

Putting Off the Old and Putting On the New

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Date: 26 September 2021

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Thanks, Joyce, for reading for us. My name is Vijay Henderson. Just before I came on here, I was just making sure my hair was straight and my collar was settled, but I don't think that really matters, does it, when you're wearing a shirt like this.

Don't worry, I'll explain later. Just bear with me for now. If I can distract you away from this for a second, let me start with a question. What is the one job you had that you would never, ever go back to?

Ever had a job like that that you would never, ever go back to? Have you ever been to a restaurant and afterwards you thought, I'm never going to eat at that place again?

Maybe it was a relationship you had a long time ago and you thought, I'm never going to give that another chance. Perhaps it was a subject at school. For me, it was physics at uni. Never again.

You see, those situations, they're so terrible, I don't need to convince you to stay away. Nothing will make you try them again. But in our passage today, that's exactly what the Apostle Paul has to do.

[1 : 08] Over and over, he pleads with the Ephesians, don't go back to your old way of life. And in verse 17 to 19, in our passage which Joyce read, verse 17 to 19, that is Paul's diagnosis on the old way of life.

As I read it out, see if you can hear what the sickness is. 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. Did you spot it as I was reading?

Dark thinking, hard hearts. You see, that is the sickness of Pharaoh. Remember in Exodus, Pharaoh, despite all the miracles and plagues he saw, his heart was so hard to God, he thought he could carry on fighting him and that that would be a good idea.

And Paul looks at the empire around him and says the Gentiles, that is the pagans, the Gentiles are suffering the same condition. Hard hearts, darkened mind.

[2 : 29] Hearts and minds. It's all the same to Paul, an inner sickness. Verse 19 says, Verse 22, They're corrupted by deceitful desires.

And if you think in pictures, it sort of works this way. Lies, that says lies there. Lies go in. They harden the heart, which darkens the mind and results in impure behavior.

Hearts and minds. It's an inner sickness. And that is Paul's diagnosis on the world around him. But I wonder if that makes sense of the world around you.

What is our city's response to stealing? Not stealing. That was one of the commands we heard in our reading. What is Melbourne's attitude to stealing? Everyone says it's wrong, don't they?

Even out there. But dishonest insurance claims. Cheeky tax deductions. Not scanning every item at the self-service checkout. These are normal behaviors for normal Melburnians.

[3 : 59] Putting off falsehood. That's another command in our passage today. What do people think about lies? Lies are bad. Everyone agrees. But they are handy if you're in a tight spot.

If you're facing a confrontation. Or you really want to see someone you're not supposed to in lockdown. And Paul begs the Ephesians.

He says, don't go back to that former way of life. You see, in Ephesus and in Melbourne, the difference between the old self and the new self is about hearts and minds and what goes into them.

Have a look at the Ephesian person in verse 20. It's the same process as the Gentile, but this time the gospel goes in. Look at verse 20.

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.

[5 : 02] You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which has been corrupted by deceitful desires to be made new in the attitude of your mind.

In fact, Paul is only repeating what he told the Ephesians back in chapter 1. And I think it's on his screen now. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, when you believed and your insides were changed by the Spirit.

And so if we think in pictures again, this time truth goes in, it's believed and sort of softens the heart. It enlightens, it's heard and learned and taught and makes new the mind, which results in changed behavior.

You see, lies and truth, they sort of go on the same journey around the inner self. But while one leaves a person, verse 18, separated from the life of God, the other one, truth, produces, 5 verse 1, God's dearly loved children.

The difference is about hearts and minds and what goes into them. You see, out there, it's not safe for Christians per se.

[6 : 25] It's full of lies. Lies about who God is and about our own self-importance. But here, here is the truth. The truth about God and what he wants from us.

The truth about where we're headed and how life works best until we get there. It's all here in a book for you to read anytime you want.

And doesn't that change how we think about our times in the Bible? Last week, the big application was speak the truth in love because the Bible is food that grows and changes the church.

No one starves themselves and expects to be big and strong afterwards. You can't deny your heart and mind the truth and expect to be healthy, expect to survive as a Christian afterwards.

Paul says, when the inner self is fed on a diet of lies, it produces, verse 19, sensuality, every kind of impurity and greed.

[7 : 37] That is the Gentile way. That is the pagan way. But God's truth, the gospel, it produces, verse 24, look at verse 24, it produces your new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Where in the Bible does verse 24 remind you of? It's Genesis 1, isn't it, our first reading. You see, all people were created in God's image, but lies corrupted our inner selves.

It spoiled our ability to reflect his image well. And so, in Ephesus, God stepped in with the gospel of salvation.

