

Putting on the New Nature

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Date: 30 June 1996

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[0 : 0 0] please be seated and you may like to have in front of you the reading from ephesians chapter 4 page 951 in the pew bibles and as i said before we are continuing a sermon series on paul's letter to the ephesians roughly half a chapter a week and i'll pray for us god your word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path and we pray that your word now will lead us to you and to paths of righteousness and holiness for jesus sake amen most christians don't feed their minds very well most of us are concerned about our action to some extent but far less concerned about what we think but our minds and what we think are crucially important fill your mind with rubbish and your life will be rubbish fill it with violence and you'll become violent but fill it with truth and your lives will reflect that truth in your behavior in your actions and in your speech but most christians in the western christian church of which we're a part don't exercise their minds enough most of us don't grapple with the things of god most of us don't meditate and ponder on the things of god most of us don't read our bibles if at all and even if we do not deeply or thoughtfully or considerately most of us don't read christian books enough to grapple with the things of god most of us don't think christianly about the world in which we live our views our thinking is shaped more by our world than by the truth of god and because we don't think enough about god and grapple enough with his truth and fill our minds with his truth and think and ponder that's why the western church is so immoral and so slack and so weak in this passage paul describes two groups of people the first is the group of non-christians whom he calls gentiles people who weren't jews and who aren't christians and then he describes the ephesians to whom he writes who also weren't jews but have become christians they're gentile christians and notice in the passage how important what they think is for their behavior for it's out of what we think that our behavior flows that's why it's important to think on truth that's why it's important to grapple with the things of god that's why it's important to read the bible to ponder it to meditate upon it to listen to sermons to be part of a bible study group to read christian books and to think christianly in the fellowship of christian people so that our lives will reflect the truth of god so paul describes those who aren't christians in the first three verses now this i affirm and insist on in the lord you must no longer live stop living he says as the gentiles that is the pagan non-christian gentiles live and then he describes their life in the futility of their minds he's writing to a greek culture that still honors the traditions of the great greek philosophers the mind the mind was prized in paul's society in greek society people thinking were extolled in the land far more so than our culture and yet he says despite all their brilliance of thinking they are futile in their minds he's not just saying that they've sort of got a bit wrong that their brilliance is brilliant but if only they would add a bit to it about god he's saying for all the brilliance of the mind and all the great intellect it is absolutely futile if it is without god but of course he's not writing to the great brilliant

philosophers of the day he's writing to normal people everyday people and as much as the great brilliance of the world is futile without god so is the thinking of the normal everyday person who lives in doncaster or doncaster east if their thinking is without god futile waste of time because it's failed to grasp reality because god is the center the source and the purpose of reality and if we take god out there's nothing much left and so any world view or any system of thinking that does not consider god is just a waste of time in the end ultimately so all the thinking of einstein or stephen hawking brilliant though it is without god in its center it's futile and they are futile in their thinking paul goes on to say in verse 18 they are darkened in their understanding because their mind has begun without god then it's become dark they fail to see the light of the truth they're alienated from the life of god because of their ignorance and hardness of heart here i think is a progression in view their hearts have become harder and harder as their thinking keeps going without god more and more into darkness more and more away from god ignorance is not an excuse here ignorance is a sin and ignorance makes a person vulnerable to gross immorality and depravity so verse 19 they have lost

