

## Ephesians Chapter 4 - John Karmelich

1. This is one of those lessons where it is best if I start off by giving my title: It is the two words, "now what"? When most of us think of "now what", we might think when we are accused of doing something wrong. We might say, "now what" as an answer to an accusation. While I indirectly touch on that concept in this lesson, that is not my point of those two words.
  - a) Those two words can also be an abbreviated way of asking, "What do we do now?" That definition is the focus of this lesson. It relates to a concept I started to teach in the last lesson. That idea is "OK, now that you have told us what God has done for us (in the last lesson), what do we do next with that knowledge?" In other words, "now what?"
2. With that said, let me explain where we are at this point in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.
  - a) Paul has ended what I call "part 1" of the letter to the Ephesians. Beginning with Chapter 4 (remember that there were no chapter breaks in the original letter), Paul is now going to explain how we are to apply what He has taught in the first half of the letter.
    - i) To put it another way, now that Paul has told us all of the wonderful things God has done for us as believers that is the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, what should we do with that knowledge? Again, the key two words for us are "now what?"
  - b) If I had to summarize the key point of the first half of this letter to the Ephesians, I would say that it is about God giving us believers all the power we will ever need (and more so) to do what it is He wants us to do for Him in our lives. That does not mean God reveals to us all at once everything He has planned for us for the rest of our lives.
    - i) It does mean that we as Christians are equipped to handle whatever life "throws at us" or whatever it is we believe God has called us to do.
    - ii) This second half of the letter to the Ephesians no longer focuses on what God has done for us, but mainly focuses on what God expects us to do now that we know we are equipped to do what God wants us to. Again, my summary of the second half of the Book of Ephesians is the expression, "Now what?" That "now what" is about how we apply God's desire for our lives to how we actually are to live.
3. At this point, I would also like to bring up what I consider the most important phrase in the letter to the Ephesians. It is the (translated) seven words, "to build up the body of Christ".
  - a) If you were to ask what is the purpose of Christianity, my answer would be that phrase, "to build up the body of Christ". Whatever it is God has called us to do as Christians, the ultimate purpose of being a Christian is just that: "To build up the body of Christ". In other words, those seven words are the answer to the question, "Now what (do we do)?"
  - b) Let me explain those seven words a little more:
    - i) We as Christians are going to spend eternity with God. The purpose of living the Christian life now, is in effect to prepare us for that eternity.
    - ii) That does not mean we spend all day studying our bible or all day in prayer. While those things are important, that is not what this letter is stating. Yes all of us must still live out our lives and be responsible for what we are called to do.
    - iii) If we are a follower of Jesus, each one of us has been given at least one special gift. In this lesson, I will explain how we discover what are these gifts and how we are supposed to use them in our lives. The purpose of these gifts comes back to those seven words, "to build up the body of Christ". Since you or I believe (or hopefully will believe) we have these gifts from God, the way to tell it is from God is if we can and do use that gift, to build up the body of Christ.
    - iv) To put it simply, what we are called to do as Christians should in some way help other Christians grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. Let me get back to my two word title of this lesson, "Now what?"
  - a) Those two words ask the question in effect of what we should do with our salvation. The answer to "now what" is to work someway, somehow, to build up the body of Christ.
  - b) In other words, if all Christians are to prepare to live forever with Jesus in heaven, we must be work now to be prepared for that eternal life. That means we:
    - i) Learn to trust God now with every aspect of our lives.
    - ii) We learn to trust God now when things are not going well in our lives.
    - iii) Learn to trust other believers to help us prepare for that eternal destination.
    - iv) Learn to help other believers and other potential believers learn to trust God with every aspect of all of our lives.
  - c) All of these "preparing for eternity" comments are to remind us that we are not to live for Jesus all by ourselves. God does not call say, "one billion individuals" to be His followers, but Christians working together as a group to help each other grow in Him.
5. Now let's talk explain what are those special gifts I mentioned earlier. For example, if we enjoy helping people, then the ultimate purpose of helping people is so that they can grow in their relationship with God the Father and God the Son. Yes it is the Holy Spirit working through us to give us the ability to use that gift, but we are the ones that actually use whatever gift God has given us to help people grow in our and their relationship with God the Father and God the Son.
  - a) Here's another example. Let's say that you have a gift for evangelism. That simply means that you enjoy telling new people about Jesus. The purpose of that gift is to bring in new members into the fold, so they too can grow in their relationship with God.
