that you do something with that anger problem that you have. Then he goes into a verse and he says stop stealing from people. Instead, go get a job so that you can share stuff with people. He's going to go through forgiveness and being kind. It's just a practical list of things that Paul says these should be moral behaviors that should be seen in our life as Christians.

What's interesting is if you look at that list, in particular from the service, there's really nothing all that shocking about it you would expect to see. In fact, every religion in the world has a list that's pretty similar to that. The YMCA and the Boy scouts have a list of behaviors. Right? Be kind and don't lie to one another and be trustworthy and share your things. Some people, they conclude because all the religions of the world and many of the organizations in the world, even Caribou and Starbucks, they have a code of ethics, a code of conduct, this is what we care about. It's natural for someone on the outside to look and say, "You know what, it's all the same. The goal is this: just be good. Just be good. All these paths, they're all saying let's just be kind to one another. Let's be good."

The problem, according to Jesus, his own words, is that none of us are good. Oh, we can be good, for sure. In fact, we all are. Even unbelievers, even people who don't love Christ or know Christ, the fact is they can be kind, they can be loving, they can forgive somebody who has harmed them, but what Paul knows and what God knows is that God sees a sewage pipe underneath. You see, God is the only one unsurprised when sinkholes suddenly emerge.

We look at people and we go, "Wow, can you believe he left his wife?" God says, "I can. I watched it happen from the very beginning when a just a little bit started to just drip out of that pipe, that poison, that sewage, and it began to erode over and over." God sees the whole thing. He sees absolutely everything in our life. What he does is this, is that before telling us sort of how to behave starting in verse 25, he shows us how God gives us power to change. He shows us in this passage, verses 17 to verse 24, what God does in our life in order to help us change.

This should be really pertinent to all of us, because every single one of us have something we say, "Man, I just wish that habit, that old part of who I used to be, I just wish it would go away and never come back again." Let's read what he says. Starting in verse 17 Paul writes, "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. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greed to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ. Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Providence, what does God do to bring about change in our lives? The first thing is this, we see is that God exposes the darkness of our heart without him. He exposes the darkness, and this is what we find in verses 17, 18, and 19. You see in verse 17 he says “No longer walk as the Gentiles do”. It’s really important that you sort of understand when he uses this term “Gentiles”, because he uses it in different ways, even in Ephesians.

In chapter two he’s very specifically talking about race and ethnicity. There he says there’s these people called the Jews, and everyone else is called the Gentiles, and God has brought us all together and formed us into one body. When he gets to this place in chapter four, just like much of the New Testament he uses the word Gentile as synonymous as someone who’s far from God. Most of the Gentiles in the world at this time, they didn’t know who God was, they didn’t know Christ, they didn’t know the gospel, they had no Bible, they didn’t even have the Old Testament. They were Gentile. The fact is many of the first readers of Ephesians, these believers in Ephesus, they were Gentiles also. He clearly makes a shift and he says, “No longer walk as the Gentiles do.”

Then what he does is he describes the heart of somebody who is far from God. It’s fascinating what he does, because he shows us the symptoms, but then he moves to the source. He starts and he says this is what most of you guys think about. You look at somebody, and when you see the tangible manifestations of their sin, we go (shock). He says, but it’s actually a lot deeper than that. We should start there, and that’s verse 19.

He says, “They’re callous and they’ve given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” When we see somebody who is greedy to practice impurity, when they’re vile, when they’re sinful, when they’re immoral, we go, “Oh my gosh, look, look at them”, or when we’d see that in ourself. We think “Oh, that’s the deepest, darkest part of this person that’s all come out.” Actually, what God says here is that’s not the case.

You see, every heart has cravings. Your heart has a craving. Many of the cravings are very, very bad for you. They’re very destructive. You may have a craving for sex or for money or for man’s approval, or for somebody to say, “Man, you are so special, you are so important”. The fact is that every single one of us have cravings. Apart from God, it says that we give ourselves up to them. The word give ourself up, it means to surrender. What it means is we bow the knee to them. We say, “I need more of you. No matter how much I have of whatever that craving is, I need more, and more, and more. I’m going to resource it. I’m going to pursue it. I’m going to think about it. I’m going to talk about it, because I need more of that.” That’s what it means to give ourself up to a sensuality.

