

Walk as Children of Light

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining in for us. My thanks as well to Philip Bond for reading. Thanks so much, Philip. That was really fantastic. Wasn't he dressed so well in his jacket? Fantastic. He looked really dapper. Not like me, dressed in this thing. But don't worry, I'll explain a little bit later. Maybe I can distract you by talking about that question which Michelle asked as we went to the break.

What is the one job you've had that you would never, ever go back to? Have you had a job like that? Maybe it was a restaurant experience.

Maybe you went out to dinner and afterwards you thought, I'm never eating at that place again. Maybe not a restaurant. What about a relationship? Have you ever had a relationship and you thought, no matter what, I'm never getting back together with that person again?

Maybe a subject at school. For me, physics at uni, never again, thank you. You see, these situations, those situations, they're so terrible, I don't need to convince you to stay away.

[1 : 05] But in our passage today, that's exactly what Paul has to do. Over and over again, he begs the Ephesians, don't go back to that old way of life you had.

Actually, in verse 17 to 19, that is Paul's diagnosis on the old way of life. As I read these verses, see if you can spot what this sickness is.

Verse 17. Dark thinking, hard hearts.

That's the sickness. And actually, that is the sickness of Pharaoh. Do you remember in Exodus, Pharaoh, despite all the miracles, all the plagues that he saw, his heart was so hard to God, he thought it would be a good idea to oppose him.

And Paul looks at the empire around him and says, the Gentiles, the pagans, the Gentiles are suffering the same sickness. Hard hearts, dark minds.

[2 : 24] Hearts and minds, it's all the same to Paul. An inner sickness. Verse 19 says that like Pharaoh, the Gentiles have lost all sensitivity.

That is, they're like a hard callous with no sense about God and what pleases him. As such, verse 19, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity and they're full of greed.

Verse 22 as well says they're corrupted by the deceitful desires. And if you think in pictures, I think it sort of works this way. Lies go in, that's lies.

Lies go in, they harden the heart which darkens the mind which results in impure behaviour. That's just a way to think about it in pictures.

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

[3 : 30] What is our city's response to stealing? Stealing, that's one of the commands in the passage today. What do Melburnians think about stealing? Stealing is wrong, right? But what about dodgy insurance claims?

Cheeky tax deductions? Not scanning everything at the self-service checkout at Woolies. These are normal behaviours for normal Melburnians.

Putting off falsehood. Putting off lies. That's another command in the passage today. Lies are bad, right? Everyone agrees. But lies are very handy if you're in a tight spot or you're in a conflict situation or perhaps you want to visit someone you shouldn't during lockdown.

Lies are handy. And Paul begs the Ephesians, don't go back to that formal way of life. You see, in Ephesus and Melbourne, the difference between the old way of life and the new is about hearts and minds and what goes into them.

Have a look at the Ephesians in verse 20 to 24. It's the same process as the Gentiles, but this time gospel truth goes in.

[4 : 42] Have a look at verse 20 to 24. 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.

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 mind.

Actually, truth be told, Paul is only retelling them what he already said to them back in chapter one. Have a look on your screen. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

When you believed you were marked in Him and your insides were changed with the Holy Spirit. And so, again, if we were to think in pictures, it sort of goes like this.

This time, truth goes in. It's believed by the heart. And then it's heard and learned and taught and makes new the mind, which results in changed behavior.

[5 : 51] Truth goes in. It softens the heart. It's believed by the heart. It changes the mind and changes the behavior. You see, lies and truth, I think they sort of go on the same journey around the inner self.

But while one leaves someone, verse 18, separated from the life of God, the gospel truth makes us, by verse 1, His dearly loved children.

The difference is about what goes into hearts and minds. You see, out there, it's not safe for Christians. It's full of lies. Lies about God.

Lies about our own self-importance. It's full of deceitful, crafty schemes. And all cunning in the world. But here, here is the truth.

Here is 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.

[6 : 52] It's all here in a book for you to feed on anytime you want. And doesn't that totally change how we think about our times in the Bible? Last week, the big application was speak the truth in love.

Because the Bible, God's Word, that is the food that grows and changes the church. No one starves themselves and expects to be strong and big afterwards.

You can't deny your inner self, 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 results in, verse 19, sensuality and every kind of impurity and greed.

That is the Gentile way. That is the pagan way. But God's truth, the gospel, the Bible, that produces verse 24.

Your new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Where in the Bible does that remind you of?

[8 : 08] It's Genesis 1, isn't it? Which was our first reading. You see, all people were created in His image as we sang before. But lies have corrupted the inner self.

And so now, we poorly reflect His image back. In Ephesus, God steps in with a gospel of salvation. It was a second Genesis, a second act of creation as the message of Jesus produced something brand new called a Christian.

