

New Life: New Likeness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 July 2008

Preacher: Canon David Short

- [0 : 00] Well, now you'll find it helpful if you take your Bible that's in the seat and turn to the passage that was read, Ephesians chapter 4, on page 182.
- We're going to take a break from Ephesians starting next week for about eight months. I apologise. What I apologise for is not finishing Ephesians now.
- Some of the most important teaching on the Christian life in chapters 5 and 6. But for our five August services, we're going to have the children in and we want it to be like a family barbecue without the barbecue and we want the children to participate.
- So the services will be briefer. There'll be a talk with children, which I've always thought is aimed at the parents, but so the children can understand. And we'll be looking at the theme of the race.
- The race. And starting in the fall, we're going to look at the Gospel of Luke. But we need to come back to Ephesians sometime because the second half of Ephesians is all about the so what.
- [1 : 12] First half of the book shows how kind God has been to us. The amazing grace that he's shown to us in Jesus Christ. And from chapter 4, verse 1 onwards, we get, so what?
- So what difference should it make in our daily lives? And the magnitude of what God has done for us and the amazing grace that he's poured out on us has to affect every life, every part of our life if we're Christians.
- And so in the first paragraph in chapter 4 and verses 1 to 7, we saw that our first concern is for unity, unity in the body. Last week we saw from the next paragraph it's maturity.
- We need to grow up into Jesus Christ. And now for the last half of the chapter, which is far too big a passage to bite off on any one Sunday. The theme is in verse 23.
- Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Becoming a Christian is like learning to live all over again.
- [2 : 21] You know that. We put off our old life like dirty clothing. And we put on this new life and we learn to live again. And it has a completely different mindset.
- It has a completely different way of looking at the world. And different ethics. So what does it mean to be renewed in the spirit of our minds?
- And the Apostle gives us two main things. There are two headings if you're taking notes. And the first is this. It means learning Christ. It means learning Christ.
- Now this little phrase is at the centre of the passage in verse 20. And if you look at the whole passage, you can see how important it is from the shape of the passage.
- Verses 17 to 19, if you just cast your eyes over it, is life BC, before Christ, before you become a Christian. And then from verse 25 onwards is life, what the new life looks like.
- [3 : 24] And in the centre in verses 20 to 24, the Apostle describes the most radical change that can happen to any human being. It's like a new creation where we're made in the image of God again.

It's like God takes us back to the Garden of Eden where we lost his image and begins to rebuild it. And where does it come from? Verse 20, he says, You did not, so learn Christ.

In contrast to verses 17 to 19, You did not, so learn Christ. And it's easy to miss something of the power of this statement because it's in the negative. He says that being a Christian, becoming a Christian, is learning Christ.

It's not learning a philosophy. It's not learning a doctrine. It's not learning a morality. It's learning the person of Jesus Christ. That's what being a Christian is all about. It's why being a Christian is not some moral evolution.

It's not an extension of who we are, of our spiritual sense of things. It's a new creation. And it's something that doesn't go this way.

[4 : 31] It comes this way. It's from God, supernatural, divine, miraculous. That's why at St. John's we're not trying to improve people. You might have noticed that.

What we try to do is we try and proclaim Jesus Christ so that all of us might learn him and be transformed and become new and different people.

The purpose of a church is so that we might learn Christ. If you're not learning Christ here, find a church where you will. Learning Christ is this massive change where we put off the old life like smelly, dirty clothes and put on the new clothes.

And what Paul does is he wants to show us the smelly clothes that we have to put off in verses 17 to 19. And he gives us a devastating x-ray view of life apart from Christ.

Life without God. He's not saying that those who don't know Christ are not intelligent and brilliant in all sorts of areas, nor that they're not good and loving. But he says in this area of relating to God, well, let me read it.

[5 : 37] It's devastating. Verse 17. Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do. The nations, not Gentile versus Jew, but just nations who don't know God.

In the futility of their minds, they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart.

Each cut goes deeper. They have become callous, spiritually insensitive, given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness.

Before I become a Christian, my world stops ten feet above my head. All my ambitions and dreams and goals and desires are focused not on God.

