

We are Being Transformed

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Well, what we've been seeing in Ephesians over the past number of weeks is who the church is! From God's perspective, not from ours.

What we've seen is the church is central to God's plan for history, to unite all things under Jesus Christ. It's a plan that he achieves through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It's a plan that's, in fact, being worked out right now through time and space, through his church, as both Jews and Gentiles, people from every tribe, language and nations, are united together under the Lord Jesus.

That's really the summary of the first three chapters. What we're starting to see now is that Christianity isn't about giving ourselves a little boost to live a better life, a better version of the life that we're currently living.

What we're seeing is that Christianity is nothing less than being a Christian, is nothing less than a sweeping revolution that changes every aspect of life.

[1:17] And this is what Paul is addressing in the opening verse in our section today, which is what he's already been doing since the beginning of chapter 4, where he says, What our topic today is, Paul's calling us here, is to be transformed.

That is, to be who we already are. So, four points, which is going to be our progression today.

First of all, already transformed. Now, the key to this whole section, and I'm really covering right through to chapter 5, verse 21, the key to the section is verses 22 and 24, putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

Now, I need to get a little bit technical here for a moment, so just bear with me, because it's really, really important. I'm going to talk linguistics and language, and particularly in the original language of the New Testament, the Greek language, both verse 22 and 24 is in what is called the aorist tense.

The verb there, to put on to put off, is in the aorist tense. Now, the aorist tense is not something the English language, or virtually any other language, understands.

[2:59] It doesn't, the aorist tense doesn't exist for English language. But what it means, what the aorist tense means for Greek language, is it's a single action that's happened in the past, that's finalised, but has ongoing implications for my very present.

That's what the aorist tense means. And what that means is, when you look at verse 22 and verse 24, putting on and putting off, the Ephesians have already put off and have already put on.

That's what it means. It's already happened. And what it means is, in the past, there's been a conscious, decisive decision that they've made.

And it's been a decision to turn away from the old life, to take off the old life, like an old piece of garment, and to put on a new self.

And what they've turned away from is described in verses 17 to 19. You must no longer live, as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

[4:18] They are darkening 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. Now, what we have here in these verses is Paul's psychology of unbelief, of life without God.

This is how our minds and our hearts work when they are separated from what Paul says here is the life in God, the life of God.

It's a life that is marked by futility and vanity. It's a sense, if you like, of doing life, of an awful lot of work, doing an awful lot of things, and not actually getting anywhere.

Of all of those things, still having a sense of hollowness to it all, not accomplishing anything. And this futility leads to verse 19.

[5:25] 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.

This futility in life means that eventually we give ourselves over to things. Now, they are things like pleasures and activities and indulgences in life.

They are things that, on the surface, might appear to be harmful and good for us, but all of those things are designed to soothe this sense of futility and vanity in life.

They are things, you know, you might say things like, well, you know, life might be futile, but maybe it'd be better if I could run a marathon under three hours.

And so that becomes the driving force of my life, or if I'm financially secure in retirement, or I've got more than 2,000 friends on Facebook, or I get an ATAR over 98, or my kids are happy, or I've got a career that I'm validated in, or that I've got the ability to have holidays wherever and whenever I want.

[6:45] And what it says here, all of those things become the markers for who we are, and it's designed to soothe this sense that my life is futile and a vanity.

And then eventually it says we give ourselves to them. That is, we give ourselves over to them. In other words, that they become the controlling things in our life.

They become the advantages of our life. And we need it more and more and more. I've achieved three hours marathon. Maybe two and a half would be better now. And it's a sense of I'm now controlled by the futility of life.

And that goes on, and I get busier and busier and busier to try and hide the loud noise of futility that sits in my soul.

Until something forces me to stop and be confronted with the vanity of my life. And that's what happened to the Ephesians in verses 20 and 22.

[8:07] 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.

Now, again, there are three, another three verbs in there that are also in the aorist tense. Decisive action in the past that's finished that is consequences for my present right now.

And what Paul's saying there is they lived in the futility of their life until a radical decision happened and a radical change happened in their life.

