

No Longer Perishing in Futility

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Brethren, we're going to resume our study in Ephesians 4, so if you would open your Bibles. Ephesians 4:17, which actually opens up a fresh division. I'd like to start out by reading verses 17 through 24. "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. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ - assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old man (old self) which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new man (the new self) created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Father, I pray for help. Open your Word to us. May it be powerful. Speak to us, Father. Speak, O Lord. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Big Picture

So, okay, just take in the whole big picture. Let's see the forest for a second. The apostle has laid down the great doctrine of the first three chapters. Then having done that, he makes this great appeal to us in the first half of chapter 4. It's this unity of the Spirit appeal. It's life in the church, how we are to function together in the church in the unity of the Spirit, growing up in every way into Christ, into the Head. The body building itself up in love when every part is working properly. So it's life in the church. We've got apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers that equip the people in the church for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. There's this dynamic going on in the church, and we looked at that. Now, what Paul is doing is, I can't help but think that the whole rest of the letter, from 4:17 until the closing salutations in chapter 6, I can't help to think that what this is, is that which he set forth in 4:16 - when each part is working properly.

What Does a Real Christian Look Like?

You want to know what a proper working part is, what a properly working Christian looks like? Just look at 4:17 right up until the closing salutations in chapter 6, and you've got it. I mean, this is really a treasure. I counted them up. From 4:17 all the way to 6:20 is sixty-nine verses. Sixty-nine. What a treasure! I mean, if you really think about what this is, we have a concise 69 verse - God-inspired, God-given, God-spoken - body of instruction concerning the primary points of godliness. Listen, when every part is working properly. If you want to be a properly working Christian, give yourself to these 69 verses. I mean, you talk about ethics, you talk about morality, godliness, here it is. What does godliness look like? Apply yourself to living out these 69 and you've got it. I mean, we've got such a concise, beautiful body of the primary points of godliness. This is inspired. It's like the Spirit says, "Paul, tell them. Tell them what it looks like to live a godly life." And, I mean, you've got things in here about how to be a child,

how to be a husband, how to be a wife. You've got things in here that cover all aspects of the Christian life. The Spirit of God says, "Paul, tell them. Tell them, in very concise fashion, in 69 verses, what it means to live the Christian life, what the new life, right, the new man - didn't we just see that? - what the new life in Christ looks like. Give them a synopsis as to what that life looks like that's pleasing to the Lord."

But I'll tell you this, make no mistake about this. No one can live this life by just deciding to do it. You see what it says in verse 20? "That is not the way you learned Christ." Oh, you know how you live this life? By coming face-to-face with Christ and by learning of Him and embracing Him. Or you look at 21, "Being taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus." Brethren, I'll tell you what, to live this life, we need the new-man power created after the likeness of God. You see that in verse 24? "Put on the new man created after -- Created. Who does the creating? This is God. God is the Creator. We're not the Creator. We don't create this in ourselves. We need God's creation of new-man power flowing through ourselves. And then you go down to verse 30. Look what he says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Well, in another place, he says, "Don't quench." Brethren, the reality is this, we need the Spirit's power to live this life and you don't want to grieve Him. You don't want to quench Him. It's an impossible life. But I'll tell you this, if you indeed are a Christian, it is an unavoidable life. You say, what do you mean by that? I mean, no one can live this life without the new man power of God upon them. But for everybody that is a genuine Christian, this is precisely the case. Paul is speaking to those who are entirely new creatures in Christ.

