

A Double Life
Eph 4:17-32

Brothers and sisters, we're all familiar with the concept of living a double life right?

If we say someone is living a double life it usually means that they present themselves in one manner by their actions and words for one context – but in some other context they are quite a different person, perhaps even completely opposite.

Sometimes a double life is needed to conceal a secret identity, if you are a super-hero for example; Peter Parker lives a double life as Spider-man and Clark Kent leads a double life as Superman.

Or if you happen to work as a secret agent then you will lead a double life where your friends and family can't really know what you do for work so you have a "cover job" and people are lead to believe that you're a travelling vacuum cleaner salesman – but really you're a top-secret spy.

And sometimes people lead double lives for less noble reasons. Such is the story of Andrew Ingham in Great Britain, who was married to one woman with whom he had eight kids, all the while keeping another relationship going with another "wife" and having four children with her.

He managed to live a double life with these two families, who only lived 10 miles apart from each other, for 21 years - until his oldest children discovered the double life through Facebook in 2012.

Now most of us don't NEED a double-life because we are not super-heroes or top-secret spies; not that I could tell you about that part of my life anyways... and we're not trying to keep a secret family on the side.

But while we might not need a double-life... as Christians we do struggle with living a double-life because following Jesus requires us to live one way and fitting in with our culture and society requires that we live another way.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Of course you do, but... when I was preparing this message I realized that it's actually a bit tricky to give a good example of how this works.

For instance if you follow Jesus – you need to love other people right? But if you want to fit in with our culture, does that mean you need to... hate people??? Not exactly...

Or if you follow Jesus – you should give to the poor, help the homeless, and visit the sick right? But if you want to fit in with our culture does that mean you need to take from the poor, make life difficult for the homeless and ignore the sick??? Not exactly...

It's more like if you want to fit in with our society you need to say that all religions lead to god, but if you want to follow Jesus we need to trust in him alone... he's the only way to God.

Or if you want to fit in with our society you need to allow people to express their sexuality in whatever manner they

need to and affirm them for it... but if you want to follow Jesus he calls us to a life of purity and holy expectations for sexuality within heterosexual marriage.

Or if you want to fit in with our society you need to agree to agree that science is public fact and that religion is just private opinion... but if you want to follow Jesus he calls us to do so publically and confess Him as Lord as the scriptures reveal the truth about Him.

To fit in with society you need to agree that it's very important that we pursue what makes us happy... but if you want to follow Jesus he calls us to seek holiness before happiness.

I could go on, but you see how this is working right?

And what we need to realize is that the examples which illustrate how following Jesus requires us to live differently from our culture are not moral examples... about loving others, or being generous and so on, rather they are examples of how Christians Think differently.

Do you see what I'm getting at here?

The question of absolute truth and if one religion is correct and others are wrong is a matter of thinking.

The issue of human sexuality is not really about sex – it's about how we think about sex.

Living our lives in the pursuit of happiness is really an expression of what we think is really the ultimate meaning and purpose to life.

And ironically the fact that our society considers scientific knowledge to be public fact and religious belief to be personal opinion makes us unaware that how we think as Christians is vitally important and it contributes to our struggle with living a double-life in this regard.

Because we THINK that when we are in church this is where our personal religious opinions have validity, voluntarily associating with others who share those same opinions... but

out in the real world we have to deal in facts – even if those facts seem to be contradictory to our opinions about the Christian faith.

And that brothers and sisters is the double-life that we all struggle with – and it is not so much rooted in how we behave... as it is in how we think.

Now last week we learned in the first half of Ephesians chapter 4 where real unity in the church comes from. And all the differences between us fall into proper perspective when we are focused on the Oneness IN Jesus Christ and what we confess and believe and experience about the body, the Spirit, Baptism, the Gospel and God the Father...

And when we become unified together in this way we begin to experience more commitment to BEING together, more compassion for each other, more cooperation and more comradery – and that puts us in a safe space were we can be confronted.

And so now that we've gone through all the important prerequisite chapters and the unifying experiences, this morning in the second part of chapter 4 Paul now calls out that which we need to be confronted on – and it's our thinking.

