

# The Futility of the Mind

Tim Conway | *illbehonest.com*

Ephesians 4:17, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you, Christians, must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus," and what is that truth as it is in Jesus? "to put off your old man (ESV wrongly puts self there but it's the old man) which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self (or the new man), created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Let's pray once again. Father, it's with faith that You fill this place and dwell here, hear our prayers, and are a God who answers prayer. Lord, we will ask that these verses would not be just merely ink, print, a dead letter; but I pray that Your Spirit would take these spiritual things and teach them to those here who are spiritual. May they resonate with us. May they help us. May Your Word be a lamp unto our feet. I pray that these people would be able to promise that they would keep what's found here. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Now what Paul does here, in verses 17 through 19, and you'll notice in verse 21 there's a transition. But in verses 17 through 19, Paul gives us a description of the unregenerate. Probably one of the most complete definitions or descriptions of the unregenerate man that we have in our Bibles. Now I know there are other ones. In Romans 1 verses 18 and following, you have, through the end of the chapter there, a massive description of lost man. Again, we could go over to Romans chapter 3, again we have a very detailed description of the depravity of unregenerate man. You think of those first verses in Ephesians chapter 2, which was prior to the portion of Scripture we are reading by a couple of chapters, they have descriptions of the lost man as well.

Look, these three verses, this is man who is going to hell. This is hellbound man without the Spirit. This is man without salvation. This is man who is lost. And this is the shape of man by nature as he comes into this world. That's how we were. We were this way. If we are not this way, we are no longer that way but we were that way. That's where the 'no longer' comes in. This is how we were. By nature, this is how man is. We all were children of wrath. We all were these unregenerate, without the Spirit, hellbound, without God, without hope kind of people. But notice, Paul's main purpose here is not so much to tell us what the unregenerate man is like, as much as it is to tell us what we no longer are. You see that there. If you've learned Christ, this is what you are not any longer.

Now notice verse 17, because I want to focus on something this morning: "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer" - you **MUST** no longer be like this; you must! "You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do," and how do they walk? "in the futility of their minds." And that's our subject matter this morning: The Futility of the Mind.

You know in Peter's first epistle, he has something to say about futility. Don't turn there but listen to this: In 1 Peter 1:18, "Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers." Now I just want you to think for a second. "Your forefathers" - you know what Peter is saying? You have an inheritance, and he's not talking money, lands, houses. You inherited something. Do you ever think about your forefathers? Some people love family trees. You know what Peter is telling us? Take a look at your family tree and you know what you're going to find? You're going to find a bunch of people - and this is typical; you can be certain that Peter, by and large, is writing to first generation Christians, as Paul was, and as many in this room are. You see, the people that have a lineage of Christianity are very rare in this world. They are the exception.

By and large, you know what you find when you look at your family tree? Do you ever think like this? Great-grandfather, you know, we start losing the names of even who our relatives are right about at that level. Can anybody name all - how many great-grandfathers do we have? Well if you have two grandfathers, how many great-grandfathers would you have? Common, do your family tree. Four, right? Is that how it works? Or do you have eight? Common, do your family tree in your mind. Every one of your grandfathers would have had how many? You have grandfathers, grandmothers. Anyway, do you know their names? Can you say all the names of your great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers? Anybody can do that? Is there anybody that knows their family tree well enough? Nobody does. Isn't that amazing how fast you get forgot? You're gone. I mean, in a couple of generations, unless you wrote a book or you discovered something (your name got put on a star or something,) brethren, you're gone. You're just forgotten. We pass away. We are like the grass.

But think about your forefathers. You know what Peter sees in your forefathers? We like to find out about, "What did our grandfather do? What notable thing did he do?" Peter looks at your grandparents and he says, "I'll tell you what notable thing they did. They passed on to you futility." You know what he is saying? He is saying that by and large, not a nice thought, but by and large, most of our grandparents and great-grandparents went to hell. And they went there in all their futile ways. That's what he is saying. And he is saying they just passed them on to you.

My family, by and large, catholic, passed on to me those futile ways that were landing them generation after generation of Irish catholics went to hell; trusting their works and not trusting Jesus Christ. And those things were passed to us. Just like it was passed to me by family, so your forefathers passed on to you futility. And Jesus Christ has ransomed us from that futility. That's what Peter is preaching. Futility, this is the way of the Gentiles. They have minds that are filled with futility. That means their thoughts; the thoughts of your grandparents were full of futility. And what is futility? Emptiness. Vanity. Uselessness. It means that their thoughts came to nothing. The things that they thought about, that they were striving after, they never got. The things that they hoped for in their minds never came to pass. The thing that they were trying to avoid, they got. Futility. Their efforts came to nothing, they were worthless. That's what was passed on to us. Look at your family tree, that's what Peter is saying. That's what God is saying. We basically come from family trees of futility. That's our heritage.

