

EPHESIANS – “THE NEW MAN/WOMAN”

Ephesians 4:17-24

July 24, 2022

We are now in the second half of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and last Sunday as we began chapter 4, we looked at Paul teaching on how to start putting into practice what we had learned in the first three chapters, putting feet to our faith so we can walk out our walk in our everyday lives as mature believers. Last Sunday we looked at how to “*Walk Worthy of God’s Calling*,” as we learned the importance of unity within the body of Christ and the spiritual gifts that God has given to each believer within the body for ministry – for serving God and serving others. So, to function effectively, everyone within the local church body needs to know and use their spiritual gifts as we the body “*become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.*” Paul emphasises here is that we are no longer to be infant Christians blown back-and-forth, and here-and-there by any false teaching that happens to come along; instead, we are to “**GROW UP**,” becoming mature followers of Christ who are led by the Spirit, not by our human understanding. God is always looking for mature unified Christians who know their spiritual gifts and will obediently carry out their role within the Body of Christ as we are all built up and made perfect in love, creating something beautiful that can be used by God to bring Him honour, glory, and praise.

Starting in **Ephesians 4:17** with the word “**So**” – Paul begins this large section on instructions for Christian living, on how we no longer live as sinful unbelievers, but as mature sanctified believers, which will take us to the end of his letter. However, before Paul starts giving us these instructions, he needs to remind his readers once again where they have come from. How God reached down to them by His grace to save them from the life we used to live before they came to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Paul frequently teaches the same message in a variety of ways, because our behaviour is important – we must not live as the unbelievers around us live. But we tend to forget the importance of living as believers, as Satan tries hard to distract us after we hear and study God’s Word – the Thursday evening Bible Study and the Sunday message can easily be forgotten once we leave the building by distractions. The Gospel of Mark tells us in the Parable of the Sower that Satan comes immediately and tries to snatch away what was sown into our hearts (Mark 4:15). Satan doesn’t want us to meditate on God’s Word; instead, he wants us to forget it quickly, so it doesn’t take root in our hearts and start producing fruit. However, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit helping us

to remember, especially as we live in a world where we can easily pick up bad habits from others. So, Paul wants to make sure these Ephesian believers don't drift back into their past sinful behaviours. And the same for us, the more unbelievers we are around, at work or even in our families, the more we need to be reminded not to follow their example, but instead be an example to them! And when they see our godly behaviour, our peace and joy; hopefully, it will reveal to them that there's a better way to live the way they are currently living!

The seven verses we will look at today are divided into two sections or two areas of thoughts: **verses 17-19** Paul appeals to believers to live a life totally different from their former sinful way of life (making a 180 degree turn in their behaviour), while in **verses 20-24** Paul describes the transformation that has taken place within every believer who is in Christ. Then all the verses that follow, to the end of the letter are basically Paul's teachings on how we are to live this all out in our marriages, families, workplaces, churches and wherever God takes us.

These verses we are looking at today – is where Paul's letter reaches a climax, a turning point. His readers now must make a moral decision before going any further. Here every believer needs to decide which path they are going to take – the narrow more difficult path few tend to travel but will lead them to an abundant joy filled life serving Christ. Or will they choose the widely travelled easier path that most believers take because they like to sit on the fence and keep one foot in the world, ending up living an unfulfilled life, living far below what is available to them as a follower of Christ. Paul is not talking here about losing our salvation but cautions those believers who choose to live below their full potential that they will not realize their **IDENTITY – WHO THEY ARE IN CHRIST**, which is the central point of Paul's letter; thereby, missing out on the authority and power that they have been given to significantly impact the lives of others around them by hosting His presence!

