

## OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW

APRIL 23, 2023 | EPHESIANS | EPHESIANS 4:17-25 | PASTOR DON SCHWING

Who remembers their first car? Okay, yeah. It's mostly guys who remembers their first car. I'm not talking about that special car you saved up for, like the '68 Mustang with the whatever-cc. I don't know what any of that means. (I even misidentified John's car in the parking lot. I said "Wow, that's a great Mustang." He said, "No, it's a Camaro.")

Now I'm not talking about the car you saved up for, but I'm talking about that jalopy. The thing that was all that you could afford. The type where you would see where you were driving and the passenger actually had to push the car down the road to get enough momentum to get it started. Then they had to sort of hop in before you ran over their feet with the tires. I'm sure many of us had some. I know I had a few junkers in my day. One where you sort of had to slide across the bench seat to open the passenger door because that was the only one that opened.

My first car was a 1979 Ford Fairmount station wagon. "Oh my." I heard that! In high school with this 1979 station wagon, I was really cool. On top of that, it had woodgrain panels. But it was a gift that I got from my Uncle Vito. So I really, appreciated it.

That lasted until I got another car, and another one that died, and another one that died, and finally ended up with a Ford LTD that I had to put oil in every 50 miles. On my first date with Andrea, we had to stop at a gas station and put in oil. I was like, "Uh oh. We'll see if this goes anywhere." That was 30 years ago.

Sometimes we have these old things that we really want to get rid of. But other times, there are things that are a little bit more difficult to get rid of. Think of that 15-year-old t-shirt that you have that is really the most comfortable thing that you own. It has holes in the armpits and the collar is all torn, but you really just don't want to get rid of it. But change is just a matter of life. Things don't last. They break. The style becomes obsolete.

But there's a necessary change that happens when we enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We're going to be talking about that transformation this morning. We will see Paul describe the old self with words like *hardness* and *callous*, and telling us not to be that way – to put off the old self, but to then put on the new. This new self is created in the likeness of God.

We will see him describe a progression from a darkened of heart to a choice to a pursuit for ungodliness. But then he says this isn't what we've learned in Christ. What we've learned is to put off the old self and to put on the new.

Let us pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for gathering us to you today. Father, we just have so much that we can learn from you and your word. So I pray that our hearts just be open today. As this message is shared that will be my voice, I just ask your Spirit to control my thoughts and my words so we can be ministered to this morning straight from your word. Father, we ask you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

So far in Ephesians in chapters 1-3 Paul was talking about how, as new believers, they are not bound by the Jewish identity and the Jewish law of the day. In chapter 4, he switches his directions and he talks about how as believers they are to live amongst one another. Some people describe chapters 1-3 as being theologically rich, and then chapters 4-6 being practically rich.

Last week, Pastor Scott talked about wholesome talk and wholesome speech, and how it builds up the body and builds up one another. You may remember the ending verse from last week, where Paul said – *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Let us stand as we read the first half of our passage today.

Paul writes – *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you 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, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.*

You may be seated.

Paul opens up here, which is translated in the ESV as *now I say*. The word is actually *therefore*. So he's coming off of saying, "I've said that we need to speak truthful thoughts, we need to be building up of the body." Then he's saying, "Therefore, now this is what I testify in the Lord. I speak with truth." So when we hear the word *testify*, it's similar to speaking with a level of authority.

When we were in Grace Group on Thursday night, I was trying to get the group to identify testimony. Yeah, it's speaking. Yeah, it's being truthful. But when you testify, think of in court where if you're brought into testify, that means you are a firsthand witness and you have something absolutely that you're an expert in that you have to share. So it carries a weight of authority with it.

Paul is saying – *I testify*. I speak to you with the truth, *that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do.*

I think it's important for us to remember that Paul is writing this letter to Ephesus about 30 years after the resurrection of Christ. So for the Gentiles in Ephesus that are reading this, I wonder if they're thinking, "Well, I'm a Gentile. You said at the beginning of this letter that you were in prison for us as Gentiles. But now you're telling me not to live as a Gentile." My head might be spinning a bit saying, "Wait, what? What are you actually telling me?"

