

## From Futility to Fullness

During my teenage years I struggled on the edges of bulimia. By God's grace it did not take me under, but I did exhibit much of the typical behavior common to bulimia such as binging and purging. My "purging" was in the form of excessive exercise and going for days without eating anything.

Like any young woman who suffers from anorexia or bulimia I believed I needed to lose weight - even after my periods stopped. When I looked in the mirror I saw hips and thighs that did not look like the models' in the magazine. I wanted to look like them. My thoughts had conformed to the ways of the world and those thoughts - even though they were wrong - dictated my behavior.

The way we think dictates our behavior. If we think like the world we will act like the world in all its futility. But if we adjust our thinking to God's will and way we will begin to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13, NIV).

### Hardness or Holiness

***Read Ephesians 4:17-19. How does Paul describe worldly thinking (like the "Gentiles")? Check all that apply:***

- Futile***
- Lacks understanding***
- Ignorant***

***What is the result of this kind of thinking?***

***Read Ephesians 4:20-24. What is the result of thinking in accordance with God's truth?***

"To be made new" or to "renew" in Ephesians 4:23 is the Greek word *ananeo*. Here's the definition from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*:

*The "renewal" here mentioned is not that of the mind itself in its natural powers of memory, judgment and perception, but "the spirit of the mind," which, under the controlling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, directs its bent and energies Godward in the enjoyment of "fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ," and of the fulfillment of the will of God.*

***Read Romans 12:1-2. According to Paul in verse 2, what will be the result of the “renewing of our minds”?***

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul systematically presents the great salvation we have in Christ. Now here in 12:1 he says “therefore.” Because of everything God has done for us, since Christ paid our debt on the cross, our proper response is full submission to God and His will. This submission, which Paul describes as a “living sacrifice,” will result in two things:

1. We will no longer conform to the world and its ways.
2. We will be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) through the renewal of our minds.

The English word, “transformed” is translated from the Greek word *metamorphoo*. *Metamorphoo* refers to a change of condition and form. This is a **continual** process, not a one-time event. It is an ongoing renunciation of the world and its ways and a renewal to God’s thinking and ways. We must *continually* reject the world’s ways, constantly checking to see if our thoughts, attitudes and behaviors measure up to the pattern of Christ.

*The more our thinking is renewed to be like the way God thinks, the easier it will be for us to see and understand God’s plan and ways, His design for things. It will become easier and easier to walk in His will.*

Keep in mind, we can only do so much to change our thinking. We can fill our minds with God’s truth and fight the lies of the world, but only the Holy Spirit can bring real spiritual transformation. He is the agent of both our rebirth and our renewal (see Titus 3:5).

### **Right Thinking Leads to Right Relationships**

In both the Romans and Ephesians passages we read, Paul clearly taught the general truth that right thinking fosters holiness and Christ-likeness. Now, beginning in Ephesians 4:25, Paul gets specific. He contrasts some particular futile behavior with particular Christ-like behavior.

***Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and 5:1-7. As you read, fill in the table below. On the left side, list all the worldly characteristics that Paul says we must “put off.” On the right, list all the holy characteristics we must “put on.”***

PUT OFF	PUT ON

Did you notice how Paul’s teaching in these verses center around how we should treat our fellow Christians? In last week’s lesson we learned that God commands His children to love each other like He loves us. This table we just filled out is a practical profile of what loving behavior should – and shouldn’t – look like.

*Compare the profile on the left to the profile on the right. Which type of person would find the most fulfillment and joy living in the body of Christ? Why?*

We covered an awful lot of ground in the last two questions. I want to go back and highlight one particular verse.

*Read Ephesians 4:29 and write it below.*

The Greek adjective translated as “unwholesome” or “corrupt” literally means “rotten or putrefied.” It refers to language that is itself rotten or that spreads rottenness.

*Instead of spreading rottenness, what should our speech accomplish? How can this verse serve as a guide for our own speech?*

*Now look back at the table you completed. Underline or highlight everything that has to do with our mouths, the way we talk, or what we say.*

Did that exercise impact you with the magnitude of the need to carefully watch your tongue? If not, go back and do it again! If you still aren't convinced, read James 3:1-12.

### **Step into the Light**

***Read Ephesians 5:8-20.***

The Bible repeatedly uses “darkness” and “light” to represent sin and holiness, the things of the world and the things of God, the realm of Satan and the Kingdom of God. Jesus declared Himself to be “the light of the world” (John 8:12) and the Apostle John wrote that “God is light; in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

Several times in Ephesians, Paul has contrasted his readers' life *before* Christ with their life *in* Christ. Now he does it again using this familiar motif of darkness and light. Because God has brought the Ephesians out of the darkness and into the light, they should “live as children of light.”

***List all the direct commands you find in this passage. (Depending on how you break down the sentences you may find as many as 13!)***

Yes, Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12). And He calls those of us who belong to Him to reflect His light in the dark world.

*You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14a, 16)*

***This week we've seen a very clear picture of what God expects of His children. How are you doing? What are your areas of strength? Weaknesses?***

### **Weekly Challenge**

*(Each week, in addition to the weekly lesson, I will provide an opportunity – for those who have the time and desire – to go a little deeper. If you are unable to do this, please don't worry, but if you can, take the plunge!)*

***Memorize Ephesians 4:29 this week. Then find a situation in which you can actively practice it! I'd love to know how you “built others up according to their needs” with your words!***