

Trinity 19

I take as my text today from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians:

...henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart....

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable un to thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

This is an interesting passage from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In it, he talks of the specific things that Christians must abandon if they are to separate themselves from the Gentiles and their wanton way of life.

What struck me most is the use of the phrase “the blindness of their heart.” I find it interesting that those putting together the King James Version of the Bible used the word “blindness” to translate the Greek word Paul originally used — that word was *porosis* and originally meant a stone that was harder than marble.

Some translations of the passage, indeed, read “because of the petrifying of their hearts,” for instance the late Biblical scholar and commentator, William Barclay, used this exact phrase in his translation of that particular passage.

Maybe even better, though, would be the word “hardening.”

What Paul is getting at here is that for the Gentiles, their hearts are indeed hardened, petrified, because they have not accepted God's Grace. Their lives are calloused and devoid of any real feeling; they have lost the power to feel because they do not know Jesus Christ.

These people live in sin, driven by the insatiable lusts of their desires, a shameless wantonness.

As he looked at the world around him, Paul saw people whose hearts were so hardened that they were not even aware of their sinning; nor did they have concern for the effect their sinful behavior had on others.

Paul paints a pretty grim picture of the Gentile world in that age.

Not unlike Paul, Christians today can find many parallels in our own age, grim as his picture may appear. Each succeeding generation complains about the present generation and as society advances technologically and scientifically, with the world shrinking around us, circumstances seem even more dire. Often, we ask ourselves “what is the world coming to?”

For Paul, there is a cause and a cure: the cause is that the Gentiles have not met Jesus Christ; the cure is letting Jesus Christ into their lives.

Moreover, Paul has found that many of his Gentile converts have not made the full connection with Christ. They have not fully given up their old ways.

Thus, he tells them, and us today, to put off the old life and put on, clothe yourself, in a new life; put off sin and put on the righteousness and holiness that God can give through his Grace and Love.

Paul goes through a list of things that a Christian must abandon:

1. Put away falsehood, both the lie of speech and the lie of silence. Be truthful and don't condone falsehood or deception by failing to speak up.
2. Put away bad temper and irritability and control your anger. There are times when anger is good but uncontrolled and selfish anger is sinful and hurtful.

3. Put away festering anger. Don't hold resentment rather make reconciliation. Don't let the sun set on your anger.
4. Put away thievery and dishonesty; become honest workers. While this perhaps was poignant in Paul's time, nevertheless, today we find no less in the world around us.
5. Put away foulmouthed speaking. A Christian should be noted for his words that seek to help and uplift. Deriding and belittling have no place in Christian speaking.
6. Put away any acts that will grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is to guide and counsel us; to ignore that guidance and counsel is to grieve the Holy Spirit and is hurtful to God.

It seems like a significant list of "shall not's" but more to the point, as Christians clothed in a new life, having put on Jesus Christ, these things should be far from us, and having accepted God's Grace, our lives are marked by kindness. This is a kindness from the Greek word *chrestos* that means to be kind, but more than that. It is a quality that looks outward, not inward; that perceives the good of a neighbor equal to one's own good.

Sometimes, we need to take a realistic look at the world and understand our relationship as Christians to that world. In his letter to the Ephesians, we see Paul struggling with the problems of good and evil in the world.

He looks at the cause, and offers a cure.

In language that is both profound and beautiful, harsh at times, yet comforting, Paul confronts us in our own struggles against sin, and encourages us in our efforts to live a life in Christ.

Paul causes us to look into our hearts and open them up to the light of Jesus Christ, to allow our Lord and Saviour to restore in us the power of feeling.

Whatever we perceive of the world that we live in, we must be conscious of who we are and what is expected of us as Christians. We must take to heart what Paul is telling us through his Letter to the Ephesians that our hearts are not blinded or hardened, even petrified.

The love that flows from God to us is always in the mind of Paul and he is ever longing that we should return that love, not just in prayer or worship, but in the whole of our lives; that we live a life that reflects the glory of God revealed in Christ, indeed, imitating our Lord in all that we do.

Banishing from our lives the ways of the world, we may, then, take on our Lord Jesus Christ, clothe ourselves in His righteousness and holiness, following His commandment to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Love is the core of our relationship with God and our relationships one to another in this world; it is the core of the Gospel of Christ.

When we accept God's Grace freely given and take into our hearts the love he offers, we are enabled to put away the blindness of our heart and allow the light of Christian kindness to shine forth from us.