



Truth Applications

# What They Learned Made the Difference

Ephesians 4.17-24

“Moral consensus has given way to moral relativism—a **doctrine** which makes each individual the sole judge of his own action and which is designed to give full leeway to the pursuit of individual appetites” (emphasis added).

Attorney General William Barr, Speech  
Catholic University of America Law School  
*Vital Speeches of the Day*, Sept 15, 1992

**People act the way they do because  
they think the way they do.**

*Notice Barr’s use of the word “doctrine.” Teaching. Instruction. Or a philosophy.  
That is important because we are always tempted to focus on practical  
outcomes and externals, on symptoms rather than causes.*



Ephesus-Artemis Temple

## Life in Ancient Ephesus (and Roman Culture)

- Provincial capital (Asia), cosmopolitan, a center of trade, major city behind Rome and Alexandria.
- Ethnically diverse, materialistic, pluralistic worldviews (as many as 50 gods and goddesses).
- Cult of Artemis (Diana) centered there. Strong presence for the cult of Dionysius (Bacchus-fertility, wine, and growth).
- Judaism & Christianity were minority, isolated faiths that were misunderstood and either ignored or opposed.
- Ephesian people (and those who passed through) acted the way they thought.
- **Paul wrote as if he believed the Ephesian Christians could be different (holy).**

### Bad Thinking (Eph 4.17-19)

Futile minds

- Darkened understanding
- Obstinacy (hard hearts)\*
- Alienation from God
- Callousness (without feeling), sensuality, and greed for every sort of impurity

\* NEB: “their minds have grown hard as stone.”

### Good Thinking (Eph 4.21-24)

*The process of putting off the old self in  
favor of the new self*

Right teaching

- Renewed minds
- Good desires

*Paul wrote vv. 17-24 **before** getting “practical,” turning to outcomes and behaviors as the consequences of thought (“therefore” in 4.25). Outcomes of 4.17-24 → honesty (4.25, 28), anger (4.26-27), purity & character of speech (4.29-31; 5.3-5), forgiveness (extending grace) (4.32), life direction (5.1-2, 6-20), relationships (5.21-6.9).*

## Seeing the War Correctly

<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy **arguments** and every lofty **opinion** raised against the knowledge of God, and take every **thought** captive to obey Christ,...

- 2 Corinthians 10.3-5

Main action: **waging war**, in the following manner:

- ➡ While *walking* in the flesh
- ➡ *Destroying* arguments and opinions ...
- ➡ *Taking captive* every thought to obey Christ.

### Articulating What Satan Is Thinking

(A Screwtape Letters type of analogy)

The Enemy's [God] people think they are safe from us because we cannot create or move matter, as the Enemy can, but all we can do is tempt and influence thought. Ha! 'All we can do' is quite enough. For as one of their poets sagely said, 'Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.' Their thoughts are their premises; their lives—and their eternal lives—are their conclusions. Get those premises! Occupy the premises! Conquer their philosophy. ***That strategy works especially well in American society because they don't pay much attention to philosophy, so they let their guard down there*** (my emphasis).

~ Peter Kreeft, *How To Win the Culture War: A Christian Battle Plan for a Society in Crisis*, 71

## Fighting the War

- Christianity was the brand new, therefore unwelcome, religion; "foreigners and exiles" (1 Pet 2.11, NIV); then "atheists" (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 3.2; 9.2); an illegal religion until the early 4th century (300 years after Acts 2).
- How did they change the Greco-Roman culture? They were salt and light (Matt 5.13-16) who engaged with ("reasoned with" - Acts 17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8, 10) their culture's thinking.
  - ➡ "... you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4.21, NASB): the New Testament is the teaching from Christ (see Eph 3.4-5; John 16.12-15; 1 Cor 2.9-13).
  - ➡ "But that is not the way you **learned** Christ (Eph 4.20, ESV; cf. Matt 11.29).
  - ➡ "Learn" is the verb form of the noun "disciple" — not just a "follower," a "*learning* follower."
- "Just as a Jew learned Torah, so now a Christian can be said to learn Christ" (Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, 280).
- "A century ago our task was to edify those who had been brought up in the Faith: our present task is chiefly to convert and instruct infidels" (C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," *God in the Dock: Essays in Theology and Ethics*, 94).
- It will take work. It will require thinking outside the box. It will require a commitment in study, thinking, and communication that differs from much of what has become our new tradition.
- How did the church, viewed by others as "a ludicrous collection of trivial people" conquer Rome's "enormous strength, universal acceptance, [and] great traditions? ... The Christian 'out-lived' the pagan, 'out-died' him, and 'out-thought' him" (T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* [1917], 198-220, 203, 205).

"The Christian out-thought the pagan world. . . . They would go to the shrines and ask uncomfortable questions. . . . The Christian . . . lived the freest intellectual life that the world had. Jesus had set him free to be true to fact. . . . **Who did the thinking in that ancient world? Again and again it was the Christian.**"