

## ***“Think Different”***

*Ephesians 4:17-32*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 29, 2018

I think it's probably safe to say that you would have a hard time finding someone who has never heard of Apple Computer Company, the maker of the Macintosh Computer, the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Apple has been a dominant force in the technology field for many years now. It's estimated that nearly half of all smart phones in use today are iPhones. But twenty years ago that wasn't the case. In 1985, shortly after the Macintosh computer was introduced, the board of Apple forced Steve Jobs out of the company he had helped to start. By the mid-90s, Apple was struggling. Steve Jobs had been the driving force behind the creation of the Mac and the CEO of Apple realized it. So in 1997 he convinced the board to purchase Jobs' computer company, called NeXT, and bring Steve back on board.

Steve Jobs was one of those rare individuals who had vision. He was able to see where technology could go and to push the company to get there. Of course there were failures along the way but their successes have changed the world. And so in 1997 one of the first things Jobs did back at Apple was to create a new advertising campaign. It was a brilliant ad campaign and some have even said that it was what saved Apple by giving them back their identity. The campaign was simply called "Think Different," and it featured black and white photos of individuals who significantly shaped the Twentieth Century with the Apple logo and the words, "Think Different." The ads featured people like Albert Einstein and Bob Dylan and Martin Luther King, Jr., Amelia Earhart and Alfred Hitchcock and Nelson Mandela and Ansel Adams.

Listen to the words of the Think Different television commercial: *“Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify*

*them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”*

Our passage today from Ephesians 4 is about this same thing, It's about thinking differently. The reason is that thinking leads to doing. Our thoughts determine our actions. What you think, the way you see the world, will determine the actions you take. For example, it's unlikely you will ever attempt something that you think is possible. But if you begin to think something's possible you may be willing to try. That's how change happens. God's Word is clear that right thinking can lead us to right actions, and wrong thinking can lead us to wrong actions.

The way Paul teaches us this truth is by contrasting the world's ways with God's ways. In Isaiah 55 God says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." The world's ways are often opposed to God's ways and Paul is going to give us some examples of that in this passage as he points us to following God's ways. Paul calls us to leave behind the world's ways to follow Jesus. He says, "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."

Verses 17-19 gives us a glimpse of life separated from God. "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, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." That pretty well sums up the evening newscast, doesn't it. The picture we get is sort of like travelling along a highway. You can

choose to go in one direction or the other, you can't do both at the same time. You are either travelling toward God or away from Him. That's really the only two options. Paul says you can move toward God's ways or toward the world's ways, you can either become more like Christ or less like him. As you move away from God things get worse and worse and Paul tells us some of the mile markers along the way.

First is *hardness*. Paul calls it a hardness of heart. He's referring to an intentional rejection or unwillingness to hear embrace God's truth. Something happens to start a person down that road. Sometimes it's something tragic that happens in their life – a death, the loss of a job, something that starts the person questioning whether God is good or whether He even exists at all. Steve Jobs walked away from the Christian faith when he was a teenager after he asked his pastor a deep question about God and human suffering and he received a somewhat shallow answer. Others begin to walk away because Christians in the church don't always act like Christians and it begins to harden their heart.

Second, hardness of heart leads to *darkness*, the absence of spiritual understanding. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." The farther away from Jesus we get, the darker it is and the darker it is the harder it is to see the truth. For example, there are some people today who are involved in scientific work but who now reject basic scientific truths about human bodies and about life. Because of the darkness surrounding them they are no longer able to see the truth.

Third, this darkness leads to what Kent Hughes calls *deadness*. They are alienated from the life of God. Hughes says, "This separation [from God] makes everything possible." Here's where wrong thinking begins to lead to wrong actions. The person who is this far down the road no longer feels any twinge of guilt or shame about sin. Verse 19 says, "they have become callous," literally that they are beyond feeling. There is nothing inside them to constrain their behavior.

That leads to the fourth stage, *recklessness*. They begin acting on their desires. Paul says they "have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." At the heart of all of these is selfishness. But then Paul says in verse 20, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" In other words, you can't follow Christ if you're going in the opposite direction. Instead, you need to be moving along the road toward Jesus, not away. The metaphor Paul uses is changing clothes. He says we are to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and 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." We're to take off the bad things, like we take off dirty clothes, and put on the good things.

The first things we are to put off is *lying*. Instead we are to put on truth telling. "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor." There is an epidemic of lying these days. As our society rejects the idea of any kind of absolute truth, lying becomes simply an "alternative truth." As followers of Jesus, who said, "I am the truth," we need to be known as people who are honest all the time. The reason, according to verse 25, is that we are all members of the body of Christ. If we are dishonest with each other we are actually being dishonest with Jesus.

The second area that can affect our life together as the church is *anger*. This may be the hardest one for many of us. He points out that there can be good or righteous anger, for example anger at injustice. The problem is that it often leads to sin. We make it persona. We let our anger smolder inside us until we lash out. Brene Brown, a professor of Social Work at the University of Houston, talks about anger and blame. She says that blame is how we discharge anger. The problem, Brown says, is that when we focus on blame it's difficult for us to maintain relationships. As a result, anger divides people, it divides churches, and it prevents the Holy Spirit from working in us. So

Paul says we must work to make sure we do not sin. He says we need to deal with our anger issues right away, not putting it off until tomorrow.

The third issue that Paul addresses is *theft*. Instead of taking what doesn't belong to us we are to do honest work. But much like Jesus did in His teaching, Paul raises the bar for followers of Jesus. He says that not only are we to work instead of taking what doesn't belong to us, we are to work so we can have enough to share with others who don't have enough. Most of us at this point are thinking about money but I would say that this also applies to our time and to the talents and abilities God has given us. If we are not using them to glorify God and help others we are in effect stealing from God. He has blessed you so that you can be a blessing to others.

The fourth area addressed here is our *speech*. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." My grandmother used to say, "If you don't have something nice to say...don't say anything at all." Today even prominent people use social media like Facebook and especially Twitter to have insult wars. God warns us that speaking that way about others is like spreading decay. Instead, as

Christians we should be known by what we say. We should be known as people who never say an unkind word about others. This would be such a radical change that the world couldn't help but notice.

Finally, Paul says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." What sorts of things grieve God? Bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. In other words, anything that divides and hurts people saddens God. It's that simple. Every time you speak or act you have a choice to either move toward God or away from Him. That brings us to the real point today. This putting off of the bad and putting on of the good is not a one-time event. We much choose every day, every moment really, to become more like Jesus. We must choose to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Because here's the paradox: just as right thinking leads to right actions, right actions can lead to right thinking. Choosing to do the right thing, even when we don't want to, gives God the space to work in our lives and renew our minds. Think about that.

*Amen.*