Brethren, do you realize, regeneration is one of the most profound changes in the world. This is not some abstract theory or myth or pie in the sky that is-- Do you read Paul's words here? I mean, all you have to do is look. For instance, Ephesians 5:3. This is a big problem today. Sexual immorality and all impurity. Just ask yourself this, does Paul seem like he's suggesting that this might possibly be one way that a Christian can live? Does it sound like he's saying, "Well, in theory, this is the target, but nobody actually achieves this"? Is this the "O wretched man" kind of thing where, "Well, nobody can actually do this"? Or do you actually hear in Paul's voice something of an expectation that if you're a new man, this indeed is going to be a reality. Listen to him. Sexual immorality or impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you. It must not. He's not talking theory here. It must not be named among you. There's a proper way to live as a new man, Saint. Let there be no filthiness, no foolish talk, no crude joking. And you know what, when you get to verse 5, "You may be sure of this: everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or is covetous, they have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Brethren, what I want you to do with these 69 verses is embrace them by faith. This is a life you're called to live. And this is a life that, as a new creature in Christ, you not only can live, you must live. You must! I mean, do you get that must? "Must not even be named." What makes a man or a woman a Christian is that they've been born again. They have a new nature. The life of God is in him. He's all together different than what he was before. This is precisely what Paul is emphasizing here. Now look with me, because I just want to deal with verse 17 today. Notice how verse 17 begins. "Now this I say." Just think about that. Think about the words "This I say". Somebody stands up before you: "This I say." I mean, that's coming across pretty strong. Okay, this person has something to say to me. But he doesn't just leave it on that level. Notice where

he goes next: "And testify in the Lord." Or that could be, "I testified by the Lord, or with the Lord." Paul speaks in various places with this kind of terminology. And I'll tell you, every place he does it, he desires to especially capture our attention. This is the kind of thing you say before you're going to say something that you really want to get people's attention. You want to grab hold of them. "This I say and testify in the Lord."

Listen to Paul to the Ephesian elders, "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all." To testify is what? It's to bear witness. Somebody testifies in a court of law, well, that's what they're doing. They're bearing witness. To Festus and Agrippa, Paul says, "To this day, I have had the help that comes from God. And so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass." It's to make an emphatic affirmation, an emphatic demand even. Listen to this. 1st Thessalonians 2:12, "We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you." There's our word right there. Charge. Testify. It can be translated "charge." "I charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God." You know what, Ephesians 4:17-- We basically could read it this way, "Now this I say and I charge you in the name of the Lord." This is strong. This is apostolic. And if we have ears to hear it, it is God's voice. God is saying, "Listen. You need to grab this." Christian, brother and sister, listen to this. This isn't me. This is apostolic authority. This is God-inspired. There's a solemn charge here.

No Longer Walk as Gentiles

So what is it that God is so concerned to get our attention about? Look at the text, "That you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. This I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do." KJV says other Gentiles. But the reality is this, you are called to no longer walk like you used to walk, like the rest of the world walks. The Gentile-ish conduct. No longer. This is an interesting sentence. In the original, it literally reads this way, "No longer you to walk." It's an infinitive. Infinitives, you put the word 'to' before it. To walk, to build, to go. That's an infinitive. And it's odd. It's really extremely awkward in the English, but no longer you to walk as also the Gentiles walk. The translations just basically make an imperative out of this, so that it reads this way. The KJV says, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth - from now on - walk not as other Gentiles walk." The NJKV, "You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk." The ESV, "You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do." But you hear what's being said. Christian, no longer. You should not any longer walk as the Gentiles walk. You must not walk any longer. Why? Verse 20 and 21, this is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus.

We're going to look at more of that in the weeks ahead. But brethren, do you see the implication in this "no longer"? What does that imply? We once did. No longer. But what? Something's happened. We heard Paul. He's pointing out pictures. "This guy was like this, but something happened." Now he's saying he's not exactly sure where these guys are at. But this is the picture here. When you say 'no longer', something happens. That's the Christianity of Scripture. Something happens. 'No longer' means that you and I had a past. You remember how Peter speaks of it? "The passions of your former ignorance." The passions of your former -- former. Before. Or Paul says it. If you go down here to Ephesians 5:8, look at 5:8, "For at one

time." At one time. Not any longer. But at one time in the past, sometime in the past, you were darkness. But not now. Now you're something else. Brethren, this is key. 'No longer' implies there's a way we once were. There's an unregenerate life, which is radically different than the life of being born again. No longer. Something has happened. I just say this to all of you.

