Ephesians 4.17-20

Texts, NRSV: Ephesians 4.17-20

1 **Ephesians 4.17:** There are many ways to preach this, usually on maturity or integrity
2 i.e. We can do better, We just need to become what we believe, etc.
3 Let's look at this Text in light of Paul's culture, and different cultures today

i. Shame-based cultures

    a Many cultures in the world are based on public honor vs. public shame

        1 These are called *shame-based cultures* vs guilt cultures in the West

        2 Guilt is internal. Shame is external.

        3 I can sense guilt, even if no one else knows what I have done wrong

        4 Shame comes from my peers, my context, those around me, the public

        5 *Shame-based culture*: I lose my honor, *I lose face* in my social network[1]

    b The Bible reveals that the *aNE* was home to *shame-based cultures*

Tennent "The term *guilt* and its various derivatives occur 145 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament, whereas the term *shame* and its derivatives occur nearly 300 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New Testament."[2]

    c Individuals are shamed, but also whole groups can be shunned

        1 For instance, anytime there is a "we," then there is a "they" by default

        2 Jews and Christians have standards, including some, excluding others

    d The Hebrew Bible contains "we" and "they" standards, or boundaries

        1 These standards reveal what it takes to be an Israelite

        2 Standards also reveal how to be an Israelite walking in the favor of God

        3 These boundaries set a line between the Israelites and the Gentiles

ii. Paul sets new boundaries, writing to Jewish and Gentile Christians

    a However, Paul speaks against non-Christian Gentiles

        1 In a way, the non-Christian Gentiles are being shamed (verse 17)

        2 "futility of their minds," subject to the devil or to the vanities of this life[3]

    b **Ephesians 4.18-19:** Paul specifically shames the non-Christian Gentiles

        1 "They are darkened in their understanding" **(verse 18)**

            a) No ability or faith to make decisions about right and wrong

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[1] Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 78-79.
[2] Ibid., 92.
[3] Origen, *Catena on Psalm cxviii.37*; Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians xii.iv.17*.

b) They're not in the light.[4]

2 They have started down a slippery slope. This is a digression

a) They turn a deaf ear toward God and harden their hearts

b) They lose "all sensitivity," desensitized, overexposed to sin

c) They give themselves over to various impurities

d) Further hardening of the heart, and complete lack of remorse[5]

3 I believe this is a cycle of sin, making their hearts harder and harder

a) As a result of this sin cycle, they are shamed

b) Banished from God, "alienated from the life of God" (verse 18)

c Paul writes about sexual sins

1 Paul could choose any sin, and he does list other sins in other places

2 Jewish Christians understand sexual sins, because they must stay pure

3 Gentiles "have abandoned themselves to licentiousness" (verse 19)

a) Translated *lasciviousness*, eagerness for lustful pleasure

b) NOT always lust of the eyes or flesh, but found in many forms

c) Our music industry makes a lot of money off of *licentiousness*

4 They are "greedy to practice every kind of impurity" (verse 19)

a) *Greedy* can be translated coveting, we covet what is forbidden

b) *Practice* and *impurity* are both words that refer to the physical

c) *Impurity* can be translated as *unclean*

1) Toy with lust, 2) covet what is forbidden, 3) make plans, and 4) put them into action

iii. This is purity language like we find in the Hebrew Bible

a Lines have already been drawn, Israel is set apart from sin, and unto God

b Now Paul also forms a boundary line for Gentile Christians

1 These sins represent their old life and their pagan neighbors

2 When Paul names these types of sins, he draws a line in the sand

c Paul's boundary-making strategy works for the Gentile Christians

1 They realize that they cannot go back to those types of sins

2 They realize that they must maintain the purity of their new life

3 If someone allows sin into the group, it brings shame on everyone[6]

iv. Ephesians 4.20: "That is not the way you learned Christ!"

a This brief verse stands in contrast to all the wicked ways of the Gentiles

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[4] David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 62.

[5] Theodoret, *Epistle to the Ephesians iv.18-19*; Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians xii.iv.17-19*.

[6] deSilva, 295, 299.

b The word "you" sets us apart as the readers
    1 Any time there's a "we" then there is by implication a "they"
    2 We're not in that other group, although we came out of that group
c We WERE ignorant in darkness (verse 17-18) NOW we've begun to learn
    1 Our minds have been opened to the Spirit
    2 This is salvation language!
d We are restored to fellowship, no longer alienated (verse 18)
    1 We are learning about Christ the Person, in relationship with Him
    2 This also means that we are learning in the community of Christians

v. INVITATION: Revolutionize society or reform Christian culture?
a Paul's answer is not to start a revolution to overthrow the Gentile culture
    1 It is a shame-based culture, based on group honor
    2 Group norms are held so highly, that individuals simply conform
b Paul's answer is not to revolutionize society, but to reform Christian culture
    1 What does Christian education, discipleship, and community look like?
    2 What if we draw some lines in the sand and our minds open to Christ?