On Saturday, September 2nd, 1972 my life dramatically changed – that was the day I married Laurie. And after the marriage ceremony had taken place in the Dresden United Church, I was 100% legally married on paper, but that was just the beginning of married life – there was a lot more to learn on that road we have been travelling for almost 50 years, and I haven't arrived yet at a complete understanding of what it means to be married. As I started down that road of marriage there were many things I needed to learn and there were even more things I needed to unlearn. So, even though I was 100% married on that specific day,

since that day I have been learning what it meant to be married. And then, after 2 ½ years there was another dramatic change when our first child Carrie was born, and I had to learn to be a parent, so once again there were many things, I needed to learn on how to parent. When we brought Carrie home from the hospital, she was 100% legally our child on paper, but we had a great deal to learn on what it means to parent a child through the different stages of their lives, every stage brought new challenges. Paul uses the same analogy here when we become a Christian. You can become a Christian in an instant, but you will spend a lifetime learning how to be a Christ follower as you go from stage-to-stage!

Paul has been telling us in this letter up to this point – that in light of all that God has done for us, we are to no longer live the way we have in the past. For these reasons: You are chosen, God chose you for salvation from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), that is from the beginning of time; He has redeemed you through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ; He has forgiven all of your sins and adopting you as His child (Ephesians 1:5, 7); and as His child He has lavished upon you the riches of His grace and given you a great inheritance that is awaiting you in heaven (Ephesians 1:11). God has taken you, who once were dead in sin, and has extended to you His grace through Christ Jesus and made you fully alive in Him. Thereby, the barriers of hostility between you and God, and between you and other believers has been broken down (Ch. 2) and you have been made part of the unified body of Christ, called the church. So, in gratitude and thanks, Paul says this is to be our response: ***“You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed”*** (Ephesians 4:17-19). That lifestyle doesn’t describe you any longer! That’s the old you that was left at the cross the day you surrendered your life to Christ!

Paul is pointing out that your past pursuit of worldly things will result in nothing of significance in the end because you can’t take them with you into eternity. King Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, said the pursuit of worldly things is like chasing the wind – ***Ecclesiastes 2:22-23, “What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.”*** Without God in the picture, Solomon summarizing the worldly life as, “vanity of

vanities, all is vanity, a striving after the wind.” That’s why Paul want to make plain here the condition of the unbeliever’s heart – so that we would leave that former lifestyle far behind us – never to return. Unbelievers have no relationship with God and don’t know Him. Unbelievers live in the vanity (uselessness) of their minds. Unbelievers follow their own thoughts and emotions and do as they please. Unbelievers live according to their own reasoning, but they are deceived. Unbelievers don’t have the life of God in them. Paul’s point is that’s who you used to be, but now you have the life of God within you – you have new life in Christ. You cannot take your accumulated wealth and possessions with you into eternal life; your good health and physical fitness only lasts until you die; positions of power and influence only lasts until someone else replaces you; and fame only lasts until you are forgotten with the passing of time. So, Paul insists, don’t be like the rest of the world, who in futility pursue all of these temporary things – in the end they will have nothing to show for it!

So, here’s the question: “*Why would anyone pursue the things that don’t last into eternity?*” Paul answers that question for us in **verse 18** – they pursue these worldly things because “***They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.***” Moral darkness keeps them from the true knowledge of God, so they need to be enlightened or reawakened to what really matters in life, and turn their focus towards God, and off of worldly things. Paul’s point here is this, “*You Ephesians, you have been enlightened to what really matters in life, so don’t get caught up once again in trying to be like everyone else around you, forgetting who you are in Christ.*” And that’s why it’s important for believers to keep meeting together for fellowship, worship, prayer, and the teaching of God’s Word, so we can quickly re-adjust our bearings whenever we start to get off track. It’s a slippery slope whenever we start venturing away from our faith and stop meeting together and stop encouraging one another!