In Christian circles, we call it conversion. God calls it recreation. He calls it new birth. That's what Paul's referring to here. It revolves the rejection of our former self, a life without God, and the starting of an entire new life under and in God and under the lordship of Jesus.

And verse 20, the three verbs are, you learned Christ, you heard Christ, and you were taught the truth that is in Christ. What happened to them in the past is that they heard about Christ.

[9:39] And then they heard the voice of Christ. And in so doing, they discovered the truth that is Jesus. And they turned from the old life to the new life.

They discovered the truth of who he is and what he has done for them. And so what Paul's doing here in this first section is he's reminding the Ephesians here of their conversion, of the moment that they took off their old self and they put on their new self, when the truth of Jesus broke into their lives.

And he says, you're already transformed. But notice that in verses 25 and onwards, and if you read to the end of chapter 5, and in fact, keep going really into chapter 6, there are various moral actions and behaviours that Paul is calling the Ephesian church, in fact, some to put off and equally others to put on.

He's still calling them to put off and put on. But crucially, we need to understand that before you get to verse 25, verses 17 and 20 to 24 are there.

They come first. Verses 22 and 24 talk about putting off the old self and putting on the new self, not about putting off old behaviours and putting on new behaviours.

[11:26] It's talking about the self, the person. Christianity, this is essential because way too many people get this wrong in the church and outside the church.

Christianity is about being someone before it's doing something. First and foremost, it's about becoming a whole new self.

It is a comprehensive revolution that changes who you are before it revolutionarily changes what you do and how you live.

That's possibly the biggest and most common mistake people make about Christianity. morality is not Christianity.

Even biblical morality is not Christianity. Christianity is not about becoming more moral.

[12:49] This is how most people look at it. And to be honest with you, I've, over more than three decades, I've had this conversation so many times with people and I'm confident that in my old life, I asked exactly the same questions.

It goes something like this. Look, I'm interested in becoming a Christian, but I'm just wondering, if I do become a Christian, do I need to stop having sex with my married co-worker? Like, will I need to do that?

I'm just weighing up here, you know, will I have to give money away? Do I need to do that? Do I need to come to church at all? Do I have to forgive my parents for not giving me the Porsche on my 18th birthday?

Because I haven't spoken to them for 10 years. Like, do I need to do that? Now, the answer is, well, yes, ultimately, in fact, you'll see all of those behaviours mentioned, not in the details I just gave, but you'll see them there eventually, but let me just say, you've asked me the wrong questions and you've got in Christianity entirely wrong.

Entirely wrong. Becoming a Christian is about becoming a new person before you live with a new set of behaviours and attitudes.

[14:24] You haven't understood what Christianity actually is in asking those questions. That's the first point. Already transformed.

Secondly, verse 25 says, it starts with, therefore. And so what follows is the implications of the very fact that they have already taken off and have put on.

Therefore, because you have made the decision to throw off your old self once and for all, you must now put on all conduct.

so you must continue to put off all conduct that belongs to the old self. Throw it away. And the point here as we move on is this new self that we have taken on, all of its behaviours and attitudes, you do not naturally drift into it.

doesn't just happen. We must actively put it on. Chapter 4, verse 1, which Ash took us to last week, calls us, the Christian, to live worthy of the kingdom that we've been called into.

[15:47] Verse 17 says, stop living the old life. Chapter 5, verse 3 refers to the old life being in brother for God's people. Instead, he calls us in chapter 5, verse 1 and 2, 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 as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 2, which I was, took us there a number of weeks ago now, says that the very essence of the old life of sin is a life which is centered entirely on me.

It's a life where everything exists for my glory, where my heart is curved towards myself. It's a life fundamentally that is selfish, no matter how we cover it up and make it look good.

That's the old self and what we see here, the new self and all its behaviors and attitudes is the exact opposite.

it's a life as chapter 5 tells us there, a life of love. It's a life of personal sacrifice, of giving and serving and forgiving.

[17:26] In fact, everything that's listed here is about building relationships, loving others. Third point, how do we do that then?

How to be transformed, how to continue to be transformed. I want to spend a bit of time on this one because, frankly, we all want to change and it's one of the preoccupations, in fact, of our society and yet we always struggle to change.