Futile, vain, empty, pointless, to no avail. And right here in Ephesians chapter 4, futility of mind is the characterization of the Gentiles. That's how you are no longer to be. Christian, we are to put away futility. No longer. You must no longer. Futility of mind is a picture of people

using their mind in ways that are just a waste of time. They are a waste of effort. You want some examples? Brethren, I know this about all of us. We all want to be happy. That is what mankind is striving after. Mankind wants to feel good, and mankind strives after that. You want an example of futility of mind? Futility of mind is man who is forever and always trying to figure out how to be happy while he is an enemy of God. That, folks, is futility. That is vain. That is worthless.

Brethren, we don't have to think real hard about figuring out from somebody else's life, or somebody else's thoughts, or somebody else's futility about these things because this is where we were. We no longer walk this way because we did walk this way. That's what 'no longer' means. It means you used to, you don't now. And brethren, when we were there, how did we think? Here's a Sunday, how did you think? Take yourself back. I would go back thirty years. I was 20 years old, still 5 years off from being saved. How would I have thought on a Sunday morning? What would have been the futility in my mind? You know what we are thinking about? We are thinking about all the things that we think are going to make us happy. We are thinking about the things that, "Oh, if I could just get that." "You know what, if the Lions win today, then I'd be happy." I mean, that's how I thought. "If I could win the lotto, then I'd be happy."

Think about the things that you thought. "If I could just get this, if I could just get over there, then I'd be happy." But you know what? No matter what you ever got, you weren't happy. No matter what you ever got, you were not fulfilled. No matter what you got, there was still a sense of that hollowness within. You thought, "If I had that money, If I just had that girl around my arm, or that guy come and show interest in me, then I'd be happy." And you know what? Even when the things that we wanted came to pass, isn't it amazing we never found the paradise that we thought we were going to find. Because we always wanted something else. Why? I'll tell you why, brethren, I'll tell you why this is such futility. Because the Bible says, "'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'" Or, God says this in Isaiah 3:11, "Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him." Or, you might think of Romans 3:16, "In their paths are ruin and misery."

You know what? You can have a pocket full of money, you can have the person hanging off your arm that you want to be with, you can have all the stuff that you might imagine, you can have the president get elected who you think is going to change the world; and then what happens? You wake up Sunday morning and your heart is hollow and empty. You know why? Because God is not going to let you be happy. You got to get in those verses. God is saying, "You know what? If you're wicked, you will not have peace. If you're wicked, it will go ill with you. If you're wicked, you will experience misery." You know why it is so futile? Because God will not let you be happy as long as you're at odds with Him. It's futile, and that's how this world is. That's how San Antonio is today.

Brethren, every single person that has a rational mind in San Antonio, you may say it's insanity, but I am talking about every lost person who can think, their mind isn't all messed up and broken, they can actually put thoughts together and they have some cognitive function, they are thinking today about what to do, how to do it, so that they can be happy. And most of them are thinking about how to do that while they are at odds with God, while they are in rebellion to God, and while they are bowing down before whatever idol it is in their life. And it's not going to happen. It's futile. And you know what? That's what your forefathers did.

Isn't it amazing? It's not like we can even find one example of one person who has ever been successful. It's not like we can find one day in our lives; yes I know there are some things that we can find and it may give us happiness for a season, but it always runs out. There is pleasure in it for a season but then it's gone. And you know what? Our own experience tells us it's true, and it told us it was true while we were lost. And yet, isn't it amazing, the very fact that there is not any exceptions to this, we still pursue it. We'll get to more of that.

Something else, another example of futility: Trying to fix the world's problems any other way than by Christ and Him crucified, and Him resurrected. Brethren, any of you that are buying into "the next president got to be this guy, and that's going to set everything right," you are buying into the futility of this world's thinking. If you think that getting rid of wheat out of your diet is going to make everything right, immunize your children or don't immunize your children is going to make everything right, brethren, it's not. We've got all these solutions. You know, if we could just get all the nations together. If we could just have a peace accord over in the Middle East. Brethren, how many peace accords have we had in the Middle East and there has been no peace ever? Why? Because there is only one thing that changes the hearts of men. It's the power of the cross.