  - b) Now let's say you have no idea what God has called you to do. This comes back to the idea of just asking God or even asking others what we are good at or pondering what is it we just enjoy doing. The key is then to take those things we are good at, or those things we enjoy doing in effect to help others grow in their relationship with God.
    - i) That does not mean we will be great at helping others on day one. Whatever it is we are called to do, will still require practice and hard work. I've yet to meet one Christian who does not have to work hard in preparation for what we do for God.
  - c) My point is whatever God wants us to do; we can tell what it is because we just have a gift and a joy (think pleasure) to do that "thing" anyway.
  - d) By the way, just because one has a gift to do something does not mean we should be above helping out around say, our church or our homes. I've yet to meet a person who says their gift is to help clean up. Yet, all of us have to be involved in doing our share of what needs to be done as well as doing our share of what we just enjoy doing anyway.
  - e) OK, I've now spent almost two pages answering the question of "now what". So what do you say I take that "now what" and actually go to Verse 1 of Chapter 4.
6. Chapter 4, Verse 1: As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
  - a) In the last lesson I focused on the fact that Paul considered himself a bondservant of Jesus Christ. I stated our life as a Christian can be thought of in terms of "volunteer slavery". That is, we choose to be obedient to Jesus and live with the concept that He is in charge of the results of our lives and not us.
  - b) Chapter 4 opens with another reminder that Paul is a prisoner of Jesus. Paul is saying he believes his role in life is to live for Jesus. That is God's desire for us as well. If we are prisoners of Jesus (in the sense that we have committed our lives to serving Him), then we should live our lives to be worthy of what that term "prisoner of the Lord" means.
  - c) Does this mean we have to try harder to be a Christian? No it does not. The point is not how hard we work for Jesus, but simply that we do commit our lives to Him.
    - i) The way I describe the idea of living a life worthy for Jesus, is to honor our commitment to Him whether one feels like it or not. It is a matter of keeping that commitment despite however one feels at that present moment.

7. Verse 2: Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- a) From Verses 2 through 6, we read of what Paul desires of us in order to live the life God desires for us. Paul is going to focus on our attitudes that we should have in life.
  - b) Paul starts by saying we should be completely humble and gentle. This is the opposite of what the world admires. There are lots of books and seminars about having self-pride and living in order to make oneself happy. The concern of the Christian is the opposite. A way to tell if we are living a life worth of God is if we put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. So, how does one do that practically? Let me give some examples:
    - i) If we are married, then often it is a matter of putting our spouses needs over our own. If we have children or elderly parents at our homes, it is a matter of putting their needs above our own. If we work, then our job is to make our company a profit and not be focuses on our own happiness. This concept does not mean we ignore our own needs for survival, but it is about our priorities in life.
    - ii) If we are concerned with the happiness of others around us, we will in turn be happy ourselves far more than if we focused on putting our own needs first.
    - iii) I have found that the happiest times in my own life come when I focus my energy on the needs of others. The mistake I make is I expect gratitude for that happiness I give to others. If that person chooses to thank me, that is a good thing, but we shouldn't live for that expectation of gratitude. Our job is to be pleasing to our master if again we live with the attitude of being a slave to Jesus.
    - iv) So how do we balance our time to do all of this? That also, is where we ask God for help. There are never enough hours in the day to do all the things we desire to accomplish. I find that if we tell God that He is in charge of our day and then plan our day accordingly, our schedule just sort of "works out" so that God's desire does come through us whether we consider our day a good day or a bad day.
  - c) Meanwhile we are still on verse 2. The last part of the verse mentions patience and the concept of bearing each other in love.
    - i) The problem with life is we deal with imperfect people. Because we deal with imperfect people, life requires patience as we interact with others. While that seems like an obvious concept, we get frustrated because we expect others to be better people. The hard part is to learn that yelling or getting frustrated does not help our situation. What helps is to gently (humbly) teach others, if they want to learn, how to do things differently.
    - ii) In such times where we are frustrated in our interactions with people, the solution of course is to give the pain and frustration we feel to God and say to Him in effect that this situation is His problem and not ours. This is when we need to remember that the results of our lives are His problem and not ours. Yes life is frustrating at times, which is why Paul is reminding us to have patience. The point is God is working out our lives on His timing and it is a matter of us remembering that fact.