When the elders sit down and we interview people, now I recognize I might come across somebody like Timothy, who they had a mother and a grandmother and they were exposed to the Scriptures from the time they were a child and, perhaps, they don't really recognize. They can say, "I've always been saved." Well, we don't like to hear that because we believe people get saved at a certain point in time. But we can recognize that if somebody has been exposed to as a little child, it may have happened and they don't really know when it happened. But for most of us, that's not the case. And when I'm listening to people's testimonies, that's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for this reality that there is a way they once were, then something happened. What happened? They learned something of Christ. They were exposed to Christ. They were exposed to the gospel of Christ. They were exposed to the beauty of Christ, the preciousness of Christ. And something happened. What happened? They're no longer the way they were. And so when people's testimonies don't line up there, with that they don't line up with Scripture. There needs to be a 'no longer'. That's what Paul's assuming about these Ephesians.

Now, what he knows about these people is he knows that these people, there weren't any that were children and were exposed to the gospel and now they're Christians and they don't really know when they were saved. Why? Because the gospel came along, just recently, into a dark Roman world, and people are just being saved for the first time. They'd only been saved - who knows when this was written? The gospel had gone in there, and people are being plucked out of the darkness. And he knows that, literally, for everybody making up the church in Ephesus, they are first-generation Christians. They've been snatched out just now, or at least in the last however long. Whether it was written long enough for there to be some children who were-- I don't know that. But the likelihood is this is mainly a first-generation [church]. They have been plucked out of this Greek, Roman darkness. But that's what we're looking for. Does your testimony reflect this? Paul confronts us with a radical change that regeneration produces. The Christian man is a new man. Old things have passed away. Behold, all is new. That's what Scripture says.

Now, brethren, aren't you thankful that we have a gospel like this? Paul can go in-- Trevor said some of these guys have eaten human flesh. You come across guys like that? Cannibals. And you look at their life, they came in and they cause all sorts of trouble. It's the same as reading Stan Dale or some of those guys from the '60s. They say they encountered the same kind of darkness, the same kind of interruptions, the same kind of guys that were constant trouble. Some of those guys actually filled Stan Dale and his cohort full of arrows. Brethren, we can thank the Living God for a gospel that enables us to speak like this and say, "No longer. I once was blind, but now I see." This is the gospel that we have to take to the world. No longer. No longer. I once was lost, but I'm not lost anymore. I've been found. No longer. God has made me new. I'm no longer what I once was. I'm no longer the old man. I'm no longer.

When I was up in Michigan, I've told this before. When I met with my high school buddies, I told them, "You guys know what I once was. Nobody down in Texas does, but you guys do. You knew what I was." I was telling them that when I was preaching the gospel to

them, when I was telling them about this very truth, about regeneration and what it looks like. You guys don't know that guy. But that's what the gospel does. This is the kind of gospel that we have. There's a new life, a new start, a new power. Praise the Lord for this. Brethren, we don't want dead religion, do we? We don't want the kind that people coming off the streets, come out of San Antonio, come from wherever they come from, come in the church and they just clean themselves up a little bit on the outside. And inside, they're still the same wretched people they were? We don't want that. We want people well-saved. We want the power of the new man demonstrated here. That's the power of God. That's what we need. That's what we want. That's what turns people's lives upside down, and not just so that they come into the meetings and they don't lay down on the front row and do circles around the preacher. This is so that they love their wives like Christ loved the church. So that they put off the sexual immorality and they put on purity. There's purity in their life, and they're walking worthy of the Lord, and they're now children of light. And instead of getting drunk, they're living in the life of the Spirit now. They're putting on the armor of God. They're going to battle.

Brethren, we want the gospel that says, "No longer." God help us. Last thing we want is bad religion, bad Christianity, dead Christianity, where people come in and they take the Name, but nothing changes. They can't say "no longer" because they're just the same as they've always been, only they've cleaned themselves up a little bit and they come to church on Sunday. God spare us from that.

