

Text: Ephesians 4:17-32

Title: "Stop It!"

Introduction: Well our summer series for this year is "ONE: A Study of the Book of Ephesians". For those of you who haven't been here, here is a brief overview of what we've done.

The title of this series is "ONE" because as Paul writes to the Church in Ephesus (Roman capital city in Asia Minor), he is encouraging that church to live up to their potential ... be everything that God wants them to be. The only way they can do that is to understand and act on the fact that under God they are ONE! There is no way they can be everything that God wants them to be as a Church if they are divided because of looks or economic status or what they've done in the past or type of clothing or whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Okay. That's a big one. The Jewish people and the non-Jewish people had been at odds with each other (that's putting it lightly) for centuries because the Jewish people had rightly claimed that they were the chosen children of God. They were not lying! Read the Old Testament and you will hear it clearly that God had chosen the Hebrew/Jewish people to play favorites to. God cared for them in a very special way.

Now, in the Book of Ephesians, Paul tells the Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) that there is no longer a division between the two. God is fully available to ALL PEOPLE and God's gifts and inheritance will be divided equally among the Jews and Gentiles.

Wow! What a kick in the teeth! Paul writes that God took away the Jewish people's bragging rights! Needless to say, the Jewish people in the Christian Church are angry. Then Gentile people are getting angry because Jewish people don't want to share their distinction as God's chosen people. There are some who grew up in the Jewish faith who are trying to put too much emphasis on the Jewish traditions and saying that the Gentile people cannot follow Christ unless they first follow the Jewish traditions...

So, here's Paul. He's writing and telling them flat out, "You cannot be the Church that God wants you to be unless you come together and work as ONE! It's not about any individual or ancestry ... Everything you do must be about Jesus Christ!"

Last week, we covered the first part of Chapter 4 where Paul teaches practical ways for the people of the Church to get along with each other. He reminded the people to be HUMBLE, GENTLE and PATIENT with each other. Remember that other people are human too. They will make mistakes. It's not our job to make them feel worse about it by telling them how incompetent they are. Our job is to understand that people will make mistakes and to be humble, gentle and patient with whoever it is and whatever they've screwed up!

Now, this week, in the last half of Chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul is no longer talking about getting along with the people in the Church; he's talking about the people of the Church living within the culture they live in BUT not getting caught up in it. Remember that Ephesus was a town of people who believed in the Goddess Artemis (huge Temple) and had multiple magicians and fortune tellers. Their background for generations was more about idol worship and magic than it was about the God of the Israelites and Jesus Christ.

The ideal thing would be for the people of the Church of Ephesus to stay inside the walls of their house churches, work with each other and ignore the outside world. Paul tells them that that is not an option. We need to live in this world, but that doesn't mean that we act like everyone else! We, as followers of Jesus Christ, are commissioned to be different than the rest of the world. Will we let them influence us, or will we influence them?!?

Hey, did any of you ever have your parents yell at you? Did they ever yell, "Stop it!" or "Knock it off!" and you knew right away what they were talking about? You really did not have to ask, "Knock WHAT off?" because you knew as soon as you heard their voice what you were doing wrong!

Paul gets a chance in here to say, "You know the right things to do, so just do the right things. Do what you know is going to make God happy ... NOT mad!"

Before I go any further, let me invite you to take the insert out of you program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will see a brief outline of where we are going. Hopefully, you have enough room for notes. My hope is that you will hear something today that might help you this week or in the weeks to come. If not you, maybe what you write down will be helpful for someone you know on their faith journey.

Our Scripture for today is the second half of Chapter 4 in Ephesians. We will be starting with verse 17...