    - iii) It never ceases to amaze me how when I give my problems of the moment to God, those problems go away much faster than if I try to fix them without His help. When I say or pray that "This problem is now Your problem God", that gives me the patience to face whatever it is I have to face at the present moment.
    - iv) With all that said, that is how we bear with one another in love. We should not expect perfection out of other people or even expect gratitude. We remember that it is our job to live to make a difference for God and however the results work out of our situation of the moment is His problem to deal with and not ours.
    - v) God just calls on us to go forward, make the best decisions possible with the situation at hand and live to make a difference in the world around us.

8. Verse 3: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- a) This verse says in effect that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have peace with other Christians who we would not otherwise have a lot in common with. It never ceases to amaze me how I can have peace with people that otherwise, I have little in common with. I could meet a Christian from another part of the world and pretty quickly share a sense of peace, which comes from the Spirit giving both us that peace.
  - b) Notice that this verse requires us to make an effort. Yes we have a built-in sense of peace that comes with being a Christian believer. However, sometimes a difficult situation can overcome that sense of peace. That is when we have to make an effort in order to have that peace. With that said, let's talk about that person or group who may or not be believers that we struggle with at times. How do we have peace with someone like that?
    - i) Again, the solution is to give that relationship to God and say in effect, "This person is your problem and not mine."
    - ii) I can think of times where I dreaded having to call or face a certain person. I have found that when I have given that situation over to God, that situation is never as bad as I feared it to be. When I pray, "Lord, whatever happens in this relationship is Your problem and not mine" the problem is never as bad as I feared it to be.
    - iii) Like most people, I have friends and acquaintances, who I don't consider mentally healthy people. I may pray for them and I have learned that I cannot control or fix them. However, when I do have to interact with them, I have learned that the situation is always better when I have turned (prayed) that situation over to God and said in effect, "This person is Your problem and not mine."
    - iv) My point here is the way we have "unity of the Spirit" and peace with one another is not by trying harder to make those relationships work. The point is to get the Holy Spirit involved in those situations so the peace of God overcomes whatever obstacles exist in our relationships with other people.
9. Verse 4: There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- a) The word "one" is used seven times in these three verses. The key point of all of the "one's" is that all believers are unified as Christians.
  - b) In order to explain these verses, it usually helps to explain what they are not saying. They are not saying that all Christians of all denominations have to get together join hands and sing "Kum-by-ah" in order to fulfill this verse. ☺ If anything, trying to unite all believers in a community or in a country I find only creates a layer of bureaucracy that is not needed in order to be a follower of Christ.
  - c) I heard this issue put another way. If you have siblings, you don't have to get together with those siblings in order to prove you are siblings. You just know that you belong to the same family as your siblings and it is not necessary to have to get together to prove that fact. I am not saying one has to ignore one's family. I am saying that we don't have to get together just for the purpose of proving we are all one family.
    - i) That believe it or not, leads me directly to explain just what these three verses do mean: The point of these verses is not that we as Christians have to get together with believers of other denominations or other congregations in order to be united as Christians. The point of these verses is that we are already united in the same way siblings are part of the same family and don't have to unite to prove that fact.
  - d) Now let me briefly go over some of these terms as they are important to grasp:
    - i) The term "one body" simply applies to anyone and everyone who has committed their lives to serving Jesus and trust in Him as both Lord (in charge of their lives) and Savior (He is God). Such believers are (that's the key word, "are") Christians whether we would accept them into our own fellowship or not.

- ii) The idea of "one Spirit" is to remind us that though Christians are very diverse in terms of each of our spiritual gifts, there is one Spirit who gives us these gifts.
  - iii) The term "one hope" means that all Christians who do trust in Jesus as both Lord and Savior have the same hope of eternal life based on that trust.
  - iv) Finally, let me comment on "One Baptism". One issue that tends to divide many Christians is how we should be baptized. That is not the issue here. The issue is that baptism is a sign for believers that we have committed our lives to serving Jesus, and nothing more than that.
  - v) The key point is that even though Christians are very different in terms of their God-given gifts and their views on some Christian issues, we are all united as part of one family of believers despite all of our differences.
10. Verse 7: But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.
- a) Verse 7 sums up the last point in that God has given each believer grace in that He has called each of us to salvation and has given us gifts to better serve other Christians.
