Ephesians 4:17-32

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[0:00] Pray with me while you stand. Dear Father, thank you for giving us your word and for preserving it for thousands of years.! And I'm the artizo apprentice here at St. John's.

And if you don't know what artizo is, you came on a good night because you're going to find out in a little bit. And there is a video, so stay tuned. It's going to be fun. But right now, we're looking at the second half of Ephesians 4.
And the image that immediately came to mind when I read it was that of a job orientation. You know, you first start a job, you have some kind of an orientation. It usually involves some PowerPoint presentation.
And they tell you the vision statement of the company, the mission, the values that you need to know as a new employee. And then usually you'll go meet with your direct supervisor and you'll learn how to do your specific role, the day-to-day tasks.
So there's this vision casting and then there's the particulars. Or for those of you who are still students, it reminds me of the first day of school. You know, you go over the syllabus, you get the big picture idea of what the class is about.
[1:23] And then you get into the nitty-gritty details of when are the midterms, what's due each week, all that fun stuff. And in this passage, we see something like that.

Paul is talking to some new hires, so to speak, new Christians. And in the first half of our passage, he's casting the vision. This is what it looks like to be a Christian.
And then in the second half of our passage, he gets down to the job description. Okay, so what does that look like day-to-day? So that's what we're going to look at tonight. We get the vision statement of the Christian life and then the job description of the Christian life.
So the vision statement. I think if we were to sum up these verses in a pithy statement that you could frame on a company headquarters wall, you could say something like, the Christian life from corruption to recreation.
Something like that. But this is what Paul actually, this is where he moves us through the passage. He starts with a vision of the Christian life with where we used to be before we were part of this life.
[2:27] If you look at verse 22, he says, put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. The primary way Paul describes our pre-Jesus selves before we knew God has to do with our internal state.

Look at the language in this passage. Futile minds, darkened understanding, ignorance, hardness of heart, corrupted desires.
We sometimes talk about corrupted computer files, you know, files that contained good information at some point, but that have become unreadable by software and somehow they've become broken. They used to contain useful information, but now we can no longer read them correctly.
Actually, that's the same idea here. Our minds and our desires were created good as ways to love and glorify God. And in his grace, we can still see hints of that.
We can still reason through complex ideas and we still can desire good things like beauty and community. But the point here is that no part of us is unaffected by sin.
[3:37] Augustine, one of the most famous theologians of the early church, he taught that the problem is not that we have loves, but that we have disordered loves. We love some things too much, like health or relationships.

They can't bear the weight of our ultimate love. And we love some things too little, like God himself. And the problem is that humans apart from God are always going to tend in the direction of disorder.

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We have a moral entropy. And I think the message translation does a good job of describing how sin affects our minds even. For these verses, it says, Paul is saying everything that you do or even think, your ability to grasp reality apart from God is broken.
That's the old self. Now, when I was going through this, I wondered why Paul spent so much time on this because he's already talked about being dead in our transgressions and sins in chapter 2. I wondered why he paused us here to go back to it.
But if you were here last week, if you listened to the sermon on the first part of chapter 4, he's describing this unified church, right? It's this beautiful picture of what Christians are supposed to be like.
[5:04] It's this body of many different parts that fit together with Jesus as the head that grows and builds itself up in love. That's what he describes what we're supposed to be.

And it's beautiful. But it's not inevitable. And I think Paul wants to pause right here with that beautiful image on our minds and say, if you want this, you're going to have to defend it.
It is so easy to slip back into the old way of living. And he uses really stark language here to shake us awake, to remind us that we don't want to go back to that.
Disordered loves, unable to grasp reality. And so he takes the time to remind us, this is what you've been saved from. And then he picks up again, okay, here's what you have been saved for.
From corruption to recreation. So verse 20 says, but that is not the way you learned Christ. Verse 23, that you may be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.
[6:12] He says, that's not who you are anymore, that picture of the old self. You learned Christ. Which I think is a wonderful phrase. It evokes Matthew 11, where Jesus says, learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly.

And no, it's not just learn about Jesus. It's learn Jesus. It's the difference between knowing about someone, you know, some historical figure, someone famous, and knowing someone you love.
When you know Jesus personally, that enables you to put off the old self and put on the new self.
And self here is the word anthropos in Greek, which is the word for human.
And this is where we get the theme of our whole series. God's new humanity, put on the new humanity. And that phrase, created after the likeness of God, it's echoing Genesis 1, the original creation of humans, created in the likeness or image of God.
And so Paul is bringing that language from Genesis 1 back to here and saying, all that has been broken since then by sin and death is now being made new. It's being restored.
[7:21] And together as the church, we are the glimpse, we're the pioneers of the new humanity. We can grasp reality. We can desire rightly. We can love well.

So this is the vision statement of the new humanity. From corruption to new creation. But now we get into the job description. This is verses 25 to 31.
And for the more practical among us, this may be a relief to you because you're like, okay, old self, new self, death, life. Like, what does this actually mean when I wake up on a Monday? Well, Paul's got you. He's going to list some specifics of what our new job is.
And notice here, there's a shift from the passive to the active. The new humanity is not something that we can create.
We don't do a 30-day challenge to become the new humanity. You know, work on those holiness muscles. That's not how it works. We were taught in Christ. We are to be renewed.
[8:22] We are created. These are all passive verbs. They're done to us, for us, by God. But now, now that that has happened, we are given instructions.

Now that we're new, this is what we do. Eugene Peterson has a great quote on how these things work together. He says, the Christian life does not start with moral behavior.
We don't become good in order to get to God. But, having been brought into the operations of God, made the new humanity, saved by Jesus, moral behavior provides forms for maturing in a resurrection life.
Moral acts are forms in the sense that a pottery vase gives form to a bouquet of flowers. And this idea is not new. If you look back at how God has interacted with humanity, he's always the one initiating.
Go back to the Old Testament, the Israelites. He rescues his people out of slavery in Egypt. He miraculously gives them this new land. And then he says, now here is my law. Here's what it looks

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like to be my people.
[9:33] And this isn't a transactional thing. God's not like, I did this for you, so you've got to do it for me. The point of the Old Testament law is love. Love of God and love of neighbor.

The point is to be with the God who delights in us. And the same thing is happening here. These moral behaviors that Paul's going to list, these expectations of the new humanity, they show us what love looks like.
And it can feel counterintuitive, I think, especially in today's world. But obedience is actually how we experience God's love, as well as how we show it to other people.
So I'm going to list five brief observations about the instructions that are here. So if you're a note taker, this is going to be good. Observation one, the goal of all of these is unity.
Several of the commands have a reason given for them. And it's always to build up the unity that Paul has spent the past three and a half chapters talking about. So if you look at it, it says, put off falsehood, but put on truth, because we are members one of another.
[10:41] Put off stealing, but put on working honestly, so that you may have something to share with those in need. Put off destructive speech, but put on speech that's good for building up, so that it may give grace to those who hear.

Unity requires us to put some things off and some things on. And the old life and the new life cannot be lived side by side.
We have to stop doing certain things and start doing others, all with the goal of unity. And look at verse 30. Here's another aspect of unity.
This one says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Grieve here is deeply relational. It's emotional.
When you resist clear conviction from the Holy Spirit, you're cutting yourself off from love and sorrowing the God who loves you.
[11:43] And so Paul's saying, don't destroy the unity you have with each other, and don't destroy the unity you have with God. Okay, observation two. These rules are not exhaustive, but they are comprehensive.

They're not exhaustive, but they are comprehensive. So they don't list every kind of behavior that you could possibly do or shouldn't do. But they do paint a picture general of what the new humanity should look like.
And it touches every area of life. Just look at verse 31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
The word all here is used twice. There is no tolerance for a little bit of temper, a little bit of hostility in your heart towards someone else. And this is a really high demand.
But we need to face it without flinching, because this is what Jesus expects of his people. And a quick note here on the bitterness. I think this is a sin that is very culturally acceptable, even in churches.
[12:50] We don't want to be hurt. But when we feel that we've been wronged, I think we can feel rather virtuous about it. We can cherish this sense of victimhood. And Paul is saying here, this is not an attitude that's appropriate as a Christian.