He says to us *"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live [walk] as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking." (vs. 17)*

And It's important that we understand Paul is speaking about how thinking influences our life's path here - which is why *"live"* should actually be translated *"walk"* because *"live"* doesn't carry the directional dynamic progress that is in the word *"walk,"* and this aspect of how your life progresses and is going somewhere is important in understanding how Thinking affects your life over time and develops and directs it.

And secondly, we may misunderstand Paul's following description of the Gentiles as a *"straw man"* caricature – you know that kind of *"ooh they are just really bad people, nasty*

and mean and you just really don't want to be like them or have anything to do with them."

That's not what Paul is doing – instead he is describing their thinking and why it is futile.

Because Gentiles do not know God and thus their hearts are hardened, their thinking is darkened and they are ignorant of God and his ways. *(that's where the Jew / Gentile split began as the Jews knew God and his way because of their Covenant with Him)*

Without knowing God's ways and being sensitive to them, they must rely on something else to guide their thinking and they rely on their senses and build their thinking upon that – and Paul says this leads to indulging in *"in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed."* (vs 19)

Which doesn't mean that every Gentile is a raging drunk, who sleeps around with a different woman or man every night and only cares about getting more money - there were some very

noble and moral Gentiles in the ancient world like Plato and Socrates and Cicero...

But rather that their framework for thinking is leading them down the path away from God and His laws and thus all of their life will be impure, even the good deeds they do, and there is nothing in their thinking which will stop them from going down that path because the sin that is in us feeds on and desires more sin and pursues it.

It's why Proverbs 14:12 says *"there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."*

So Paul is describing their thinking as futile here – do you see how that works?

It simply leads them away from God, step by step by step so that the farther they go the farther off course they get, and we see this in our own society today too.

Those of us who are older may remember when fitting in with society wasn't all that different from following Jesus and we shake our heads in disbelief now when we see the debate about whether or not it is oppressive for parents to raise their child as a boy or a girl because gender and sexuality is now thought to be a social construct.

"How in the world did we get to this point?" we ask. That's the progression of thinking...

Step by step by step by step as we have adopted and learned to think like the Gentiles do – and now we can see the futility of it as it has progressed this far – and to be honest why should it stop there? It will only continue to go farther as sin desires more expression of itself.

But – the point of this passage is not to focus on the futility of Gentile thinking and complain about where our society is going...

It's to remind us that such thinking which is not sensitive to God's laws, does not acknowledge God's existence or our responsibility to Him is not how we were lead to Jesus Christ – and since Jesus Christ is our focus and the one who unifies us as a Church we need to identity any way of Thinking that does not lead us to Jesus... and we must leave behind and not think that way anymore, no more double life.

That's why Paul says to us *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (vs 22)*

But what kind of Thinking is Thinking that leads us to Jesus? Are we only supposed to think about bible verses or the Ten Commandments? Are we only supposed to think about Jesus all the time, and what does that mean?

Well those are good questions because it means you're starting to Think about how you Think and that is a good first step.

So let's look at what Paul instructs us to do here, he says we must *"be made new in the attitude of our minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

We need to be made new, our minds have to have a new attitude about thinking – we tend to downplay thinking, but our thinking and thinking correctly is very important to God.

But it's not simply a matter of thinking correctly – remember Paul says that the futility of Gentile thinking is caused by their ignorance and separation from God, so there is a spiritual root that needs to be addressed.

And that spiritual root is addressed by putting on the new self. There is a new "us" that God has made, created, for each of us that exists IN Jesus Christ and is given to us when the Holy Spirit fills us and renews us.

This is really important because otherwise the Christian faith can be misunderstood as simply an exercise in Thinking

correctly and important as that is – it doesn't address the underlying cause of why our Thinking is futile in the first place.