It causes us to be greedy for impurity. I need more, I need more. It’s never enough. Now some of us we look at it and we go, “Well, see that’s the problem right there.” Paul says no, it’s actually deeper than that. He forces us to look deeper. We have to ask this question: why do they crave? Why do these Gentiles, these people far from God, why do they have these cravings? He tells them. He says it’s because they’re alienated from God.

You see, you and I, we were created to find our joy in being near God. We're not near God, God's absence in our life, or his distance, or our distance from him, it causes restlessness; and because we feel empty and restless we settle for substitutes. We don't place our heart on him because we don't even know that he's there. We've separated from him. We're alienated from him, so we settle for substitutes.

We say, "Okay, well that's the problem." Paul goes, "No, actually there's a reason that people are alienated from God." He says, "It's because of ignorance." It's because of ignorance. Why do they settle? Well, it's because they don't know. You might say, "Well, wait a minute. All these people, if they just knew, I mean just go ahead and be satisfied in God." The problem is they don't know that God is the person they're missing. They don't know that God is missing in their life, and as a result of that they have cravings for everything else.

You see, one of the things you and I have to understand is that every single thing in the world that's been created, every molecule, every cell, every person, everything, everything has literally been created for God and by God. Everything has, life every sunset, every rock, every mountain, every wave, it's like a flashing arrow that says, "Look to Jesus. This is for Jesus. This is for him." Everything is meant to push us to him. Here's the thing, when we are ignorant, when we don't know that God is the thing or person that's missing in our life, we can be confronted with all the evidence that points to his glory in the entire world and still not see him.

This is what he says when he says their understanding is darkened. It's like a dark room. There's furniture everywhere, there's stuff all over the room that all points to Jesus, but the lights are off and so they cannot see. They don't know. This is why a scientist could know 10,000 things about this strand of DNA and never have a consideration of God. Even though all of this, all the proteins, everything about your DNA is intended to say that God is amazing. You and I, we can look at this landscape. We can see the beauty of color. We can see the beauty of texture, and hardness, and softness, and complexity. There are people in the world, because they're ignorant of God, they don't know that he's there, they don't know this points to him, they can look at this and never have a single consideration that there's a God behind all of this.

You say, "Well, that's the problem." He goes, "Actually, we need to go one step deeper. That's not actually the source of the cancer." He says that "they are ignorant due to the hardness of their heart." Jesus said in John chapter three, verse 20, he says, "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light." What's he saying here? What he's saying is this, that a dark and hardened heart does not want to be exposed. It wants to be alien. It wants to stay in the dark. It refuses to have somebody go over and say, "Hey, you know, we could flip this switch and you could see everything."

When we love our sin, we don't want it to be exposed. Providence, this is the most significant thing I can tell you about your sin. Your greatest problem is not that do, it's that you want to. Have you ever thought about this, that if your want-to's changed, then you would never sin? It's inside. While you and I pay such careful attention to our public behavior and other people's public behavior, God always says, "Let's dig deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and deeper so that we can actually get to the source."

What do we do with this, Providence? The application is this. It's let's accept as truth what God exposes in our heart. Let's accept as truth what God exposes in our heart. God sees everything. He sees every crevice. He knows every desire that you have and he also knows every motive of why you have that desire. Nothing is hidden from him. Hebrews chapter four, verse 13 says, "Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

My question is this. Why would God shovel down into the dirt in order to get to the place to where your eyes and my eyes can see the sewage, and where your nose and my nose can smell it? Think about this for a second. He's writing a church. He's writing believers who have been saved out of this. He's not saying, "this is where you're at", unless this is where you're at. He's talking to people who he believes has already been forgiven of their sin. Why would he dig down deep and show the heart?