  - b) It would probably help right here to remember the purpose of being a Christian: It is to help the family of believers, "grow and trust in our relationship with Christ". The key purpose of living this life now, is to prepare us for that eternal relationship with God. That preparation and growth as a believer is all about learning to trust God in every situation. All spiritual gifts are used to help other believers grow in that trust in God.
11. Verse 8: This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."
- a) This verse is a quote of Psalm 68, Verse 18. If you read that verse in the Old Testament, the words are a little different. Understand that this is Paul's interpretation of that verse. The quote above can be one way to translate it. My point is that even though it is not written the exact same way in the Old Testament, the point Paul is making is valid.
  - b) OK John, and what is that point? Glad you asked. ☺
    - i) Paul's point is that since God ascended into heaven, he must have first descended to earth. So could that be describing any time God spoke in the Old Testament? If one studies Psalm 68 carefully, it could only be describing the specific time Jesus rose from the dead. Let me explain why that is so:
      - a) That quote says that when God ascended up to heaven (i.e., resurrected), he led people with him. We believe that Jesus was the first "man" to enter heaven. That is because God could not have eternal fellowship with people until the price for sin had been paid, which was the cross.
      - b) So what about all the people who are saved prior to Jesus? In effect Jesus answered that question in a true story (not a parable) about two men sent to hell. One was in a good part of hell for all saved believers and the other was in a bad part of hell. This is all from Luke 16:19-23.
      - c) My point here is that when Jesus died on the cross, part of what He did was go to this "good part of hell" in order to take those people to heaven. That good part of hell is in effect now closed for business ☺ as that "nice holding place" is no longer necessary as the price for sin has been paid.
    - ii) Paul's final point is that God gave gifts to man. That in effect ties to the last few pages of this lesson. The point is that all believers have some sort of spiritual gift. It means that every believer when we have made that commitment to God are given some special gift(s) that should be used to help believers "grow in the body of Christ". I won't expand on that now, as that is the point of Verse 11.
  - c) To summarize: Paul's point is that when Jesus went back to heaven, He took with him all of the saved people who died prior to Jesus' resurrection. At the same time Jesus gave gifts to men. Those gifts are all of the talents that God has given us believers in order that we may "build up the body of Christ". (That phrase is coming up in Verse 16).

12. Verse 9: (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)
- a) These two verses don't require a lot of new explanation only because I have already given that explanation in discussing Verse 8. Paul's point again is that if God ascended from the lower earth regions, then He must have been there in the first place.
  - b) At this point, I need to mention a debate between bible scholars. Some believe Paul simply meant that Jesus was the earth. Others think it refers to the fact that Jesus also went to hell after he died in order to resurrect believers who died before Jesus' time.
    - i) Both facts are correct and either one could be in view here in Ephesians.
    - ii) Let me quickly discuss the word "hell". The original Greek word literally refers to the lower parts of (in the middle of) the earth. Does this mean that the earth is empty on the inside and the souls of dead believers are (or were) stored there?
    - iii) Since I believe our eternal bodies exist in more than three dimensions I don't have a problem with that concept of human souls "resting" or being in torment (again remember this hell) within the earth somewhere. It could be literal, or it could be simply describing the idea of not being with God in heaven.
    - iv) OK, time for us to get out of hell. It was uncomfortable place to be anyway. ☺
13. Verse 11: It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,
- a) First notice the "he" in this verse. That He refers to God. The idea is that no matter what role we are called as Christians, it is God who called us to our specific ministries.
  - b) The point of this verse is not about those in what we call the professional ministry. The point is that God calls all believers into some sort of service for Him in our lives.
    - i) Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen". (Matthew 22:14). Yes this verse is talking about salvation, but it is greater in scope than that. The idea of being called by God is the "two sided coin" that if we do have faith in Him, we show that faith by somehow getting involved for Him to make a difference for Him.
  - c) With that said, let me now talk about the five specific "jobs" being listed in Verse 11. There are some churches that teach that all the gifts that God gives to people can be divided into these five categories: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.
    - i) The idea is that one uses one's spiritual gifts in one or more of these categories.
  - d) At this point, let me quickly define these terms, and then I can explain the gifts.
    - i) Apostles can refer to the original 12 apostles. As I said in the last lesson, that word apostle simply means sent one. An apostle can refer to anyone sent by a Christian church in order to accomplish a Christian assignment.
    - ii) Prophets is another term I defined in the last lesson. It refers to anyone who can and does teaches others about Jesus and not just those who have a special gift to see into the future.
