

Lily Became a Butterfly

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 October 2023

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] please turn again with me to page 919 in your bible and ephesians 4 verse 17 through 32 which is titled in my bible at least the new life the new life do you ever wish that you could change i recently met a lady called lily not her real name she is only a couple of years younger than me although she looks a lot older lily had lived a very moral life filled with promiscuity alcoholism poverty drug addiction mental illness and several children born out of marriage in her mid-40s she became so tired of life that she tried to commit suicide by overdose she woke up in the hospital having been saved by paramedics lily hated herself but then ward 9 of a busy city hospital lily was visited by the pastor of a local evangelical church over a number of visits lily explained to her that through faith in jesus all her sins could be forgiven and that by the power of his holy spirit she could change well there and then in that hospital bed in ward 9 she committed herself to the lord jesus christ and became a christian when i met her just a couple of months ago she was with her grandson grandson and she's younger than me she was bright and cheery and she had a tattoo of a butterfly on her arm and not knowing her story i asked her about the butterfly after telling me about her conversion she said to me you know colin the old lily died that day in ward 9 the new lily came out like a butterfly the old lily died that day in ward 9 the new lily came out like a butterfly i felt deeply privileged to have heard her story do you ever wish that like lily we could crawl like a caterpillar into the chrysalis of god's grace and emerge like a butterfly do you ever wish that we could change this passage ephesians 4 describes the life of a christian who by faith in jesus has changed and is changing god's new society the church is populated by god's new people and this is what they look like the old them is gone and and they're now bursting forth in newness of life to quote the words of psalm 20 or verse 23 really uh rather they've put on a new self from verse 32 they've been changed by how in christ god forgave them this passage holds out hope to us all that through faith in jesus christ we too can change that like lily whatever's gone before the new us can come out like a butterfly this passage follows on from paul's teaching about how christ has given pastors and teachers to equip and train christians for works of ministry so that the church grows in love these are the changes god works in us and we need ourselves to make if according to the words of verse

one we are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have received and for us as christians these changes aren't just possibilities they are certainties they're not optional changes that we need to make they are apostolic commands do you ever wish that we could change and become the new people that god calls us to be and equips us to be then according to the apostle we need to do two things first in verses 17 through 24 we need to live for god and then in verses 25 through 32 we need to live for others live for god live for others you ever wish that the like lily the new us could come out like a butterfly then listen to the teaching of paul as he leads us through that gospel change heavenly father we bow in your presence may your word be our rule your spirit our teacher and your greater glory our supreme concern through jesus christ our lord amen first of all from verse 17 to 24 live for god live for god in the christian life the gospel always comes first what god has done for us must always come before what we do for him god changed lily in ward nine and now she lives for him what he did in her life comes before what she is now doing for him by telling her story god changes us and we change for him these verses are governed by the last words in verse 24 put on the new self created after the likeness of god in true righteousness and holiness here we have the gospel in a nutshell when someone becomes a christian what happens isn't so much a transformation as a miraculously new creation a new creation a new creation and just like a child looks like his mother and father so i'm looking at naomi at the back and she looks just like eva and danny so when we're recreated by faith through jesus christ we begin to look like him in righteousness and holiness this is the gospel the apostle has been describing in ephesians chapters 1 through 3 all that god has done for us by loving us giving us his son and filling us with his holy spirit has been done for this reason that we might become his new creations no longer living for ourselves but for him in righteousness and holiness now between verses 17 and 24 paul is referring to the old life from which god has rescued us the caterpillar life many of the christians in the church in ephesus had come from a gentile background and they knew only too well what their pre-christian lives had looked like paul describes it as ignorant and sensual he just calls a spade a spade ignorant and sensual and that's exactly the kind of society some of our political leaders want to create for us today but for paul it's exact opposite of what it means to be a human being it is a futile dark hard callous and greedy life it is ignorant it is sensual

it is ignorant in that in verse 18 it is entirely separated from the life of god for all the supposed intelligence of modern society it is ignorant because it is darkened in its understanding of god the ultimate reality it has shut its ears to god it wants nothing to do with jesus christ it lives only for itself the advances we have made in science and medicine in particular are little short of miraculous and yet for all our advances in terms of our spiritual lives as a society there's only been retreat are we truly richer now in terms of our spiritual lives than our fathers or our grandfathers or our great-grandfathers or are we more lonely ignorant and confused a very short investigation on google will reveal shocking statistics about the loneliness of our society it's appalling mental health and its sheer ignorance of the reality of god have we really advanced as a society since we gave up on god or have we gone back this is the ignorant life from which god saved us the caterpillar life when we were separated from the life of god and then in verse 19 it was sensual in that it was greedy to practice every kind of impurity now greed is entirely consumed with the self it's not just about food it's about everything what i want what what makes me happy greed is about putting what makes me happy before anything else the greedy society always ends up in sensuality it does whatever it wants with whoever it wants whether that should be consensual or non-consensual this is the way that lily used to live and although for a while at the beginning it made her happy to be with many men even then she knew deep down it was wrong of course it's wrong it's selfish because we end up not just using other people but they use us also we become users and the female form which god made to be honored is degraded into a pornographic image for men to lust after and abuse look at the statistics again has the sexual freedom of our society made us less or more fulfilled as human beings has promiscuity given us a more robust society or has it destabilized us as a nation now this is the sensual life from which god saved lily and it was the sensual life from which god saved the greatest ever african christian saint augustine of hippo in his younger years saint augustine had been a highly promiscuous man he famously prayed lord give me chastity but not yet through faith in christ