I think there's two reasons. Number one is hope, and number two is healing. Hope, why hope? You only say "you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, or as those who don't know God", if indeed there was a rescue. You only say "stop doing that" if it's possible. This is what he says to us. You see, he says in verse 17, he says, "I say and testify". In other words, when he says "I say", he's saying "I'm your teacher". When he's testifying it, what he's saying is "that truth that I'm teaching you, I want to show you how it's been applied in my own life."

Paul at one time was in prison, a prison of futility. He was all engaged in sin. He was greedy for impurity. He was given to sensuality. He was alienated from God. He was ignorant of Jesus Christ. He was darkened in his understanding. He was hardhearted towards Jesus Christ. He says, "I was in that prison, but here's the thing, I found the exit." When he says "I'm testifying", what he's saying is this, "For those of you who are still trapped, I know the way out." That should give us hope.

I think the second reason that he digs down deep so that we can see and smell the sewage is because he wants pure and total healing. Healing. You see, if you find yourself at a place where you've even trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you know you're justified, and you know that his righteousness has been applied to you, and yet you find yourself on any particular day given up to sensuality or greedy to practice impurity, what he's saying here is this: don't go find a motivational poster. You've got to dig deeper. You have to keep digging deeper. Don't settle for that quick fix, you have to dig deeper.

You have to ask, “If indeed my heart is given right now over to this impurity I need to start asking questions. Number one, why do I have that craving? Am I alienated from God? Am I distant from God? Am I far from him right now? Am I ignorant of something that I should know? Am I enjoying the light and committed because of a hard heart to keep the light off?”, meaning do I love to sin so much right now that I don’t want it to be exposed? In other words, friends, I think what he’s doing is this, he starts by exposing the darkness to help us as believers know how to receive true and complete healing from the inside out, so that our life never gets to the place to where there’s a sinkhole that maligns the name of Jesus.

This is you and this is me, and he knows. Let’s accept as truth what he says about our heart. He doesn’t just expose the darkness. The second thing he does is he shines the light in our heart through Jesus. It’s interesting. There’s a lot of people who love to get to verse 22, 23, and 24, but Paul says there’s actually a stopover that if you don’t stop in verse 20 and 21 and absorb this, and see this, and apply this to your life, then literally the rest of the entire book of Ephesians and the Bible as a whole is absolutely irrelevant in your life.

You think, “Gosh, that’s a bold statement.” Think about this. Why or how did God bring us out of the darkness? Well, he shined light. That’s what he says when he says, “That’s not how you learned Christ. You heard about him. You know him, and the truth is in him.” In other words, nothing else that I’m going to say today applies to you if you do not hear the voice of Jesus calling you to trust him. You have no power in yourself to apply anything in the rest of this book on an ongoing basis unless Jesus Christ literally lives within you. The only way for that to happen is for him to speak. Sometimes he speaks through people. Sometimes he speaks through his word being read over us or explained. Here’s the thing, you need to hear the voice of Jesus, and you need to trust him.

You need to trust him. I want you to know that he is the most trustworthy person in the world. There is nobody that you should trust more than Jesus Christ, because nobody has been more committed to you than him. It is for you that he stood up from his throne in heaven and took on the garments of servant and came to this earth. It was for you and me that he absorbed all the temptation and yet never sinned one time while he was on this earth. It was for your sin and mine that he went to a cross and died for and paying its penalty, absorbing all the wrath of God the Father that was directed towards us, it was for us that he did this. When he rose from the dead, it was for you and I that he gave an invitation that if we would trust in him and believe in what he’s accomplished, that we would be forgiven of all of our sin, and that we would be given his righteousness.



This is what Jesus makes available to us. What I'm trying to say is this, that if you and I are in a prison of futility, if you and I are addicted to something in our life, even as believers, and we can't get away from it, the only voice that can help you out of that pit is the voice of Jesus Christ. It's as if you're in a physical prison and you've heard that there is a route of escape and your door is unlocked, but you don't know which way to go. Suddenly, there's a voice on the intercom saying, "Turn left 20 feet, turn right." If you do not hear that voice you will never get out of that prison. The only voice on the intercom is Jesus Christ.