    - iii) Evangelists refer to those who have a special gift to lead others to Jesus.
    - iv) Pastors and teachers can be "connected" in the original Greek, meaning it could be two separate titles or one combined title.
  - e) OK John, now that the definitions are given, how does this apply to my life?
    - i) The main issue is that all of us are doing something to make a difference for God.
    - ii) Many Christians tend to worry we are not doing enough for God and think that if we are not "killing ourselves" working hard for God, we are not doing enough.
      - a) That is not the issue. It is not about doing more for God, but simply about doing what He wants us to do. This gets us back to the issue of working in ways that we just "enjoy doing anyway", as well as doing our fair share of things that have to be done.
  - f) OK, enough lecturing on doing what we want or have to do, time for Verse 12.

14. Verse 12: to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- a) We have now come to the most important sentence in this letter. It is that the body of Christ (i.e., all believers) may be "built up" meaning that all of us grow in our trust in God.
  - b) Let's start by asking what is really important in our lives? Yes it usually is to care and provide for our loved ones. The related question is, what is God's way for us to deal with the stress of our lives? The answer is to give our issues to God and say in effect whatever are the results of our life are His problem and not ours. We then make the best decisions possible knowing that the results are God's will for our lives.
    - i) By each one of us being involved in the "ministry", we are helping each other deal with our difficult moments in life and helping each other cope with our lives. If there is some "clean up" to do, we are helping to make the life of another person easier. That is why I am emphasizing the importance of doing what God calls us to do and at the same time helping out when such help is needed.
      - a) The underlying point of this whole section is in effect, we don't have to worry about what God calls us to do, because it is God Himself who gives us the power and skills to do what He desires for us in the first place. God does not want us to spend our lives doing what we don't enjoy doing in the first place or at the least working toward that goal.
  - c) Verse 13 says in effect we work for God until we all reach the "unity in the faith". So is there a point where I am officially ready to go to heaven in that my work is done?
    - i) If God is in charge of our lives, then He and He alone knows when we are ready to go. Our job is just to do what God wants us to do at that moment in time. God may know our future, but we don't. We can and should still plan, but we plan with the idea in mind that God has every right to change our plans.
    - ii) What Paul wants to get across in these verses is in effect the idea that life is bigger than "just us". God created people with the intention of believers working together to make a difference for Him. The idea is to get to a point where we do what we can't stand not doing in the first place to help the lives of others.
    - iii) I was thinking about how Jesus ministered to people. It was not possible for Jesus to help every person who was hurting. At the same time, He did what He could when He could. He also took time out to rest and spend time with God the Father. That concept of "doing what we can" is God's desire for our lives as well. Jesus in effect went where The Father wanted to go and work where The Father wanted Him to work.
15. Verse 14: Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.
- a) When Paul says we will no longer be infants, he is not talking about acting like a baby. The point is we mature to a point where we don't let bad results bother us as much. We understand that God is in charge of the results of our lives and not us.
  - b) Paul is not saying the Christian life is easy. Paul is saying as we grow in our trust in God, we are not affected by every new movement that comes along in the Christian church.
  - c) Let me explain this another way: One of the biggest complaints of pastors and priests in the professional ministry is they don't get the time to do what they enjoy doing or do what they believe God has called them to do, because they are busy answering to this committee or this particular "plan" for their church. The warning here is to simply stick to what God has called us to do and not be caught up in whatever is the latest craze that is spreading through our church or our community.

- d) OK so Paul is preaching against getting caught up in the latest "craze wave". How exactly do I know what God wants me to do now? What is my "now what"?
    - i) I don't have that answer. That is for you and me to ask God what it is He wants us to do at this moment in time. It is amazing to watch how God answers those types of questions. Often the answer will be obvious just by observing our lives. The answer to those prayers may not come immediately as often God simply wants to guide us in the direction He wants us to go.
    - ii) Bottom line: Only God knows what is His desire for our lives. The answer won't come from me or anyone else for that matter. Remember we are slaves to Christ, not slaves to other people's desire for our lives. Obviously there are times of exceptions to that rule when someone close to us needs our help.
    - iii) The point is to do what we believe God calls us to do. If God wants us somewhere else, He will make that possible on His time schedule.
  - e) One final point. This verse also warns against "deceitful scheming". Let's face it, when someone asks us to do something, often we want to please those people and go along with their plans. God does not want us to be "people pleasers" but God pleasers. Yes, to please God usually involves helping other people. The point is for us to develop over time discretion over what is His intention for our lives and not try to please everyone else.