all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness greedy to practice every kind of impurity what a bleak assessment of the culture of paul's day accurate though it was because their ignorant thinking their futile thinking leads them into all sorts of impurity in practice later on in verse 22 he calls their way of life corrupt and deluded by its lusts for the society of paul's day like our own thinks that they will find satisfaction in various avenues of pursuit in power in money in sexual excitement and thrills but paul says they're deluded that's full of deceit because when they chase after it they find that there is no satisfaction in those things it is empty and meaningless you can never be satisfied he's saying with the pursuits of this world without god they may look attractive but they fail to deliver the goods and a bleak assessment this is paul's not denying that there are decent and good people in the world who are not christians of course there is goodness in people because we're all made still in the image of god marred though that is but he's saying that a society and individuals who are without god are in a progression away from morality and away from truth and our society is much like this society here for in our society we have a premier who despises the christian gospel and says it has no part in the life of this state and asks church leaders to be silent on issues of morality and public concern that's like this society futile in its thinking and heading towards depravity depravity of a gambling culture the depravity and immorality of a culture where it's becoming more and more acceptable and even legal tomorrow in one part of this country to kill other people a society which still applauds drunkenness and and loutish behavior a society which approves homosexual relationships a society which is greedy for greedy for money and for excitement and for power not only in the high flyers of bond and scarce but in everyday life our neighbors and our friends and it's futile paul says wrong thinking leads to wrong behavior the mind is important lack of truth leads to lack of morality and as we look on our society and those of you who are older than i am will probably have much better perspective of how it's moved i suspect it's become more depraved more immoral in the last 50 or 100 years because more and more our society is based on ignorance of god and that lack of truth is leading more and more to a lack of morality for if we do not have god in our lives then there is absolutely no reason at all why we should care for anybody else and indeed half of our world doesn't but christians are to be different paul says indeed he says that christians are different therefore they are to be different in the verses that follow so in verse 20 he says but not you that is not the way you learned christ in verse 20 for surely you've heard about him and were taught in him as truth is in jesus you were taught to put away your former way of life your old self corrupt and deluded by its lusts and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to clothe yourselves with a new self created according to the likeness of god in true righteousness and holiness where the world is ignorant christians have been given the truth and taught the truth and learned the truth it's not that we're somehow more clever than the world because we've discovered the truth it's that god has revealed himself to us and given us the truth in the christian gospel and so christians are fundamentally different to the world because they have the truth of god given to them i've discovered having come back from england being in england for three years the people around about have changed clothes i don't mean the fashion and of course everybody's changed their clothes because otherwise we'd be very smelly but a person called tony lockett wore red black and white three years ago and now he wears red and white a paul broderick wore maroon and blue or yellow or something a color that we won't see anymore probably and now he wears yellow and black they are people who've changed football clubs tony lockett from st kilda to sydney paul broderick from fitzroy to richmond they've changed their allegiance so instead of wearing one set of clothes that reflects where they belong they've put on a new set of clothes to reflect the team for which they now play and that's the sort of picture that paul has in mind here that a christian has gone from being under the allegiance to the world to ignorance to lack of morality allegiance to themselves and now when they're a christian they have an allegiance to god so he says they have are supposed to have put off the old self like a set of clothes in a way and put on the new self of course the analogy is weak because paul's talking about a completely new person not just the outer exterior of the person but there's sort of this analogy there putting off the old self in verse 22 you are taught to put away or put off literally take off clothes your former way of life put it to one side he's not just talking about putting off a bit of life as though when becoming a christian we get rid of one or two bad habits so we sort of take off a little bit of clothing and then basically right he's saying we take off entirely the old self and we put on a completely new self not just a few bits and pieces but a completely new outfit and of course the analogy is not just really of clothes it's about the whole of life itself and he's talking about a once-off action that when we become a christian we really do take off one set of clothes and put on another

and it's once and it's done once that's the sort of picture and the sense of the verbs in this passage the former way of life is put off and a new way of living and a new way of being is put on a completely new person and what we're putting on is not clothes of our own making but clothes of god's making so in verse 24 these are clothe yourself it says clothe yourselves with a new self created by god that is according to the likeness of god in true righteousness and holiness but that's not the full story because when tony lockett went to sydney and changed his jumper and socks that wasn't all that had to happen he had to learn how to play with new teammates with a new coach in a new style paul broderick the same when he went from fitzroy to richmond all other footballers the same remember reading just recently about how richmond is playing a very different style of game this year because of the change of coach from northy to walls and so even the players who are there have to learn a new way of playing new partners to kick to and pass to and so on and there's a sense in which that's there for christians as well for though there's a putting off of the old and a putting on of the new in verse 23 we are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and that has got a continuous ongoing sense about it to keep on being renewed in the spirit of your minds to keep on learning to keep on changing to keep on growing and so there's a sense in which tony lockett walks out for the first time with a sydney jumper on and his allegiance is clear by the jumper but he's still learning how to play for a new team and he's still learning his new teammates and the way to operate and the same with christians there's a decisive break when we become christians but we are to keep on changing and growing to reflect our new status or our new allegiance to god in our life you've changed your clothes paul says now live out the change imagine a ballet dancer wearing the normal clothes of the street walking up and down the street but changes the clothes into the ballet shoes and ballet outfit or whatever and now they behave differently they walk differently they up on their toes or whatever it is i know for me if i'm wearing a clerical collar part of me keeps thinking i must behave a bit better than uh if i were uh if i were not and it's sort of what's going on here paul saying you've got a new set of clothes on so live up to the clothes that god has given you in your behavior and he goes on and gives five examples of that in the verses that follow that's why verse 25 begins so then because that you're supposed to be wearing this new set of clothes now live it out therefore here are some examples for it and the first one in verse 25 is put away falsehood but don't just put away falsehood it's not about undressing it's about changing clothes so put off something and put on speaking the truth to our neighbors meaning christian neighbors because it's in the context of the christian church for we are members of one body it's not just getting rid of the negative but it's putting on the positive it's not just putting away falsehood as though then we'll might as well be silent but it's actually speaking the truth putting away the negative putting on the positive changing clothes not just getting undressed and paul is saying that falsehood stabs at the heart of the christian church at the heart of christ's body whenever we lie to our brothers whenever we carry deceit to each other in the christian church we are stabbing the body of christ himself verse 26 and 27 is the second example be angry he's not encouraging anger he's restricting it be angry but do not sin do not let the sun go down on your anger literally meaning don't carry your anger into the next day the sunset is the end of the day for ancient israel and he's saying control your anger restrict your anger in fact anger is dangerous be angry yes but do not sin most of us are angry and most of us are angry often and there is a growing anger i think in people's lives in society sometimes people are encouraged to express it occasionally you hear of people who are encouraged to control it or to deal with it a carlton footballer was fined i think it was recently in the last two weeks for expressing his anger and punching someone at a nightclub and he was told he had to go to an anger counseling type service to deal with his anger most of us carry some sort of long-term anger from things in our life that we've never resolved or never wanted to resolve i know that periodically i i'm by myself and i suddenly think why am i feeling unsettled or angry about something and i trace back the last i think i wasn't like this an hour ago what's troubled me or made me angry and i try and trace back the things that have happened in the last hour and and if i find what it is which i usually do and ask god to help me i find that my anger is prompted by some sort of sinful desire that i'm wanting something that i'm frustrated because i haven't got and when i think about what it is i'm wanting and why i'm angry that i haven't got it i realize that it's something that i shouldn't have and it is something that's covetous or greedy anyway anger is very dangerous paul says yes there are times when there is right anger but even then we must not let it control us but rather to control it jesus of course himself was angry in mark 3 for example righteous anger that was controlled not anger that was controlling him so anger is dangerous and we need to deal with it carefully and put away all wrong anger in order that we do not sin and do not make room for the