It's one of the things we kick ourselves for, how quickly we have New Year's Eve resolutions and 90-something percent fail before the end of January.

Struggle to change. So, the first thing we need to do, there's three points here, and the first thing is we need a new motive, a different motive to change. That is what it's saying is that the reason why we do things is critical.

It matters critically. Why we do the things we do absolutely matters. It matters so much because it's in fact possible to do the entirely right things to do, to even live with Christian morality and to do it for the wrong reasons.

[19:01] For instance, let's take raising children. And you want to raise your child to be truthful. The main ways that we raise children ethically and say, for instance, in the issue of truth, the main ways we do that is through fear or pride.

Fear or pride, or maybe a combination of both. Fear says something like this, you better tell the truth or I'll punish you. Liars, or God will be angry with you, or even take it even further, all liars go to hell.

Or you're going to get found out, and if you get found out, people won't trust you, they won't like you. That's fear. Pride says something like, oh, awful people lie.

Awful, awful people lie. Truthful people are good people, but awful people are bad, bad people. God will bless you if you tell the truth.

truth. And so what happens in that moment is an external pressure for fear or pride.

[20:21] Fear, I don't want to get caught, I don't want to be punished. Pride, I don't want to be like the awful people, and if I'm not like the awful people, therefore I'm a good person. Fear and pride.

External pressures to tell the truth. And the reason the reason I will tell the truth is because I'm motivated by self-interest.

That's the reason I do it. It's about me. It's got nothing to do with damaging the life of the person that I'm lying to.

It's got nothing to do with whether it honors God or not. It's about me. And it's no different than Ephesians 2 and my life being curved in on myself. And so I pursue Christian morality for my sake. And that works for a little while. But then there's a time when telling the truth doesn't work for me because there's something else that's even more valuable to me in my identity. And that might be, for instance, being rich.

[21:35] rich. And so when the opportunity presents itself, I will lie, I will falsify, I will embezzle.

And if I ever get caught out in that moment for doing those things, I go, I don't know what happened to me. This is not who I am. I'm not a liar. I was not brought up to be a liar. And the answer to that is, well, of course you are.

Of course you were brought up to lie. You were brought up to make everything about you, and that is why you've embezzled. It's why you've lied. It's why you're falsified.

You've been practicing new self behaviors out of an old self heart. And it's been working for a little while.

But ultimately it doesn't. And there are churches all over this country right now, like this one, meeting, and there are people sitting beside each other in those churches, living with the same moral frameworks, but doing it for entirely different reasons.

[22:53] Entirely different reasons. There are those who are doing it because they hope God approves of them in the end, or because it makes them feel superior to those who are not living the way they're living, fear and pride.

And there are those who are doing it simply out of gratitude. for God's grace in Jesus Christ, taking them from darkness to light, from death to life, from the old self to the new self, and so they're doing

the life they're doing, they're living the life, they have the behaviours, they're just out of joy, out of joy.

So that's the first thing we need to change, to really change, and that's a different motive from the heart, an internal motive as opposed to external compliance.

The second source of this new, and the second thing, and I think it's the source of this new motive, is we need a new identity. We've seen that we've been made an entirely new person in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5, verse 1, is the Christian's new identity. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children. Verse 3, his holy people.

[24:11] Verse 8, you are his children. Light in the Lord, which means in Christ, you are light, not dark.

You've been forgiven and made new in him. That is, God has loved us, he has chosen us, he has called us, he has forgiven us, he's redeemed us, he's filled us, he's changing us, and one day he will glorify us.

The almighty God, who alone is holy, who is all-powerful, who is perfect, he has set his unconditional, undeserved, sacrificial, adopting, redeeming love, on you, the Christian.

And it is all a gift. Not one moral act on your behalf has caused him to turn his face towards you.

Not one positive good thing that you've done has made him approve of you. It is all about him and his perfection and desiring to impute it to us, to give it to us as a gift.

[25:32] And he knows already the darkness of the heart, the hardness of the heart, the greed, the debauchery, the impurity. He knows it all.

And yet he's still set his face towards us, designed to love and to take us from old to new.

And it's because of who the gift giver is, in his sovereign grace, what he has set his face towards us, his love in determining us that we are his children, that will never change.