    - i) In summary, focus on what God calls us to do and not worry about what someone else tells us we have to do in order to be, say a good Christian. The answer to what God wants us to do comes through study of His word and through prayer.
16. Verse 15: Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
- a) Are there people in your life that get on your nerves? If you said yes, you are normal. God is not calling on us to fix people or to change in order to make everyone like us.
  - b) God calls upon us in effect to rise above that and focus on what He calls us do.
    - i) The phrase "speaking the truth in love" means that the goal of all Christians is to show love to other people. Sometimes showing love involves making hard decisions and even sharing with someone how they have hurt us.
  - c) We can't fix all the problems in our lives, nor can we change people who say, rub us the wrong way. God does not call on us to please people, but to please Him. The way we please Him is by giving Him control of our lives and whatever problems we are dealing with at the present moment. That is what Paul means by "growing up" in Him. It is the idea of trusting God (Jesus) with all (a big "all" here) aspects of our lives.
17. Verse 16: From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
- a) Think of all believers in the world as being parts of one large human body. God calls on all us to work together in order to do His will. One can apply this concept to our circle of friends or a circle of people committed to working on a particular project.
    - i) The point here is not to worry that our project is not going the way we desire it to go. If we are to work with other people, God does not call all of those other people into submission to our will, but hopefully, His will for all of our lives.
    - ii) Again, it is our job to do His will, not the will of anyone or everyone in our group. If God's love is within us, and we believe He is calling us to be involved in a particular project or ministry, we seek God through prayer and let Him lead our group as He sees best. It is about getting out of the way and letting God work.
  - b) But what about when our group can't focus on our goal, because everyone wants to do it their own way? We should then just pick a leader and go with what they decide. If we can't agree upon a leader, maybe it is not God's will to get that "thing" done. My attitude is God is bigger than any project we have. If it is God's will to get that project done, it will get done on His timing and His way. We just have to be open to that possibility.



18. Verse 17: So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.
- a) It is important at this point to re-define the word Gentiles. I regularly used that word to describe anyone and everyone who is not Jewish by birth. That is a correct and biblical definition of that word. However, in this verse, Paul uses that word gentiles differently.
    - i) Remember that Paul "now" divides the world into believers and nonbelievers. So when Paul says "gentiles" in this verse, he is just referring to nonbelievers. That is obvious by seeing that word used in the surrounding context.
  - b) OK, John, I understand that Paul is not talking about believers in this verse. How exactly do nonbelievers "live"? In other words, what is it we are to avoid doing?
    - i) The answer to that question is the next two verses. The point is that nonbelievers by definition are concerned with things other than God. The idea of Gentiles here is about people who in effect see themselves as being in charge of their lives and not God as being a significant part of their lives.
19. Verse 18: They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.
- a) Verse 18 says the nonbeliever is "ignorant" due to the hardening of their hearts. The older I get the more I am convinced that the gospel message is easy to comprehend and makes perfect sense. The reason most people reject it is not because it is theologically wrong, but simply because their hearts are hardened to that message. If you ever hear people argue against Christianity, it is amazing the fervor they have in their views, but they usually lack any sound reasoning in their arguments.
  - b) If people are "willfully ignorant" of God's message, who is the one who hardened their hearts? Was it God Himself or is it just people refusing to believe the Gospel message?
    - i) The way I describe those who turn from God is as if God-Himself says to such people, "Don't go that way in life or I will make it harder to turn back." It is as if one starts living a sinful life and then in effect God greases the road so it is now harder to change. Why is that? Then it becomes more obvious to people of the consequences of turning from God in one's life.
    - ii) It doesn't mean such people can't still turn to God. The point is we can tell who is saved by the behavior of both the believer and the nonbeliever. Does that mean we shouldn't try to witness to such people? Of course we should. Sometimes nonbelievers are interested in the Gospel message. The point of these verses is by watching people's lives we can tell what is their attitude toward God.
  - c) Verse 19 is a good summary of the consequences of choosing to ignore God. The point is the non-believer has no limit to the "lust" one can have for more things in their lives.
    - i) Let me explain this concept another way: In the world of professional advertising, such ad designers are well aware that people crave what is new and design their ads based on that desire for the newest and latest thing. Advertisements appeal based on desiring more of things in one's life and that our lives won't be satisfied unless we have that latest thing. Such ads work, because people are never satisfied with what they currently have and desire more.
