

Sermon "Abundant Life Through Jesus"

Jesus said, I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly. When you think of abundant life, what do you think of? Joy, peace, love, fulfillment, health, serving others, and close relationships with God and others. One of the reasons that Jesus came into the world is to give us abundant life. We are going to see how we can have that abundant life this morning as we continue our series on Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:17-21

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

In the first few verses, Paul gives us a description of the opposite of the abundant life, of living according to the sinful nature that leads to spiritual death and that we as Christians are to avoid. In verse 17 Paul commands **that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind**. Paul's use of the term "Gentiles" corresponds to unbelievers of our day. Futility is emptiness and purposelessness. The thinking of unbelievers is empty and purposeless as far as eternal things are concerned.

Paul moves on from futility of thinking and living to far more darker and evil things that characterize unbelievers and that we as believers are to avoid. Paul describes unbelievers as **18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart**. Unbelievers have darkened their minds by blocking out God's light. They are ignorant of God's ways, having alienated themselves from the Source of true life. They are excluded from the life of God.

In verse 19 Paul describes the fruit of this ignorance and hardness of heart: **19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness**. An example of sensuality is lust. An example of impurity is gossip. Over the past several decades, much of the secular media in America has given itself over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity and has led much of our nation along with them. Do you adequately guard yourself from the pollution of the secular media?

Verse 19 speaks of unbelievers who practice **every kind of impurity with greediness**. That is, the manner in which sensuality and impurity are practiced is with greediness or with a continual lust for more. Their desire is insatiable, their desire is always to have more.

Despite man's fallen nature that manifests itself in these evil ways, God wants to give all people life. Jesus said, I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly. Paul mentions the life of God in verse 18 when he mentions that unbelievers are **excluded from the life of God**. The Greek word for "life" here is zoe which, in this case, means the supernatural life belonging to God.

The life of God is what we need to live our lives to the full, like love, like relationships, like a sense of purpose. God gives this life to us believers in various ways, such as through his Word, directly through his Spirit, and through other believers.

God wants to give people life, but people exclude themselves from it because of their ignorance that comes because of their hardness of heart. Unbelievers are excluded from the life that God wants to give them. For believers, we are not totally excluded from the life of God, because God has given us new life and lives in us. However, we can exclude ourselves from the life of God in certain areas of our lives when we, either knowingly or unknowingly, don't allow him to have his way in that area. This is why Paul tells us in our text to not to walk like the Gentiles, because it is possible for us to exclude ourselves from the life of God in certain areas of our lives.

We exclude ourselves from the life of God in a certain area of our lives when we separate ourselves from the replenishment God wants to give us through his intended means, such as fellowship with God, love from people, etc. When we exclude ourselves from the life of God in a certain area of our lives, then we can be led into sensuality and impurity in an effort to artificially fill that area. This artificial filling doesn't satisfy, but leads us to a continual lust for more as our Scripture says in verse 19.

For example, a Christian man does not have a close relationship with his wife and is unfulfilled in his marriage. He has excluded himself from the life of God that comes through a close relationship with his wife because he and his wife have not worked through their marital problems. Instead of seeking help from his pastor or a counselor to get connected to the life that God wants to give him through his marriage, he turns to pornography. The pornography gives him a temporary high and an artificial fullness; however, it doesn't satisfy, because as verse 19 says, greediness is a part of sensual sin. So the man's involvement in pornography draws him deeper into more grotesque forms of pornography in order to get the same sensation of fullness.

Here is another example: a Christian woman is lonely because she has excluded herself from the life of God that comes through deeply connecting with other believers. She has patterns of relating to others that keep others at a distance. Instead of getting help to get past these patterns of relating to others, she turns to food to comfort herself. The food doesn't completely satisfy her, but leaves her struggling with weight control.

Can you think of a time when you tried to comfort yourself or get some satisfaction through some activity instead of working on a problem directly?

Sinful habits become compulsive activities because the pleasure they give relieves deep disappointment in our souls better than anything else we can imagine. For example, the good feelings offered by eating delicious food can numb the ache of unmet desires by providing a satisfaction that, for a time, fulfills like nothing else ever has.

People feel alive in the midst of consuming pleasure so that whatever generates pleasure seems right. Pleasures of the body such as eating or of the mind such as fantasy can be marvelous counterfeits of real life, when the life of God has been excluded from those areas. The powerful appeal of these pleasures is due to the quick relief they bring from emptiness, relief that feels more than just good, it feels like the life of God.

One of the root causes of addictions and chronic bad habits is being excluded from the life of God. Many of us struggle with bad habits we can't seem to break, habits of thought as well as habits of deed. For example, some of us may struggle with negativism toward others, uncontrollable temper, or laziness.

When we are excluded from the life of God, then our unmet needs can drive us to fill ourselves up with something. It can be a substance, sex, food, shopping, or gambling, but these never satisfy, because the real need is for connection to God directly and to God through others. When we receive that, the power of a bad habit can be broken.

What bad habits do you struggle with that may be due to being excluded from the life of God?

To recap, we have seen how God wants to give us life, but when we exclude ourselves from the life of God in a certain area, we are led to a quest for pleasure that will not satisfy us in that area, but only draws us into deeper sin.

Our final point is that Jesus wants us to come to him to receive the life of God. We can then break the cycle of getting our needs met in unhealthy ways and get them met God's way. After the miserable spiraling down that comes from following the sinful nature that we have been looking at, verse 20 is the great turning point, and is indicated by the word "but."

Beginning with verse **19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.**

Jesus is the one who can turn the tide. Truth is in Jesus and Jesus is the truth. The truth is always our friend, no matter how much it may hurt sometimes. Jesus will tell us the truth about ourselves, how we are seeking life in unhealthy ways, and how to get connected to the life of God. Jesus may show us the truth through his Word, through the still small voice of his Spirit, through another person, or through some other means.

We all have areas of our lives where we need more of the life of God. The path to life is to understand and get in touch with our deep desires. We do this by allowing God to search our hearts for the desires that he has put there. Then we ask him to show us how we are trying to meet those desires in ways that are not his ways. We turn away from seeking to meet those desires in ways that are not God's ways and seek God for how he wants to meet those desires.

What are the deep desires of your heart? Are you seeking to get them met in God's intended ways?

Sometimes barriers exist between us and the life of God that need to be removed. One of these barriers could be sin. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that breaks a command in the Bible. Sin can get in the way of our fellowship with God and receiving life from him. 1 John 1:9 tells us how to deal with sin in our lives. It says, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Through this process of confession and cleansing, the barrier of sin can be removed and we can get plugged into the life of God. Is there sin in your life that is a barrier to you receiving the life of God that you need to deal with?

Another barrier that can keep us from the life of God is broken parts of our hearts that need to be healed. We learned last week that God binds up the broken hearted; that is, God heals the hurts from our past. Unhealed hurts from our past can interfere with our relationships with God and others and make it difficult for the life of God to flow from them to us. We can ask God to heal our hurts from the past, either directly or through someone else that we can open up to. When this barrier is removed, we are freed to connect with God and others in ways that God's life can flow from them to us. Do you have a broken part of your heart that needs to be healed?

Jesus said, I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly. Lets ask him for that life now.