That will never change. As I said to my group on Friday night, there is no sin so small that it's not eternally damnable.

And there is no sin so great that it's not eternally forgivable. You see, deep and enduring change in life comes from an internal motive, and the only energizing motive is an entirely new identity.

[26:58] And as we grow to understand who we are as his children, it will shape our hearts in such a way, change our motives in such a way that we will take on his new framework of life in determining what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad for my life.

And we will live into that. So where do you get your ethical framework from?

Where does it come from? TV, family, your culture, friends, social media, maybe it's just a vibe, a feeling.

Like Donald Trump said, the war in Iran will end when I, he said, I'll feel it in my bones. Maybe that's it. It feels the right thing to do.

I mean, I laugh at that, but that is the current young generation. It feels like the right thing to do. Or is it God and his word? You see, it's not until the source of right and wrong shifts to God's word do we actually change.

[28:18] And it shifts because of our new identity. identity. Our new identity is shading a new motive.

There's a parallel passage to this, Ephesians passage, in the book of Colossians. Paul also wrote that. Chapter 3, verse 16, Paul writes, let the word of God dwell in you richly.

Now, what he's saying there in Colossians 3.16, it's not just, oh, you know, read the Bible. He's not just simply saying here, read the Bible, you know, a chapter a day will keep the devil away kind of stuff, keep God happy.

It's in fact having God's word imminently! present in your heart, the driving center of your life through your mind. It's pushing the reality of God's word down into the very center and the driving being of my life.

So let's go back to Ephesians now. Remember I said Ephesians verse 22 and 24 were in the what tense? The aorist tense.

[29:37] A single past action that's completed with present consequences. I've already taken off the old self, already put on the new self. In the middle of verses 22 and 24 logically is verse 23 as it happens.

And verse 23 is how we consistently take off the old and put on the new. Verse 23 is how it happens. And verse 23 is not in the aorist tense.

It's in, for those with pens you might want to write this down, don't, because it probably won't mean anything to you anyway. Verse 23 is in what is called the present middle infinitive tense of a verb. And let me tell you what that means. It means putting on and putting off is a continuous action that you do while it's being done to you.

That's what that means. And a good way to read verse 23 is something like this.

[30:54] Constantly be made new in the spirit of your thinking. be made new.

So in other words you are being made new. That is something that's being done to you while you were doing it. Now what he's saying there is he didn't just say because he'd been made renewed as you read the Bible.

Or as you think. He didn't just say as you think. It's literally the spirit of your thinking which is a very unusual term. for Paul. It's more than rational thought.

It is more the spirit of your thinking is more like the idea of the direction of your thinking. It is the state of your mind. It is the inner life of your thinking.

To have or as some commentators have put it it is to be renewed by having your imagination being taken captive.

[32:03] By what? Verse 20 and 21 again. That however is not the way of life you learned when you were heard about Christ were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

The way to be constantly renewed in the spirit of our thinking is not to focus on Christian morality or Christian principles or Christian ethics or even dare I say key doctrines.

It is to focus not on a principle not on a dogma but on a person. It's to focus on a person.

not even on a title but on a person. And the reason I say that interesting again verse 21 is the only time in all of Ephesians where Paul doesn't use the term Jesus Christ Christ Jesus or simply Christ he says Jesus.

It's the only time he says Jesus. That's what he writes. And normally in Ephesians he's emphasizing the lordship of Christ over all things and here he draws their attention to the man Jesus.

[33:35] Why? Because the key the key to being transformed from the inside out giving us a new identity and a new motive and all its behaviors you know taking off the old self with all its behaviors and putting on the new self with all of its characteristics and behaviors becoming more loving more selfless more forgiving is to be captivated by the man Jesus.

You see the Christian life and what Paul's calling us to here Christian ethics Christian behavior Christian morality makes absolutely no sense at all unless they are seen through the lens of the person Jesus.

No sense. That's why when the person says you know do I need to stop gossiping and become a Christian? You know well I need to stop that life of slander and gossip in order to be a Christian you've not understood Christianity.