      - a) If you get a chance, study advertisements for a while, and you will notice how obvious this fact is. Advertisements need to be successful or else people won't pay to advertise. The common thread of all ads is that they appeal to the human desire that craves more "whatever" out of life.
    - ii) That desire for more of things in life is Paul's point in Verse 19. People who desire anything other than God is never fulfilled and always leave us wanting more.

20. Verse 20: You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.<sup>21</sup> Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.<sup>22</sup> 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;<sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds;<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- a) These five verses say in effect, we did not come to Jesus because of good advertising. It is not as if we respond to billboards that advertise, "Do you need more of God in your life?" and then we believed that ad and committed our lives to God.
  - b) Instead, most of us became Christians because we saw the futility of going after things other than God and we realized that "letting go" and trusting God is the only way to live.
  - c) I have found that most people are drawn to Christ through hearing about Him, and then once we become believers, we realize how our lives were displeasing to God. It is only after we realize that Jesus is God that we realize the futility of our former ways of life.
    - i) I have learned that it is a waste of time to try to change people's views on politics or their desires for things without first trying to preach about God's truth to them. The only way people really change is if God gives us new hearts.
    - ii) Even when someone is a born again believer, we should not say to them, "You now need to do this or that in your lives." If that person now belongs to God, all we have to do is let God work in their lives the same way He works in ours.
    - iii) My point here is the "now what" of our lives is not to try to fix others, but to pray for others and let God work on others, His way and at His speed for their lives.
  - d) Yes God calls on us to share His message of love with others, but to actually change people's lives is His business and not ours. Even once people are saved, God does not call on us to fix others, but to let Him work on people His way and on His timing.
  - e) Getting back to the verses, the effective point is we let God work in our lives to be more like the type of person He wants us to be. That in effect, is the point of these verses. It is about constantly and regularly letting go of the things that are not pleasing to Him and live our lives based on what is pleasing to Him.
21. Verse 25: Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
- a) Well, the text no longer focuses on the lives of unbelievers. From this point to the end of Paul's letter, the epistle focuses on the specific's of what it is we should do with our lives as believers.
    - i) My goal is never to change your life to be more like me (John), but I do desire that if we do call ourselves Christians, to do what the bible teaches all of us to do. That in effect is the main reason why I write these lessons for all of us.
  - b) Verse 25 teaches us to always tell the truth. There is nothing new about this command as it is in effect one of the 10 commandments: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." (Exodus 20:16.) Paul is not teaching us anything new here in Verse 25, but reminding us what God has already said about how we are to live as believers.
    - i) But aren't there moments when lying is necessary? Paul is not talking about the exceptions to the rule, just the rule itself. If we do tell half-truths to people, we must also bear the consequences if we get caught telling those half-truths.
  - c) So why this commandment? Why not start with murder or trusting in God alone? The answer is if we can't be trusted to tell the truth to people around us, how will they ever take us seriously when we talk to them about Jesus? Therefore, Paul starts with the importance of being men and women of our words.
  - d) Does this mean we are not saved if we don't always tell the truth? Paul's point is about how the believer should (not have to, but should) act now that we are saved. If we do care about pleasing God then we should make the effort to be truthful to others.

22. Verse 26: "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,<sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.
- a) Notice these two verses do not say, "Do not get angry." These verses are teaching us to avoid sinning when we are angry. When we want our desire done and we are not getting that desire fulfilled, we can get angry. Another way we get angry is when we see the consequences of sin. There are even a few moments where the bible records that Jesus Himself got angry. (See Mark 10:14 and John 11:38 as examples.)
  - b) The point is when we get angry we give that anger to God and don't end our day angry. That is what Paul means by, "do not let the sun go down while you are angry".
    - i) We are back to the idea that we can't fix people or change people. All we can do is give that anger to God and say in effect, "This problem is now Your problem." That is how we properly let go of our anger. The other way we let go of our anger is to pray for people who have hurt us. That way we see others as needing Jesus and not just as someone who has hurt us.
  - c) Finally the verse says to not give the devil a foothold. We are all painfully aware that some of the worse sins we commit is when we angry, so I won't go any further on that.
