

# 1/12/2020 - Ephesians 4:17-24

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Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Oodawa.
- You can find help more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). If you are new visiting with us, I'm really glad you're here. If I haven't met you yet, I'm Benji. I'm the pastor here, obviously.
- And I would love to get to know you. So please stick around after we're done and let me have the opportunity to get to know you. If you do have your Bibles or you have your bulletins, turn to Ephesians chapter 3.
- Paul Hahn should be here this morning, but he and I, I've been thinking about this passage, and so I have some thoughts, and he told me some of the things he was thinking about. And so I just want to spend some time meditating on this passage and see what God's Spirit might teach us as we gather together in it.
- So I'm going to read from Ephesians chapter 4, verse 17 and following. 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.
- [ 1 : 1 7 ]     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've become calloused and have given themselves up to sensuality, greed, 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, and 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.
- Amen. This is God's word and he gives it to you because he loves you and he wants you to know him. That's why we have God's word. So just a brief introduction of Paul Hahn.
- Paul is our denominational leader, as I said. And he and I were talking, as we were talking about this passage, he actually told me one of the things that he had been thinking about with this passage was this old Twilight Zone episode that I remember, but I would have never thought of.
- [ 2 : 3 6 ]     You might remember this. I don't know if you watched the old school Twilight Zone, like from the 60s. But some of you are of a particular age where you might have watched that. But some of you aren't.
- But there was one called After Hours. I don't know if you remember this. It was about this woman who goes to a department store. And she is at this department store, but it's unlike any department store she's ever been in while she's shopping.
- It has whole floors where there's nothing on them. And there's people, sales clerks, who know her name and treat her like they know who she is.

And she's never seen them before in her life. And there's this elevator man who takes her up and down and takes her to floors that she doesn't even want to be on. And there's all this weird stuff.

And she gets so overwhelmed. She goes to the manager's office. She's trying to figure it out. And she falls asleep. And when she wakes up, this store has closed. It's after hours. And so she starts wandering around the store after hours.

[ 3 : 41 ] And she sees these interesting things. But she ends up on this floor that is the storage room for all the mannequins, except the mannequins are alive.

And what she realizes is that all the mannequins, which is creepy enough, that all the mannequins, that what happens is that every month, one mannequin gets to become a real person for a couple of weeks and go and go around the world and go and meet people and talk to people and end up shopping.

And she was one of those mannequins. She has been alive for a couple of weeks and loved being alive so much that she had actually forgotten that she was a mannequin.

And when the morning comes and the store opens again, she is back in her frozen pose of plastic and paint. I love the Twilight Zone. And it's this moment of asking the question.

And the narrator, you know, at the end always asks this question, you know, what, you know, asks something about that. But one of his questions is, what is it like to feel like we were once alive and no longer are?

[ 4 : 53 ] You know, a church plant gathers people who many times are people who have felt spiritually alive at one point in their life and yet are longing for something new.

They don't feel that anymore. Maybe it was when they were a kid and they had this spiritual experience or in college and had a dramatic conversion or got involved in a church. And it may have just be months of some spiritual coldness.

Sometimes it's longer, like years. For some people, it's been decades that they have just been going through the spiritual motions. And they realize as they gather around a new church and all these new things are happening, one of the things that they realize is that they hadn't even noticed that there had been this deadness about them for a long time.

And they really want new life. Sometimes church plants gather people who realize that they have never felt spiritually alive. They may have called themselves Christians.

They may have hung out in churches and have some sort of history, but they've never come spiritually alive. What would it be like to actually see yourself and your life come alive spiritually, maybe for the first time?

[ 6 : 16 ] Can God awaken you? Can you feel alive again? That's part of what Paul is talking about. The Apostle Paul, there's Paul Hahn who was going to preach in the Apostle Paul, so I might get those confused, but they're not confused.

Only one has written the Bible. That's what the Apostle Paul is talking about here. He keeps using this amazing language in Ephesians to talk about us. We are Christ's body.