And if God has done that for you too, to return to your former way of life would be as crazy as returning to that one job you swore you'd never ever go back to or that one relationship or that one subject at school.

But actually, I think it's even worse than that. Because on your screen, chapter 2, verse 1, this is Ephesians. It says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live.

[9 : 19] When you followed the ways of the world and the ways of the sons of the disobedience, you were dead in transgressions and sins. And that means it's not like returning to that one office or that one restaurant or that one school.

It's like going to a cemetery, digging up a grave and jumping in and piling the dirt on your head. And you would never do that, would you? But I hope that that makes sense of this T-shirt I'm wearing. You see, here is a bit of hostility down there. If you can see it. Should I stand here? You can see it? Great. There is some greed. There is impurity down the bottom.

What's this one? This one is stealing, a bit of stealing. On my back, if you can see, the whole back full of anger. You see, and notice as well that the red colour, that is no accident.

That is blood red because these sins are mortal wounds. Remember, we were dead in our sins. And it's striking, isn't it, how shocking this T-shirt is, how messy it is.

[10:30] It's quite strange, isn't it? Obviously, I would never normally wear something like this in church. You would never normally wear this in your workplace or when you go out with friends or when you walk around Ruffy Lake.

But to the Gentiles, to the pagans, all they see here is a clean white shirt. Perhaps a few grey areas here and there.

There'd be no problem for them to put this on and wear this around Melbourne in their daily lives. But to God, these sins are not sort of cheeky Aussie behaviours or folksy misdemeanours or acceptable sins.

These are mortal wounds, like mortal wounds on a corpse. We were dead in our sins, remember? And Paul begs the Ephesians not to go down this path again.

Look at 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 created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

[11:46] Paul's illustration is about 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. And so that's what I'm going to do now.

Don't ruin my microphone setup. There's the old and I'll put on a new.

So here is the new self and notice this time it's sort of the same basic structure, isn't it?

Gospel goes in, hearts believed, minds change and it results in all sorts of new godly behaviours.

And notice as well if I just sort myself out.

Notice as well that I was the one who changed the shirt because these are a series of commands for me. They're not for God to do. I'm the one who needs to put off the old and put on the new.

[12:55] It doesn't mean that I am saving myself. Remember, only God creates. But now that he has, it's up to me to live differently and put on the new self.

You see, when the Gentiles live in all of this corruption, when the Gentiles live this way, at least they're being consistent. At least they're living in accordance with where their hearts and minds are at.

At least they're living in accordance with the lies that they believe. But what excuse does the Christian have? God has told us the truth.

He's given us his spirit to change our inner selves. We have no excuse to go back to that former way of life. This passage is a series of commands for us, not for God.

It's up to us to do them. To carry on the clothing illustration and help you, imagine, if you can, a police uniform. So, a police uniform.

[14:00] Now, the police are able to carry out their duties even when they're in plain clothes. They're able to enforce the law when they're off duty.

Similarly, just because I grab a police uniform doesn't mean I can start arresting people because the clothes don't make the officer. But there is an appropriateness about the uniform, isn't there? The uniform matches their calling about what they're supposed to do, about the situations they find themselves in on the streets. And Paul uses clothing illustrations and he 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, wear holiness like a new clothing, new clothing, like a perfectly tailored suit.

That's how it fits you now that God has made you new. It's not just a series of do's and don'ts. It's about having a fantastically high view of who God has called us to be.

[15:17] There was an old you, God made a new you. Verse 21, when you heard the truth about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth, the gospel that is in Jesus.

For the rest of our passage, it's a bunch of practical applications that follow that same pattern. Old self, new self, the truth that makes the change.

Old self, new self, and the truth. And so, we're just going to go through a few of them. They're very practical. We won't do all of them, but just a few. Have a look at verse 25.

Therefore, each of you put off falsehood. Put off falsehood. Put on speaking truthfully to your neighbour. And why? Because the truth is, we're all members of one body. Imagine a body. How can that body walk properly if the left leg keeps telling lies to the right leg? Imagine how hard that body would find it playing the piano if the thumb kept lying to the finger. [16:26] Ear in this body. How hard would it be to function well if the pastors kept lying to the congregation? Put off falsehood.

Put on truth-telling. We're members of one another. Let's do another example. Verse 26. Put off sinning in anger, which is ungodly anger, for unrighteous reasons. Put off sinning in anger. Put on peacemaking. That is, sort out peace before the sun goes down. That way, grudges don't form.

The truth is, verse 27, the devil wants to gain a foothold. You see, Satan wants to exploit the tensions that appear between Christians.

In a church like ours, of our size, we're bound to clash with others. We're bound to rub each other the wrong way. In my small groups, there have been frictions caused that I've had to step in and try and sort out and broker peace quickly before the sun goes down.

