

How Then Should I Live?
Ephesians 4:17-32
May 16, 2021

It's easy for us to forget how radical the Christian gospel was for people in the 1st century Roman Empire. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus reminds us just how demanding the message was for these new Christians. Jews, but especially Gentiles, would have found his letter a counter-cultural statement, living as they were in a polytheistic culture. Their many gods required sacrifices to ward off evil, requested the co-operation of nature for their crops, and help them in sickness and grief. But Paul asked Christians, having been transformed by grace, to abandon these pagan gods and live out a life that conforms to the way of Christ.

Last year I began a series called, **Framing Your Worldview**. It was an attempt to show that everyone has a worldview, one that provides an interpretive framework through which we make decisions on fundamental issues in life. We emphasized that it was important for each of us understand what that view was. I'm suggesting that our worldview determines how we interpret the experiences of life and how we live out what we believe to be the truth.

Paul is arguing here in this letter is that our Christian faith is decisive on how we view the world and interpret life's issues. He says: **Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. (Eph 4:17)**

What is Paul's thinking here? One of the popular misunderstandings in our society is that accepting the Christian faith means closing off our minds. N.T. Wright describes this view of Christians in this way: **that Christianity means closing off your mind, ceasing all serious thought, and living in a shallow fantasy world divorced from the solid truths of "real life". (Paul and the Prison Letters, p.51)**

For Paul and Christians in the first century the pagan worldview was incompatible with their faith. Just like the Greek philosophers Paul argues we too exercise our minds when we interpret life around us. Faith doesn't close our minds; rather it opens them up! Faith enables us to open our minds to grasp the truth at a deeper level. Mind and heart have been radically changed by faith in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The unbelievers outlook is startlingly different from the Christian worldview. Listen to Paul again speaking of his contemporaries who are outside of faith: **They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! (Ephesians 4:18-20)**

If this is what we have learned, my question is: so what? **How then do we live? What difference does it make?**

This question is particularly relevant on this seventh Sunday of Easter. Yes, we have been speaking about the meaning and implications of the resurrection since the beginning of April. Having spent these seven weeks thinking about the ways Resurrection reality thinking influences how we think and live, I repeat the question: **how then should we live?**

I don't know about you, but I am keenly aware of the temptations to follow the advice of our materialist/consumerist society and seek the good life through the stuff I can cram into my life. The very idea of defining my life on my terms has a huge appeal for all of us today.

Chuck Colson reminds us in his book, **The Good Life**, that personal autonomy is the ultimate goal that is advertised in our media. Hence my pleasure, my happiness, my freedom to pursue whatever I want, is how we define the good life today. But is it true?

In Mark we read Jesus' startling words: **If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8: 34ff)**

Right away we know that we are in the presence of a very different world of meaning from the one we read about in popular magazines and today's media. Their message promotes self-indulgence, personal autonomy, unrestrained consumption, and tolerance of all beliefs. Jesus and his followers, however, press the delete button and send this hedonistic

philosophy into the trash bin. We do so because we know it not only to be false, but also destructive to us.

I'm aware of the fact that the demands of Jesus will probably not sit well with our self-indulgent culture. To follow Christ is to swim against the current of popular opinion. Your neighbours if they are pressed into an honest sharing of their opinion, will tell us that we are out of touch with reality. They think we are strange, narrow minded, perhaps bigoted, and even a little crazy. To follow Christ doesn't seem like an appealing option today. Why would it be when Jesus asks us to submit to his Lordship and live out a very different worldview? It goes against the secular worldview that is prevalent today.

Robert Frost wrote these words in his poem "The Road not Taken" in 1915.

**Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;**

**I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.**

When I read this poem I naturally wondered what he meant. There is great uncertainty about the poet's meaning, but for me the image was important. Like all of us the poet stands before two paths in life, one looks more popular than the other. It has evidence of many footprints. The other is less traveled. Which one do I take? Do I go down the popular road or the less traveled one?

It reminded me of Jesus' words about the two roads that face each one of us. He says: **Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life-to God! -is**

vigorous and requires total attention. (Matthew 7:13ff, The Message)

Whether Frost meant it, and I doubt he did, but I believe his closing stanza contains a profound truth: **I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.** We face this choice on a daily basis. I may have faced this choice when I was asked to take the step of faith many years ago. But every day I am faced with moral and spiritual choices. To follow Christ daily in my life requires the discipline of faith, prayer and community. I can't do this on my own. Which pathway are you going down?

Here is how Ephesians phrases it in modern language: **And so I insist that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can't think straight anymore...But that's no life for you. You learned Christ!...Everything connected with that old way of life has to go...And then take on a entirely new way of life...a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct.(Eph 4:17ff)**

So we become truth tellers, peacemakers, generous to those in need, wholesome and constructive in our speech, a whole new lifestyle develops as the Spirit works within us. The cultural commission for us Christians is to apply this radical Gospel to every facet of our life in society. Ours is a Christian worldview! God wants to use us to bring about God's reign of justice, love and peace in the world. His radical message of transformation is not merely for my inner life, but applies also to life around me. We do so not arrogantly or stridently, but with sensitivity and compassion. This is our calling and great privilege as Christians.

Amen