It was a second Genesis, a new creation, and the message of Jesus produced something new called a Christian. And if God has done that for you too, it would be crazy to return to your old way of life.

Crazy, like returning to that one job you swore you'd never go back to or that one relationship or that one subject at school or that one restaurant. But actually, I think it's a little worse than that because chapter 2, verse 1, which is on your screen, it says, as for you, you were dead in transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world, like the sons of disobedience.

[9 : 13] So actually, our old way of life is not like going to that restaurant or going back to that old workplace. It's like going to the cemetery, digging up a grave and jumping inside and pulling the dirt over your head.

You would never do that. And I hope that that makes sense of the t-shirt that I'm wearing today. You see, here is a bit of falsehood.

I don't know if you can see that. Maybe if I step out, is that better, guys? There's a bit of falsehood. I'll go this way. Here, there's some impurity. There's a bit of hostility.

On the back, can you see that? My whole back is full of anger. I don't know what that says about me. But the red colour is no accident either because these sins, they're like mortal wounds.

because chapter 2, verse 1 says, we were dead in our transgressions and sins. And it's striking, isn't it? It's striking how messy this shirt is.

[10 : 16] Obviously, I would never normally wear this shirt to church. You would never normally wear something like this to go to work. You'd never wear this to go out with your friends or to walk around Ruffy Lake.

But to the Gentiles, to the pagans, all they see when they look at me or look at this shirt is a clean white shirt. Perhaps a few grey areas here and there.

There'd be no problem for them to wear this shirt around Melbourne. But to God, these sins, a bit of hostility, a bit of impurity, these are not cheeky, Aussie character flaws.

They're not folksy misdemeanours. Not acceptable sins. They're mortal wounds because we were dead in our sins. Like mortal wounds on a corpse.

And Paul begs the Ephesians, verse 22, you were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which has been corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self.

[11 : 25] Created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. The illustration is clothing. Put off your old self. Put on your new self like you put off an old T-shirt and put on a new one.

So that's what I'm going to do now. So bear with me. I hope I don't rip my microphone off. So there's the old and let me put on a new...

My thanks to the kids who helped me destroy dad's T-shirts. There it is.

Notice this time, it's the gospel that goes in, not lies, and it results in a changed self, changed behaviours, which you'll see a little bit later on.

But notice as well, notice as well that I'm the one changing the shirt. These are a series of commands for me and not for God. It doesn't mean that I am saving myself.

[12 : 30] Only God creates, remember? But now that he has, it's up to me to live differently, to put on this new white self.

You see, when the Gentiles live according to this sort of corruption, when the Gentiles live this way, at least they're being consistent. At least they're living according to where their hearts and minds are at.

At least they're living according to the lies that they believe. But what excuse does the Christian have? God has given us his truth. He's given us new inner selves via the Spirit.

We have no excuse to go backwards. This passage is a series of commands for me to do and not for God. To carry on the clothing illustration, imagine if you can a police uniform.

Now, police can enforce the law even when they're in plain clothing. Similarly, I can't just put on a uniform and start arresting people because the clothes don't make the officer.

[13 : 39] But there is an appropriateness about the uniform that perfectly matches a police officer's calling and the situations they find themselves on the streets.

And Paul uses the clothing illustration and says wear the kind of lifestyle that is appropriate to your calling, to who God has made you to be.

Acting in righteousness and holiness that won't make you a Christian, only God creates. But now that he has, wear righteousness and a holy lifestyle because they fit you perfectly, like a perfectly tailored suit.

It's not just a series of do's and don'ts. It's about having a wonderfully high view of the calling God has made in our lives.

There was an old you, now God has made a new you. When, verse 21, you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[14 : 49] And the rest of the passage is five practical examples that follow this pattern. Old self, new self, and the truth that makes the change.

Old self, new self, the truth that makes the change. And so what we're going to do is just look at a few of those examples. So have a look down at verse 25.

This is quite practical help. Verse 25, therefore, each of you must put off falsehood, put off lies, and put on speaking truthfully to your neighbor.

Because the truth is we're all members of one body. Imagine how hard it would be for a body to walk if the left leg kept telling lies to the right leg.

Imagine how hard it would be for a body to play the piano well if the thumb kept lying to the finger.

Let's do another example.

[15 : 47] Verse 26, put off sinning in anger, which is ungodly anger for non-righteous reasons. Put off sinning in anger, put on peacemaking.

That is, make peace before the sun goes down. That way, grudges don't form. Because the truth is, verse 27, the devil wants to gain a foothold.

You see, Satan wants to exploit the tension that sometimes forms between Christians. Even in a church our size, we're bound to rub each other the wrong way and clash with others.