But if you look back at verse 1, Paul said that the Gentiles, the believers have been called for something special. *So don't walk as Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.* The idea here in *futile minds* is emptiness.

It's as he said in verse 14 – *that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* Paul goes on to say that they have been *darkened in their understanding.* Not only are their minds empty to Christian principles, they've been darkened. It's actually literally spiritual blindness within them that alienates them from the life of God.

It's really sad when we see this alienation happening. Some individuals are so inflated in their own virtue, they are completely blinded to the truth. But really isn't that the story of Jesus' ministry?

Jesus came to preach the good news of forgiveness and salvation. But all the Pharisees were so focused on their supremacy that they ignored the truth that was standing right in front of them. The Pharisees had the teachings, they had the prophecy, yet they still wanted to kill Him. Pilate, a Roman, saw nothing wrong with Him. But the Pharisees had the Jews behind them and had them so wrapped up into a frenzy, they were screaming for His blood. Then you have the soldiers in their darkened mind, nailed Him to the cross. As Jesus is hanging there, those that were looking up at Him were so blinded, they mocked Him and cursed Him and teased Him to let Himself down. They were alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that was in them.

You know what happens when our hearts become hardened? Paul tells us they become *callous*. And then we become *greedy*. It's unable to allow the truth to come in. This word *greedy* here, we're going to get into in a bit. It's important, I think, in our understanding of what Paul is telling us this morning.

Then Paul goes on to say that this is the life of the Gentiles that way, but you have learned something different.

That's really what being part of a church and being part of a body of believers is for us to learn something different. To learn the new self, so we can continue to be working to put off the old self.

He says the truth is in Jesus.

I think this is where people run into a problem. Have you ever heard someone say, "The Bible can be true for you, but it's not true for me." How can that even make sense? There's no way for

something that is absolute to be both true and false at the same time. In modern philosophy, there's a statement that there is no absolute truth. All truth is relative. But that's an absolute statement. So it's self-defeating. Right? People confuse truth with opinion.

People say the Bible isn't true for them. I think what they're actually saying is that they just don't like what it has to say, and they just don't want to believe it. What does the Bible say? Maybe we're singing about the solid rock. God is unchanging. Jesus compared His teaching to an immovable rock. Jesus gave the truthful statement that He is the only way to salvation. The only way we can be in a relationship with Christ is to be born again. These are absolutely true statements. Just because you don't like them doesn't mean that it's not true.

The truth is in Jesus, and it begins for us in our lives with putting off our old self. But it's not just putting off our old self once we accept Christ. It's really an ongoing process. So we need to constantly be working to put off our old self, because the old self has been corrupted by deceitful desires. Putting off the old self is hard. I think this is why Paul begins with their identity.

I think identifying ourselves as something Christian has become so prevalent in today's culture. How many times have you had people be described as a white Christian, or a black Christian, or a gay Christian, or an American Christian, or a socialist Christian. By putting an adjective in front of the word 'Christian,' you're actually modifying 'Christian; to support the identity which you've put in the front. When we do that, we end up reading God's word through that identity. So if we put ourselves with our identity first, we will interpret scripture or read scripture to suit the identity that we hold on to.

There's a word for that. It's called eisegesis, which is opposite of exegesis. Exegesis is looking at God's word and allowing God's word to transform you into the identity that God wants. The other way is to read into the Bible to support the identity that you've claimed for yourself. That is holding on to the old self.

Like Paul says, when we latch on to some identity, it modifies our faith because we have futile minds. It ends up darkening our understanding.

Cultural identity is one thing, but now, really, in our walk, it's our spiritual identity. Is there something that we're holding on to that we're unwilling to commit to the Lord? What is the old self that we won't let go of?

This lack of understanding and this lack of identifying properly with the Lord is a heart problem, because when our heart is focused on the wrong thing, we become callous and we pursue that which we shouldn't. It doesn't really matter because the result is the same.

Look at how Paul maps it out for us. He says you start with a hardened heart, you become callous, you give up to sensuality, and greedy from impurity.