[17:32] We all rub each other the wrong way. And so, Paul says, don't be angry uncontrollably or sinfully. Rather, let anger lead to peacemaking.

And why? Because the devil would love nothing more than to divide two Christians irreparably. That's one example.

Let's go to verse 29. Verse 29. Put off any unwholesome talk from your mouths. So, swearing, filthy talk, gossip, innuendo, any talk, any words that break people down.

Put them off, says Paul. Put on words that are helpful in building up and are a benefit to others.

Why?

Because the truth is, verse 30, unwholesome talk grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Do you remember in the temple back in Israel? God dwelt in the temple.

[18:33] It would be a scandal if the priests were caught in gossip and innuendo and filthy talk from their mouths. Why? Because God lives there. Well, now he lives here and he lives in you by the Spirit.

It would be a scandal for that body to engage in unwholesome talk, especially since the Spirit lives in us. It grieves him.

Let's do one more, verse 31. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. So in other words, put off all hostility and put on, verse 32, being kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, because the truth is, in Christ, you're a forgiven person.

And so in Christ, be a forgiving person. You see, this passage is so much more than a series of do's and don'ts. It's about having a fantastically high view of yourself.

You're one of God's holy people. We've got his truth, his Holy Spirit dwelling inside us. We have everything we need to put off the old and put on the new.

[19:49] And so why wouldn't we wear this new calling like a perfectly tailored suit for us? As we finish, I just want to give you a couple of motivations that raise this passage beyond a series of do's and don'ts.

And so here's one motivation. Did you notice in the passage as we went through, did you notice that all the commands, all the behaviours, are other person-centred?

Did you notice that? That's because Ephesians is all about a cosmic-sized church. It's God's masterpiece for the end of time. In chapters one to three, God has begun all of the building work, but as yet, we're not as united or as obedient or as populated as we can be.

So chapters four to six, we set about, at least God puts us to work on the building project too. And so these do's and don'ts, they're other person-centred because it's all about church-building.

It's about us playing our part, building up what God has made. And so I want you to imagine you arrive to church, arrive here on a Sunday and you're keen to be fed with the truth because you know this is the thing that will help you when you're out there.

[21:11] So you come to church, keen to hear the truth. But during the sermon, instead of being taught God's word, all you hear is some smooth speech that has nothing to do with 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 brothers and sisters, but instead all you see is tensions and hostility around the room.

All you see is people avoiding one another and leaving quickly so they don't have to talk to certain people. Imagine if during coffee and tea or chicken and chips afterwards, instead of encouraging one another with what you learned from the sermon or how God has been working in your life that week, all you heard was gossip and innuendo about the pastor or gossip about another person in church.

Imagine if the church experience for the women here was to hear a bunch of sexist chat from the men. Can you imagine a church experience like that?

An experience of lies and anger, hostility, greed, impurity, gossip and so on and so forth. That would be a terrible church experience.

[22 : 33] We're not as obedient or as united as we should be, as we could be. that is a useless church experience, isn't it?

Because if you wanted to experience those sorts of things, you could have just stayed in your workplace or your university or your neighbourhood or your sporting club because that is how the Gentiles live, isn't it?

In the futility of their thinking, the darkness of their minds and 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. Let's finish with a positive one.

Did you notice in the passage when we put off the old and put on the new, when we follow these commands, did you notice who we start to resemble? Let me read a couple of verses and see if you can hear who we start to look like.

[23 : 39] 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 one, follow God's example therefore 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 would be meeting a room full of Jesus's, a room full of God's or more accurately his children as we are united like a family and obedient to our father just as he has called us to be.

For lots of you, I know that you spend most of your weeks surrounded by Gentiles and their standard practice is blood red t-shirt living.

But imagine you are able to arrive at church where our standard practice is truth telling, it's sharing, it's building up, it's forgiveness, it's peacemaking.

[24 : 56] Wouldn't that be like a refuge for you in your week? Wouldn't that be radical compared to what you normally experience out there in the world?

Wouldn't that help this church to grow in maturity and number? Putting off the old, putting on the new, they are a series of do's and don'ts, but they do push us to have a fantastically high view of our calling, of who God has created us to be.

But he is building a church, and that means this is not an individual pursuit. And so I need your help, and you need mine. And so let's pray that we would help one another to put off the old and to put on the new.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask you to forgive us when we try and go back to our old ways of life. Forgive us if we think the world is more exciting. Thank you, Father, that you are merciful and kind and gracious and compassionate.

[26 : 08] Please forgive us in Christ for our wretched living. And please, Father, give us a high view of your calling on our lives. Would we see ourselves the way you see us?

By your spirit, Father, would we put off the old and put on our new selves? Would we wear our new lifestyle like a perfectly fitted suit? And please, would we speak the truth in love to help one another?

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.