Now, brethren, I just feel like I need to emphasize something because I feel like it needs to be emphasized because I get this, it's amazing. You can never please anybody, and with James throwing everything out on the Internet, we get attacked from both sides. We get people that say that we don't deal with sin and we're antinomian. But then we get charges that we're legalists. And, Brethren, I want to tell you this: Using negatives is not legalism. Paul repeatedly tells these Christians throughout these verses not to do things. Notice 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." 27, "Give no opportunity to the devil." 28, "Let the thief no longer steal." You know what it's saying? Stop letting the sun go down on your anger. Stop with unrighteous anger. Stop giving opportunity to the devil. Stop stealing. 29, "Stop with the corrupting talk." 30, "Stop grieving the Spirit." 5:3, "Stop looking at pornography. Stop with the sexual immorality." 5:4, "Stop with the filthiness. Stop with foolish talk. Stop with crude joking." 5:7, "Stop being partners with people that are sexually immoral and impure and covetous." 5:11, "Stop taking part in the unfruitful works of darkness." 5:15, "Stop being unwise." 5:17, "Stop being foolish." 5:18, "Stop getting drunk."

I mean, brethren, there's a place to say to Christians, "STOP IT! STOP! Stop that life." That's what he's saying to these people. You say, "Wow, that's all pretty negative." Yeah, there's a lot of positives in there and I'm only emphasizing-- But what I'm saying is this: When you tell people, "You need to stop doing that," and you tell people these kind of things, that's not legalism. That is encouraging the same kind of Godliness that the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, is encouraging us with. Brethren, when you no longer live the way you used to live, you're going to stop doing a whole bunch of stuff that you used to do. That's just the reality. We need to stop. We need to say to Christians, "No longer. No longer. Quit it." Brethren, there's a place for Christians to say to themselves, speak to yourself, "That's it! I'm done with that." Stop it. Where are the Christians, like I talked about years ago in a message that I

preached from Psalm 119, but where are the Christians who, like David, are going to say, "I promise to keep Your words. I promise, God, I'm stopping with that, and I'm going to do--" Or you remember what David said, "I have sworn an oath and confirmed it to keep Your righteous rules. I have sworn I am going to keep Your commandments. I'm going to keep Your rules." This isn't legalism. Impressive Christianity is what it is. And true Christianity ought to be impressive. It's not legalism.

What Are We To No Longer Do?

So here's the question of the hour, Brethren. What then are we no longer to do? What is it that's Gentile-ish that we are no longer to walk in? What is the apostle calling us to refrain from? Look at the text. "You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. I looked at that verse on Friday. It's like I was overawed by it. I was staggered by it. It's like it broke loose on me in a way that I don't think that verse ever has before. I felt overawed. You know what this verse does? It so perfectly defines everything. It's so revealing. It defines all that we see around us. It defines the world. It defines mankind. It defines the stock from which Christians come from. It defines the mere man. It reveals what Christianity does to a man. It reveals how much the mind has to do with everything. The very first Gentile-ish quality we must not allow in our lives has to do with your thought life. It has to do with your mind. Brethren, futility of the mind. What a terrible and tremendous description of the lost pagan world all around out there. There's hardly a more profound description of lost humanity than this. And you can think of the places, Romans 1, Ephesians 2. Ephesians 4 is one of the lesser-known descriptions of lost mankind.

But just these first three words. These three words capture lost humanity almost like nothing else does. Futility of mind. We hardly need to define the mind. It's that place in each of us where we exercise our faculty for thinking. It's where we exercise our way of thinking. The mind is where we exercise our faculties for understanding, reasoning, deciding, knowing. It's the center of our thought life. But this other word - futility. Brethren, give me some synonyms for futility. Vanity. Emptiness. Useless. Yeah, just take those. Emptiness. It can be frustration, nothingness, purposelessness. The idea is a failure to attain to any true purpose. I mean, this is staggering. What's psychology? The study of the mind. You want Psychology 101 from God's perspective? You've got it right here. Think about it. Think about the reality of this. You take an individual, take all their thoughts, everything they think in 80 years, every desire that they've had, all the understanding they've attained to, all the reasoning, all the logical, all the deducing, everything, all the workings of the conscience, all the workings of their brain power, their musings, all of it, all their feelings, their decisions, their purposes; put them all together. And God looks at it, it's empty. Nothing. Total futility.