They're focused here in this little box I create around myself. And I give myself to all these things in the box, things that are very good in themselves, to try desperately to find meaning for my life.

[6 : 48] I'm blind to spiritual truth because Christ is not part of my frame of reference. So what I do is I latch on to the good gifts that God has given me and I begin to worship them and hold them up as idols instead of worshipping God through them.

And I take the good gifts that God has given me and I take the good gifts that God has given me and instead of bowing down and saying, God, you've been so kind to me, I complain and I say, why don't I have more?

And I wonder, I begin to wonder why it's not working. And I'm plagued by a vague sense of purposelessness, of futility, of emptiness and meaninglessness.

I'm constantly disappointed in myself. I know that I was born for more. And what happens is this. Christ comes in and takes the roof off.

You've seen this advertisement. I think it's a Habitat for Humanity advertisement. A woman's in a kitchen. She opens a coffee jar and the roof gets peeled back. It's a little like that when you become a Christian.

[7 : 50] Suddenly, Christ comes in and smashes the frame of reference that I have so very carefully built up around myself and I begin to learn Christ. And I begin to build my life on him and not on the things that he's given me.

And I suddenly learn that Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone, that everything God is doing in this world and in the world to come is built on him. And that if I'm building my life on anything else, I will be in the end ultimately futile.

And what Paul is saying by giving us this dirty linen, is that when you learn Christ, as you begin to learn Christ, you need to expect to be out of step with others.

You'll be fundamentally different from those around you. You'll be the same in all sorts of ways, but you'll be different. The problem for us is we are such conformists.

We so want to blend in. And we do it, I think, often without even thinking about it, in our priorities, in our way of thinking, in our attitudes. And we're squeezed by the world around us without even knowing it.

[9 : 02] There's a lovely illustration of this that comes from a university campus in the States. And the class decided to try and experiment on the teacher. And so what they did was this.

Every time the teacher went over to the left-hand side of the lecture podium in the classroom, they would stop paying attention. They would look up at the sky, they'd start talking, they'd rustle their papers.

And every time he moved over to the right side of the classroom, they would pay very careful attention. And the further right he went, the more careful attention they would pay.

Second lecture, with this game, he spent 50% of the class on the windowsill on the right-hand side. Third lecture, 100% of the class on the windowsill.

He'd been conformed and he didn't even know it. And I think we're controlled by the world around us without even knowing it. And we need to decide with each other that if we're going to follow Christ, we need to be prepared to be different.

[10 : 10] That is why we have to learn Christ. Because the source of our difference is not trying to be better or trying to be different. It's not that we're moral goody-two-shoes.

It's because of one person. It's the person of Jesus Christ. So how do we learn him? Verse 21. Assuming that you have heard him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus.

There's no about there. It's not that we've heard about Jesus from preachers or from Bible passages. It's that we have heard the voice of Jesus.

When we hear the Bible read or we hear the Bible taught or we sing hymns to one another, the living Jesus Christ himself speaks to us. You know the very simple difference between knowing someone and knowing about someone.

I know quite a lot about Cadel Evans. He's an extraordinary athlete. Happens to be an Australian. Happens to be coming second in the Tour de France.

[11 : 23] Very humble athlete. Unusually humble. But I've never met him. I know a lot about him. But I don't know him.

But we don't just know about Jesus. We know him. Which is one of the things that sets Christianity aside from every other world religion. The other world religions are about building on the teaching of the founders and living that life.

Whereas Christianity is at its essence learning the person of Jesus Christ. And why on earth would we want to do that at the end of verse 21? Because the truth is in Jesus.

The truth about God. The truth about you. The truth about me. The truth about our future. So that when I come to see Jesus, when he lifts the lid on my tidy world, I come to see myself as I really am.

And he shows me what's really valuable. And he makes me new. And I put off what is old. And I put on what is new. Because I've seen that the truth is in Jesus. That is why in verses 22 to 24, you have this clothing picture, putting off and putting on.

[12 : 40] Now some of you will have seen that program on television called What Not To Wear. It's a reality TV show where there are two fashion experts called Clinton Kelly and Stacey London.

And they ambush some poor unsuspecting fashion disaster. I've been thinking of nominating some of you. But... Just kidding.