It is absolute futility to think that you are going to solve abortion, transgenderism - if that's even a word, I made it up and had to add it to my dictionary in my computer. But brethren, all these things that we think have to be fixed, have to be set right - all the shootings in the schools, the politicians who are chronic liars, supreme courts going liberal on us, all the divorce, the terrorism, ISIS, all these things, brethren, there's only one thing that's going to fix this. Yes, you can go in and you can drop your bombs and blow everybody up. But does that fix any problem? No, because the next generation just comes forth and they are just as evil. And they do all the same things over. Brethren, nothing ever fixes it. Man is full of all their ideas, but nothing. And brethren, we are the miracle right in this room. I mean, we've discovered something that does change the world. But it's the only thing that does.

How about futility. Brothers and sisters, can you imagine the amount of time that men's minds have been given to trying to figure out how the universe started without God in the equation, and how life started without God in the equation. The books, the whole educational system out there, all the time. The futility that men pour their whole lives into trying to figure out how man came forth from apes. Futility! Why? Because we didn't come forth from apes, and God made life, and God made the universe. It's just futility to try to figure out how something came into being when it's not true. That's just futility. People spend their whole lives.

Brethren, how about this? Man trying to figure out how to be good without the Holy Spirit. And men try to do that. Every Christmas, don't you notice this? Every Christmas, men are infected by this spirit of "peace on earth and goodwill towards men." But what happens? Christmas gets over, and what we've been talking about all along, the hollowness comes, the emptiness comes, people go back to being just as mean. Sometime ago, I read a story about Christmas eve. It was one of the World Wars, I believe, because I remember it being Americans and perhaps British as well, and then the Germans over on the other side. It was Christmas eve, and one side started singing Silent Night." They sing Silent Night in German as well. And the song wafted over the front lines to the other side. And the other side started singing. So, both sides are singing Silent Night. And of course, the story is written to show, "Look, even at the

hardest times, man is basically good, and there's love, and there's goodwill." Man is sentimental, I'll grant that. But what the story fails to say is the guys woke up the next morning and went to putting bullets in each others' heads again.

Brethren, trying to be good without the Holy Spirit is total failure. Total failure. Total futility. Somebody wants to say, "Hey look, see, man has good in his heart," but it's not that. Or how about this: We have this futility of just trying to be good enough to be accepted by God. Just this mindset that man imagining he can be good enough on his own to receive God's approval on judgment day. This is man like Cain. What did Cain do? He brought his own kind of sacrifice. You remember when you were lost? You did not think you were going to go to hell. Probably. I never thought that until the Spirit convicted me of sin and righteousness and judgment. Then I knew, I knew God had to send me there. But I'll tell you this. Before that ever happened, I didn't believe I was going to hell. I believed I was going to heaven. Why? Futility. Why? Because I had it in my mind, and you did too. You know this is true. You had it in your mind that somehow, you weren't going to go to hell. Why? Because you had it figured out. And it's just total futility.

When God's Word just screams, "Man is wicked. God hates evil doers. God is going to send them to hell for their sins. There is eternal punishment. There is a price to pay. God does deal with wickedness and He does not sweep it under the rug. There is justice with God and He never bends the rigidity of that justice." And we just have it in our mind, all futility. "Yeah, whatever. I mean, whatever." Isn't that what happens? You take the Gospel out to people, you try to tell them about this, and they still walk away after what you've just told them. And they've devised in their own minds, "I've got a way. You just keep that. You share that with somebody that needs it." You ever had that happen? "I got that taken care of. You take it to the guy next door, he needs that." Just futility.

Or how about this: The futility that people walking around just spending their time; I was thinking about, some of you know about Bruce Gerencser, who was one of the co-elders down at Community Baptist Church when Ruby and I were down there, who apostatized and basically became an Atheist. What futility to spend your life trying to convince yourself there is no God. You see, these are the futile ways or futility that comes to nothing. Nothing at all.

Or how about this: How about those that try to convince themselves there's no hell? We were watching the Noah deal that Ray Comfort did the other day, and he's talking to people and they are like, "No, I don't believe there's any hell." What a waste of breath for somebody to say that. It's like you're on an Amtrak [train] going down the tracks towards a great big chasm and the bridge is out, "Well, I don't believe that chasm is there." What foolishness! What a waste!