But the thing is this. I mean, I think we hardly believe this. The world doesn't believe this. We're the people who know about this. We're the people who really know psychology. The world doesn't think we do. The world thinks we're a bunch of idiots. But you see what's going on? That's their thinking. That's their mind. And it's fruitless, it's ignorant, it's hard, it's dark, and it's empty, and it arrives at no purpose. That's all around us. Total futility. And we might think, well, if we could even find one individual who had a mind that totally added up to nothing, we should have found some kind of anomaly or something that's very, very, very rare, highly unusual. But

Paul doesn't say, "Well, there might be one or two people way out in Papua New Guinea that you could find if you added it all up, it comes to nothing." Do you know what it means to be a Gentile? Do you remember what Jesus said even about physical Jews in the book of Revelation 2 and 3? He said, "They claim to be Jews but they are not. They're liars." He called them a synagogue of Satan. What does that mean? What does it mean when Jesus looks at some people and says, "They say they're Jews, but they're not"? What does that mean? That means that physically, yes, they come from the lineage of Abraham, but they're not true Jews. In the spiritual sense, they're Gentiles. We are the true circumcision, brethren.

Few There Be That Find It

But you know what's staggering about this? Jesus himself, you know this from Matthew 7, He said, "Few there be that find it." What's the "it"? Life. If few there be, in all the billions of this world, who find life, you know what we infer from that? Most are Gentiles. There's only a few Christians. Do you know what that says about the world all around us? You take the cumulative thoughts and brain activity, the decisions, and God looks at it and says, "It's totally empty." You recognize that when you walk around in this world as a Christian, you are walking by people who the whole sum of their thought life is absolute futility. What a totally devastating prognosis for mankind! Brethren, most people in the world fit the description of Ephesians 4:17. Literally, billions of people. And it doesn't matter if they're scientists or they're politicians or they're doctors or they're farmers or bankers or musicians or bus drivers or policemen, bartenders, housewives. God's assessment of the activity that goes on in the minds of unbelievers is the exercise of their minds is utterly empty. It is void when it comes to this. It's not void of thoughts. It's void when it comes to having any true significance or any true spiritual value. Let men do what they will. Let them try as they will, search as they will, be religious as they will, get educated as they will. So many pursuits. Men, women, children, wanting, wanting, desire.

I just thought about this. Just stand by the side of the Interstate Highway and watch the people going by enmasse. I mean, go out at rush hour. Watch them. Jesus says, "Few there be that find it." How many Christians do you think are in there? Not many. And you watch these people, where are they going? Where are they going? With all that has gone on in their minds, they may have IQs that are 130, 140. Where are they going? You know where they're going? They're going to Hell. You know what's at the end of that road? You know just as well as I do what this thing looks like. People, broken, backward. Everyone in this world who's not a Christian fits this description. Where's everyone going? What does it all amount to? What are they after? What awaits them at the other end? You know what's out there? Futility. Futility. Because what do people want? They want to live forever. They want that. They want pleasure. They want gratification. They want happiness. You know what futility means? It never leads there. It leads to pain, and sorrow, and emptiness, and void. Futility. Futile. Futile. Futile. It's futile. It just screams emptiness, utter emptiness. We've read it, "No one understands. No one seeks for God." It's all aimless, pointless, lacking direction. What's the reference point? You see, futility. No one is seeking after God. We're talking about men in their own strength, men in their carnality, men in their Gentileness.

No one seeks God. Oh, that doesn't mean that they're not religious. They're very religious. They make their poles and they speak in other languages and they have their Sago

festivals. And we do the same in this country. And it's just as backward and just as futile and just as easily leads men and women to the futility that's at the end of this. Absolute empty. It's the life that leads nowhere but to Hell. See, it never really gives any real satisfaction. You've got all these people, they're searching. What are they looking for? That's what goes on in people's minds. How can I make the next dollar? How can I get the prettier girlfriend? How can I get sexual gratification? How can I get what I want? How can I get that little white ball in that hole in fewer strokes? How can I improve my tennis game? How can I improve my lawn? How can I get that new scratch in the door of my car off there? How can I get a nicer car? How can I avoid getting old? How can I avoid getting to this nursing home? How can I get a nicer house? How, how, how? They're thinking, how can I have better relationships? How can I be more liked at work? How can I be more successful at work? And you know where it leads in the end? Weeping, Christless eternity. It's futile, futile, futile. It's a life that leads nowhere.

