

Ephesians: Grace Changes Everything

Part 9 – Old Self, New Self

Today, we continue our exploration of the book of Ephesians by focusing on a passage that challenges us to live transformed lives. In the second half of Ephesians 4, Paul instructs us to put off the old self and to put on the new self, emphasizing the importance of living in righteousness and holiness. This passage provides practical guidance on how to live out our new identity in Christ.

Ephesians 4:17-32 *"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that 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 so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.*

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

This passage can be divided into three main sections: the contrast between the old self and the new self (verses 17-24), practical instructions for living out the new self (verses 25-29), and the call to kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (verses 30-32). Each section provides us with considerable insight into how we are to live transformed lives in Christ.

The Contrast Between the Old Self and the New Self (4:17-24)

Paul begins by emphasizing the stark contrast between the old self and the new self. He urges the believers to no longer live as the Gentiles do but to embrace their new identity in Christ.

The Futility of the Gentiles' Thinking:

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking." Paul insists that the believers must no longer live like the Gentiles, whose thinking is characterized by futility. This futility refers to their aimless and meaningless way of life, driven by worldly desires and pursuits.

Reflect on the ways in which worldly thinking and values may be influencing your life. Ask God to help you identify and remove any areas of futility in your thinking.

Darkened Understanding and Separation from God:

"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." The Gentiles' understanding is darkened, and they are separated from the life of God due to their ignorance and hardening of hearts.

This separation leads to a life of spiritual blindness and estrangement from God. Consider how ignorance and hardness of heart can impact your relationship with God. Seek to cultivate a soft and receptive heart, open to God's truth and guidance.

Giving Themselves Over to Sensuality:

"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed." The Gentiles have lost all sensitivity to moral and spiritual matters, giving themselves over to sensuality and indulging in impurity and greed. This lifestyle is marked by a lack of self-control and a pursuit of selfish desires. Reflect on any areas of your life where you may be tempted to indulge in impurity or greed. Ask God to help you develop self-control and to live in a way that honours Him.

Learning the Way of Christ:

"That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." Paul contrasts the Gentiles' way of life with the way of life the believers have learned in Christ. The truth that is in Jesus calls for a radically different way of living. Reflect on the teachings of Christ and how they challenge and transform your way of life. Commit to learning and living out the truth that is in Jesus.

Putting Off the Old Self:

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." The believers are taught to put off their old self, which is characterized by deceitful desires and corruption. This involves a conscious and deliberate rejection of the old way of life. Consider what it means to put off your old self. Reflect on the specific attitudes, behaviours, and desires that you need to let go of in order to live a transformed life in Christ.

Being Made New in the Attitude of Your Minds:

"To be made new in the attitude of your minds." Paul emphasizes the importance of renewing the mind. This renewal involves a transformation in the way we think, aligning our thoughts with God's truth and perspective. Commit to renewing your mind through regular study and meditation on God's Word. Allow His truth to shape and transform your thoughts and attitudes.

Putting On the New Self:

"And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." The believers are called to put on the new self, which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. This new self reflects the character and nature of God.

Reflect on what it means to put on the new self. Consider how you can cultivate righteousness and holiness in your daily life.

Practical Instructions for Living Out the New Self (4:25-29)

Paul provides practical instructions for how to live out the new self, emphasizing honesty, self-control, generosity, and wholesome speech.

Speaking Truthfully:

"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body." Paul instructs the believers to put off falsehood and to speak truthfully to one another. Honesty is essential for maintaining trust and unity within the body of Christ.

Commit to speaking truthfully in your interactions with others. Reflect on the importance of honesty and integrity in your relationships.

Handling Anger Appropriately:

"In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Paul acknowledges that anger is a natural emotion but cautions against letting it lead to sin. He advises the believers to resolve their anger quickly and not to let it fester.

Reflect on how you handle anger. Seek to address conflicts and resolve anger in a healthy and timely manner. Avoid giving the devil a foothold through unresolved anger.

Working and Sharing:

"Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need." Paul encourages the believers to engage in honest work and to use their resources to help those in need. This reflects a life of integrity and generosity.

Consider how you can use your skills and resources to benefit others. Commit to working diligently and sharing generously with those in need.

Wholesome Speech:

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Paul instructs the believers to avoid unwholesome talk and to speak in a way that builds others up. Wholesome speech reflects a transformed heart and mind.

Reflect on the words you speak. Commit to using your speech to encourage and build up others. Avoid gossip, negativity, and harmful language.

The Call to Kindness, Compassion, and Forgiveness (4:30-32)

Paul concludes this section by calling the believers to exhibit kindness, compassion, and forgiveness, reflecting the character of Christ.

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit:

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Paul warns against grieving the Holy Spirit. Our actions and attitudes can either please or grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Reflect on how your actions and attitudes impact the Holy Spirit. Seek to live in a way that honours and pleases Him.

Getting Rid of Negative Behaviours:

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Paul lists several negative behaviours that the believers are to get rid of: bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. These behaviours are contrary to the new self and must be put away. Reflect on any negative behaviours or attitudes that you need to let go of. Ask God to help you remove these from your life and to replace them with positive, Christ-like qualities.