### **READ EPHESIANS 4:17-32 NOW AND PRAY!**

I love how Paul starts this part of the letter: "With the Lord's authority, let me say this: **KNOCK IT OFF!**"

#### **I. Stop It!**

- A. Remember what Paul was up against. He was writing this letter back to the Church in Ephesus from a prison in Rome around 60AD. He had lived there for three years and left somewhere around 55AD.
  1. So, from the time Paul first arrived in Ephesus and introduced those people to a faith in Jesus Christ and when he wrote this letter was less than 10 years.
  2. For hundreds and hundreds of years before this, the people of Ephesus had been caught up in living life however they wanted to. They worshipped a goddess of sensuality, followed magicians and listened to fortune tellers.
  3. It takes 13 miles of ocean to turn around a large ship, and it was going to take some time to turn around the culture of Ephesus.
  4. The people in Church in Ephesus were probably going back to their old ways of living.
- B. You all understand the 'Snowball Effect', right? If you start rolling a small snowball through sticky snow the snowball will get bigger and bigger...

1. I love how Paul says “they are hopelessly confused” and “they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him (Jesus).”
  2. Paul is talking about the people of the city. They have heard Paul and others preach about Jesus, but they’ve decided that they are much smarter than that. “Jesus is for wimps who don’t know how to think or stand on their own two feet.”
  3. Have you noticed that the more you tell yourself something, the more you are convinced that it’s true whether it’s true or not? (No way Brett Favre is a Jet! No way Brett Favre is a Jet!)
  4. It has snowballed ... many people have convinced themselves that Jesus is not real and that they can live however they want to and that is a better way to live life.
  5. They’ve told themselves so many times that they don’t need Jesus that their hearts have hardened and they cannot even respond to Jesus anymore.
- C. And what is the result of their hardened hearts? Verse 19!
1. “They don’t care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways.”
  2. They are going to do whatever feels good and it doesn’t matter who gets hurt in the process. Life is all about them!
  3. “Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed.”
  4. Why? “Everyone else is doing it, so what’s wrong with it? It’s not impure (meaning not right with God) if everyone else is doing it!”
  5. Filled with ‘greed’ = “It’s all about me! I want what I want and I’ll do anything to get it!”
  6. Can you see how that attitude and those actions don’t really bring about UNITY or ONENESS?
- D. So, Paul says, “STOP IT!”
- E. It is way easier to live like a PANSY and Follow the Crowd. “But” Paul says, “that isn’t what you were taught when you learned about Christ.”

## II. Be Different

- A. When you learned about Christ, you were taught that you must “BE DIFFERENT”!
- B. Paul reminds them here that they have heard all about Christ and the truth that is in Jesus ... I can hear my Mom saying, “Stan, I taught you better than that!”
  1. Paul wants the people of that Church to understand that they cannot have it both ways. You either follow the crowd (culture) or you follow Jesus Christ. You cannot do both!!!!

2. In order to be different, we must ask God to remake us spiritually and do an EXTREME MAKEOVER with our thoughts and attitudes!
  3. Do you know anybody who could use an extreme makeover of their thoughts and attitude?!? (Don't point!)
  4. Let me ask you this ... *What's your attitude been like recently?* And, how has that affected how you've treated people?
- C. If we are going to be the Church that God wants us to be ... If we are going to work together as ONE BODY here at BMZ, we need to pray to be a "new person (v.24), created in God's likeness--"
- D. Righteous, Holy and True – Thinking, Acting and Attituding the way God wants us to.
- E. And then Paul says this ... he draws a line in the sand and says...

### III. Make a Choice

- A. Quit pussy-footing around the subject and "Choose a Choice!" Decide if you are going to live for Jesus or not. Stop trying to fool yourself and others with your going back and forth!!
- B. Now, there must have been some specific things going on with the people of the Church in Ephesus ... Paul decides to name the things that the people there are doing that are NOT Righteous, Holy and True. He names 5 things:
1. #1 = LYING – A lie is a statement that is not fact that is told with the intent to deceive the other person.
    - a. Talk about your snowball effect – One lie always leads to another and another and another...
    - b. When we tell the truth, that gives God's Holy Spirit a chance to go to work. When we lie, Satan goes to work.
    - c. Note the reason Paul gives for sticking with telling the truth: "because we belong to each other." We can only become ONE if we tell each other the truth...
  2. #2 = ANGER – Anger in itself is not a sin. We see God get angry many times in the Old Testament. We see Jesus get angry at times in the New Testament. The difference is: I'm not God or Jesus!
    - a. It's hard for humans to distinguish between the person and the hurtful words or actions. We get angry and all that stuff blends together.
    - b. Remember Jesus knew people's hearts and did not get angry with the person; only the actions.
    - c. We are not that good. It's best for us to try to avoid getting angry at all.

