

EPHESIANS #63 4:18-19 3-24-13

CALLOUSED, CONFUSED AND CARNAL

(Ephesians 4) As a teacher of the word of God I get to handle the greatest subjects in the world for the greatest Boss in the world. For the most part that is good, but it is also demanding. I hate doing poorly for my Savior, and, as a result I put myself under a lot of pressure when I prepare my messages. On Monday as I drove to work I was feeling “under the burden” when the Lord reminded me that He is my Provider. He would give me what I needed and I sensed a confidence in that because I know that many of you pray for me. Thank you. Thank you for making this pulpit ministry a matter of your prayers. And please don’t stop. Pray for me and for us as we open our minds weekly to the lessons of Ephesians. Today we look again at chapter 4: **17-19** *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.* We are going to participate today in what you may call Biblical psychology 101, and our subject is the psychology of unbelief. R.C. Sproul has written a wonderful book called, *If There is a God, Why Are There Atheists?* The book was initially given the title: *The Psychology of Atheism*. Paul Vitz, more recently, has written a book with that sub-title. Both of these books deal with why some people wind up in unbelief. The psalmist says, Psalm 14:**1** *The fool says in his heart, “there is no god.”* That is why some of us refer to April 1 as National Atheist’s day. It is there only annual holiday. Today we are going to look at why the fool may say that God is not, and what that leads him to do. In verses 17-19 the apostle is offering us a negative illustration of what not to be. He says we are not to be like the unconverted Gentiles and then he explains for us what they are like. We saw last time that their lives are marked by a futility of mind, a darkness of understanding and an exclusion from the life of God. Today we are going to get to the very core of the unbeliever’s problems, to the cause behind the cause. If you follow the argument in verse 18 you will see what I mean. It indicates that the reason the Gentiles were futile, darkened and excluded was what? Well, it mentions the problem of ignorance- the ignorance that is in them. But it goes a step further doesn’t it? It offers the explanation behind the explanation, the cause behind the cause - the last phrase in verse 18 says all of the above is due to the hardness of their hearts.

The next phrase refers to the same reality 19a *they having become callous*. You know what a callous is don't you? Maybe some of you kids don't know. Just ask your dad to let you rub his feet and find out. A callous is a patch of thickened and hardened skin that develops wherever the skin is constantly being rubbed or worn. The callous serves to reduce sensitivity in that area so as to limit or eliminate the pain one might otherwise feel. In verse 19 the word translated "callous" could be translated as "beyond feeling." It is the same thing as what verse 18 calls "hardness of heart." Is the development of a callous a good thing? Physically it certainly may be a very helpful thing, if it happens in moderation. I heard a waiter recently tell of taking, with pot-holders, a very hot plate to a customer, telling the man the plate was hot and then watching as the man grabbed the plate bare-handed and smiled at him. The man explained that he had worked for years in a steel factory and his hands were so calloused that the heat didn't bother them? Is that good? How many of you ladies would want to marry that guy? No, that's not good. You may not feel pain where there is a callous, but you won't feel pleasure either. You wouldn't want to hold hands with that man, or let him perform oral surgery on you. And even worse it is when you develop a calloused heart. Life becomes boring at best. Everything comes to feel the same. Do you know what leprosy is? You say, "Sure, it's that ancient disease that rots away your skin and bones." Not exactly. Hansen's disease, as it is also called, does not rot away your flesh. The way leprosy works is to destroy feeling in your extremities. Lepers are not in pain, but what happens is their inability to feel pain can kill them. You put your foot in a fire, but you don't know it. You get an infection and can't feel it. When you lose feeling you are on your way to death. That's true physically, and it's true spiritually.