devil to break up christian fellowship the third example in verse 28 is about thieves must give up stealing paul's writing to a church where there were still thieves in it he's uh acknowledged because literally it's saying stop thieving he's addressing christians who are thieving and most of us probably are not sort of shoplifters or armed robbers or bandits maybe we are in which case we must stop but very often in our attitude to our work the way we treat the tax department and the government and the council there is a sense in which perhaps from time to time we're involved in keeping or taking things that really are not legitimately ours it's very easy in all sorts of avenues of work employment and life and paul says stop but not just stop thieving but actually now do something positive in its place again it's putting away the negative but putting in its place something positive so instead of stealing with your hands and using your hands dishonestly he says work labor literally work hard and work honestly with your own hands but notice the attitude changes as well it's not work honestly with your hands to accumulate for yourself but as the end of verse 28 says so as to have something to share with the needy wonder how many of you tomorrow morning as you head off to work think i'm going to work hard today so that at the end of the day i've earned some pay so that i can share with the needy i don't think i ever thought like that when i went to work at national mutual i don't even think i think like that now when i get up in the morning to work as in this job but paul is because most of us have an attitude of working hard to accumulate money for ourself see how demanding this is most of us probably think oh i'm not a thief so this doesn't apply to me but how many of us can honestly say that we work hard we labor wearily so that we can share with the needy that's much more demanding isn't it see it's in some sense it's perhaps easy for us to take off some old clothes but putting on the new may not be quite so easy the fourth example in verses 29 and 30 let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is useful for building up again it's putting away the evil talk evil talk is something that's obscene and filthy maybe swearing but it's actually very broad it includes things like gossip includes things like just general speech which harms paul is aware of the destructive power of words words spoken can't be recalled if 10 people speak to you this week and nine people encourage you and one person speaks ill of you i'm sure that the person who spoke ill of you is foremost in your mind at the end of the week not the nine who encouraged you words harm and we have to be careful about the power of the tongue that's why when i came to the parish i said that it if from time to time as there's bound to be we're critical of something i do or something the church has done or hasn't done don't ring up somebody and complain don't gossip behind your back criticizing don't speak ill of me or somebody else in the parish but go to the person if there's something i've done wrong