And you know, one of the futilities that really permeates the Church is people thinking they can have God's salvation without holiness. What futility. They live their lives saying, "Lord, Lord, we came to church, we were there with the Grace brethren, we came to the prayer meetings even." But you know you are a slave to unrighteousness, and you're trying to convince yourself despite all the sin in your life, "It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay." That is futility. Absolute futility.

Those are some examples of the futility. Just the worthless efforts that people make and spend their time on. Now, here's what I want you to see. We might ask the question, "What fuels all this futility?" I believe that verse 22 has something to say about this. It captures a reality.

Notice Ephesians 4:22, If you've learnt the truth in Christ, it teaches you this, "To put off your old man," - who is the old man? Well, remember the context, he is the Gentile. You're no longer to walk like the Gentiles. You are to put off the old Gentile, the old man - "which belongs to your former manner of life," Right? You're no longer to walk that way because that's your former manner of life, not your present manner. Not if you learn Christ. You are to put off that old Gentile which belongs to your former manner of life. But notice this. Notice what characterizes that: "And is corrupt through deceitful desires." Now, here's what I want you to see. Futility of mind and deceitful desires go hand in hand. They are brothers.

And the question might be, "Why? I mean, why are they brothers? How does that work?" Well, think about it. What are deceitful desires? Your Bible might say lusts; deceitful lusts. It's deceitful passions, desire, lust, I'm drawn to something. What is that? It's clearly a desire that is sinful. There are desires that are not sinful unless they carry you to do what is forbidden. A man desires his wife - that's good. 1 Corinthians 7 says he should. A man desires another man's wife - that's bad. You see, deceitful desires are forbidden desires. Like Eve in the garden desiring a fruit. There were lots of trees in the garden, and there were lots of fruits in the garden, and desiring to eat fruit is a good thing. But desiring that fruit; the fruit that was forbidden, suddenly, it becomes not only a forbidden desire, it's a deceitful desire. Why? Because it says, "Eat of me, and you will not surely die. In fact, your eyes would be opened and you will become like God." You see, that's why they are deceitful, because they make a promise that they can never deliver on.

"Oh! Take that man's wife, and then you'll be happy." And then you wake up in hell, and you say, "Wait, that didn't work quite the way I thought it was going to work." You see, it's deceitful. It was forbidden. You chased it. It was a lie. It's a deception. Eve, it's a deception. If you eat of that fruit, you will die. It may say you won't die, but you will. It's right here that the futile mind holds hands with deceitful lusts. You see, brethren, it's in the mind that you get deceived, right? Your body desires, it's pulling, it's pulling, "That looks good; that's desirable." There is a pull, a pull, a pull, and it's in your mind where you get deceived. It's in your mind where you buy into the lie of that desire. You say, "Hey! I can do that and it's going to feel good. And there's not going to be any consequences." It's in the mind where I reason that way; it's in the mind where I reason that I can eat the forbidden fruit and I will not surely die. And it's total futility. It's total futile use of the mind. Why? Because you will die. The soul that sins shall die.

Brethren, it's the very height of futility for people to use their minds to try to achieve goals, that try as they might, they can never attain. Isn't that futility? Christian, no longer. Think about the things you think about. Think about the things you desire. Brethren, we need to be honest with ourselves. We need to ask, "Are the things that I desire futile? Where are they taking me to?" No longer, brethren, no longer. That is not the way you've learned Christ. What are we doing with our brains, what are we doing with our minds, where are our thoughts? You see what I am saying? Man desperately uses his mind to seek what? Brethren, you think with me cos you can think about this cos you can go back to when you were lost. But you think about this. All, say 2 to 2.5 million people in the greater San Antonio area, how many of them do you think today are going to set their minds on money, sex, sports, physical fitness, things that they think that, "If I get those things, they are going to make me happy."

What do men set their minds on? Oh brethren, what do men want? And I'll tell you, there is a forbidden path here and there's a non-forbidden path here. Hear what I am saying. What is it that men desire? Men desire riches. Well you know what? There are riches that are not forbidden, and there are riches that will never bring true riches. Men want riches. Men want beauty, and I'll tell you, there is a beauty to be had. But there is a beauty that people chase that will never bring them what they want. Intimacy; oh brethren, there is an intimacy to be had, and there is an intimacy to be chased that will lead you to emptiness and to the pit. What do men pursue? They pursue happiness. Pursuing happiness, pursuing joy, pursuing fulfillment, pursuing pleasure, those are things that men pursue. And brethren, that can be good. Men pursue peace; men pursue a quiet conscience. But, the people of this world are seeking all those things in the wrong places, and they are chasing, there's futility. And I'll tell you what, death and hell strip it all away.