- d. This goes back to last week's Scripture that said, "Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love."
  - e. The problem with anger is that it has a way of gaining control over us instead of us over anger.
  - f. "Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry."  
= If you hang onto it, it will start to hang on to you!
  - g. And, if it starts to hang on to you, you are offering the Devil a foothold in your life.
  - h. When we are angry, it is close to impossible to have the thoughts and attitude that God requires of us ... remember that EXTREME MAKEOVER thing?!?
  - i. ANGRY? Forgiveness is how God wants us to handle anger ... "Wait, but that's not fair! They did that to me and they should hear about it! They should have to pay some sort of price!"
  - j. No. Jesus did that!
3. #3 = STEALING – This is one of the 10 Commandments.
- a. I love the way Paul handles this ... If you are a thief, stop stealing, get a job and give to those who need it!
  - b. In other words, God's grace works total transformation from life being all about me (stealing for me!) to really looking to help others (get a job and paycheck so you can help those who cannot help themselves).
  - c. This is not just a "Thou Shalt Not", but it's also a "Thou Shalt!" Thou Shalt make a positive difference in your community.
4. #4 = FOUL LANGUAGE – I remember my Mom saying, "What comes out of your mouth is what's in your heart." I didn't know that was Scripture, but it is (Matt. 12:34).
- a. Remember the power of the tongue. It has the power to build someone up or tear them apart! Paul = "Let EVERYTHING you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them."
  - b. The words we say should bring people closer to Jesus Christ.
    - i. Sometimes we try to talk like everybody around us so we sound cool. That brings people closer to us.
    - ii. Sometimes we cut people down with words that will never allow us to tell that person about Jesus. They will never listen!
  - c. It doesn't have to be a cuss word to be Foul Language!

- d. Every word we say should invite the people who hear to get to know Jesus Christ. At the very least our words should not turn people away from Jesus...
5. #5 = FOOHOLDS – This one really gives Paul a chance to share more about how our anger can lead us to many other sins... these are ways that Satan can get a foothold in our lives.
- a. **Bitterness** = Once we have been hurt or offended by another person, anger builds up inside; especially if we let the sun go down on it! Bitterness is sort of a simmering anger.
- b. **Rage** = Rage is an outburst of what's been simmering inside. If we don't let the sun while we are still angry, this doesn't get a chance to happen.
- c. **Anger** = This is the anger really settling in and making a home for itself in our lives. We will NOT let this go! Some say, "I can't help it." Yes, you can. Jesus wants us to CHOOSE to let it go, not CHOOSE to let it settle in and start putting it's feet up on our coffee table!
- d. **Harsh Words** = When we are angry, we often say things that we wish we could take back. Certainly these are not words of encouragement! I once had a girl tell me that I was the meanest person she ever met ... why? Because I was angry and I said things to her that I can never take back.
- e. **Slander** = Some get so angry that they start to make things up about what the person they are mad at said or did. Again, the snowball effect = they say it so much they start to believe it about the person they are angry at. It's a chargeable offense!
- f. **Malicious Behavior** = Any wicked thing the person could think of ... at this point, that's easy because the Devil has a foothold in your life!

C. INSTEAD!

1. Be kind.
2. Be tenderhearted or gentle and understanding of other people.
3. Forgive one another ... and remember what you've done that God has offered you forgiveness for!
4. Only if we live out this section of Scripture will we be ONE.
5. Only if we live out this section of Scripture will we be the people that God wants us to be.
6. Only if we live out this section of Scripture will we be the Church that God wants us to be.

Let's Pray!