You know, we are united under him. He is our head. He is our king. He is the creator. He has created us. He talks about us having the power of God's resurrection life in us.

He is going to talk about us being the bride of Christ. All of this kind of lofty language. And then he gets to this section. And he seems to just get really simple and practical.

Look at verse 20. That's not the way you learned Christ. You have... He is assuming that his people have learned Christ.

[ 7 : 20 ] What in the world does that mean? I just want to sit on that idea for a few minutes. What does it mean to have learned Christ? What does it mean to learn Christ? Well, fundamentally, it means getting to know a person.

You know, learning Christ is not like learning the causes for the outbreak of the American Revolution for a history test. You know, the facts and the figures and the dates and the people.

That's not what learning Christ is about. It's meeting a person that changes you. It's a personal interaction that changes the way that you see the world.

In many ways, my friendship with Paul Hahn actually began that way. My first job when I was getting out of seminary, which is the graduate school for pastors, my first job was to work with students at the University of Texas in Austin.

It's a ministry of our denomination called Reformed University Fellowship, RUF. And so I moved to Austin in June. And my first week in Austin was Paul Hahn's last week in Austin.

[ 8 : 24 ] We were like ships passing in the night. He had come eight years before. He had planted a church in central Austin right by the campus at University of Texas. Had served there eight years. And he was now leaving to come to Knoxville.

And he was going to plant a new church in Knoxville here. And right by the other, right by the campus of the other UT. They actually had the same name, Redeemer.

And so Paul was leaving. I was coming. And so I got time with him for breakfast. We met one morning for breakfast at the MAG. Magnolia Cafe, if you've ever been to Austin.

It's the best breakfast in Austin. They have the best migas in Austin, which is saying something. And as happens most of the time in Austin on those steamy summer mornings when you meet people for breakfast, most of the time people are coming right off the trail.

They've been jogging and exercising. That's just kind of an Austin thing because nobody actually works real jobs in Austin. And so he showed up after a run and we sat out on the patio for two hours.

[ 9 : 28 ] And he tried to explain to me some of the challenges that I would face and some of the opportunities I'd have. And he tried to just give me some parting words of wisdom, which amazingly, there were three or four things he said in that conversation that I have never forgotten.

And it was just a one-off conversation as we were passing. But for years, from that point, from meeting him, he and I had met before, but we were not friends.

We didn't really know each other, had not really talked. But from that time, he and I kept up a friendship that has lasted years, even to the point that he was the first one to try to recruit me to come to plant this church three years ago.

See, knowing someone is more than just knowing about them. It's more than knowing facts and figures. It's having a personal interaction that ends up changing you.

It ends up changing who you are and how you live. Being a Christian isn't about having all the answers first. It's about knowing Jesus. Look, here's the thing for you young people, youth, students.

[ 10 : 33 ] People are trying to teach you all kinds of Bible stuff. You know, some of you go to Christian schools. You have to go to chapel. You go to Bible classes.

You come here. We do a Bible study with you. We want to get you doing Bible stuff. Your parents want to teach you the Bible. If you're homeschooled, you're getting trained in the Bible.

All that stuff is happening, and you sometimes might feel like people are just trying to get me to learn more about Jesus. And that's true because we want you to learn that. But that's not the end of things.

Each one of you has to make the decision that you are not just going to stay in the world of facts and figures and test-taking, of learning about the Bible, but you are going to learn Jesus.

You're going to discover who He is. You're going to read His Word for yourself. You're going to get up in the morning, and you're going to pray on your own. You're going to ask other people to help you know Jesus.

[ 11 : 35 ] That's what it means to learn Christ, to take Him on for yourself. Okay? So that's what it means to learn Jesus. What does it look like when you actually do begin to learn Him?

Paul uses this really kind of quirky language here. But that's not how 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 corrupting through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

He uses this language to put off the old self, put on the new self. Paul imagines every Christian as having two parts. The old self, or the old man, or the old woman, and the new self.