Brethren, here's the problem: The mind of lost men and the way they think, is taking them down a road that is 180 degrees opposite of achieving the very things that they want to achieve. Because men want riches, men want beauty, men want health, men want pleasure, men want intimacy, men want happiness, men want a clear conscience, men want peace; and you can have all those things if you have Christ. And they are pursuing them in new cell phones, watching the Cowboys, getting the right woman, having money, shining their cars, jogging the trails. Death and hell strip it all away. They expose all of it as futility. They are going in absolutely the opposite direction of getting the very things that they want. It's folly. It's vanity. The vast majority of mankind has this kind of mind that thinks thoughts that are leading to the absolute failure of obtaining the very things that they want.

Brethren, have you ever thought about the text that says, "There is a way that seems right to a man." Have you ever thought about, 'Seems right to him about what?' Well, seems like it would be good for me to go down this path. But what's down that path? You see the futility? Brethren, that's how we were. That is how Gentiles are. That is how the old man is. No longer. We are to put all that aside. Be done with it.

Brethren, just look at the advertising of this world. What does it promise? What does the advertising in this world promise? It promises everything. What do the politicians promise? I think I've said this before, but I heard Donald Trump say, "Hilary Clinton is not going to take us to the promised land." What is he implying by that? He will. This world promises us everything. Does it deliver? Last election or two ago that I remember, Obama was the messiah. Has he delivered? It's all futility. It's all emptiness. The world doesn't have answers. And brethren, why? I mean, what is there in all of this for your soul? You have souls. God created us in His image. We are spiritual, and we are trying to feed on food that is not made for us. It doesn't work. That's how we were as Gentiles. Man is scheming, he is planning all the time how to get what he thinks he needs to really make him happy.

As I was thinking about all this futility, I was thinking about what hell must really be like. Hell is the great revealer of futility. Do you think about people who get exposed to the Gospel? People who might visit here and hear the Gospel and then they just go away. What futility. They came face to face with the one thing that is not futile, but rather would lead them to have their hearts desire, and they go. They go back to their TV sets and their computer screens and their cellphones and their sport teams and their health craze and their diets and just all the stuff. Hell

strips it all away, because you know what would happen when somebody dies? Every hope they had; every vain hope they had is dashed. All their plans to not go to hell are wrecked, because that's one of the follies, that's one of the futilities that is filling men's minds. They do not plan to go to hell. They are going to miss it. They are going to live their lives the way they want to live their lives, enjoying life the way they want to enjoy it, following the idols they want to follow, having the sin in their life that they want to have; divorcing, remarrying, aborting their kids, living the way they want to live, drinking, soothing their consciences with drugs and with pleasures of this world, and all the time thinking, "But I'm not going to go to hell in the end. Look how hell just rips and wrecks. What a wake up call to the futility. But then it's too late. It's too late.

And then what do men use their minds for after that for all eternity? There's no more vain hopes. They are not having hopes that, "Well, this isn't real. God isn't real. The fires of hell will burn out one day." It's just torment. Notice what's said in verse 20, "But that is not the way you learned Christ - assuming that you have heard about Him." I mean, if you've heard about Him, then you didn't learn to be futile. "That's not the way you learned Christ - assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old man, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds." That futile mind, it's new. You learn of Christ. It transforms the mind. That knowledge of Christ comes in, you see Christ, you behold Him, you learn Him and the mind is renewed.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. As you study Christ (and we as Christians are told, Christ says this, "Learn of Me") and as we make it our life's study to learn of Him, I'll tell you, what you learn as you study Christ, you learn the opposite of futility. You learn the exact opposite. Brethren, as I was looking at 'futility', I looked at 'futile' and 'futility' on my thesaurus, and I was looking for antonyms - antonyms are the opposite. What's the opposite of futility? Brethren, whatever words they might have there, I thought, "Christ is the opposite of futility!" Christ and Christ alone, because I'll tell you this: Every path in life is futile except the path that leads to Christ. Every other one! Every path! Every hope of every person in this entire world that has a hope that is outside of Christ, not resting on Him, it is futile. All of it. If you learn Christ, you learn that which is the opposite of futility. He is the summation of all that is opposite and contrary to that which is futile. What we learn from Him is that He is the great futility remover. He removes futility from what He touches. Where He goes, you will not find futility. Where He goes, you find just the opposite.