What they do is they secretly... That's why I wear robes. They secretly travel around with this person for a couple of weeks beforehand. And they film their atrocious attire.

Then they pounce on the poor person with all their friends around them. And offer them a \$5,000 cash credit card or something like that. If they will let Clinton and Stacey throw away all their old wardrobe.

And they will follow Clinton and Stacey's rules. Shopping in New York for a new wardrobe. It's a very interesting program actually. Be careful what I say.

[13 : 46] It's very interesting because usually in the program, there's this moment of tears. Where the person realizes that the way they've been dressing themselves has more to do with their self-image.

The way they view themselves. And there are all these lines that say, you know, you look beautiful. Do you now feel beautiful? And it's a life-changing experience. At least for a week after.

Well now Paul gives us, from verse 25 to the end of the chapter and to verse 2 of chapter 5, a spiritual what not to wear.

And it's not about trying harder. It's about allowing the Christ who we're learning to live through us. So this is the second heading.

The first was learning Christ and the second is living Christ. Now these are the good works that we are meant to walk in. And they are appeals.

[14 : 46] He appeals to us. That's why I've called it living Christ. No hope of doing these things. I mean, we're not even going to want to do these things unless Christ is everything to us.

But if you've begun to learn Christ, you will want to do these things. We don't have time to look at them. He lists six. Six. We don't have time to look at each of them. But I would encourage all of you to take them and to meditate on them.

They're extremely deep and very profound. And I would encourage you to take one and grab a friend and talk about it. And try and figure out what are the consequences of this one for me.

But let me give you three pointers in how to think about them and then we'll pray together. The first thing to say about them is this. All of them, all six of them, have to do with unity.

He hasn't dropped unity as a concern. It still is concern. Look at verse 28 for an example. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands.

[15 : 55] Why? So that he may be able to give to those in need. Apparently there were people in the congregation at Ephesus who were making their living by thieving, by stealing.

It might have been an employment issue. They may have been wealthy. It doesn't really matter. But why does Paul say, don't steal any longer? Why does he say you've got to carry your own weight?

It's not so that you'll have enough. It's not even so that you won't be a burden on others. It's not so that you'll live in luxury. It's so that you'll be able to give to those in need.

Why do I work and earn an income? It is to give. It is for the sake of the body, for the community. And who do I give to? I give to the needy, those in my community who are tempted to steal.

Or take verse 29. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths. The word evil is the word rotten, like a piece of rotting fruit in the basket that touches everything else.

[17 : 00] Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, building up, as fits the occasion that it may impart grace to those who hear.

Most of us come to church hoping to be spiritually refreshed and built up in our faith. And Paul says, that's not the reason to come to church. You come to church to build up others in their faith.

If we're learning Christ and if we're living Christ, our aim will be to impart grace to others. And there's almost no better way to do that than in our conversation.

A word of encouragement, a word that's needed. It binds us together. It helps us live in unity. So as you look through the six of them, they're concerned about unity, firstly. Second, each of them have a negative and a positive.

I think this is a great secret to Christian living. For years, I tried to put away certain things without putting the positive in place. It's very frustrating. If you want a garden, it's not enough to pull up the weeds.

[18 : 00] You have to plant seeds. And it's not enough to plant seeds. You have to do both. Pull up the weeds and plant the seeds. And if you try and deal with one area of sin and not all the areas of sin, it's not going to work.

We have mosquitoes in our house right now. My wife has been dutifully closing up the screens. The mosquitoes keep getting in and we discovered that one young man in our house had his window wide open.

There are clear don'ts and there are clear... We don't like this very much, do we? We wish it was all positive. But there are clear no's.

So the Apostle Paul says, if you are lying, stop it. If you are stealing, stop it. If you are harbouring unforgiveness, you need to stop.

Look down at verse 26 with me. He says, be angry, but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

[19 : 07] The Apostle says, there are two different kinds of anger. There's righteous anger and there's unrighteous anger. Isn't it interesting, within the Christian community, he's saying there is a place for anger.

John Stott says this, there is a great need in the contemporary world for more Christian anger. Does that surprise you? He says, we human beings compromise with sin in a way that God never does.