As a church family, every time we come to this we look and we say, "You can trust him". We urge you to do that today. We want to help you. We want to introduce you to him. If Jesus is not working and laboring in your heart, you cannot get out of the pit that you are in. His is the only voice, but his is a powerful voice. This is what Jesus said when he was on the earth. John 5:25, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Do you hear his voice? Christian, do you hear his voice? You see, for those of us in Christ, you need to understand that it's the story of Jesus that we call the gospel that keeps shining light in our hearts so that we can grow. When you read in the Bible Jesus' story, when you read the Bible ... It's fascinating when people start reading the Bible to me. Every time I ask people to read the Bible folks send me an email and say, "Do you know there's a lot of bad people in this book?" There is. There's a whole lot, actually all of them but one.

Every single person in there is just a total nightmare except one. They're all like us. They all sin a little differently, but what you see here is they all give themselves to sensuality, they all have different things of impurity, they're all alienated, they're all hardhearted, they're all darkened in an understanding, but then as you keep reading what you find is God intervenes in their life. He intersects at the point to where they need. As you are reading the Bible, and you're reading the voice of Jesus, and you're reading how God intervenes in their lives, Jesus begins to speak in our hearts as he shines light in theirs.

All of the sudden we're looking, and we're like, "This is how God works in people's life." Suddenly, as you're reading the scriptures you see in Jesus a beauty that is so powerful that suddenly the power of impurity in your life is broken. You see something more beautiful than your sin. You keep reading and you see Christ's invitation to us to come to him. Suddenly, alienation begins to lose its power. You keep reading and you see the light of Jesus Christ, and suddenly darkness loses its power. You see the truth of Jesus, and suddenly your ignorance loses its power. Then you see a grave that's been overcome by Jesus Christ, and suddenly the grave of your hard heart is overcome.

What I'm trying to say is that if we will endure at the feet of Jesus' story, the chains of our futility will break. It's available to us. The application for the second point is let's not tire of hearing the gospel. Sometimes people come and they say, "You know, Brian, you talk a whole lot about Jesus' death and resurrection." It's true, we do. "When are you going to move on?" Never. Do you know why? Apart from the voice of Jesus and the story of Jesus, not only does the unbeliever have no possibility of coming to faith in Christ, but the Christian has no possibility of growing in Christ.

Guys, it's not about your strength. It's not about our creativity and ingenuity. We have to have Jesus in us saying, "Trust me. Trust me." Only when we're confronted daily with the story of Jesus and the voice of Jesus will that take place. Let's not tire of hearing the gospel.

The third and last thing is this, is that God invites us to participate in being changed. He invites us to participate in being changed. Now this third point assumes one very important thing. That is that you have trusted Jesus Christ, that you have heard and learned of Christ, because if you haven't verse 22, 23, and 24 not only will it confuse you, it will forever frustrate you because you don't have the power to pull it off.

Real quick, go back. Trust Jesus. Assuming you have though, as believers in Jesus Christ, when you enroll as it were in God's school of grace as a Christian, one of the things that he tells you to do to help you to grow in the areas of your life is he says you've got to change your clothes. It's a fascinating thing, change your clothes. It's exactly what he means. Now, it's a metaphor. You see it here when he says "put off the old self and put on the new self". It's literally take off as in a garment. He's saying get undresses and then get redressed.

The crazy thing is when you enroll in the school of grace as a Christian, he says, "Now here's your clothes", it says they're created. You don't make them. He makes them for you. It says they're created in true righteousness and holiness. He says "Now wear these". The craziest thing happens, is that as believers every single day you wake up, you look down, and you're in your old clothes. You're like, "Wait a minute, this isn't right. I need to put these off." You put them on, all the sudden you go out the door and you get in the car. Someone pulls out in front of you, and suddenly you look down and you're in those old clothes again. How does that happen?