So, hardness of heart, a callus over the soul, is bad news. Calluses are okay for s-o-l-e-s but not for s-o-u-l-s. And that is the core of the problem for sinful men and women. This is point one - hardness of heart. But what exactly does it mean? As you read the Scriptural descriptions of hard-heartedness you see that it is a synonym for pride. The most famous of the Biblical hard-hearts was Pharaoh. He was hardened of heart and wouldn't give in to Moses, in spite of the enormous costs to his nation. Sounds like pride to me. All of Pharaoh's advisors said to let Moses go, but Pharaoh just couldn't stand it. The facts were clear enough. All the evidence pointed one way but Pharaoh had to go his way. That's a hard heart. In II Chronicles 36 we read of another king, by the name of Zedekiah. He wasn't as powerful as Pharaoh but he apparently had the same heart trouble. **11-13** *Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he*

became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² *He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the Lord.* ¹³ *He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel.* You see these descriptions of the man? He wouldn't humble himself. That is pride; and the more picturesque language of verse 13 says he was stiff-necked and hard of heart.

Now, here is the main point I want you to see today. Please notice from Ephesians 4:18 and 19 that this hardness of heart is the root cause of two other major problems which make up our second and third points. First, it leads to what is described in verse 18. It leads to ignorance. It leads to darkness of understanding. Hard hearts lead to dark minds. ® Now, ignorance, and mental disability, is something that may deserve our pity. We don't feel that we should be blamed for our lack of knowledge or intelligence. But, there are different causes for that condition. Some blamable, some not. Ephesians 4 says that sinners are in the grip of a blamable ignorance that flows out of a corrupt heart. The same type of psychology is offered by Paul in Romans chapter 1. Please look there with me. Romans 1:13-32 is an expanded version of what we find in our text. So, we are going to spend a lot of time here today. Look at 1:**18** *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.* What is the verb that describes what men have done that angers God? *Suppress* is the word. It is a psychological term isn't it? We have a certain capacity to suppress unpleasant memories, so powerful that you can, in a real sense, forget some awful trauma you endured as a child. You forget the truth because you don't like it. Paul says that is what sinners do about God. People become atheists, either professing ones, or practical ones because they don't want to believe in God, at least not a holy one. So you see right there that the origin of one's belief is not found in some objective evaluation of the evidence. It is found in the heart. Jesus said this, Listen, John 7:**17** *If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.* You get that? Jesus says the key to properly evaluating his teaching is not found in any mental prowess but in a simple heart- willingness to accept and to do the truth! The reason people get so many different teachings out of the Bible is that we come to it with so many different desires and our desires influence our thought process. You turn on Christian TV for long and you will run in to a guy named Frederick Price who has a mega-church in California. Price is a prosperity preacher who

wears big diamond rings and drives a Rolls-Royce and you know what? When Price opens the Bible he finds in here a Jesus who was materially wealthy. He says, quote, “the reason I drive a Rolls Royce is because I am following Jesus’ steps.” You ask, “Is he reading the same Bible I am?” Yes, he is but he is reading it with a heart need to justify his lifestyle. We all do this to some degree. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Hard hearts lead to dark minds. Go on in Romans 1:**19** *that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* Paul says that the root problem here is not ignorance. God made his truth evident. Nobody is going to be able to plead ignorance on judgment day. Why not? **20-22** *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.* ²¹ *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* ²² *Professing to be wise, they became fools.* That sounds familiar doesn’t it? Where does this futility and darkness come from? A heart that is too proud to honor God. Do you see that? The root problem is not intellectual but spiritual and moral. The verse in John 7 said the problem was an unwillingness to do the truth which leads to a need to deny the truth. John 3:**19** *This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.* There is in all of us a need for conformity between our beliefs and our behaviors. When those are out of sync we experience some discomfort, some dissonance, that we normally call *guilt*. So, we have to do one of two things. You either have to change your behavior to fit your beliefs, or you change your beliefs to fit your behavior. Which one do sinners do best? We are better at altering our beliefs to fit our behaviors. If we fornicate we argue that it must be okay. If we get drunk we delude ourselves into approving that. If we kill our children we make speeches about a woman’s rights. If we divorce we conclude that divorce is really the best thing for all involved. And, we conclude these things regardless of the obvious facts, and regardless of what our conscience tries to tell us. And we do it because we emotionally need to. You can trace certain trends in cultures. When one generation says a certain behavior is wrong, but does it anyway, the next generation will say there was never anything wrong. It happens in cultures over decades, it happens in individuals, sometimes in a matter of days. We shape our beliefs to fit our behaviors. Again I mention the book called, “Intellectuals” by Paul Johnson that makes this very point. He looks at the philosophies of