What we learn of Christ is that if we can only get to Him, if we can only touch the hem of His garment, if we can only get His attention, He will save us from futility. Brethren, Jesus touches things and they are just big differences. I mean, think about where He walked. It's like an aroma of total futility killer, eradication. It's like everything where He walks becomes changed, becomes transformed. It's moved away from futility to that which is fruitful and useful and valuable. Watch Him in Scripture. There are fishers of fish; Christ shows up on the shore, and now they are fishers of men. You take another scene: look at this guy, as Paul Washer said, lepers - you can smell them before you see them. This guy is unclean. Jesus touches him, and he's not a leper anymore. Look at Him: Five thousand hungry people, but wait, Jesus shows up; all these people are satisfied, and they've got twelve baskets to spare.



I mean, watch how Jesus transforms the futility of this world. You get all these brave soldiers, they come in there to the garden, "We're looking for this Jesus." Next thing you know, there's a pile of bodies there. They weren't so bold anymore. Paul, the Christian persecutor; Christ meets him on the road to Damascus. Now he's the persecuted Christian. He just turns everything on its head. He is the deliverer from futility. There is no futility in that. Stormy sea, Jesus wakes up, calm sea. Naked demoniac, chains can't hold him, full of a legion of demons; Jesus shows up, clothed in his right mind and headed back to his hometown to speak of what Christ did for him. Brethren, running around among tombs cutting yourself is futile. Clothed in your right mind headed back to your hometown to preach Christ is not.

Do you recognize what we learn of Christ? Every page of those Gospels, you are confronted by [this]. Here's a guy living his life as a tax collector, you think that's futile? In his day it probably seemed good - buy the tax franchise, get rich. Christ comes, he's not a tax collector anymore. He's headed to heaven as one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. See blind Bartimaeus over here? Here comes Jesus down the road; they didn't call him blind Bartimaeus after that. Just Bartimaeus. You want to put an adjective on it? He's seeing Bartimaeus. His eyes were futile; they were stuck in his head and they couldn't see. And Jesus comes and sets it all right.

How do we learn Him? Brethren, I'm talking about your life. That's what we are talking about here. That's what Paul is talking about. You must no longer walk in the futility of your minds like the Gentiles do, because that's not the way you learned Christ. What we learn about Christ is we are to put off the old man with all his futility of mind.

Brethren, If you have ever read Pilgrim's Progress part two (I know some of you haven't even read part one,) the part two is the story of Christian's wife, Christiana, and her venture to the Celestial City. You know, Christian went into the Interpreter's house, and Bunyan magnificently portrayed all manner of spiritual truths. In the second part, Christiana visits the Interpreter's house as well. Can I tell you about something she sees? She is taken into a room where she sees the man with the muckrake. You get the picture. Imagine a man standing, he's raking the muck, he's kind of pulling straws and sticks with the edge of that rake. And the picture is: there's one who is above him, offering him a celestial crown. But he never looks up. His eyes are locked down. This crown offered, and he just rakes the muck, rakes the muck.

Christiana says, "I am persuaded that I know the meaning of this; for this is a figure of a man of this world. Is it not, good Sir?" Brethren, you know what we have a picture of here? The Gentile. The old man. Interpreter says, "You have said right, and his muckrake does show his carnal mind. And as you see him give attention to raking up straws and sticks, and dust of the floor, rather than to look to the one above him with the celestial crown; this is to show that heaven is but a fable to some men. And to such men, the things here in this world are counted as the only things that are substantial. Now, since it was shown to you that the man could look in no direction except down, it's to let you know that earthly things when they come with power upon men's minds, they carry their hearts away from God."

Christiana cries out, "Oh, deliver me from this muckrake!" And Interpreter says this, "That prayer is scarce, the prayer of one of ten thousand."

You see what he is saying? Almost nobody in this world is asking to be delivered from futility; from the muckrake. Just raking the muck, raking the muck, when there is a crown;

celestial crown. You know what Paul is saying? Christian, look up. Be done with the futility of mind; minds focused on the muck. Get your eyes off the computer. Get your eyes off the TV set. Get your eyes off the stuff of this world, and look to Christ. Learn Christ. Study Christ. Imitate Christ. Walk like He walked. Be done with the Gentile ways of people in this world who just obsess themselves with muckrakers. Be done with it. That is what we're being called to. No longer, brethren. That is how you used to walk. No longer. The absolute foolishness of raking the muck in our lives.