Everybody's looking for truth and for explanations to why the universe works the way it does. They're all searching for the meaning of life. Everybody looking, looking, looking, "What makes life worthwhile?" That's what it is, you know, "Give me my thing. I'm going to be a race car driver. I'm going to be successful at this. I'm a great gardener. I'm a-- fill in the blank. I've got beauty. I go to the gym and I've got big biceps." And where does it go? Look 100 years ahead, their soul is in Hell, their biceps are rotted in the grave. And God just says it's futile. It's futile. People trying to, "Let's put another Hubble better than the Hubble telescope out there. Why? We're going to look out in the deepest realms, and with all our scientists and all our knowledge, and we're going to try and see back to the Big Bang and we're going to make sense of it all." And then they're in Hell, and they die Christless, and it's all Hell and it's all empty.

Futility

All the theories, all the religions, all the gods, where does it lead to? Futility. I mean, think about it. Think about it. My dad was a farmer. He worked at GM, but he was a farmer. You think about this. You strategize, how to plant the field, when am I going to plant it? How am I going to plant it? I'm going to have a tractor ready. I'm going to go out and till that field. I'm going to haul in the fertilizer and I'm going to make sure that the irrigation is in place. And I'm going to harvest that crop. And I'm going to grind that wheat. I'm going to make the bread. I'm going to set it on the table. I'm going to set the family down and we're going to eat. And then we die and we go to hell. And you say, "Well, you're being awful graphic."

You think about Donald Trump. Unless he repents. You can fight to have all your billions and be successful and make it to the president, and you die and you go to Hell. You can be religious. "Oh, I decided I'm going to get religious. I'm going to start going to Grace Community Church." You can get impressed by the preaching, but you don't ever learn Christ. There's no reality. You play the hypocrite and then what happens? You die. And you know what? It's more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you. The whole thing was futile. You see, so many religious people, they're thinking that they're building up the credit, but in the end it's futile. Have you ever seen Catholics just pray their Hail Mary's? It's just futile. It does no good for the soul. It leaves nothing for the soul. It's hollow, it's futile, it's aimless. It just leaves you in the end like a husk. Ruby and I saw it. We went on this cruise. Thank the Lord we had a balcony. We were able to spend lots of time in the room just being together for seven days. But we'd venture out of

the room and we look at people. The last day of the cruise, you should have seen the look on the people's faces - empty, hollow. Why? That's their heaven. And in the end, all the anticipation, all the places they were going to visit, all the stuff, it just left them empty. That's what this world does. It just takes from you, takes from you, takes from you.

We saw a documentary on Mike Webster. You know who he was? Eighteen years, professional football player. He was a center for the Pittsburgh Steelers. You remember him? He's the guy that got that-- whatever the football players, they're finding in their brains now. The world just takes from you. It took from him. All the people in Pittsburgh loved him. And then what happened? He lost his brain. He lost his mind. All that impact with the brain, impact, impact, impact. It tears the cells apart and releases this protein. It basically clogs up their brains, "I can't think straight anymore." Yeah, he had Super Bowl rings, and he died and went to Hell.

You think about what all of it's worthwhile. You get the people sitting in-- they're going to go to their classes tomorrow and they're going to study. Why? So they can get a good job. Then what? Another job. Typically, people change jobs every three years. Then what? Save up for retirement. Then what? Then one day you're going home on a wet road and you get in a head-on collision, and you die and you go to Hell. Brethren, that is what's happening all around us. Every single Christless life is futility. It ends in Hell. It ends empty. Those lives out there, you know why they look empty at the end of life when they had 18 successful years in the NFL? You know why they look empty after seven days on a cruise and seeing some beautiful-- We went diving. I was trying to talk underwater just praising the Lord. It was so beautiful. And you know what? The day after we got back, I was out at Breckenridge, walking along the side of the river, praying and thinking on the Lord. And I'm thinking, "I get to come home to this? This is glorious."

