

EPHESIANS WEEK #8 – SJGC

“Put off the Old Self”

PATTI

We're in Ephesians 4, and as we pointed out last week, Chapter 4 marks a transition in the letter.

In the first 3 chapters we explored **the grace of God** at work in and through Christ toward those who are his.

But in these latter 3 chapters, we see **a series of exhortations to godly living**; some specific ways that Christians are **called to think, feel, and act.**

Last week the exhortation was to “grow up”, because though we have the life of the Trinity in us, we are immature.

And God's way of growing us and building us up is by putting us into a community of believers where there is lots of ministry going on, and therefore lots of opportunities to speak the truth to one another in love.

This, Paul says, is what will lead to the unity of Christ's body and the maturity of it's members.

But if the exhortation last week was to “GROW UP.” then Paul further explains how it is that we are able to do this.

We are able to GROW UP in Christ by **PUTTING OFF THE OLD SELF.** By putting off our old human nature.

Next week, Paul will show us what this looks like. Beginning in v. 25 he articulates six very specific things that Christian maturity entails.

But before he does that, he reminds us again of our UNION with Jesus.

He wants us to know that the message of Christianity is NOT “**you should be good person**” but “**by faith Jesus has made you NEW.**”

JEFF

RIGHT. THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS, NOT GOOD ADVICE! And it’s GOD’S GRACE (and our understanding of it) that prevents us from turning the commands of the New Testament into a self-righteousness project. Mind you, there are plenty of those out there today.

But Jesus didn’t leave us a to-do list, **he left us his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, so that by HIS power at work in us, we might bear fruit for the KINGDOM.**

Paul reminds us of this, so that when we hear him saying “**live this way, not that way**” we won’t hear him reducing Christianity to morality, **or a check list of do’s and don’ts.**

In this letter to the Ephesian Church (and to us by extension) Paul is balancing two desires that he has for all believers of every time and place.

- 1, *That we will **know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge** (3:19) AND*
2. ***walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called** (4:1)*

Paul is saying here that once you’ve been embraced by the grace of Jesus and

have the life of the Trinity in you, it would be foolish to go back to your old way of life that was characterized sin, death, and idolatry.

It was the year 1986, and The Bangles were singing to us, *“Walk Like an Egyptian”*.

A cute mindless song about nothing, really. But now that tune will be in your head for the rest of our time. So you’re welcome.

In a completely different way, Paul is saying to the Ephesians, “Don’t walk like a Gentile.”

In the Scriptures, the image of walking is often a metaphor for how we live our lives, so what Paul is saying here is simply, “don’t live as those who don’t know Jesus, who don’t have the life of the Trinity in them.”

PATTI

Yes, and the first thing to notice in v. 17 is **whose command this is**, Paul is emphasizing that this is God talking to you; This isn’t merely Paul’s opinion, but Christ’s Word to you.

v. 17-19 is a complex sentence, but Paul is saying 3 things:

First - The Gentiles walk — how?

**In the futility of their thinking.
with darkened understanding...**

This way of walking is characterized by a distorted mind-set that is obsessed with **idols** instead of God.

A mind set on the pursuit of money and possessions doesn't make sense, when - given a long enough timeline, everything is destined to rot and return back to the earth.

A mind fixed on the pursuit of pleasure doesn't make sense, when consuming more and more of something leads not only to less and less rewards, but eventually to pain, regret, and bondage.

A mind fixed even on something good like family doesn't make sense, when in reality, all human relationships (however intimate) will eventually be severed by the grave.

Do you see why the unbelieving mind-set is futile?

Secondly, Gentiles (or unbelievers) are separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

There's an element of **willfulness** in all of this. Their ignorance' isn't merely a failure of intellect or reason. It's the refusal to **acknowledge** and **submit to** and **obey** the Living God.

To be separated from God is, in a very real sense, to be alienated from life - and not just life everlasting, but also LIFE NOW.

Jesus says in John 10:10 -

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

If Christ is the center of everything - if we are created BY Him and FOR Him - if our PURPOSE is to **serve** and **enjoy** and **glorify** Him, what then does a life apart from God look like?

Well, it looks like a **lesser life now**,
and **judgment and condemnation in the life to come**.

JEFF

Thirdly - In v. 19 Paul warns that unbelievers
**have 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.**

They are, in every way, "Gentiles gone wild."
Welcome to America in the twenty-first century.

Habitual sin deadens the conscience.
Sometimes we find ourselves repulsed by the
most heinous crimes - trying to imagine
how anyone could do such things.

Sometimes I say to Patti,
"I can't believe I did that."
But why shouldn't I believe it?
In my heart I have the same
capacity for sin as the worst
criminal in the world.

So when we ask how people can do the most
heinous things we hear about on the news,
the answer is that moral decay happens
little by little.

In fact, it happens exactly the way
spiritual growth does - one step at a time.
And spiritually, you're either moving forward or backward.
But never standing still.

So **nurtured bitterness** leads to **unrestrained anger**.
And unrestrained anger leads to **murder**.

An obsession with material things leads to ravenous greed.
 And ravenous greed leads to fraud and theft.

The untamed pursuit of **sexual pleasure** leads to **all-consuming lust**.
 And all-consuming lust leads to **promiscuity and infidelity**.

With persistent effort, the human conscience,
 can be killed completely dead.
 In fact, given time and circumstance,
 all of us are just about capable of anything.

And this kind of walking, this kind of living,
 results in a life in which people are
greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

PATTI

If we read between the lines of what Paul is saying,
 it's that people will take notice when Christians live
 a distinctively different lifestyle.

When worldly people see a difference in you
 they get curious and want to know more.
 When people see a difference, they will
 be attracted to Christ in you.