There's been friction in my small groups that I've had to step in and sort of broker peace quickly before things spiral out of control and grudges form.

So, don't be angry uncontrollably or angry sinfully. Rather, let anger lead to peacemaking. And why? Because the devil would love nothing more than to create a division between two Christians and make it irreparable.

[16:58] Let's do verse 29. Skip down to verse 29. Put off any unwholesome talk from your mouths. So, that is things like swearing, filthy talk, gossip, innuendo, any talk, any words that break someone else down.

Put it off, says Paul. Put on words that are helpful in building and benefiting others. Because the truth is, verse 29, unwholesome, sorry, verse 30, unwholesome talk grieves the Holy Spirit. Imagine in the old temple in Israel, if the priests were engaged in gossip and filthy talk, that would be a scandal because God lived in that building. But now that God lives in us via the Holy Spirit, it would be scandalous to carry on with unwholesome, filthy talk.

The Spirit lives in us that would grieve him to be in that body. Verse 31, let's do the last one, verse 31. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of mouth. In other words, put off hostility and put on, verse 32, being kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other because the truth is in Christ God has forgiven you.

[18:29] In Christ you're a forgiven person and so in Christ be a forgiving person. You see, this passage is more than a series of do's and don'ts.

It's about having a fantastically high view of yourself and who God has made you to be. You're one of his holy people. We have his truth and his Holy Spirit living within us.

It is everything we need to put off the old self and put on the new. And so why don't we wear our new calling like a perfectly tailored suit?

And as we finish, here are a couple of motivations that take this passage beyond a series of just do's and don'ts. Did you notice that in this passage all the behaviours are other person centred? Did you notice that as we were reading? They're all other person centred and that's because Ephesians is all about a cosmic sized building called the church. It's God's masterpiece for the end of time.

[19:35] In chapters one to three, God has begun all the building work, but as yet we're not as united or as obedient as we could be. So in chapters four to six, he wants us to join in with the building work as well.

And so these do's and don'ts are other person centred because they're about us playing our part in the church building too. And so I want you to imagine that you, imagine lockdown's over, imagine you arrive here on a Sunday, you're eager to hear more truth, more of the good stuff to help you when you're out there in your daily nine to five.

You arrive at church, you're keen to hear truth, but during the sermon instead of hearing God's word, all you hear is a smooth speech that doesn't resemble at all the passage you're holding in your hands.

Imagine if during the greeting time you're looking forward to sharing peace and catching up with other Christians. But instead of shaking hands and peace, all you see are divisions around the room, you see people running away, deliberately avoiding other people.

Imagine if during the morning tea afterwards, instead of encouraging one another with what you learned in the sermon or how God has been helping you this past week, all you hear is gossip about the pastor or about other people in the church.

[21:04] Imagine if the Sunday experience for women was to come here and hear sexist chat from the men. Wouldn't that be terrible?

Can you imagine a church experience like that? Maybe you've experienced some of those things before, maybe even in this place. We're not as united or as obedient as we could be, as we should be.

And if you wanted a church experience like that, you could have just stayed in your workplace or your neighbourhood or your university or your sporting club, because that is how the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thinking, the darkness of their minds, the hardness of their hearts.

God's word to us today is verse 17. I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.

So that is a bad church experience. That's an awful church experience. In fact, that is a useless church experience. Good for nothing, that is. Let's finish with a positive church experience.

[22 : 15] Did you notice in the passage when we put off the old, when we put on the new, when we adopt these behaviours, sharing these sorts of things, truth-telling, did you notice who we start to resemble?

Let me read a couple of verses. See if you can hear who we start to resemble. Verse 24, put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Verse 32, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Five, verse 1, follow God's example as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

If a bad church experience is arriving to a room full of Gentiles, a radical church experience is arriving to a room full of Jesus's, a room full of God's, more accurately a room full of his children who are united as a family and obedient to their father just as he called us to be.

Wouldn't that be incredible? Wouldn't that help this church be built up in maturity and number? You see, putting off the old and putting on the new, they're a series of commands, but they also give us, they force us to look and have a fantastically high view of who God has made us to be.

[23 : 52] They are about a church and about God's church building, growing, and that means it's not an individual pursuit. And so putting off the old, putting on the new, I need your help and you need mine.

And so let's pray that we'd help one another. Do pray with me. Father, please forgive us for not walking in love with each other.

Thank you that in Christ we have forgiveness, that you are merciful and gracious. Jesus, Father, give us a high view of your calling on our lives.

By your spirit, would we put off the old self and put on the new? Father, would we speak the truth in love to one another? Please, Father, would we do these things until your church is fully built?

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.