Rousseau and Marx and Sartre and Russell among others and shows off the connection between their blatant immorality and their ideals. The father of socialism, Karl Marx, for instance, inherited a great deal of money but blew everything he had with loose living and was constantly in debt. Hounded by his creditors he developed a world-view that made devils of? The wealthy. You look at historical realities like slavery. By the way, I just read that the state of Mississippi has more black elected officials than any other state in the union. Not just per capita. They have more than Texas or California or New York. I bet you would never have guessed that. We look back now with disdain upon the Southerners who tolerated slavery. I mean, our culture specializes in moral indignation against white Southern slave owners. It's amazing to think that 150 years ago they were having serious debates about the full humanity of black Africans. Why would anybody doubt it? What is there to draw that into question? One thing. The economic benefit of slavery. Slavery made men rich, and so they needed a belief system to justify it. We look down our noses at our forefathers while the exact same thing has happened in our generation. 1973 the Supreme Court ruled again that preborn babies aren't really humans, so you can go ahead and kill them. What objective evidence leads to that conclusion? Nothing at all. In part, it is the economic benefit of abortion that has blinded our minds to the reality of what it is and has otherwise sane people arguing that it is the sacred right of a woman to hire a doctor to kill her baby right up to the moment that baby takes its first breath of air. How can people be so irrational? How can they seriously defend these things? How can they really believe them? Ephesians 4 tells us. Romans 1 tells us. Hardness of heart leads to darkness of minds. Look at Romans 1:**28ab** *just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind.* A depraved mind. That explains a lot. But it begins with this refusal to give place to the Lord. Aldous Huxley, the famous atheist, went to the university as a young philosophy student. He wrote: *"when I studied the possibility that there is no God I had just started having sex. I realized, if the Bible was truth, I would have to stop.* There you go. It is a commitment to do your own thing, have your own way. And your polluted heart has clouded your mind. Ephesians 4:22 talks about the lusts of deceit. ® Your lusts, your cravings to get yours lead you into all kinds of deception. Just try reasoning with someone who is having an affair, who is doing cocaine, who is gambling. You know that people running away from God don't want to deal with the truth. They don't want to face reality. They consider ignorance to be bliss. Why doesn't your cousin want to talk about Jesus?

“Blindness please” - that’s the plea. That’s the pursuit. Don Francisco describes them well in one of his songs, he says that Adam’s children are running helter-skelter to destruction with their fingers in their ears. The prophet Zechariah describes the apostate people of Israel this way **7:11,12a** *But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing.* ¹² *They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear.* You know what flint is? It is a super-hard quartz stone. It represents the extra-hard and unbreakable. **12** *They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts.* You see that? They hardened their hearts to the end that they could not hear God’s word. They really couldn’t hear. They really didn’t perceive or understand. But will they be held guilty for their ignorance? Absolutely. It was chosen ignorance. Our text says they are ignorant, but it is a willing ignorance. Dark minds come from hard hearts. You remember that old public service spot about drugs that shows the egg? “Here is your brain.” Then it shows the egg frying. “Here is your brain on drugs.” You can replace drugs with “lusts” or “pride”. Here is your brain. Here is your brain on lust, on pride. We’d say your mind gets fried. Paul says it is darkened, and deluded.