So if you are not sure if you have put on this new self in the Holy Spirit please come and speak with me afterwards ok – it's important that we have this new self because as Jesus says in Mark 2:22 *"No one puts new wine in old wineskins"*

If we want to Think in new ways that lead us to Jesus – we can't live a double life with our old-self thinking like our society does while at the same time trying to follow Jesus by being a part of His church and not changing our thinking. You can't put new wine into old wineskins.

So when we do have our new-self IN Christ our new attitude about Thinking will cause us to ask *"Why? Why am I doing what I am doing – what am I thinking about what I am doing?"*

And Paul wants us to begin doing this with how we treat each other in the church – because the why... in terms of how and what we think about things is more important than what we

are doing – not that we say "well it's the thought that counts" and not follow through with action...

But because the thinking behind something pushes it and develops it and turns it into the fullness of what that Thinking is really all about – do you understand.

So you can have a group of people who do everything that Paul talks about in vs. 25-32, they don't lie and they speak truthfully, they try not to get angry with each other, they don't steal, they speak positively and they get along and are kind and compassionate to each other – but if their thinking behind all this action... is that this is how WE make the world a better place... or that WE are basically good people and we should act like it, and if we treat each other nicely we can overcome our faults and failings and what is wrong with this world...

At first this sounds fine and it seems to have a lot in common with following Jesus and being a part of His church – but this doesn't reflect an awareness of God, and His laws or other

truth that we find in scripture, or Jesus... And eventually this thinking behind the actions will develop and grown into full blow Humanism which says *“humans are gods and we determine what is right and wrong.”*

And in spite of the fact that they are very moral people, something in their walk will be way out of line with how God has created and designed this world to work – like saying that *“we have a right to end our life when we do not think it is worth living anymore and we should have access to a doctor to help us kill ourselves.”*

Are you following how Thinking develops and grows brothers and sisters?

So in vs. 25 -32 when Paul gives six examples of how we need to treat each because we are the church together, he makes sure to include the “why” the “Thinking” behind how we are acting so that we can deliberately choose to Think this way about being together.

i) Action: you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor,

Why? For we are all members of one body.

ii) Action: In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

Why? Do not give the devil a foothold.

iii) Action: Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work.

Why? That they may have something to share with those in need.

iv) Action: Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.

Why? So you can say only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.

v) Action: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Why? You were sealed in Him for the day of redemption.

vi) Action: Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.

Why? In Christ God forgave you.

So this is all about starting to deliberately think differently about church and why we do what we do together and how we treat each other.

Its' not first about the actions – apart from the action of thinking... start thinking about these six thoughts and you'll see the actions start to follow through!

This is the purpose of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, that's what all the truth that you've learned in the previous three chapters is for...

So you can think about what you do at church, about how you are together with others as the Church and you can deliberately replace how society thinks about these sorts of things with the truth that you've been given from scripture.

We can't continue to live a double-life by thinking like our society does and then applying that thinking to how we are together in the Church.

Because the truth is we can't live a double life for very long – and not because we need to have internal consistency between what we believe and how we act...

The truth is that our thinking will determine what we are becoming much quicker than what we realize, and if we do not deliberately choose to think differently about being Church, then we will succumb to thinking as Gentiles and our church participation will mutate into something that is not really Church...

But if we do choose to think differently about being Church, then our lives apart from when we gather as the Church, start to change and we quickly become quite different from the rest of our society, and we learn what it means to live in the world but not be of the world.

But it starts – according to Paul – by choosing to think differently about being the Church...

So let me close off by giving you things that we've learn thus far that you can deliberately think differently about and see how that changes things.

- God chose you before you could choose Him
- Being the Church is being IN Christ
- Grace is why you are part of the Church
- The Church is created by Grace
- The purpose of the Church is to display God's iridescent wisdom to the Angels
- The Church takes those outside the covenant and brings them into it through Jesus
- You are called to be the Church
- To be the Church is to be together
- Living a worthy life is living life together as Christians
- What we think about the Church is important to God.

So why are you here today? Why are you singing, why are you praying, why are you listening to a sermon? Why did you sit where you did? Why will you stay or leave afterwards?

Ask "Why" brothers and sisters – and then choose a biblical reason and make that your way of thinking. Amen.