You're focusing on a behavior not a person and when you see the person you'll understand that gossiping and slanderous is damnable to hell because of who Jesus is.

And what specifically are we meant to see? We're meant to see Jesus moving in the opposite direction that we've been moving.

[35:17] We've taken off the old and put on the new. He was already new and he put on our old. We need to see that happening. We can only take off the old corrupt self of darkness and death and decay and eternal destruction and put on the new self of life and life and renewal and glory because Jesus went the opposite for us.

Ephesians 2 says he was equal with God with all his perfect love and splendor and majesty and glory but he laid it aside and he entered took on human flesh he entered all the suffering the darkness the evil the sin the corruption of this world he identified with us and he traded places with us when he went to the cross he bore!

Human history's entire old self on himself and where it says in chapter 5 God's wrath gets poured out on such sin he allowed God's wrath to be poured out on him instead he took on our old self so

we could have his perfect self he took on the corruption so that we could have his holiness he was hated so that we could be loved he was put to death so that we could have life and when we are captivated by Jesus doing the opposite for us captivate we actually start to see that what he outlines here in the Christian life makes entire sense as we're captivated by him the new identity grows and so does the internal motive of wanting to please him and be like him in everything so finally and really quickly there is a fourth point and

I'm going to brush over this real fast what does it look like what might be the signs of such transformation how can I tell whether I'm truly being transformed or if I'm just taking on certain behaviours first of all this is a summary of verses 5 to 14 the transforming Christian knows their sin and they walk in obedience they know their sin they don't minimise their sin as the Christian grows they have a growing sense of just how comprehensive and evil their sin is and comprehensive in the sense of the power that it has over their hearts the guilt of their sin the guilt that is required of their sin and also the forgiveness of sin the forgiveness of sin that is what they're doing is as a Christian grows they grow deeper and deeper and deeper in grieving and being aware of their sin and higher and higher and higher of understanding if that's how deep my sin is that's how great God's forgiveness is you do both they correspond to both and they hold it in balance there is no sin so small that it's not damnable and there's no sin so great that it's not forgivable secondly in verses 15 to 17 the growing Christian knows the time and they walk in wisdom the transforming Christian the ones being changed knows that obedience is not simply obeying rules but it's about living life rightly under the lordship of Christ for his glory when there appears to be no rule in the Bible associated with this particular action or activity which is probably 80% of what we do day by day the [39:40] Bible speaks to it directly or it forms the categories by which I approach it that is to grow in wisdom they are careful they are thoughtful they are maximizing the time right now in view of the end they don't compartmentalize Jesus just to a Sunday morning in their life and a couple of other activities he is their life captivated by Christ the growing Christian doesn't look for a rule to obey they seek to make Jesus look great in all of life they seek to reflect him and be like him in all of life and they redeem the time and they pursue his kingdom and not their own glory thirdly verses 18 to 21 knowing the Lord the growing Christian knows the Lord and they walk in joy why does Paul put here in this section why does he say don't get drunk on wine instead be filled with the Holy Spirit why connect those two why not say don't be greedy and don't have sex outside of marriage but instead be filled with the Holy Spirit he could have done that couldn't he why not do that well it's because of verses like this in the Bible Psalm 104 verse 15 wine the glad and human heart judges 9 13 should I give up my wine which cheers both God and humans Zechariah 10 7 their hearts will be glad as with wine and so see the theme here one of the markers of this new self is joy joy not duty but joy despite the circumstances of my life instead of wine soothing the futility of my life the spirit now is working through the word of God to fill my heart with hope and purpose and joy in such a way that it overflows with songs of praise to

God there is something not right about the consistently miserable Christian the grumblers read the book of numbers and see the grumblers grumbling grumbling grumbling joy grows as we are captivated by Jesus because you see more and more that you can lose everything in life and still have absolutely everything in him and so let me just say very briefly by way of application all of our seven rhythms at this church our rhythms of grace exist to get us into the habit of being captivated by Jesus that's why they exist to be captivated by Jesus that he might feel our imaginations and our lives and that we might change that we might become more confident of our forgiveness that we might become more wise that we become more joyful and so make a decisive choice now to take your next step to become transformed because

Christian you are transformed a ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending