

Mindset Change: Put on the new self

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 4, verse 17 to 24. Well, let me begin by asking you whether you've ever succeeded in effecting lasting change.

! So it could be a habit you tried to kick for a long time, bad habit, that's it, that is not a good habit. Or if you are sort of a bit of a manager in your workplace, organisational change, or instilling discipline in your children or students, now is not the time of your parent to look sideways at your children.

It's not easy, is it? For example, with personal habits, it often takes more than sheer willpower, right?

Rules by themselves, not enough. Instead, before true behavioural change, permanent long-term change occurs, what's required is a mind change.

We need to convince ourselves in the head that this change is needed. Otherwise, it's likely to be temporary. And the same goes for the Christian life.

[1 : 12] Change starts with our beliefs and our convictions. And so the passage today teaches us the need for our minds to be renewed. Now, of course, that's something that requires God's power, the same power that made us alive in Christ to begin with.

Faith in Jesus is an act of grace that only God can accomplish. But so too is the life after that, the one He calls us to live.

And if you recall from last week, chapter 4, verse 1, Paul urged us to live lives worthy of our calling. And last week, the focus was on living together as Christ's body, united and mature, just as Jesus, our head, is.

Well, this week, Paul continues in a similar vein, but the focus now is on the individual believer, how we are to live in the world.

And actually, the section here is quite a long one. So it starts here, and if you look at your Bibles, it ends sort of at about chapter 5, verse 20.

[2 : 26] That's the next heading, if you can see, in your Bibles. So one way we could do this is for you to take out your Uber Eats and order dinner, and we can have a one-and-a-half-hour sermon.

What I've decided to do instead to spare you is to look at these verses over three weeks and build up a complete picture over that time. So for today, we're only going to concentrate on verses 17 to 24, which focuses, just like it did in chapter 2, in the before and the after.

Life before Christ and life in Christ, after. Or if you look at the outline, it's only two points. The other way of phrasing it is the former way of life, 17 to 19, and then the new way of life in Christ, 20 to 24.

But remember, the controlling theme is still chapter 4, verse 1. The life lived worthy of our calling. But to get there, there needs to be a change in mindset or a renewal of our minds, which then inspires us to live that life in true righteousness and holiness, just like God, as Paul says in verse 23 and 24.

So as we go through these verses, I want you to take note of the numerous references here to the mind, or related to the mind. So let's read verse 17.

[4 : 05] So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must not live, 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.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. So I wonder whether you notice thinking, that's the mind, understanding, ignorance.

These are all references to the mind, isn't it? But they determine then how the Gentiles live. Their lifestyles reflect their way of thinking.

So let's consider that in a bit more detail, because even today I think the choices that we make are largely shaped by our mind, our assumptions about what life is all about.

Its purpose, its meaning. And Paul reminds the Ephesians that that is how they used to be. Before they knew God or his son Jesus, their lives were shaped by the futility of their thinking.

[5 : 20] Now futility is that idea where, you know, you keep, continue pursuing something, even though you know it's doomed to failure. Failure. It's what we call banging our heads against the wall.

We keep doing it, even when we know failure is certain. And without a knowledge of the true God, that's how humans live. Imagine not knowing what a strange gadget in your toolbox is for.

I've got a few of those at the bottom of mine. I used to know what they were, but I forgot. And, you know, when you forget, it's hopeless, isn't it?

Trying to use it. You know that Allen key? Like, which furniture was that used for? Because they're all different sizes, and, you know, they don't go into that particular screw that you want.

That's how humanity as a whole, I think, goes about life. We were created by God for a purpose in this world. Paul revealed that to us in his letter.

[6 : 25] God's plan for this world is to bring unity to all things under his son Jesus. We were all created to serve Jesus, save for good works that reflect this aim.

But without a knowledge and belief in this, the world by and large channels its energy and resources to goals that sort of miss the point.

And they're not all bad things, like world peace, global conservation, alleviating poverty, these are not bad in themselves.

But when they are pursued without recognizing that actually hopeful humanity does not lie in these things, or us, but in Christ, who brings in the new creation, then in the end, all these efforts are sort of to no avail, isn't it?

Futile. And, you know, we've been at it, haven't we, since the beginning of time. World peace. We've been trying to do that since Adam, not Adam, came, murdered Abel.

