

Date: 10.9.08 Eph 4 midweekchurch File: Ephesians 4b(mid)

I thought we might start off our sermon tonight by doing something a bit different. I want us to see if we can spot the differences between these two pictures. Apparently there are nine in all. What are they?

It might be easy to spot the differences between these two pictures, but sometimes it is much harder to spot the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. Now I know that it should be easy. I know that we have been called to be different. I know we should have different masters. I know that we should respond to the grace that God has given us by doing good works, but at times it is difficult to work out whether people are Christians or non-Christians, isn't it?

And yet the Apostle Paul will insist that our faith must make a difference in our lives. We can't just blend in. We have to stand out. We can't afford to live like the non-Christian does. We might have once lived like that, but we can no longer. And Paul will go on to say that as we compare ourselves with others, there must be at least 5 differences that people can spot.

1. Spot the Difference a) Mind. And it starts off with our *minds*, with our thinking, with our thought processes. (Turn over page! Paul says in verse 17, that the non-Christian has a futility about their thinking. In verse 18 there is a darkening in their understanding. They are separated from the life of God because of the ignorance attached to a hardening of their heart.

Put simply there is a black spot in their minds. (Draw black spot) Sure they might be intelligent, thoughtful, caring, sharp witted but if they don't have God at the centre of their thinking, if they don't acknowledge the Creator of all that they see. If they don't recognise the most important truth of all, then that will in turn affect all their other thinking. This will turn them into people who live for themselves, their own sensuality, their own desires and feelings and that will lead them to a lifestyle where life is all about ME not all about HIM.

Whereas the Christian will have a mind, that according to verse 20, knows Christ. According to verse 21 has been taught the truth by Jesus. The Christian will have their minds renewed which gives us a whole new attitude to life.

Thus as Christians we should have a different way of thinking to our non-Christian neighbours. We evaluate arguments by saying is that in accordance with God's truth? Would this please God? Is this about purity, wholesomeness, being right and noble?

Friends what is going on right now is a battle of the mind. Henry Ford, the inventor of the motor car also said "*Thinking is the hardest work*

there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it.“ So friends watch your thinking. Watch what you look at on TV, what you listen to on the radio, evaluate their message in comparison to what God says is important, to what the Bible says is truth. Spend time pondering God’s thoughts after him. For one difference that others should see between us and non Christians is our minds.

b) Clothes. Yet you should be able to spot another difference, the **clothes** we wear. For Paul in verse 22 tells us to put off our old self and put on the new self. So Paul is saying that changing our lifestyle is like changing our clothes. (Draw two types of clothing).

You take some off and you put others on. So just as you get up in the morning and take your pyjamas off and put on your work or casual clothes for the day ahead. So the Christian should be wearing a different lifestyle to those who are not a Christian.

We should no longer be involved in any sort of falsehood, in lying, in deception, in leading others up the garden path. We shouldn’t allow our anger to stay for too long, and there are certain things that shouldn’t provoke our anger in the first place. We shouldn’t get things dishonestly by stealing or cheating or deceiving or hiding things. Instead we should have our clothing made out of righteousness and holiness, out of truthfulness and contentment and generosity.

So can others see these qualities in you? Are they there sufficiently for you to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Are you known for your truthfulness, for your generosity, for your control over your anger and your emotions. Paul says as we play spot the difference, this is an important thing to look at.

c) Talk. But it is more than just our thinking or our clothes, it is our **talk** as well (Draw 2 types of mouth). Before we were Christians, we were involved in talk that was unwholesome, stuff that was bitter and twisted came out of our lips, that slandered others, there was rude words and course jokes, we gossiped about others, we showed an unforgiving nature. And when we did this we grieved God’s Holy Spirit, we made God’s Spirit unhappy, He wept so to speak because our words fell so short of the standard God hoped for.

But now our talk needs to build up not tear down. It needs to praise God, not grieve His Spirit. It is to spring forth kindness and compassion, forgiveness and grace.

You see our words are one way that can set us apart from others. I know that on the sporting field I have had more opportunities to talk to others about Jesus because people asked why I don’t swear than probably for any other reason. So when we fail to pass on gossip, when we don’t involve ourselves in groups that are complaining or whinging or knocking others, when we don’t have our speech littered

with swear words, we stand out from others. We show the world that we are not going to stoop to their level.

d) Night/Day. But Paul hasn't finished just yet. It has to do with whether we live in the **dark** or in the **light**.

Walking in the dark is completely different from walking in the hard, clear light of day. (*Draw darkness*) At night we walk cautiously, carefully, even secretly. A lifestyle of darkness is one which is shameful and needs to be hidden. It involves sexual immorality, greed, foolish talk, false worship, emptiness.

But a lifestyle of light (*draw light*) abounds in goodness and righteousness, in thanksgiving and God's blessings. It has nothing to hide and is happy to be seen by all. In other words, there ought to be no actions, motives or secret fantasies that we'd prefer that others would not know about.