Brethren, you have one life to live, that's all. You weren't made to muckrakers. God made man in His image, and God made man to be the bride of His Son, and God made man to worship Him in spirit and in truth. What a waste of time to spend your life with the muckrake. Have you ever seen this car - we don't get snow down here, but I grew up first 25 years of my life I saw many snow storms - it's like, you see a car, you can maybe imagine it in the mud down here, a car stuck in the snow, a car stuck in the muck. And what happens? The tires spin and they don't go anywhere. That's futility! You spin your wheels, you spin your wheels, you spin your wheels, you're going through life but it's not taking you anywhere.

Brethren, let's be honest. The author of Hebrews could look at the people in his day and say, "There are some of you, and at such a time as you ought to be at a certain place, you haven't got there. You haven't moved! You need the initial principles. At such a time as you ought to be a teacher, you need somebody to come and teach you the most basic principles of the Christian life." Brethren, honestly, some of you haven't yet figured out how to get up on time on a Sunday morning in order to be prepared for the worship of God among the gathered saints. To even show up without having to walk through that door in the middle of what we are doing already as a congregation. You walk in and interrupt, many of you, interrupt Sunday School. Brethren, there is a time to mature. There is a time to learn of Christ. You get one life to live. I am talking about the basic things.

Brethren, we got to be done with the futility and the things of this world. True Christianity is not to be any mere exercise of futility. Brethren, we are to be advancing; we are to be running towards heaven, making strides in holiness, in maturity; onward, advancing beyond the elementary things. We are to be running. We are to be people that turn the world upside down. You don't turn the world upside down if you can't get out of bed. Brethren, futility! It's the world out there that sleeps in until 11 o'clock on Sunday mornings. And I'm talking about one thing. Brethren, futility. May the prayer of Christiana be our prayer, "God, deliver us from it."

Escaping the futility of mind of the Gentiles means living a life where you're using your minds to do what? To live for God. To think with your mind. To pray. To strategize. Brethren, in ways to magnify our God. To live for our God; to extend His kingdom. To help people that are in darkness be brought to the light. To live, to grow, so that we might have the greatest influence, so that we might be like those men in the book of Acts who turned the world upside down. Brethren, you have one life. We need to escape the futility of this world. Escaping futility is not just simply, "Now, we watch Little House On The Prairie, we don't watch the Zombie movies anymore." Don't watch the Zombie movies. It might be okay to look at that, but brethren, you got to hear what I'm talking about. I'm talking about we have to fill our minds with the things that matter. We have to think and use our minds in ways that matter.

You know what I know about somebody's mind who walks through that door mindlessly, halfway through Sunday School? They don't care if they are interrupting. They don't care that brother studied the first 30 minutes of that message, that he prepared to teach them something. You see, that mind is very likely on the muckraker stuff. Because if life was centered around, "I'm living for the glory of God, and my whole life is devoted to that, and I'm going to structure my life and give my life," And I hear the kind of person that says, "Lord, I promise, I am going to keep your Word, and I am going to live for your glory." Brethren, that's how you escape futility.

How do you escape futility? You escape futility when you get to the place like the apostle Paul, where he says, "For me, to live is Christ. And I'm going to live for Him, and what I do, I am going to do for the sake of His people - for the elect's sake. And if I know that walking through that door is likely going to distract some of God's people, I am going to live my life so as not to do it." But you see, that's not what's being thought of. What's being thought of? "Well, I stayed up late last night." Why? "I was out with the guys, we went to the movie, we did this." And so you come in here, you come in late, you distract, your mind is on the things you did last night because you didn't prepare. Brethren! There's a bigger picture here.

How do you escape futility? "For me, to live is Christ! And I'm going to live my life for Him on Saturday night and on Sunday morning, and all through the week. I am going to focus my life on living for Him." Brethren, Jesus Christ went to the cross to unleash power to deliver us from futility. He died on that cross to deliver you from a life in front of the TV set, and from a life at the movie theaters, and from a life of Saturday nights ill-spent. He died to deliver us from that. And I'm just making one little thing here into a big thing because, brethren, it's so representative of the kinds of things that just turn into muckraking. We just continue, week after week, we rake the same muck, rather than looking up and saying, "Wow, the power of the cross! The power of resurrection! I am no longer to walk like that. I learn in Christ of a Man who spent His time well; lived His life for others." We heard about, in the first hour, what He did with His life.

Brethren, man was made for bigger things and greater things than to constantly be moving the sticks and the dust and the stuff and the straw in the muck. Look up, brethren. Look up! See where you are. See what's happening.