Being Kind and Compassionate:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another." Paul calls the believers to be kind and compassionate. Kindness and compassion reflect the heart of Christ and build strong, loving relationships within the body of Christ. Commit to showing kindness and compassion in your interactions with others. Look for opportunities to extend grace, understanding, and support to those around you.

Forgiving Each Other:

"Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Paul emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, reminding the believers of the forgiveness they have received in Christ. Forgiveness is essential for healing and maintaining healthy relationships. Reflect on any areas where you need to extend or seek forgiveness. Commit to practicing forgiveness, remembering the grace and forgiveness you have received from God.

Practical Applications:

Renew Your Mind:

Join a Bible study group or follow a personal reading plan that helps you grow in your understanding of Scripture. Seek to apply what you learn to your daily life. Choose specific books of the Bible or topics to explore in depth. Seek God's wisdom and revelation as you study.

Memorize key Scriptures that speak to the renewal of the mind. Let these verses encourage and strengthen you, especially during times of difficulty or doubt. Set aside time for spiritual retreats or quiet days where you can focus on prayer, reflection, and seeking God's presence. These times of intentional solitude can provide space for God to speak and reveal His will.

Cultivate Honesty and Integrity:

Commit to speaking truthfully in all your interactions. Reflect on the importance of honesty and integrity in your relationships. Avoid falsehood and seek to build trust through truthful communication. Be willing to admit mistakes and seek to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Find an accountability partner who can support and encourage you in your commitment to honesty and integrity. Share your goals and commitments with them and seek their guidance and accountability. Seek to live in a way that honours God and reflects His truth.

Handle Anger in a Healthy Way:

Reflect on how you handle anger and seek to address conflicts in a healthy and timely manner. Avoid letting anger fester and giving the devil a foothold. Practice forgiveness and seek reconciliation in your relationships. Develop healthy strategies for managing anger, such as taking a break to cool down, seeking counsel from trusted friends, and praying for guidance and wisdom.

Practice healthy conflict resolution in your relationships. When conflicts arise, seek to address them with grace, humility, and a desire for reconciliation. Reflect on the importance of forgiveness and seek to practice it in your relationships. Remember the grace and forgiveness you have received from God and extend it to others.

Engage in Honest Work and Generosity:

Use your skills and resources to benefit others. Commit to working diligently and sharing generously with those in need. Reflect on how you can use your work and resources to make a positive impact on your community. Look for opportunities to volunteer and serve those in need. Consider how you can use your time, talents, and resources to support charitable organizations and initiatives. Practice generosity in your daily life. Look for ways to share your resources and support those in need.

Use Wholesome Speech:

Reflect on the words you speak and commit to using your speech to encourage and build up others. Avoid gossip, negativity, and harmful language. Seek to speak in a way that reflects a transformed heart and mind. Practice speaking words of encouragement, affirmation, and support to those around you. Be intentional about using your words to uplift and edify others.

Reflect on the words you speak and seek to use positive communication in your interactions. Avoid gossip, negativity, and harmful language. Practice active listening in your conversations. Seek to understand and empathize with others and respond with kindness and compassion.

Exhibit Kindness, Compassion, and Forgiveness:

Commit to showing kindness and compassion in your interactions with others. Look for opportunities to extend grace, understanding, and support to those around you. Practice forgiveness, remembering the grace and forgiveness you have received from God. Reflect on the character of Christ and seek to emulate His kindness, compassion, and forgiveness in your daily life. Look for opportunities to show kindness and compassion in your daily interactions. Reflect on how you can be a conduit of God's love to those around you.

Living Ephesians 4:17-32 in daily life

To fully internalize and live out the truths of Ephesians 4:17-32, we must integrate these principles into our daily lives. Here are some practical ways to do that:

Daily Reminders of Your New Identity: Start each day by reminding yourself of your new identity in Christ. This could be through a morning devotion, prayer, or reading Scripture. Let the truth of your new self, shape your mindset and actions throughout the day.

Practicing Honesty and Integrity: Cultivate a habit of honesty and integrity in your interactions with others. Be intentional about building trust and maintaining transparency in your relationships.

Managing Anger: Develop healthy strategies for managing anger and addressing conflicts. Practice forgiveness and seek reconciliation in your relationships.

Engaging in Honest Work and Generosity: Use your skills and resources to benefit others. Commit to working diligently and sharing generously with those in need.

Using Wholesome Speech: Reflect on the words you speak and commit to using your speech to encourage and build up others. Avoid gossip, negativity, and harmful language.

Exhibiting Kindness, Compassion, and Forgiveness: Show kindness and compassion in your interactions with others. Look for opportunities to extend grace, understanding, and support to those around you. Practice forgiveness, remembering the grace and forgiveness you have received from God.

Conclusion:

In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul challenges us to put off the old self and to put on the new self, emphasizing the importance of living in righteousness and holiness. As we reflect on these truths, let us strive to live transformed lives that reflect our new identity in Christ. May we cultivate honesty and integrity, manage anger healthily, engage in honest work and generosity, use wholesome speech, and exhibit kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

Thank you for joining us on this journey through Ephesians. As we pause at this point, may we continue to grow in our understanding of God's love and live out the truths of this powerful passage with confidence and grace. God bless you.