I saw one woman at the end of that cruise. The look on her face was like total devastation. Why? Because that's the way this world is. It just leaves you an empty husk. That's all. It promises you everything - and the devil's behind that - and it just leaves you empty. Empty. Futile. Aimless. Nothing for the soul. Just futility. You look around. Look what people are going after. I think of a family member. I told him God hates divorce. He divorced his wife, married another one. What are we going after? Typically, when I pray alongside the river, I'm walking by the golf course. That's why I think about putting little balls in a hole. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine spending your whole life trying to get a ball in a hole in as few strokes as possible? And then God says, "Your soul is required of you, you fool." Or how much worse, yeah, you came to church sometimes. Yeah, you owned a Bible. You read it sometimes, but you never surrendered to Christ. Jesus said, "Unless you forsake all that you have, you can't be My disciple." You were not willing to surrender. You lived religious. You had your fingers crossed, hoping it's all going to be good in the end. And God meets you. You see, this was worse than futility. To whom much is given, much is required.

The Gentile way is so futile. You build homes up on stilts to escape the witches, and you die and go to Hell. But you can live right down the street here in San Antonio, and you can have your crucifix hanging on the wall to escape the evil, and you die and you go to Hell. And people are going to go off to work tomorrow, and they're working, guys, women, they're out there. They want more dollars. "Give me more. Give me more." Success. Fame. They're ever reaching. And what are they reaching for? You know what people want? Eternity is written on the heart. People want to be eternally happy. We know what everybody wants. We know. But what?

What? What? I had a friend. I remember him in high school. He restored a car. But you know what? When he was 42 years old, he got cancer and he died. Where's that car? Where is it? Who cares? Does he care? You know what? There was a time when it was all important to him. "I got to restore this car. I got to find that fender somewhere." He's on the phone, he's searching. "Who's got it? Ah, I found it." There's victory. As far as I know, he died without Christ.

We can be refined, we can be sophisticated, we can be cultured, for what? You tell me. What's in it all? And see, "No longer." We came from that stock. And you know what it was like. We sat at dinner, Ruby and I, we got into a conversation with a couple next to us. We began pressing them with the gospel. And the girl said, "Yeah, it's empty. Empty." They were trying to tell us about Karma, trying to tell us about Buddhism. But the girl admitted, "It's empty." And I just hope she woke up the next morning all the more empty so that she might try to find something else to fill that emptiness. What if you're rich beyond measure? Life without Christ is just empty, empty, empty. And you know what has happened? 2,000 years have passed since Paul wrote this, and nothing has changed. And where are they? Think about all the people that have lived in these 2,000 years, and all the things they've got, all the conquest, all the things that men have been striving for.

You can think about the poorest of the poor, like in a place like India, the lowest caste. What do they want? They're out there cracking stones. But they have some hope. Some hope of what? What are they hoping for? Just a little bit more more, put more food on the table. But then they die, whether they're rich, whether they're poor, whether they're cultured, whether they're uncultured. And it's all futile. It's just futile. "Oh, if I can just make enough to get my eldest son to go off to school, if there's just schooling, we might be able to elevate ourselves a little bit." So what? So what if you elevate yourself a little and then you die and no Christ? No Christ. The world just takes out of you and leaves you nothing in the end. That's what happened. Everybody wants to aspire. Beauty. Be the beauty queen. Go off into modeling. Go into TV. Go into the movies. Have you seen these people at the end? Just a shell. And that's what the world does to everybody. It holds out all these promises. Who commits suicide mostly, rich or poor? You know the answer. Why? Because it holds out all these promises and it just leaves them empty. It's like, "I thought this was going to satisfy, and now it's just--" You see, the poor still have this expectation. But when you get everything and you're empty, it's like put a bullet in your brain, because it's all futile. It's just futile.