    - i) Notice that the devil is not afraid to attack us if he gets a chance. The point is Satan does not want us to be a good witness for God and if we sin, at that moment, we are not a good witness. When we sin, God simply expects us to recognize what we did wrong, confess that sin and turn from it.
23. Verse 28: He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.
- a) This verse talks about those who steal. Notice that this verse implies that some believers have stolen prior to being saved. That is a subtle reminder that anyone can be saved no matter what sin they have committed prior to one's salvation. Even if one steals after being saved, we may still have to pay to society for our crimes, but God is more than willing to forgive us if we confess than sin as wrong.
  - b) I want to discuss the phrase "must work". Obviously that phrase does not apply to say, children or people who physically can't work. This verse is not saying that everyone who is a Christian must get a job. It is saying that if we do claim to be Christian and we have the ability to work in some capacity, we should not be a beggar. It sort of makes one think twice about the professional beggar who claims to be a Christian.
    - i) What about the people who ask us to give to say the Salvation Army? That is a Christian organization that does collect money to help people. Are they sinning by not working and asking us to give? Some Christians see it that way, but I don't. I see them working to help the lives of other people. I see a big difference between someone like them and those who physically can work, but chooses to beg instead.
    - ii) So should we give to those who ask of us? The big question to me is are we really helping the professional beggar by giving? What I personally like to do if I can is offer to buy them food as opposed to just giving them a cash handout.
24. Verse 29: Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- a) As a Christian, I watch what I say not because I won't be saved by using a bad word, but because it is not pleasing to God when I curse in the hearing of other people.
  - b) Using bad language usually comes out of frustration of not getting our way in life. This is another situation of giving our desires to God so that we don't get so angry we are using bad language in the first place. No I am not perfect at this, but I am painfully aware that I am not a good witness for Jesus when I speak in well, unwholesome ways.
  - c) To put it another way, how will people ever believe what we say about God if they associate us with bad things that regularly come out of our mouths. Again it is not about being perfect, but it is about confessing when we do commit such a sin.

25. Verse 30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- a) These last few verses are a good summary of the second half of the chapter.
  - b) They start by saying we can grieve the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is God, how can we possibly grieve Him or make Him angry? The point is that if God gave us free will, we can willfully choose at any moment to not do God's desire for our lives. God won't force us to do His will, but at the same time, we can sense when we are doing things that are not pleasing to Him and in that sense we can know when we grieve the Spirit of God.
  - c) Verse 31 lists a bunch of sins that I can summarize with the concept that all of these are things we are capable of doing when we are angry and not give that anger to God.
    - i) Yesterday at work, I held a lot of anger over someone who was mad at me and let me know his anger through a series of e-mails. What I needed to do was remind myself that God is in charge of this person and not me. The way I let go of my anger was to give that whole situation over to God and let Him deal with it.
    - ii) The point of Verse 31 is that we can't avoid these bad things by "trying harder". We avoid them by giving the situation that causes them to God and not try to solve our problems based on our own willpower.
  - d) The final verse of this chapter asks us to be willing to forgive others of our sins. It never ceases to amaze me how we expect God to forgive us of our sins, but at the same time all of us have trouble to be willing to forgive others of how they have hurt us.
    - i) To me, this is about remembering that other people are not "our problem", but God's problem. God asks us to forgive others not because the pain they caused is not real. He asks us to forgive so that we can then focus on our relationship with Him and have a loving attitude toward others. We can't force people to say they are sorry for what they did. All we can do is give such people to God and say in effect, "You deal with them, because I can't".
    - ii) The way I actually let go of my anger at work yesterday was to say in effect, "God this person is your problem. I can't fix him or change him and he knows how he has hurt me. My job is to show love to people and the rest I leave up to you."
26. OK, let me end this lesson to coming back to the question of "now what"? The point of this lesson is that God gives us all the power we need to make a difference for Him with our lives. The now what requires prayer and observation of our lives. The idea is to live our lives to make a difference for God and live in a way that people know we are living to make a difference for God.
- a) We will continue the "how" we live to make a difference for God in the next lesson. For now, it is time to close in prayer.
27. Dear God, first of all, we thank You that You have called us into Your salvation. Now that we are saved, the question becomes, now what do You want with our lives? The answer involves letting go of our sins and any aspect of our lives that are displeasing to You. Help us to learn to trust You with every aspect of our lives. We can't fix people. Help us to change the things we can change and to let go of the things we cannot change and give us the wisdom to know the difference. Help us to use our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.