god saved augustine from his sensual life and changed him through faith in christ god can change us also ah but it's an old life which as christians we're very tempted to return to too many christians rather than pressing on to enjoy the new life god has for them return to the ignorance and the sensuality of the old to living not for god but for themselves as christians we must resist the temptation to go back we must say a firm no to sexual immorality and to practical atheism if we want to change we must as paul says in verse 22 put off the old self which belongs to your former manner of life have nothing more to do with these things throw them in the trash can but then from verses 23 to 24 the apostle details the new life which god has for us the butterfly life having redeemed us by the blood of christ having saved us by his grace having created us again god now calls us to live in righteousness and holiness these two virtues couldn't be any different from the vices listed in verses 17 through 22 replace ignorance with righteousness replace sensuality with holiness god has saved us for righteousness not ignorance for holiness not sexual immorality god has made us not to live for ourselves but for him this change god has made in us is uber dramatic as christians we no longer want to live in the old ways we want to live in the new ways we want to live in holiness and in righteousness we want to be completely devoted to god and to live for his glory we do not merely want to take off the old self but as paul tells us in verse 24 to put on the new self we want to replace the old with the new that new life being characterized by holiness and righteousness the new life lily lives lived entirely for god now righteousness and holiness are looked down upon in our society as being prudish hypocritical judgmental but true righteousness and true holiness are beautiful virtues because that's what jesus was and that's who jesus is righteous and holy totally devoted to god he lived in love which is the summary of what it means to be righteous and holy he lived for god he lived for the other that's true righteousness that's true holiness not whether you go to the cinema or not not whether you like a dance or not but whether you love god and love others by complete contrast to our former lives what our driving motivation was to make ourselves happy at the expense of anything and anyone we now live for god in righteousness and holiness and that's true change change we ourselves can't make a change so dramatic verse 24 it requires a new creation how then shall we change to being people who once lived for ourselves to being christians who now live for god paul tells us in verse 23 be renewed in the spirit of your minds be renewed in the spirit of your minds

in other words place at the forefront of your minds all god has done for you the gospel of god that good news which paul has detailed between chapters 1 and 3 transform the way you think let the truth that christ died for you motivate your living for christ say no to self to self-ignidene to self-sensuality say yes to god because christ suffered for you and died for you to save you by his grace martin luther used to say i preach the gospel to myself every day that is the essence of what it means to be renewed in the spirit of our minds that every day we tell ourselves that because christ died for us we now live for him when tempted to do something in your christian lives listen up young christians when tempted to do something in your christian lives that you know is doubtful and probably wrong bring to your minds what jesus christ has done for you on the cross by giving himself to take away all your sins and it'll be a whole lot easier for you to say no well here's the gospel in a nutshell what god's done for us by creating us in you comes before what we do for god by living for him it's working well in lily's life she's gone from living for self to living for god and all because in that ward 9 hospital bed she believed in jesus christ as savior and lord and god created a new lily there and then what god did for lily god can do for any one of us today so believe and trust in christ and we too can change live for god but then secondly and more briefly from verse 25 to 32 live for others live for others as we said earlier in the christian life the gospel always comes first it's only when we know why we're different that we can live different it's only when we know what god has done for us by sending his son that we can live in such a way that pleases him this section is governed by the gospel announcement in verse 32 in christ god forgave you in christ god forgave you this marvelous truth of god's forgiveness of all our sins allows us to live in a totally different way no longer for ourselves but for god and for others jesus gave his life for the other dying in our place so that we may gladly give our lives also for others now if in verse 17 through 24 the gospel works out in our living for god in verses 25 through 32 it works out in our living for others for after all as we're reminded in verse 25 we are members one of another as we've repeatedly seen in the last few weeks the church is one body we belong together in the church as god's new society created by him in his grace and this passage details for us how we are to live as christians in the church in such a way that maintains the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace notice notice all the commands concern the way in which we relate to one another they presuppose that as christians we are committed to one another as the church time and time again