When a person becomes a Christian they become a new creature, we no longer live for ourselves, but for the ONE who died and rose again on our behalf. A transformed life looks nothing like a worldly life and that’s what sets us apart from others. The mature believer has a new way of thinking and a different way of seeing the world – as Paul tells us in 1 **Corinthians 2:16** we now have the “***mind of Christ;***” whereas before we had a carnal mind that didn’t accept the things of

God because we saw them as foolishness. At one time we could not understand the things of God because they are spiritual and we were carnal, so we needed the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us understand and accept the spiritual things of God. However, old habits die hard because the old self comes rushing back whenever we are under stress, tired and under the pressures of life. The solution is that we need to be re-wired, those carnal wires need to be cut-off and soldered to new connection points, giving us new thoughts, new images, new words, and new ways to use our wealth, time, and talents. Coming to church and being with other believers in fellowship is how we re-wire our brains to live our lives differently, and it takes constant uninterrupted practice to follow these new pathways and unlearn those old pathways, and that's where Paul takes us next!

Verse 20-21 tells us this in the Passion Translation, ***“But this is not the way of life that Christ unfolded within you. If you have really experienced the Anointed One, and heard his truth, it will be seen in your life; for we know that the ultimate reality is embodied in Jesus.”*** So, if you are really born again, if your circuit board has been rewired, then your new nature and your new heart should be undeniable and recognizable to everyone you meet. *It will be seen in all aspects of your life* – because ***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires”*** (Verse 22). To “*put off the old self*” means to “*strip off*” as in the case of taking off filthy clothes. Paul says this is what took place the day you came to Christ. Your filthy garments of sin were taken off and you were baptized as a right of purification and then clothed with a brand new garment, the righteousness of Christ. The idea here would be if a person came home from work smelling bad and filthy dirty and take a shower, they would never put back on those same filthy and smelly dirty clothes. Let's face it, getting all cleaned up and putting on some aftershave or perfume to mask the odour is not going to make a bit of difference either if you again put back on those same smelly, dirty clothes. So, when God gives you a new holy wardrobe to wear, Christ's righteousness, you don't put your old sinful clothes back on regardless of how comfortable they used to feel. The old need to die and be buried!

So, we now need to decide – continuing to follow the old path for a believer will only lead to staying immature in the faith (remaining a baby Christian, falling for all kinds of false teachings). Continuing to follow the old path for a believer

means struggling in all areas of faith, being unsure of your salvation, being filled with fear and anxiety whenever you get a bad report from the doctor, and when those difficult times come along you will question your faith and doubt God is good. Continuing to follow the old path for a believer means they are holding tightly onto their “*get into heaven free card,*” while missing out on seeing the great ministry opportunities around them to reach the lost, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and lonely, being the hands and feet of Christ. Not living out our faith is like taking a shower to clean up, and then putting back on those old smelly dirty clothes because they are comfortable. No one would do that!

You will notice in **verse 22** Paul says we are to put off the old self, or walk away from old ways, and then in **verse 24** he says that we are to put on the new self that has been re-created into God’s image. That sounds simple enough, but we find in our experience that we often fail to fully dwell in that new image of Christ-likeness. **Verse 23** is inserted here by Paul as the bridge between these two verses. If we want to put off the old self and put on the new self, we need to be continually renewed in our mind according to **verse 23**, “*to be made new in the attitude of your minds.*” And once again, this can only happen when we spend quality time studying God’s Word and meditating on His principals which helps us re-wire those old pathways in our mind. This is where our imagination comes in, we can’t let our imaginations go back to those old sinful thoughts. Our imagination needs to focus on new thoughts in order to behave according to the new self. It’s very important to understand the concept of these three verses because as we are made new in Christ the old nature (old man/old woman) will still try hard to rule us. Old habits are difficult to break!

This is our daily battle – daily we are to take off the old self and put on Christ. Daily we focus our thoughts on Christ, because Christian living means a continual dying to self and the continual purging of those old thoughts and desires. It’s like deciding to lose weight and staying thin as a new lifestyle. That new lifestyle choice will never happen if you keep those old large sized clothes in the back of the closet just in case you may need them again someday. Being determined and committed to living a new lifestyle means getting rid of those old clothes so they’re no longer a temptation. The old part of you must die and die for good to become a new man/woman!