So that's actually not a bad way of testing our actions. Would you rent that video if the youth group were to watch it with you? Would you say those things if you knew that person would hear them? Would you be proud of those thoughts if the rest of your family found out about them? What would God say if He saw you act that way?

You see there needs to be all sorts of differences between Christians and non-Christians. Their mind, clothes, talk, the light in which they do things and lastly their

e) **Drinking habits**. Paul's last image compares the influences that should direct our new life. For many, the greatest influence is that of drink, or maybe drugs, or gambling or something that makes us lose control and leads to hurting ourselves and others (*draw spirits*). These people walk like fools, they have no self control and the next morning they may find out that they did things that they regret and which do not do the cause of Christ any good.

Christians are not to surrender control over their bodies like that. Instead they should be filled with the Holy Spirit (*draw spirit*). And this filling leads to praise to God, to encouraging others in the faith and to thankfulness to God.

Now this is another difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. Alcohol is a depressant, it depresses our thinking, reduces our self control, our understanding, our judgement, our balance. Whereas the Holy Spirit is the opposite - it stimulates us to think like God, to love like God, to be like God. One dehumanises, the other makes us more human, more like Jesus. One hurts the relationships around us, the other affects our love for God and for others.

2. So we can see that Paul has skilfully painted two pictures - one of those without God and one of those who have received what God has given to them. But when you look at it, there's a big difference isn't there? And it's a bigger difference than what you see in reality, don't you think? For when you look at the typical non Christian, you see some of these things, but you rarely see them all, don't you agree?

Sure you see some who are drunkards, but many who are loving mothers and fathers. You see some involved in sexual immorality but others who have been faithful to the end. Some who swear too much, others whose talk is very polished. Some who are deceitful, while others are extremely trustworthy.

And on the other hand, which Christian do you know who is completely like this? How many of us would you describe as being filled with the Holy Spirit, as having true righteousness and holiness, of having a pure mind, who are clothed in all the right qualities, and who have complete control of our tongues.

So at first glance, it would seem that Paul has overplayed his hand, it seems he has overstated how bad the non-Christians are and over estimated how good we Christians are. Except.... Except he has painted the picture not from our point of view, but from God's point of view. This contrast is not how you and I normally see the world, but it is how God sees the world.

For you have to remember that God looks at the non Christian and sees *no Christ* there. He sees all their sins, for none have been forgiven. He sees how their mind really works, he remembers that malice, that slander, that gossip, that rudeness, that swearing that the non- Christian once did, or did when no one else was looking, for these things remain within him, unforgiven, unhidden, there for Him to plainly see.

And alternatively when he looks at the Christian, he doesn't see our sins, our wrong actions, he sees *Christ*. He sees Christ's purity, his righteousness, he remembers his speech, the fact that he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

As a guy called Mark Potter once said "*Jesus like any good fisherman, first catches the fish, then he cleans them.*" He saves us first, and then bit by bit he changes us. As the old Sunday School chorus goes "*Little, by little, every day, little by little in every way, Jesus is changing me, he's changing me. ... Well its been slow going, but there's a knowing that someday perfect I will be.*" One day we will be like this. One day we will be perfect. But in the mean time when God looks at us, he sees Jesus.

I like the story of the great artist who one day was walking around the back streets of Paris and he came across a man lying in the gutter -

drunk, dishevelled, hopeless. But he decided that he would paint him. So he came down each day for weeks, getting everything just right.

One day he had finished and the drunk asked if he could see the painting but he was shocked at what he saw. For there was no drunk in the painting, just a man who had got his life together, looking back on the days of where he used to live. The drunk exclaimed *that is not me*. Whereas the artist said, when I see you, I see you like this.

Well the drunk decided if that is what you see when you look at me. That is what I will become. And apparently from that day on, he never touched the drink.

You see God doesn't see us like that any more. He sees us like this. He doesn't see us full of sin, but full of Christ. He doesn't see us with the hang-ups, the vices, the weaknesses we know that we all have. He looks at us and sees Jesus. And if that is what God sees in you, then that is what we should want to become.

For that is God's will for your life. To gradually become what you are in Christ. To mature in the faith. We all start off over here, but as our Christian life goes on and with God's help, we need to be changed to be like Christ.

Now when God wants to make a mushroom, he does it overnight but when he wants to make a giant oak, he takes a hundred years. And as God makes you more like Jesus, it will take Him the rest of our lives. And we will only truly become like Him when we get to heaven and not a second beforehand.

God's will for you is that you grow up. Not grow out, but grow up. You know, babies are cute, but if babies stay babies, it's tragic. God wants us to mature and develop, and what does spiritual maturity look like? Just take a long look at Jesus Christ. That is why God has placed a part of Himself within you, to gradually change you & make you more like His son. But His purpose is that he works with you, not against you.

An old Indian proverb says "*The perfume of holiness goes against the wind.*" It is indeed strong and powerful. And one man once said to a missionary in India "*If you Christians would live like Jesus Christ, India would be at your feet tomorrow.*" So if we were to live like Jesus Christ tomorrow, I'm sure Terranora would be a completely different place as well. So let's attempt it, in God's strength and see what happens.