[7 : 41] Poverty. Jesus himself said, didn't he, that the poor you will always have with you. It's not like we haven't tried, but actually we haven't really succeeded, have we?

And that's true for individuals as well. So much energy, I think, is put into prolonging life, which isn't bad, or making the most of this life, in terms of wanting to live comfortably, trying to make, you know, achieve something in life, wealth creation.

Again, not bad things. But when they alone are the ultimate goals in life, then again, it's futile, because when death comes, and you're not prepared for what happens after death, then they're really futile, isn't it?

Of no avail. So I just want to pause here for a minute, and ask you perhaps a challenging question for yourself. What is the main motivation for your life?

When you get up each morning, what is it that gets you going, and keeps you going? Despite all the efforts that we put in, are the things that we do, making a difference that will last?

[8 : 57] Not just for this life, but for life afterwards as well. Now, as Christians, the good news is that because of Jesus, we have this eternal hope, don't we, to look forward to.

What we do on this earth isn't futile, because there's life after death. A life that's more wonderful than anything that this world can offer.

And what we do can make a difference for that life. And conversely, we're also mindful of the judgment to come, right? which, again, is far worse than the most despairing place on earth.

Well, unfortunately for the Gentiles, their ignorance of God has separated them from the life of God. And so their lives reflect that way of thinking. Paul describes their way of life as giving themselves over to milking all they can get out of this life.

Because they do know, whether consciously or subconsciously, that death ends all things. And so they say, look, let's pursue pleasure and excesses now. Let's not hold back on anything, because once life is taken from us, and that can happen at any time, then it's all gone.

[10 : 21] And, you know, I'm just reflecting that, you know, sometimes I get these pop-ups, breaking news kind of thing. And just this week, I've just, two people that, you know, one, I'm a Liverpool fan, so bear with me, but Diego Jota, 28 years old, married 10 days before his car accident.

And he and his brother, gone in an instant. The other one, slightly older, Julian McMahon, private battle with cancer. But again, within the same week, 56 years old, not much older than I am.

It's similar today, isn't it? Not everyone lives to excess, with vices and the like, but I think if you look around, we as a society, we have a tendency to over-consume.

The houses we built are getting bigger, and more luxurious. The food we eat, more calories, the types of leisure activities we engage in, or the holidays we go on.

I think we are rather, you know, we have been blessed, that would be, materially, in one sense, but that has made us a rather indulgent society. Paul describes this as being given over to sensuality.

[11 : 38] That is, society has not denied themselves from what their senses draw them to. Whatever they can look on, whatever they can taste, whatever, they're just drawn to it, given over to their senses, as it were.

Paul says then, that the result is that all sensitivity is lost. And I think that's a very interesting way of describing it, because at first glance, we don't immediately conclude, do we, that the people that are really living it up in society, have lost all sensitivity.

In fact, we say, wow, they're enjoying the finer things in life. They have refined tastes. But what they've lost is not physical sensitivity, but spiritual sensitivity.

It's the result, Paul says, of hardening their hearts so that they are separated from the life of God. And that means they can no longer hear God's voice.

They cannot respond to the work of the Spirit. And if you're not a Christian, you don't have the Spirit anyway. It's much the same way as, I know, you know, some of you hate this, but you go to the dentist and they inject anesthetic into your gums to take out your tooth.

[13:00] Then after a while, you know, I love, like, it's numb, isn't it? You don't feel a thing. And that's what they are, spiritually numb.

And thus, the ability to truly tell right from wrong that's impaired, rather than being controlled by their pure conscience, we're given over to sensuality.

We live, as it were, based on instinct. I'm not much better than the animals, actually. Yes, we're more sophisticated, but in the end, what drives us, the priorities in our life, is actually just to satisfy our desires, comfort, security, and of course, I think, fear of death.

These drive the choices we make. And we pursue wealth, we pursue health, we pursue connection and friendship as our main priorities in life, as the ultimate priorities in life.

And so, while that phrase there, if you can look at it, I think it's in verse 19, it talks about every kind of impurity. When we read that, I think we first think about sexual sin and other vices like gambling and drunkenness, but actually, it's more than that.

[14:17] Anything that numbs us to God's spirit is impure. Same with that phrase right at the end, full of greed. We often take it to refer to money, but greed is simply wanting more and more and more of anything to satisfy our selfish desires.