The great benefit in being part of a church like SCCC – is that we don't have to struggle alone. As believers we are all tempted and struggle with sin, because it's our human nature to sin, and Satan is not happy that we have discarded those old clothes for the new, so Satan constantly tries to distract us and weaken us by bringing out those old clothes and tempting us to put them back on, reminding us how good they felt. And Satan's number one strategy when you are tempted to put back on those old clothes is to get you isolated from your church family saying, *"You're the only one. People around you aren't struggling in this way. It's just you."* And believing that lie causes us to stay away and isolating ourselves from those that can help us, so we stay away or stay silent, put on our smiling mask, and keep what we are going through from others who can help. We need each other because Paul says the spiritual life is not about instantaneous perfection; instead, it's a constant process of *"putting off"* and *"putting on."* So, we need accountability partners to keep us on the right path. We need prayer partners to pray with. The truth is that you will never come to a place this side of heaven where you are sinless, and if you try to live a righteous, holy, and sinless life in your own strength, you'll fail miserably every time. The truth is that every Christian struggles and deals with sin, even though they have been born again. It's our daily battle, so you need never feel guilty if you are tempted, because temptation comes to all of us. Just ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware of Satan's strategies, and then say no to him whenever he tempts you to do what is wrong!

To help us out here – I want to close with the struggle that the Apostle Paul had with sin. *"Super-Christian,"* Paul writes about his struggles in **Romans 7:15-19**, ***"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing."*** We can all relate to Paul's problem – you want to read your Bible more, pray more, and praise God more, and go deeper with God, but you just don't do it, because that old man/woman is standing there blocking your way. In frustration, Paul makes this final cry for help in **Romans 7:24**, ***"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"*** So, what's Paul talking about here?

To help answer that question – we need to know something about the history of Paul’s time. When a Roman general went off to battle, of course, some of his soldiers would be killed on the battlefield, and then he had the problem of getting those corpses back home for an honourable burial. As well, the Romans would have also captured some prisoners of war of the newly-conquered army, so to solve their problem, they would tie the corpses of the Roman soldiers fallen in battle to the backs of the prisoners. This practice served two purposes: 1) the prisoner would transport the corpse back home for a proper burial; 2) a prisoner with a dead body tied on their back is not going to escape. That is exactly the picture that Paul is painting here when he is talking about his old sinful nature. Paul is saying, *“Who will deliver me from this dead corpse tied on by back that I keep carrying around?”*

This is a powerful picture that shows us that although we have this new nature within us – we can still carry around this old sinful nature just like a corpse tied on our back. So, you have to learn how to deal with that old sinful nature that keeps showing up. Here’s how I deal with it: I know my areas of weakness, so I put up guardrails to prevent me from going over the edge, and then I also have accountability partners that I have given permission to let me know whenever I am straying too close to the edge, because I know I can’t trust myself in those areas of weakness. I also realize that if I fall into temptation and go over the cliff, I not only hurt myself, but I take many others over the edge with me. So, we all need to be aware of that corpse we carry around on our back and must learn how to deal with it until the day you can get rid of it for good. And here’s our ultimate hope: **Romans 6:6, “For we know that our old self (the old man/woman) *was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin* (that old dead corpse we tend to carry around) *might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*”** Here’s our hope – the day will come when we will be rid of that old sinful nature once-and-for-all!

According to Paul here is the take home – the summary of the Christian life for every believer:

1. We lay aside our old way of life by taking off our old set of clothes and not put them in the back of the closet but discard them, so they are not a temptation.

2. We become renewed by the constant infilling of the Holy Spirit, being continually renewed in our minds.
3. We put on the new man/woman like a set of new clothes, and wear it with joy and victory, because we are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, and because the devil is a defeated foe and has no power over us.

It may help to also look at the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Jesus called Lazarus to come out and then this happened – **John 11:44**, *“The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’”* Is Christ Jesus saying the same thing to you? Take off those grave clothes and be free, no longer a slave to sin. Don’t live with grave clothes that can only bring death!