But when the world looks at us and says
'You're not so different from me',
 the effectiveness of our witness will be undermined;
 And unbelievers will conclude that the
 gospel really doesn't have power to change anybody.

So Paul is warning the church – he's warning US...
 don't let this happen to you... don't walk like unbelievers.
 And he's not only calling us to self-examination, but also to ACTION!

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

Christians are to

live and
think and
believe and
desire and
speak and
behave like Jesus.

The whole of the Christian life is centered on Jesus.

because He's the
content of the truth,
the conveyor of the truth, and
He's the context of the truth.

You learn about Him by being in RELATIONSHIP with him.
And Paul is saying that you and I should look at our entire lives
as an extension of what we've learned about Jesus.

Because then the ethical implications will be obvious.
There is a MORAL response to the gospel of grace,
which Paul reiterates in >>>

v. 22

²² 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;

This is what theologians call "The Happy Exchange."

It's not that we are trying harder and having more
success at being good within ourselves.

It's that the life we live, we now live through Jesus.

v. 23-24:

[you were taught] Paul says, ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;
²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God

in true righteousness and holiness.

JEFF

Dressing the part is important in our society. If you are a soldier or a bus driver, a waitress or a policeman, you have a specific uniform.

You have to dress the part. Most of our jobs and schools have a specific dress code. And even when we don't have any code to follow, what we wear still speaks volumes to anyone who sees us. Whatever we wear, for better or worse, intentionally or accidentally, expresses a bit of who we are or what we're doing.

This is precisely Paul's point in verses 22-24. What we wear is important relative to who we are. If you're a Christian, you ought to dress the part. Just like players on a baseball team, followers of Jesus should look like him and each other.

Paul is talking, not about physical clothes, but about spiritual clothes, the life we conduct, our thoughts words, and actions.

He says that if we have become new people in Christ, there are some new clothes that match.

In the early days of the Christian Church, it was customary when a new believer was baptized, that their old clothes were thrown away or burned, and they were given a white robe as a symbol of their new identity in Christ.

The idea was that their old self died in baptism

and a new person was born.
 So the clothes which were worn, then,
 were the clothes someone died in.
 And they were no longer fit for the living to wear.

This is Paul's thought here, too.
 That when a Christian comes to faith,
 whether at the baptismal font or later in life,
 we are taught to **"put off,"** to **throw away**
 the dead clothes of our old self,

those **sinful habits** and **selfish desires**,
 and **put on the new self**, dressing spiritually
 with a life that mirrors our God in righteousness and holiness.

PATTI

**Paul emphasizes that this isn't superficial
 It's from the inmost being.**

It's from the inside out...
 in the attitude of your mind,
 in the deepest part of who you are.
 you have been renewed.

Paul calls this *resurrection*.
 Which means you can't do it.
 God has to do it.

You can't re-birth yourself.
 You can't resurrect your life.
 Only God can do that.

And He does it so that His righteousness
 and holiness might be yours.

Martin Luther said our lives should tell a story of death and resurrection. Speaking of baptism. He wrote: *Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, in turn, a new person should daily come forth and rise from death again to live forever before God in righteousness and purity.*"

A common indictment of the Christians these days is that we are hypocritical, that we are pretending to be something we're not.

That's why it's crucial that we acknowledge our sin and turn away from it in repentance. Before we can put on the new self we need to deal with the old self...

to be honest about the part of our heart that is corrupted by "deceitful desires". The Devil dresses up sin and tries to deceive us into trying it on.

We know we are to be gentle and loving with our families, but someone we love provokes or angers us, we know just what to say so that it hurts.

We know it is wrong, that it comes with a cost, that it will damage the relationship, but the perfect comeback seems like it will be so satisfying at the time, doesn't it?

We know that God calls us to tell the truth, but when we need to get out of a jam, the outfit of a liar seems tailor made.

JEFF

The hard part is that we often only realize this after it's over.
 Maybe you know the feeling after falling into sin...
 when the deception is lifted, you feel horrible.

You say, "This isn't who I am, this isn't who God made me to be.
 I don't want to be this." The good news is that after you
 throw away those old clothes in repentance,
 God has some new clothes waiting for you.

Scripture says very little about the actual clothes Jesus wore.
 There's really only one reference to Jesus' garments
 and it comes when they have been stripped off of him:

John 19:23 says,

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

It's just a small detail, but I can't help but think that it is also a picture
 of the clothes Jesus wore spiritually. Just like that tunic,
 Jesus' whole life was seamless.

The clothes he wore spiritually were perfect.
 He never sinned in thought, word, or deed.
 But when he was nailed to the cross,
 Jesus took off that robe of seamless perfection
 and assumed the outfit of our sin.

Christ Jesus was stripped of his righteousness
 so that we would be clothed with it.
 He took our rags and we got his robe.
 That's the HAPPY EXCHANGE.

On this side of heaven we sin will continue to bother us.
 It will bother us and tempt us. But it can no longer define us.

The old hymn says of us that we are,
 “Dressed in his righteousness alone
 Faultless to stand before the throne”.

PATTI

Some people believe that no one really changes,
 But God promises you that in his power
 you really can
 overcome an addiction,
 repair a broken relationship,
 forgive others and yourself.

You can heal your marriage,
 or take on a new school year with confidence.
 You can go to work and be an accurate reflection of your Savior’s love.

You can live with the joy and peace.
 And knowing that heaven is yours,
 you can dress the part.

LET’S PRAY:

Father, we thank you that new life is your gift to us through Jesus. Yet we confess our tendency to live out of our old rebellious human nature. When our thoughts, desires, or actions become worldly, would you forgive us? Give us the mind of Christ, that we may walk with him, and see sin’s dominion diminished in our lives. Empower us to bear witness that the transformative power of your grace, so that as we live differently, you will be glorified. For we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.