It doesn't need to be money. It could be a lot of other things. Now, of course, this is really bleak, and so we need to go to the next section because the wonderful news in verses 20 to 24 is that if we are in Christ, then that's no longer how we live.

So Paul continues, that however, it's a big but there, however is the big turning point, is not the way of life you learnt. By the sheer fact of God's grace and love, even while we were dead in transgressions, Paul says in Ephesians 2, God sent His Son to die for us and then poured out His Spirit so that all of a sudden our hardened and callous hearts have a spiritual pulse.

Right? We went from to to to to to to a spiritual heartbeat because of this amazing power that God used in us, infected in us, the same power that raised Christ from the dead, that is the same power that was used to make us alive in Christ.

It's a miracle, isn't it? Which means that when we hear Jesus call our name and say I love you, we can actually reply and say with joy yes, I love you too.

[16:08] For you to believe in Jesus and to say that you worship Him is an act of miracle. It's the sign of a spiritual heartbeat.

All because of Jesus who, as Paul says in verse 21, is the content of our faith. for he goes on to say you learned this way of life when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

And notice here again the truth that is in Jesus speaks to the mind being touched by God, isn't it? The renewal of the mind that starts and begins our journey of faith.

And that's why incidentally as well last week Christ gives the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers whose main job actually is to teach, to train the mind so that the body of Christ can grow.

But here in these verses, in verse 22, Paul is referring to something that is being specifically taught. And so he says you were taught with regard to your former way of life.

[17:24] That is, he's saying, look, there's a lot to teach about the Christian faith, but when it comes to the former way of life, what you have been taught was to put off your own self, which is being corrupted by deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, that word again, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

righteousness. So as you heard earlier in that Old Testament reading, this here is actually an image of changing clothes, like the high priest Joshua in Zechariah 3.

Our old life, the old clothes, is tainted with sin. They are like filthy rags. Paul says it's corrupted by deceitful desires and consumed by the futility of our thinking.

And, you know, even though we are Christians, we still can hear the voice of the old self in life, can't we?

It's like the dripping of a leaky tap that keeps saying to you, look at the world around you, see what other people are up to. You've got to keep up with them.

[18 : 39] You've got to do as they do. Listen to the finance gurus on TV. Or, if you're rich enough, you can pay for one. Or, the health experts.

Or, listen to the career advisors at uni or at your place of work. If you don't follow them, do exactly as they say, you'll lose out. You'll fall behind in life.

You wouldn't live as long. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying don't ever go and see a financial advisor. Sometimes, some of you may work as financial advisors as well.

sometimes their advice is not without merit. But, the thing is, without a sensitivity to God's voice and His word, we lose the ability to filter out what may be corrupting and deceitful.

And, you know, particularly when we've had a hard week, when people have been unkind to us, we think we've been unfairly treated, our body is tired, feeling sorry for ourselves, it is tempting to give in to the old self, or the voice of the old self, to endow in the desires of our flesh, and therefore, as it were, leave those old self clothing on ourselves.

[19 : 57] And Paul says, look, we need to be vigilant, we need to be disciplined, we need to see the danger, and intentionally then put off, or actually the word is to cast off, like shedding dirty work clothes after a long day's work.

And it is placed to take on the habit of putting on the new self. And in the case of Joshua, the high priest in Zechariah, it was actually the angel that instructed for him to be dressed, fine garments, clean turban, all that representing purity that befits a priest.

That is what gives him access to God's presence, and that's the same with us. Except for us, we're able to put on this new self because of Jesus' sacrifice that has purified us from all unrighteousness.

So the reality actually is that we already have this new self. We have been purified by the blood of Jesus. That's why Paul can say that we have in our inner beings God's spirit at work in us.

But what Paul is now saying is that we then need to translate it into an outward expression of this inner reality. Dress to reflect who we are with godliness and holiness.

[21 : 22] We're no longer people destined for judgment. We're heirs with Christ, seated in the heavenly realms with him. That's a present reality. But our garments, how we live, needs to be appropriate to that status.

So in a sense, we're no longer, let's say, like on the next slide, prisoners on death row, wearing those ugly orange clothes. Cast those off and put on clothes befitting a king.

May not get to wear those physically, but spiritually. We are heirs with Christ. Christ. We need to dress and live like heirs with Christ.