The first thing, *hardness of heart*, really begins with a choice. It's ignorance. Ignorance in God's word is what Paul's talking about. So we've chosen to not hear God's word, we've chosen to not listen, we've chosen to not accept the truth. We really can be hardened and ignorant of anything.

It could be because of guilt. It could be because of an anger we're holding on to, it could be because of constant mistrust. It could be because of vanity. It could be because of pornography. When we become ignorant, the next thing that happens, the result is we're calloused.

You know, calluses, those tough marks that you get in your hands and feet from too much work?

And what happens next? We succumb to sensuality. We succumb to the pleasure of sin. We succumb to the sense of accomplishment where it's like, "Well, I can't believe that she just accepted the lie that I just told her. I told her I was going to go run an errand, but really I'm going to go do something else that I really shouldn't be doing." We have succumb and given in to sensuality.

And then finally, what happens next? We pursue impurity. Once we succumb, it's easier to give into a sin. When the sin becomes comfortable, becomes pleasurable, and then we seek it and we want to continue on with it and I want to do more.

It's getting to be the season for yard work. Yesterday was a beautiful day. I'm sure some of you were outside working in the yard. Raking, planting, weeding, maybe turning over the soil. Have you ever worked with your hands for a long time without wearing gloves? Eventually you get the calluses on your hands. You get those sores. They become hard due to constant pressure and rubbing. It forms over time and the skin ends up toughening up. The tougher they are, the more resistant they are, and the more that maybe you don't want to protect your hands because you have the calluses on there already. Pretty soon you have these crackly hands that really aren't the softest to hold.

But what happens sometimes to the calluses? They get split. They tear off. They become really sore. Or maybe sometimes we've gotten so comfortable to not wearing the gloves, because we have the calluses, that we end up with a deep splinter under our hand. No matter how much we try to dig it out, a little bit is left in there and starts to get infected.

Some people are embarrassed by their calluses. Some people are like, "Wow, look at me. I work with my hands. My hands are really, really rough," and they're even proud of them.

Sometimes we're so comfortable with the calluses in our heart, that we forget the spiritual infection that it causes. We go from ignorance, to callousness, to succumbing to sin, to pursuing it. And really this slope could be anything. We go from, "Eh, not that big a deal," to, "Okay, I want it."

Think about anything that has infected our culture or has infected the church. I think of the LGBT, the trans identity. When you look at churches, there's one down the street that actively pursues individuals, not for them to seek repentance, to hear the truth, but rather because we just want to be open to everybody. We've gone from recognizing that it's wrong, to sort of tolerating it, to now accepting it and allowing it, to be welcomed into the church body. We've gone from ignorance, to callousness, to succumbing, to pursuing it.

Paul says to *put off the old self*. That was your identity, your old way of life. Those are corrupt. And he says – *to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

Renewing the spirit of the mind is the renewing of how we think. So putting on the new self begins with our transformation, but it doesn't stop with our transformation. The idea in the Greek is that it has happened and it continues to happen. But it's in the passive voice, which means it continues to happen but there's an outside agent – something from the outside is working on it. It's better understood of the idea of to submit and to let yourselves be renewed. Let yourselves voluntarily submit to the idea of a continual progress of growth.

Paul actually describes this exactly for us in Colossians 3:10 when he says – *You are being renewed* (same word) *in knowledge after the image of its Creator*. When you submit to God and you put off the old self, you're being renewed by God, through the Spirit, which is the antithesis of the corruption that Paul's talking about.

Like I said, this isn't a one-and-done. Just after we've been saved through Christ, the Holy Spirit comes inside of us, but constantly renews us and helps us to remove the old self and *put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness*. The new self, created in Christ.

The fact is, we have this new self if we are Christians. We've gotten the old self at birth. We get the new self, the new identity when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The new self is not our work, it's not anything that we have done. It's a gift from God. The new self is the new creation created in us at our conversion. This is completely in contrast to what we inherited from [audio glitch].