Because at its root, to our earlier point, it destroys unity. If you are clinging to a sense that someone has hurt you, you cannot be unified with them. So these rules are not exhaustive, but they are comprehensive.
They touch every part of our lives. Observation three. Many of these are repeats of the Ten Commandments. Did you notice this? Do not act or speak with falsehood.
Ninth commandment. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. Do not steal. Eighth commandment. Be angry and do not sin. Reminds us of what Jesus says about the commandment to not murder.
He says, if you have anger in your heart towards someone, call them a fool. That's murdering. So Paul here is restating the Ten Commandments. And why is this important? Because by reaffirming the Ten Commandments here, Paul is reminding us that the new humanity is now able to live the way God has always called his people to live.
[14:05] Remember the vision statement. We put off the old self, unable to live this way, futile even in our thoughts. And now we put on the new self, created in the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

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These commands are concrete. Don't do these things. Do these things. And yet they are actions flowing from the identity and the strength that God provides for us.
It's a high call, but it's also coming from a place of freedom and the strength of God. Okay, observation four. This one's quick, but it's important. Note how many of these relate to speech. There's not that many verses, but a lot of them reference our speech. Speak the truth to one another in verse 25. Speak what is good for building up as fits the occasion.
Verse 29. Put away all slander. Verse 31. Proverbs says that where words are many, sin is not absent. And James says our tongues are a world of unrighteousness set on fire by hell.
[15:12] It's our strong words. But I think we can all think of relationships in our lives where just a few words damage things or destroy things. And I think we can think of words that we would give a lot to be able to take back.

And I think in this age where words are very prevalent with texting and emailing and tweeting and reposting, we are at extra risk for this. And so it's worth spending time with this this week.
What are my words doing? Do an audit of our words. Last observation. Observation five. At the end of the day, all of this is about looking like Jesus.
Look at the last verse. It's the only one that's framed completely positively. Be kind to one another. Tenderhearted. Forgiving one another.
As God in Christ forgave you. Everything in this verse directly connects to Jesus. The word for kind here is krestos, which is one letter off from Christos, Christ.
[16:18] The word for tenderhearted, often translated as compassion, is splenka. It's a fun one. That's a good Greek one to memorize. But it literally means gut or bowels.

And it's often how Jesus is described looking out at the crowds moved in his guts for people. With such deep compassion, he feels it deep inside. And then the command to forgive is explicitly linked to what Jesus has done for us.
As God in Christ forgave you, so you should forgive. And none of this is sentimentality or weakness. This is how we look like the most powerful person that ever existed, Jesus Christ.
And this is like the heading of your job description. Everything else falls under it. But this is the main task. At the end of the day, this is what you are to do. Be kind. Be moved with mercy for others. And forgive. Be like Jesus. Daryl Johnson told a story of a pastor who was preaching through a similar list of sins.
[17:23] And there was this very vocal woman in the congregation. She kept saying, amen. And he said something. Don't be drunk. Amen. Don't have an affair. Amen. Don't gossip.

Crickets. And when he looked at her like, you know, where's my amen? And she said, now you've gone from preaching to meddling. So, as we've gone through these observations tonight, a good idea is to ask yourself, which one of these felt like meddling to me?
Which instruction did I feel some inner resistance towards? And ask the Holy Spirit this week as you reflect on this passage to show you where you're not living like the new humanity that he has made you to be.
And this does not mean that you need to conduct an internal witch hunt on yourself. Some of us are very good at doing this. The Holy Spirit is clear and he is gentle.
The voice of conviction is clear and it is gentle. And I want to say again as I close, we rightly, we want to avoid legalism. We are not doing any of this in order to make God love us or forgive us or save us.
[18:37] But we also at the same time have to take seriously the do's and do nots of this passage. And we do that because we are being invited into something beautiful.

Remember the picture from last week? It's hovering over this whole passage. A body of so many different people unified in the love of their creator, spreading it to the whole world.
Corrupted people are being recreated. Broken is being made new. If you want that, then this, this way of living is what you're committing to.
Being part of the new humanity means having hard conversations because you care about unity. It means holding your tongue and apologizing often. It means forgiving when you have a legitimate reason to hold something against someone.
But fulfilling this job description, it opens you up to the love of God that surpasses knowledge. That love is always available to us, but this kind of life, this obedience, prepares us to receive it.

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[19:41] It opens the channels for the water of that love to flow through and irrigate your whole life. The new humanity takes work.

But it is not work you ever do alone. And it is worth the effort you're going to put in. Amen.

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