The Christian life, in terms of growing in Christ, is constantly changing your clothes. Let's talk about what that means. He says, "Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life". What he's talking about here is repentance. Repentance means to turn. It means to turn in the power of God's spirit, where we look at God and say, "God, I know this is wrong, and so I'm asking you to give me strength to help me leave this sin." Each time you look down and see your old clothes, which is that bundle of old attitudes and old behaviors of life before Christ, your former manner of life, he says we're supposed to repent.

Then we're supposed to put something on. He says, "And put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Now what this represents is obedience. You put off by repenting, and you put on by repenting, by obeying. Obeying this new self, this is the bundle of new attitudes and new behaviors that have been made available by Jesus Christ. Here's a really important point. That is that we must have both.

There's a lot of churches that focus a whole lot on putting off. They even put signs on the walls of the church of things you're not supposed to do. They make sure everybody knows, this is our list, don't do this. The problem with that is oftentimes these same churches, when they focus on putting off, they never tell you how to do it. They never supply the power to do it. What this causes is legalism. Legalism is just a bummer of a Sunday, it really is, because what it is is people telling you "Here's the rules. You must do it in order to be in. Yet, we're going to give you no power to do it." That's a hard way to live. Legalism is not the gospel.

Then there's another thing. We can focus on the other, and that is that "let's just not talk about sin. Let's not talk about repentance. Let's not talk about putting off. Let's just keep putting stuff on, better stuff." There's a whole lot of places today, they're not going to talk about sin. They're just going to say, "let's just be loving. Let's just be gracious." What that provides is hypocrisy, where people look at our life and we're like, "Wow, but I see love because clearly they're putting that on, but I also clearly see you doing things that the very book that you say is important to you says is sin." It creates hypocrisy.

Providence, God wants us to participate in both. I want you to notice that these two actions, this putting off and putting on, they're connected by a very important bridge. I only have a few minutes left. Typically, that's when eyes start to glaze. This is the most important thing I'm going to tell you though in terms of growing. If you miss this you're going to walk out and go, "Okay, I'm supposed to just put stuff on and put stuff on." Then you're going to leave and you're going to get really frustrated because you're going to find you can't do it.

I'm going to tell you how to do it now. You've got to listen. This is like wake up time. Shake your head if you need to. Do something like that because this is really important. You notice that there's a connecting bridge between verse 22 and 24, and it's verse 23. This is what he says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Now you notice that there's the word "be." Be renewed. Okay?

When he says put off and put on, these are kinds of verbs that it's up to you. You're supposed to do this. It's the present tense. You're supposed to do it and keep doing it. You need to repent. You need to obey. When we come to this verb, it's actually in the passive tense. What that means is it's happening to us, but because he instructs them to do it, "be renewed", you be renewed, what it means is this, is that we're supposed to position ourselves where it can take place.

It's sort of like if you woke this morning and you needed a shower. What you did is most likely you turned the water on and you either stood in a corner of the shower waiting for it to warm up or you stood outside the shower until you saw steam or until you felt it, "Okay, that's warm", and then you get under it. Here's the deal. You can turn on the shower, it can be hot water. Water is flowing out, but unless you get under it, unless you position yourself under its benefit, you get to reap none of it. It's of no value to you. It's pouring out, and there it is. Wow, there's another nickel of water, there's another quarter. You're not getting clean. Nothing is happening to you.

This is what he's saying when he says "be renewed". What he's saying is position yourself in the place where renewal of the spirit of your mind can take place. Now we need to understand one more thing, and that's this. What is the spirit of your mind? The spirit of your mind is your imagination. Your imagination.

Let me show you how it works. You go to the doctor and they test your blood. They go, "Wow, your cholesterol is really high. You need to stop eating red meat." You go, "Okay." You leave the doctor. Then you go out and all the sudden it was a long day at the doctor so you go out and you go, "Let's go to a restaurant." All the sudden they hand you a menu. You're like, "Wow, look at that steak." Now you're tempted.