You see, people in that state, they've come to the place where they have nothing to hope for. There's no future. It just leaves you exhausted. It leaves you with nothing to lean on. It leaves you with no hope, no expectation, nothing to look forward to, just hopeless. It's futile. And people are running like rats in a race to just get to the fire that doesn't ever get extinguished, where there's gnashing of teeth. They're running there. You know what Paul says? "Christian, stop it. Stop it. Be done with it. You're no longer controlled and influenced by that outlook and by that mentality. You've learned Christ. You've learned Christ. Embrace that Christ that you have learned. Live." He said, "Follow Me." Follow Him. Trust in Him. Follow Him. We're to walk as those who learned Christ. You've been born again, Christian. There's no looking back. Jesus said, you put your hand to the plow, don't look back. No looking back. Stop it. Stop with the futility. Now, life is about Christ. All out for Christ. All, all, all for Christ. That is not futility. That is a life well spent. Brethren, that's where we are.

And you know what the antonyms to futility are? What's the opposite? I just looked at them, let me give you: effective, fruitful, helpful, productive, profitable, successful, useful, valuable, worthwhile, hopeful. Listen, success for your children is not becoming a doctor. Yes, if it's a Christian doctor. But we've got ideas about success in this world. I'll tell you what success is for your children: if they find Christ. And when they get to the end of this life, they've got something to lean on. They've got a hope because they've got a rock under their feet. There's substance. My life is built on nothing less.

Does the world appeal to you? I mean, is that your conception of living? Have you bought into those lies? Brethren, our minds need to be gripped afresh with the futility of it all. If you've had any temptations to look back what this-- This world, we walk through Vanity Fair, and it's dangling that stuff out there. But you remember, this message today reminds you it's all futile. It's futile. You know what? We were able to go on a cruise. But yeah, I'm able to dive and praise the Lord. I'm able to stand out of that balcony and look at a sunset and praise the Lord. We were able to spend time in that room and have our Bibles open and be reading Scripture and the precious things of God, which my wife has been bringing to the women. And Ethics, by Grudem, is what I have there. And we were able to go to these different places and praise the Lord. And when we got to the last day, our faces weren't hollow and empty. Why? We go on with the Lord. Like I say, I get to come back, and the very next day I get to walk by the river, praying to the Lord. I mean, that's life in Christ. He's with me always. And even if I was going off that cruise into a prison somewhere, He's with me. And He's not going to leave me, and He's not going to forsake me.

Life in a prison with Christ is not futile. It's full. Life with Christ is full. Brethren, thank God we are not gripped by the futility of it all. Empty, aimless, pointless. God has opened our eyes to the reality. Thank God that in His infinite grace, He's caused those shining beams of the Spirit of God to shine in our eyes. And what does it say there in 2 Corinthians 4? I mean, we've beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. There's no turning back. We've found the treasure. We were the person just stupidly walking through the field of this futility. That's the way it was with me. I found a treasure buried in the field, and it has changed my life. No longer. I can no longer be the same after I discovered that treasure. No going back. No going back. All for Christ. No longer walk like the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind. Brethren, we are people that walk with a purpose. And we're going somewhere. A few more rolling suns at most, they're going to land us on Canaan's fair coast. And I'll tell you this, your works follow you. So live for Christ. That is not a futile life. Live for Christ. Proclaim Christ. Love as Christ loved. Press on, Brethren, press on. Run from that futility. Learn of Christ. Embrace it all.

Thank God, brethren, that we have such a Gospel that no longer leaves us like we were. I remember those days. Sunday morning, waking up, hangover. Started the night before with \$150 in my pocket. I look and there's \$6 and I don't even know where I spent it. I feel empty. Got to go back to work tomorrow. I got a pain in my head from the cocaine I did the night before. It's just empty, empty. And then Christ broke in upon the emptiness. And no longer, no longer am I what I once was. Brethren, that's our testimony as Christians and we can go out of here praising God. He has given us the grace to escape the futility of the masses. What a privilege to be a Christian!

Father, thank You. Thank You. Thank You. We thank You in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.