In the face of blatant evil, we should be indignant, not tolerant. Angry, not apathetic. If God hates sin, his people should hate sin too.

If evil arouses his anger, it should arouse also. But we have to be very careful about this. Because we're not God, so often anger leads into sin for us because we're selfish.

And so Paul gives three don'ts. He says, do not sin. The thing about our culture is that people often yield to the angry person.

[20 : 06] So that when you're angry, it's very easy to get your own way. Paul says, do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Deal with it quickly. And don't let the devil get a foothold. What he wants to do is to destroy the fellowship.

And if he allows us towards bitterness, he's already got a foothold. So he's concerned with unity. There are do's and don'ts. And finally, what Paul is doing in these six areas is he's keeping the horizontal and the vertical together.

These are not six rules that we nail up on the wall and every morning we say, I must do this, I must do this. They come out of the new reality of Jesus Christ. And let me read the last couple of verses from verse 31 to you.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[21 : 22] It's the as that makes the difference, isn't it? We ought to love one another. 100% vote on that every time. Of course we ought to love one another.

But Paul says, walk in love as Christ loved us. And how did he love us? Christ, he gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice.

We're supposed to be tender to one another because God has been tender with us. We are to forgive one another because God has forgiven us.

We are to extend grace to each other because we have received grace. We are to love one another because he first loved us. This is what it is to learn Christ.

This is what it is to live Christ. So let's kneel and pray that God would strengthen us to do that. Lord God, this morning we join with Christians all around the world in worship, praise, and thanksgiving for the death of your son on that terrible cross, a perfect sacrifice.

[22 : 32] Thank you for the opportunities we have here at St. John's to learn Christ, to hear him speak to us through his word, and to be renewed in our minds.

Forgive us for not allowing Christ to live in us, for forgetting that we deserve the death you died. Forgive us for becoming comfortable with our seemingly little sins and becoming spiritually complacent.

Show each of us, today we pray, the specific ways in which we are not living like you, with brothers and sisters in this church family.

Lord Jesus, we ask that you put a right spirit within us, one that longs to imitate you in righteousness and holiness. May our lives be marked by self-control, kindness and forgiveness as we build up one another.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. This morning, we remember in prayer the meeting of Anglican bishops at Lambeth.

[23 : 47] We ask that your kingdom purposes will go forward in that place. we pray that those leaders who have hardened their hearts to you and your word may return to you.

Guard, we pray, faithful bishops who have chosen to attend. Strengthen those who are weary. Enable them to speak the truth in love. We give thanks for Canadians who have gone to Lambeth to give witness to your work of relational and sexual healing in their lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for the spread of the gospel in Muslim countries through the ministry of Heather Bellamy with Samaritan's Purse in Afghanistan, Yoss Stranghold with Arab World Media in Cairo, and Richard and Dawn Bates also in Cairo.

Here in Canada, we give thanks for the Christian witness in our universities, especially that of Susan Norman at Kingston, Ontario, working at Queen's University with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

Strengthen her in her work with graduate students, we pray. We also pray for the work and witness of Christian camps and summer programs throughout the city and province.

[25 : 13] May many children and teenagers come to know you as their Savior, we pray for all the young people at St. John's. May this summer be a time of learning and living Christ, and may all the senior youth and ecclesia giving leadership be guided by you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. On this summer morning, when many are enjoying their holidays, we commend your care, Lord Jesus, all those whose lives are darkened by suffering, the anxious, the sorrowful, the discouraged, the poor, the unemployed, the addicted, those dealing with chronic pain, disability, or illness, and their loved ones and caregivers.

From among our church family, we remember by name Ron, Carolyn, Janet, Margaret, Gordon, Peter, Joanna, and Fiona.

We pray for Mehran, and we ask for a favorable decision from the immigration panel. We remember our troops in Afghanistan and pray especially for Christopher and Bradley on deployment there.

Give them, we pray, safety and peace of mind. And may each of us draw close to those we know who are in need.

[26 : 53] Fill us with your steadfast love for this church family, our community, and the world that you, Lord Jesus, came to save.

We pray all these prayers in your holy name. Amen.