[20 : 07] we've said that the new testament does not recognize a churchless christian there is no such thing it is only as we join together in the body we grow as christians and the church are you committed to other christians in this church really committed there are so many commands in this section that to go through each of them would take too long but notice that each of them has a reason attached for example verses 26 and 27 when it comes to not letting the sun go down in our anger this is not something for marriage as much as it's something for church we're warned that by allowing our anger to fester we're giving the devil an opportunity and we know that to be true from our experience if we don't deal with our anger there and then it turns into bitterness and before long our bitterness splits the church into factions the devil wins if the church splits pure and simple every time you hear that the devil wins if the church splits so we must deal with our anger at other christians in christian ways loving talking and forgiving one another listening as well more important than anything else again from verse 25 we're to let no corrupting talk come out of our mouths but only that which is needful that it may give grace to those who hear the word that Paul uses for corrupting here means rotten worthless it contains the idea of negative criticism destructive words we tear one another down when we criticize them when we slander them or when we gossip about them do we complain more than we compliment do we discourage more than we encourage for westerners like ourselves who are used to the best of everything complaining comes as second nature but in this verse

God confronts our corrupting talk and calls us only to say those things to each other which build them up and gives them grace let's ask ourselves am I truly living in light of Christ's forgiveness of me if all I can do is be prickly and complaining and critical of everything and everybody in this church or again in verse 32 when it comes to the way we think about each other and act toward each other the Bible says we are to be kind kindness is often in such supply in the church even though Jesus himself said our heavenly father is kind to his enemies kindness is in short supply but judgmentalism isn't we're far quicker to judge someone than we are to try and understand why they've said or done something over my years in the church

I have noticed that some Christians can be really critical of other Christians who are not quite as involved in the life of the church as they are my evangelist friend Roger Carswell reminded me of something that he had learned by reading the works of a Scottish minister called John Watson who I guess is no relation of Sherlock Holmes Roger Carswell or Thomas Watson John Watson rather said these words really great words he said be kind you do not know what battles people are fighting be kind you do not know what battles people are fighting are we critical or are we kind do we even try to understand the battles people are fighting before we mercilessly criticize them maybe they've got a difficult marriage maybe they've got wayward children maybe they've got mental health issues maybe they've got problems at work whatever let's be kind to one another for in so doing we are both maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace and also imitating the loving Christ who though he could have righteously judged us because of our sin showed compassion and tenderheartedness instead and then we have the command in verse 32 forgive one another forgive one another this this may be the hardest command of them all this is the highest expression of an understanding of the gospel having been forgiven by Christ are we willing to forgive others it may take us time to forgive others no one's saying that forgiving others is easy and it happens like that and having forgiven them once we may have to keep on forgiving them every time the memory of the wrong they have committed against us comes into our mind and it can be every morning we have to forgive them all over again but there's nowhere to turn in this command no conditions attached not even their apology or repentance rather in view of God's forgiveness of us in Christ

Jesus we are to forgive others when they sin against us how many churches have become war zones because of people's unwillingness to forgive one another although the slights committed were tiny how many churches have split over perceived wrongs which one party was unwilling to recognize and the other party was unwilling to forgive it's sad but often the last place people will come to for forgiveness is the church when they think of the church they think in terms of its capacity for judgment not its capacity for forgiveness the world around us is filled with unforgiveness and bitterness why else do wars begin why else do families break up if we truly want to change we need to fix our eyes on how much God in Christ has forgiven us how much it cost him on the cross in light of how much we've been forgiven to forgive each other isn't just reasonable but necessary if we want our church here to grow and flourish and be an attractive witness to our hostile society of how even the most desperate of sinners like

Lily can change listen a very high standard is expected of Christians within a church very high standard nothing less than that we live for each other and that we give ourselves for each other just as Christ lives for us Christ loves us and Christ gave himself for us on the cross now Lily is a very new Christian all these things just happened at the beginning of the year she still has to settle into the church but from all reports she is following Christ's commands here in Ephesians 4 and is both living for God and living for others with that wonderful butterfly tattoo on her arm what a change in her life she's changed from being a caterpillar who crawls on the ground to being a butterfly who flies in the wind and when people see her butterfly tattoo they ask her what's that all about and she gives them the gospel we too want to change do we not for those of us who are already

[28 : 13] Christians let's get on with obeying Paul's command in this passage by living for God and living for others by committing ourselves to God's new society by being the new creatures which in his grace God has made us to be but if we are not already Christians Christians and there may be some of us here today who are not already committed Christians the first step must be to recognize that we cannot change ourselves we cannot change ourselves that we're altogether helpless that no matter what we do without God we will always remain caterpillars crawling on the ground but having recognized that we need to pray that in Christ God would forgive all our sins and create us anew that he'd change us so completely that it would be as dramatic as a caterpillar becoming a butterfly and the good news is you know that God will God must he will always take us at our word he will change everything about us this is how to change this is our new life in Christ to live for God and to live for others may God draw you into his chrysalis of grace today and by faith you shall emerge like Lily did a beautiful butterfly you you you you you you you you