"For me, to live is Christ." I'll tell you what, when that grabs hold of a man or a woman; when that's the passion that drives somebody, that's when futility gets thrown out the window. When I'm living my life that, "I want to run as well as I can," brethren, there is a way people walk who put off futility. Watch their lives. You watch their lives. There is a way people live. There's a way people who have escaped futility walk. And that's exactly what Paul is dealing with. No longer, brethren, are you to walk like the Gentiles in the futility of their mind. And there is a way that you walk when you no longer walk like the Gentiles do in the futility of their mind. There is a way a person walks when he sees, "You know what? By and large, cell phones may be useful for something, but if I make that thing beyond what it ought to be in the ways that it can help me expand the kingdom of Christ, it's a mirage."

Brethren, have you figured out yet? This world, all the advertising out there, all the politics out there, and all the things that they promise, it's a mirage. It doesn't come to pass. They don't satisfy. Brethren, we are told in Scripture all this is going to burn up. We are told in Scripture about the futility of all of it. We are told in Scripture, brethren, about what really matters. And we are told that we only have one life, and that life is like a vapour. We are told in

Revelation chapter 14 that the things that we do in this world follow us into the next. And how ought we to live as people who recognize the things that really matter and the way things really are.

Brethren, I am not wanting to be legalistic in what I'm saying here; but I'll tell you this, people who cast off futility live disciplined lives, they put things off, they are calculated. They use their mind, not to think about futile things and things that are going to come to nothing and waste their time and only make them colder towards God and grieve the Spirit, but they are calculated. They are using their minds, "I want to live in a way that doesn't grieve the Spirit. I want to live in a way that is pleasing to God. I want to live in a way that is going to unleash the maximum amount of power in my life so that I might be as fruitful as I can be, and my witness might be as powerful as it can be. I don't want to live a life so that when I go to try to share the Gospel, there's no power there."

Brethren, some of you have to be taught the basics that sexual sin in your life is bad. And you know what? You go and do that, and you fall into that, and then you come into the church and sit in the prayer meeting, and your prayer is dead, because it is not owned by God, and it affects the whole church. And when we get people in the church who immerse their lives in that, brother Mike said it last week, God works through holiness. And you get unholiness, and what happens? Brethren, it's futile trying to live the Christian life as close to unholiness as you can. What waste! Why would you do that? People ask, "Well, what's wrong with that?" What's right with that? Brethren, live your life to excel.

I'll tell you this, you want to know what the absolute futility-killer is? Escaping futility is this: If there's anything that matters, if there's anything that's good, if there's anything that's the opposite end of futility, brethren, it is living your life so that you come that day - like we talked about in the Eschatology series - and you stand before Jesus Christ, and He looks at you, and your life is put in the scales and in the balances, and He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I'll tell you, that's escaping the futile mind.

Are we ready? You only get one shot at this. You say, "Why do we have to take it so importantly?" Brethren, because this is what God is calling us to. This is how God wants us to live. He wants us to live this way. He wants us to pour out our lives this way. Brethren, futility is all around us. There's a million futile ways to use your time. Think about all the futile temptations to use your money in ways that don't amount to anything eternal. And Jesus Christ comes along; how do we learn Him? "Redeem the time," through the apostle Paul. How do we learn Him? "Store up treasure in heaven. Be wise."

Brethren, one of the ways you are going to cast off futility is to use your mind to diagnose futility. Think about what you do. Think about what you say. Think about where you go. Think about who you hang out with. Think about what you're doing with your time. Think about your actions. Think about how they impact others. In all those areas, there are a million ways to be futile, and there are some ways that you will find, as you learn Christ, that you totally escape that. We need to strive for that.

Brethren, you don't have to get rich to escape futility. You don't. You don't have to become famous to escape it. You don't have to go to India to escape futility. You just need to be persuaded that Jesus Christ is that treasure that you are willing to trade everything else for, and live for Him, and be willing to die for Him. That's escaping it. You pour out your life living for Him.

I know there will be imperfections, there will be falls, there are going to be difficulties, there are going to be battles, brethren, I know all of it. But think, brethren, think about what you've been doing with your lives that doesn't amount to anything. Live in light of judgment day. Live in light of the fact that what you do here is going to carry over there. Live in light of what you do with your money here will actually store up treasure there. Don't live any longer like the Gentiles in the futility of their minds. You have not learned Christ that way. Amen.