What happens? This is what happens. The outcome will depend largely on the spirit of your mind, your imagination. If you vividly at that moment in time imagine eating this steak, there's a good chance you will. If on the other hand you vividly imagine having a heart attack, you probably won't. In other words, whatever captures our imagination typically governs our behavior. It's the same as sin. God comes to us and he says, "Don't cheat on your wife. Don't lie to your parents. Don't look at pornography". All the sudden we get tempted. It's there in front of us. What are we going to do with it? The outcome will depend on the imagination of your mind.

If you vividly imagine sinning, you probably will, but if you vividly imagine God's justice being violated and the destruction of your marriage or your children or your home or the public shame brought to you or to Christ, there's a good chance that you will not. Whatever captures our imagination will govern our behavior.

This is why Paul cares so much about the mind, so much about our thinking, so much about not being ignorant. This is why he says, "set your minds on things above, not on things that are on the earth, for you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Providence, let's ask God to renew our imagination, to renew our imagination as we repent and obey.

Let me put it all together now. You ready? If you want to change, you go to the Lord. Then you pray and say, “God, I keep going this, and your word tells me that’s sin. I don’t want to do it anymore. I repent. I need your help, I need your strength, I need your endurance, but I repent.” In that moment you’ve repented. At the same time you say, “God, I want to obey. You tell me not to do that, but to do this, and so I want to put my effort in doing this. I need your help even in obedience.” Now what I’m going to do is I’m going to position myself in a place to where my imagination and my mind can be renewed, so I’m going to read the Bible.

I’m going to come and have the Bible read to me. “What I’m asking you to do at that very moment, I’m asking you as I come under the water, under the shower, and it falls on me, I’m asking you to stir my imagination, the spirit of my mind with a brighter picture of your beauty, a brighter picture of love, or of truth, or of justice. Make it brighter than how bright sometimes I see my sin. God, would you make your truth more vivid than anything else in my life?”

What you find is this, is that when the spirit of your mind, your imagination is working and God is giving you a clear picture, a brighter picture of true righteousness and holiness than sin, that things start to happen. The first thing that happens is your heart is less hard. A light is turned on so you’re not in the darkness. You see things as truth, so now you’re not ignorant. You’re closer to God, so now you’re not alienated. When you’re closer to God, your heart is more full of joy. It’s full of satisfaction. As a result of that, you don’t have the strong cravings in your life to go seek out everything under the sun that’s impure and to give yourself to them.

As we are renewed with the truth our heart will develop new attitudes and new emotions and new practices that lead to true righteousness and holiness. Providence, this is how we grow. We actively repent, we actively obey, and we actively place ourself under the fountain of God’s truth. We look to him and say, “God, give me a brighter picture, a vivid imagination of what righteousness can bring into my life, and make it brighter than sin.” When that takes place, temptation is a million times easier to say “No, I don’t need you because my heart is already full.”

Over the next several weeks what we’re going to do is we’re going to work very slowly through this list of appropriate behaviors, verses 25 to 32, so slow that some of you are going to be like, “Man, brother, that was like one verse. You got through one verse.” It’s true, we’re going to go that slow. What I hope is this, is in each case I want to show you how God exposes the darkness in that area, how God brings light in that area, and then how he asks us to participate in that area. I promise you that if we look to him in faith, that God is going to use these weeks to liberate many of us from these very sins in our life. I ask you in faith to lean in that God can do this in our life. Okay? Let’s pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your kindness that leads us to repentance. We thank you that you have shown us the darkness that's present in our life. You've allowed us to see the light of Jesus so that we can hear his voice, saying "come this way" that we really can escape from the prison of our sin and temptation and that we can grow, we can participate, we can actively repent, actively obey and actively ask you to stir the imagination of our mind toward righteousness. God, I pray that you would help each person here to apply this to their life. Would you start with me? God, would you help all of us to become people of integrity and righteousness and holiness? Our prayer, God, is that you would work on the inside in order to safeguard the outside, so, God, that our life and our witness, we would never malign the name of Jesus. God, we pray that as we sing and as we give, we pray that the name of Jesus alone will be magnified and exalted. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.



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