The new man, the new woman. The old self was us before salvation in Christ. It was dominated by our sinful passions. It was in our desires for self-protection, our hopes for self-glory.

It was dominated by our own selfish pursuits. But salvation is the process where God comes in and takes your old man and puts him to death.

[ 12 : 58 ] Martin Luther says that Jesus comes and drowns your old man in the waters of baptism. I like that language. That there is this old man that is present and yet does not rule over you any longer.

He doesn't have mastery over you. Natalie hates it when I use this gross illustration, but I've been using it since I worked with college students, so it'll be worthwhile, I think.

The way that I understand this idea of the old man and the new man, because the old man is dead and you've been raised to this new life, and that old man does not have mastery over you and yet does influence you in some ways.

He doesn't rule you. You're not dominated by him, but he influences you. It's like that old man has been put to death, but your ankles are still chained together.

You are free to move around, but there's this body there. It's a dead body. It's heavy to drag around. It sometimes is greater than you feel like you have the strength to deal with.

[ 14 : 11 ] And besides that, it's a dead body, so it's gross. It's just like dragging on the ground, and it's all decomposing. It stinks a lot, and it's embarrassing to have around.

You know, sometimes when people get to know you and they see how you really are underneath your facade, it's kind of ugly sometimes, you know? You're jealous of people. You're selfish.

You make decisions that you don't like, and there are things that you don't love about yourself when it's really seen. But here's the thing, is that over time, that dead body is becoming less and less influential on your life.

It is going further and further away until one day, the hope of heaven is that you will be fully and finally freed from that dead body.

You will have no more sin in your life that still influences you, that still affects the way that you make decisions, that still changes the way that your instincts are.

[ 15 : 15 ] You will be full and finally freed. And Paul wants you to live in anticipation of the new man being fully and finally freed from the powers of sin and death.

Because that day is coming. And so Paul uses all kinds of language. If you were to read on from here, he uses actually six different comparisons. He says this, and it's not printed in your bulletin, but if you have your Bibles, he says that you are to put away falsehood, that you're not to speak in lies, but you're to speak with truth.

Because lies come from the old man, but truthfulness from the new man. He says, you can be angry, but don't sin in your anger. You can be true with your emotional world.

You can be honest about those, but they don't have to dominate your life. He says that you should no longer go stealing, but should work honestly and diligently.

You should have integrity. Integrity instead of stealing and stealing work and time from other people. He says, don't tear down other people with your words, but use your words to build up and encourage other people.

[ 16 : 30 ] He says, don't live with bitterness and anger in your heart, but be kind and be forgiving. He says, don't joke about sex and sexuality, but honor it and give thanks for it.

That that's the way that we are to turn away from the old man and to put on the new man. One of the funny things about being a preacher is you get to know each other's stories because we hear each other teach all the time.

And so Paul this morning was telling me that he wanted to tell this story that I've heard him tell like three or four times. And so I thought I would just tell it for him. And it was about him when he got married.

So he, Paul is a, he's a athletic guy. He played baseball in college. He's also really smart. He played baseball at Yale and he's from Lakeland, Florida. So he kind of has this Florida thing, but really smart thing going.

So, you know, you never quite could figure out which world he fit in. And, and so, you know, as an adolescent, you have all those kinds of things and that comes out in all kinds of ways.

[ 17 : 40 ] And so he met his wife, Fran. She is this like well put together, kind of elegant Southern woman, red hair, beautiful.

And when they met, they got married and, and he had a couple of pieces of clothing that had kind of come with him through his adolescence and college.

And one of them, you know, this is like the late seventies, early eighties. One of them was a pair of those coaches shorts. You know what I'm talking about? Like the, the polyester, like coaches shorts that are really tight and not good looking at all, especially when you've worn them for like, you know, a ton of time working out outside and they're all sweaty and gross.

And, and so he would wear these. And finally, Fran was like, no, we are not doing coaches shorts anymore. You cannot do this.