Alright, so where does all this lead? When you harden your heart your mind gets darkened. When you darken your mind what happens? Eventually your body gets debased. I debated what word to use here. *Defiled, corrupted, polluted.* I prefer *debased* or *dishonored*. Check the line of thought in Ephesians 4:19. He says that this hardness leads not only to mental derangement but moral and bodily defilement. Again, this is expanded in Romans 1. Remember in Romans one we study the progress of reprobation. We left sinful man in verse **21-22** *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* ²² *Professing to be wise, they became fools.* Now he goes on to show you the next step in the ugly process **24** *Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.* Interesting, in Ephesians 4 it says the people gave themselves over to sensuality. Here it says God gave them over. Which one is it? Well, it’s both. God gives them over first. He pulls away his gracious restraints and then nature takes over. Romans 1:25 gives us the reason why God removes the restraints **25-26** *For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.* ²⁶ *For this reason*

*God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural. This is going to sound disturbingly contemporary. We live in a society that perfectly illustrates this chapter. **27** in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

A society that has rejected God is headed toward these very things: the debasement, and degrading of the body. Karl Barth comments this way: “When God has been deprived of His glory, men are also deprived of theirs. Desecrated within, in their souls, they are also desecrated without, in their bodies.” I think the psychology of it runs this way. Augustine’s famous prayer says, “O Lord, thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are ever restless until they find their rest in thee.” But when the heart know no rest or joy or satisfaction in God, the only kind left to you is sensual. That is why rejection of God is step one down a path toward sensuality. The sensuality can be spectacular and draw our attention and draw our fire, but we need to remember where it comes from. Norman Vincent Peale tells of walking down a street in Hong Kong when he saw a tattoo shop that had samples in its window of the various tattoos you could get there. One caught his attention. It was a three-word tattoo that said, “Born to lose.” Peale says, “I entered the shop in astonishment, and pointing to those words I asked the tattoo artist, “Does anyone really have that terrible phrase, “born to lose” tattooed on his body?” He replied, “Yes, sometimes.” Peale expressed his amazement at that, after which the Chinese man simply tapped his forehead and said, “Before tattoo on body, tattoo on mind.” That’s right. Before tattoo on body, tattoo on mind. What our body does expresses our thinking. And you know what else? Our thinking expresses our hearts. The physical expresses the mental. The mental expresses the spiritual. It all starts right here, right here. Well, there you have the process of reprobation. Hard hearts to dark minds to debased bodies. This is the sad progression of sin in the soul.

Our final point is this: Is there any hope? Is this condition of lost humanity: hard hearts, dark minds, debased bodies, is this a terminal condition? Well, humanly speaking, yes it is. No miracle drug can reverse the effects of sin. No argument can penetrate the fog of fallen thought. There is only one way out of this and it requires an act of God. Praise God He is active! Praise God He loves sinners! Apparently those Corinthians were pretty well down the road of reprobation. I Corinthians 6:**9b-11** *Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor*

adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ *nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.* ¹¹ *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.* The old song says there is power, power, wonder working power in the precious blood of the Lamb! There is not a force in this universe stronger than the Spirit of God, and He, and He alone can overcome the power of darkness in a lost soul. And He does so by getting right to the root of the problem. What is the root? It is a hardened, proud heart. Ezekiel 36 God says **26** *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* Nebuchadnezzar, the proud ruler of Babylon was touched by the Spirit of God in this way. He came to say, Daniel 4:**37** *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.* Don't you try this at home. Most of us, in some relationship, have attempted to humble someone, as parents, spouses, co-workers. God can use us in this, but He has to do the humbling, the softening. With Nebuchadnezzar he used trials. With Saul of Tarsus he used a vision, but His most common way is by the Spirit with the word. The Spirit with the word. Jeremiah 23:**29** *Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"* That is what our hearts are, my friend. But the word of God in the hands of God's Spirit can shatter the hardness. That's why we sing, "Spirit of the Living God, break me, melt me, mold me, fill me." Once He does, the challenge is to keep the hardening influences of the world from getting to you, ever again. From today's study we learn the key to doing that. It has everything to do with humility, with a heart that is soft, and sensitive and responsive to the Lord. Proverbs 4:**23** *Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.* © Your mental purity, your bodily purity flow from this one spring. So once again we see that the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. May God give us understanding and wisdom from His word. Let's pray