[20 : 17] can come to me i don't want to hear that fred's been talking to joe or something behind my back and criticizing because that's gossip that's malevolent speech that speech which grieves the holy spirit as verse 30 says because it's about the disunity and division of the church and all of us find it easy i think to fall into that sort of sin that sort of speaking ill of somebody else thinking that it's all right because they won't hear and even if they don't it's not all right because it's festering divisions or disunity in the body of jesus christ sometimes it's said that if you can't say a good word about something then don't say anything that's weak paul is saying don't say bad words say good words he's not saying be silent when you find it hard to say a good word he's rather saying as he goes on to say but say what is useful for building up again it's positive some of us may find it easy to put aside the evil words but how hard it might be to say things that build up the body of jesus christ think about it so often our speech is fairly bland or neutral encouraging each other and building up each other in the body of christ proverbs 12 says that rash words are like sword thrusts but the tongue of the wise it's not silent it brings healing the tongue of the wise is positive in what it says and does let us be wise then and the fifth and final example of this holiness and righteousness which we are to practice is in verses 31 and 32 the one balancing the other put away in verse 31 all bitterness that is resentment and cynicism and animosity put away all bitterness and wrath which is explosive rage that controls us anger the next word is is a more sort of settled hostility put that away put away wrangling that is uh sort of angry yelling or quarreling amongst you put away slander where you're speaking ill of somebody behind their back insulting them or abusing them put all that away with all malice a general word to cover all that's been said there put it away but in its place again put on something positive put on kindness one of the characteristics of god in ephesians 2 put on tender heartedness or compassion another characteristic of god put on forgiveness as paul says at the end of verse 32 again a characteristic of god for god in christ has forgiven you not only putting off the old but putting on the new as well well let me make three brief conclusions the general heading of this passage as of last week comes in chapter 4 verse 1 i therefore the prisoner

in the lord beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you've been called we have been called to belong to christ to be in his team so to speak to wear his colors so then let us act and live worthily of the colors or the team that we belong to to christ last week i mentioned the two key words that summarize this worthiness of life as unity and maturity and today if i were to summarize these characteristics it would be purity unity maturity and purity and notice how all those things that were mentioned in verses 25 to 32 all take place within relationships it's not that we can put on clothes of holiness and righteousness as isolated individuals as though i can stand here and just be in myself and by myself holy and righteous holiness and righteousness takes place within fellowship within interaction between each other where i don't speak ill of somebody but i speak good of somebody where there is unity and harmony in the fellowship where i'm building others up and they're building me up it's relational holiness and righteousness not an isolated person by themselves being holy and righteous the second point of

conclusion is that we don't drift into holiness because we're christians it's not as though i'll wake up tomorrow morning be and be a little bit more holy than i am now and wake up the next day and i've made a little bit more progress overnight as god's done something but rather it requires our conscious effort and cooperation with god's spirit in us we're not passive spectators of a holiness process going on inside of us but rather we are to be conscious and deliberate in our progress in holiness and righteousness put on paul says be renewed in your minds he says and thirdly how how is it that we are going to make progress in holiness and righteousness how is it that we're going to get rid of evil speech and have good speech how that we're going to get rid of stealing and give to the poor and so on and the key to it as i understand it in this passage is verse 23 be renewed that is keep on being renewed in the spirit of your mind what we think affects how we behave that's why paul says the key to it is the renewal of the spirit of the spirit of your mind what you think affects what you behave how you behave that's why it's important to think on truth that's why the first half of ephesians is all about the gospel of jesus christ and what god has done for us in christ so that we might think about it and meditate on it and grapple with the truth of the gospel of all that god has done for us in christ so that our lives will be worthy it's practical theology is practical reading the bible is practical there are some of you who will say oh i don't read the bible but i live a christian life but if you don't read the bible you won't know the truth of god and therefore your lives will not reflect the holiness and righteousness of god in your day-to-day living that's why i take the bible so seriously that's why i long for every one of you to read it every day to think about it to meditate upon it to have verses of the bible that resonate in your minds to have the truth of god soaking into your soul so that your lives reflect the glory of christ in everything that you do and think and say that's why i long for everybody to take the bible seriously to be in a bible study group to think about the sermons to talk about the sermons to talk about what you've been reading in the bible to edify each other and to encourage each other to think on truth but you see we live in a world where we spend more time watching sloppy and stupid things on television and reading all the glossy magazines in the newsagent but we don't bother with the bible because it's hard to work and we are filling our minds with rubbish and that's why our lives are so incomplete and so full of rubbish as well but if we grapple with the truth of god and if we think about the truths of god then we'll realize how god will provide all of our needs so i've got no need to steal and i can give away because i'm confident that i know the character and love of god and that he gives me everything i need if we know the church to be bought at the price of christ's death on the cross then we will preserve the unity that is ours in the spirit for we'll know how important it is to god to have a church that practices the unity that is already ours and so we'll take careful steps to preserve it if we're so soaked in the values of god then we won't be running after the deceitful lusts of this world for we know where we'll find eternal satisfaction and happiness in the things of god so let us stop being mindless christians let us be christians who exercise our minds to the full we're not all brilliant intellects that doesn't matter but let's fill our minds with the truth of god so that our lives will reflect his holiness and righteousness let's pray father i pray that you the god of our lord jesus christ the father of glory may give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know as we come to know him

so that with the eyes of our hearts enlightened we may know what is the hope to which you have called us that we may know the riches of your glorious inheritance among the saints and that we may know the immeasurable greatness of your power for us who believe in jesus christ amen amen love us amen love us amen