And he said, but, but they're comfortable. Like they fit, right? I've been wearing these for years. Like, this is what I feel comfortable in. And she was like, no.

[ 18 : 51 ] And he learned as all men have to learn with our fashion. When we meet our wives is that, is that it might be comfortable. It might feel like the way that we ought to be doing things, but it's still wrong.

And we still have to put on new clothes. And that's the idea that Paul is getting at is, or that Paul the apostle is getting at is that we have to take off those old clothes, even though they're comfortable.

And we have to put on the new clothes. That's what it means to learn Christ. To be a Christian is to constantly be saying, yes, I know that's the way that I've always done it, but I'm going to do it a new way.

You have to put on Christ. That's what it looks like when we learn Jesus. Okay. So what is the heart of learning Jesus then? How, how do we do this? Well, this passage is really interesting because in English, it's Paul is, the apostle Paul is really hard to translate.

And, and so you see this in the, in the Greek some, but it's hard to see in the English that you see in this a lot of, a lot of indicatives, commands, go and do this, do that, do this.

[ 19 : 59 ] But at least in this first paragraph that's printed for you, there's really only one major command. And it comes in verse 23, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.

It's a, it's, it's called a present infinitive. And what that means is it is a command to do something, but then to continue doing it in a daily fashion.

So you are to be renewed in your mind and to continually be renewed in your mind. What Paul is saying is, is that the key to learning Christ is not just to be saved in a one time event.

You know, our culture, we talk a lot in our culture about, you know, when you walked an aisle, when you were saved, that, you know, when was it that you asked Jesus into your heart? That doesn't seem to be as important for Paul.

What Paul is saying is, whenever that began to happen in you, was there a daily pursuit of Christ and his and knowing him? It, like a relationship, an ongoing pursuit of Christ.

[ 21 : 06 ] That's what Paul is wanting you to see by renewing your mind. What does that mean? Well, Paul is saying that, that we are to continue to make the decision to live in a new life.

You know, to be a Christian at the very basic level, what does it mean to be a Christian? If you feel like you might not be a Christian, here's what you need to know. A Christian is simply this, a person who says to God, I'm a mess.

I don't have it all together. My sin and my failures are too much for me to fix. I repent of them. I turn away from them. And I seek after you for your forgiveness and your grace.

And I trust you to do that. That's all a Christian is. And every day we are called to live into that reality. Tim Keller is a preacher that I've quoted before, and he talks about that we have to preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

Every day we have to wake up in the morning and to be reminded that we are broken, and yet we are beloved because of God's forgiveness, and that we can move forward in faith. There's a church that is in Nashville that I've told you about before.

[ 22 : 28 ] It's called Emanuel Church, and I just really like the vibe of those guys. And I was visiting there one time last summer, and they had these cards that they had for people to give out to their friends.

And I couldn't remember exactly what it said, so I looked it up this week. And I think it's hilarious. I probably wouldn't phrase it quite this way, but I think it's great. And it has like, you know, it has where you can come to church or their website or whatever on one side.

But on the other side, it has three things. It just says, One, I'm a complete idiot. Two, my future is really bright because of Jesus.

Three, anybody can get in on this. And I love that. That is an encapsulation of the gospel. Look, you know, if you've gotten to know me, you know that I do not have it all together.

I just don't, and neither do you. I've made a mess of things. My life is a mess oftentimes. My children will tell you that. But my future is so bright because I'm heading somewhere to be with Christ forever where I will be fully and finally changed.

[ 23 : 42 ] And that's begun now. And anybody in this world can get in on that new life. What a great message for us to learn Christ, to live in that daily awareness of brokenness and beauty and hope.

I think that we would all do well to force ourselves in this new year to wake up every morning, to go to God's word, and to start preaching the gospel to ourselves every day that we might learn Christ.

Amen. It's good news for us. Let me pray for us. Our Father, we ask that you would help us to learn you in a new way this year.

Be with us, we pray. In Christ's name, amen.