Now, as I said earlier, all this change is first of all secured in the mind. And so it's no surprise that Paul speaks about the renewal of the mind, or to use his exact words, made new in the attitude of our minds.

That's verse 24. That is, our mindset should be that of those who are in Christ Jesus, ones with hope in Christ, with the knowledge that God's Spirit is at work with us, driven by the purpose that God has created us for good works.

[22:40] Because it is only out of that mind, or the knowledge of these truths, that our lives will change as a result, permanently, so that we become like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And just for another connection there, Paul says, in that verse that we're created to be like God, and that reminds us, doesn't it, of Ephesians 2, verse 10, on the next slide, where we were saved by grace and created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Created in Christ Jesus. But the focus here is not on the purpose of the new creation, but the quality of the works that arise. We will live with true righteousness and holiness to be like God, because these are the very qualities that God himself possess.

And you know, someone noted to me the other day, wow, this is amazing that Paul says that we can be like God. I mean, how can that be? We're just humans. But it's right there, isn't it?

Paul says it. Now, we're not like God in the sense that we're divine, but we're like God in the sense that we can live with the qualities that God possesses, because his spirit is working in us.

[23:55] Now, not perfectly, but as we live more and more, then in increasing measure, we will be like God in who he's like. And next week, as we go into the next section, we'll see some specific examples of what living like that means.

But today, I just want to finish by coming back to that same thought. How do we habitually put on the new self and cast off the old? Because, as I said again, it's not physical clothes we're trying to cast off, is it?

But spiritual clothes. So how does that work? Well, remember that what Paul says is that we are able to do this because we've been taught about Christ and the truth that is in him.

So we need to form habits that constantly remind us and saturates our minds with the truth that is in Jesus.

that is what will help us to discern the deceit of our selfish desires?

[25:03] What will help us to continually remember the truth that the Spirit uses to work in us to shape our inner being so that we know what's right from wrong? So let me put again to you another question.

Do you think you have sat aside enough time during the week to hear God in his word? You know, some of you might think, I do come to church every week, so I get a good dose of 20 minutes, or if Mark is going a bit too long, 30 minutes of God's word.

But let me ask you, do you think 30 minutes is enough to last you the week? Particularly when I don't think the old voice is limiting himself or herself to 30 minutes of drip feeding you a week.

No. The old self and the voice of the world is constantly at us, isn't it? And so we need to say, is 30 minutes enough?

Or actually, do we need more? Some of you I know come from growth groups, that's great. Some of you pray and do your daily devotions, that's great. Some of you may even put on your Spotify songs of praise as you go about your day, just hearing the Psalms minister to you who God is and what he's done.

[26:31] Those are all good things, isn't it? That we need, as it were, our constant drip feeding of God's word into our lives through our day.

And I know that, you know, and I do this too, the natural reaction is that when we're tired or overwhelmed, that the first thing we skip is prayer and the Bible, isn't it?

But actually, if you think about it, the more overwhelming life becomes, the more important it is, really, to have something else to counterbalance the drowning or the voice, to drown out the voices of the world.

I think it was Martin Luther that said, I'm too busy not to pray. But sadly, I think many of us go the other way, and I know I'm guilty of that as well.

We ought to be like Mary, isn't it, in Luke, sitting at Jesus' feet all the time, rather than Martha, doing so many things for God.

[27 : 35] And in fact, I think Jeff, myself, and Steph would often say to people, if something has to go, it would be better for you to stop or do less for God, rather than spend less time with God.

If something has to go, don't let it be your time listening to God's word. Because the messages of the world are insidious and unending and unceasing, and if you don't plan, it will just come in and your life's uninvited.

Whereas on the other hand, putting on the new self, having a mind renewed and having the attitude of Christ takes lifelong habits, vigilance.

And of course, we don't get there all at once, but we'll never get there unless we put in place things that will help us to change our mindset, make decisions that are shaped by what God is saying to us.

So I'm going to end now by putting up two questions for you to consider. Have a think, don't have to share it with anyone, but if you think some changes need to be made, then please, it's for your own good, please make those changes and ensure that, number one, are you getting enough input from God's word to shape your mind God?

[29 : 04] And number two, what will you do today to change that if it's not? So I'll leave you to those thoughts and then I'll pray. Okay. up.

Thank you.

Thank you.

May be in true righteousness and holiness, just like you. Empower us to daily put off the old self and put on the new self.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.