Then Paul gives us an example of the old self versus the new self. He says – *Put away falsehood and speak the truth*. We are all members together. He then connects this passage to the identity of the Christian identity.

It's important for us to realize that putting on the new self is the continuous putting off of the things that are not kingdom valued and then replacing them with the new, with the things that are.

It reminds me of the parable of the old wineskin from Matthew 9:17, where Jesus says – *Neither is new wine put in the old wineskin. If it is, the skin bursts and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put in the fresh wineskins, so that both are preserved*. Our minds and our hearts need to be continuously renewed.

Sometimes the change is easy. Like getting rid of that old beat-up car. Sometimes it's hard, like getting rid of the comfortable t-shirt. Either way, we need to get rid of it and put it off.

But what's great is that we don't need to buy the replacement. It's already been replaced. It's already been done for us. Our task isn't to put it together, our task isn't to manufacture, our task isn't to weave it together. Our task is to just put it on.

What's the expression? "The clothes make the man or the woman." That's the identity. We need to daily be setting aside the rotting old self to put on the new.

So how can one be daily renewed in the spirit of their mind?

Paul tells us in Romans 12. I think this is one of the most crucial passages in our faith. He says – *Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – that is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

I came across this illustration from Steven Cole. He says, "When Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, they were officially freed from their many years of servitude, but some of them went on living as if they were still slaves. The President's proclamation gave them legal standing as free citizens. It was a done deal – they were no longer slaves. But, out of habit and way of thinking, many of these poor people still lived like slaves. So, they needed to live in accordance with the facts. Even when they were tempted to think like a slave, they needed to say, "No, the truth is I am a free man!" They needed to apply the truth to their daily experience."

The same is true for us. We've been freed from the enslavement of sin. So why do we still live like we're enslaved to it? Why are we dishonest? Why do we treat the Lord with vanity, worship other gods, covet something of our neighbor's, have adulterous thoughts, hate on others? This is why Paul's statement of being renewed in your mind is so important.

We need to allow the Spirit to continually transform the old self. No matter how mature we might be, we need to be constantly putting off the old and on the new.

We have a high calling. We should walk in a different way than the world around us. Maybe you know right now that you need to live different, but you're struggling to put off the old. Maybe it's so comfortable that you can't imagine living any other way. Maybe even your friends say, "That you that I see every day? I like it," but you know in your heart that it's not the way you should be living. Or maybe there's an old self and you don't even realize it.

I'd like to lead us into prayer right now, if we could. If you could close your eyes and just listen to my voice.

Perhaps you're in a place today feeling beat up, broken down. Perhaps you're struggling with something right now. You can feel it. You can feel hate, lust, unjust anger, unrighteous jealousy.

Maybe you're working on a project at the office and all you're worried about is how much credit you'll get, rather than am I working how God wants me to be?

Maybe you just heard a bit of gossip from a friend and you can't wait to pass it on.

Maybe you're bound in fits of anger rather than praying, and you lash out in rage.

Perhaps you and your husband are struggling to communicate and connect. Rather than working on your marriage, you're thinking it might be better to be with someone else.

Maybe your way to pass the time is to watch pornography or have sexually laced conversations on Instagram, Snapchat, or anywhere.

Maybe you think the only time for God is an hour on a Sunday morning.

Perhaps you bicker nonstop with your sister or your brother just so you can be right.

Maybe you like to only complain and point out problems, just to cause division in your family or in your church.

Perhaps you're prone to drunkenness, or drugs, or anything that moves your mind from God.

Maybe you're not pleased with what you have and would rather have what your neighbor does.

Maybe you want to serve more at the church, but you can't figure out where to place the priorities.

Maybe you've just cheated on your taxes a bit to get what you didn't earn.

Maybe the language that you use is laced with profanity.

[PRAYER] Father, please help me put off the old me. I don't want to be burdened with dishonesty, and idolatry, and hostility, and envy. But I want to put on the new me to live as righteous and holy to you. Let my heart not be callous, but to be open and clear and spiritually filled. The old self is just that. It's what I was before. It's anything that isn't you. Father, help me put off the old self.