

Session 3

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[0 : 00] So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that 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 with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you have heard of him 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 is being 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.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come from your mouths, but only let what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

[1 : 19] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Be among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. It would be great if you could have that passage in front of you, ready to go, as we continue to look through the book of Ephesians.

I don't know about you, but after a couple of hits in the short space of time, you might be feeling a little bit fuzzy in the brain, so I'm going to ask God to sharpen us, so that we can hear him speak this morning.

[2 : 32] So let's pray. Father God, we want to thank and praise you for your word. We thank you that you're a God who has revealed himself and who wants us to know him.

We thank you that you are a God who shows us things in our lives that need to change, that you're a God who gives us the answers. Lord, you don't leave us to guess.

And we ask this morning that you would take away tiredness or distraction or anything else and enable us to hear you speak, the result being that we might be more like your son and that our lives might give you more glory.

Amen. I remember when I was growing up, I used to be a bit of a church event junkie. So I used to go to a lot of different church events. I used to do two youth groups when I was in high school. On Friday night, I'd go to my local Anglican church, and on Saturday night, I'd go to my local Pentecostal church because I couldn't get enough of youth group. And I remember something that struck me as I hung around youth groups and events was these incredible testimonies that evangelists had.

[3 : 36] It seemed like a prerequisite to being a guest preacher was a serious drug habit somewhere in life. And I remember I used to sit there and think, this is not long after I'd become a

Christian. I knew that I wanted to spend my life telling people about Jesus, and I was thinking, where am I going to squeeze this drug habit in?

I'm busy. I've got time. And I'd be looking at my life and thinking, my life's so boring. It's reasonably good. And I had some stuff that I thought was pretty serious.

But when I heard these testimonies, my life just sounded like I was already a Christian. I'd just forgotten to go to church. But the problem was that I'd completely misunderstood what my life was like in God's eyes.

I'd completely misunderstood what God saw when He looked at my life. And for the Ephesians, Paul comes to this point in chapter 4, and there's been a shift in this second half of the book. He started to really drive on the practical application of what he's been talking about. He's been talking about the significant work that God has been doing. In chapter 1, we learn about the gospel of Jesus, by which we were chosen and predestined and adopted and forgiven.

[4 : 41] And in chapter 2, he reminds them that in Christ they were brought from death to life. There's a significant work that has gone on. And then he begins chapter 4 by saying, As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of that calling.

This second half is all about what that life in the gospel is supposed to look like. But here, in this second part of chapter 4, it's like Paul needs the Ephesians to look again at what their life is like without Jesus.

It's like the Ephesians maybe, like I used to, have looked at their life and thought, we were kind of not amazing before, but we weren't bad either. A few subtle changes and we'll be pretty sorted for this new life that God has called us to.

But in case they've missed the phrase dead in chapter 2, Paul goes hard again here. Have a look at verses 17 to 19. I mean, this isn't subtle.

This is an absolute denunciation, an absolute slamming of the way of life without Jesus. He says, I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.

[5 : 50] And for the Jews, Gentiles is the same as what we would think of as pagans. For the people who don't know Jesus, he says, I insist you must no longer live like they do in the futility of their thinking. See, their way of life is based on a hopeless thinking.

They can't actually use their mind to understand their existence and their earth and what the right path for their life is. There is a futility and a hopelessness even in their ability to choose right and wrong.

It says they're dark in their understanding. They're separated from life. You've got to hear it again. Without Jesus, you were dead. Dead in your transgressions and sins.

Separated from God. Cut off from the source of life. And ignorant. Hard-hearted. Lost all sensitivity. It's like sin has become second nature. Sin is the normal.

It's like this happens for us as an ongoing challenge. I remember finding myself as a younger man perfectly okay with the increasing nudity and profanity that I would find on television.

[6 : 56] I remember as a 10, 11, a 12-year-old, I'd get really embarrassed if there was nudity on television and I'd run out of the room or my parents would cover my eyes or something like that. But progressively, I got desensitized to the point where it was normal.

That's what's on TV. So I'd just watch it. And Paul is saying that's what life is like before Jesus. There's no sense of this is wrong. It's natural. Your life is completely on a path of disobedience to God.

Your life is consumed by it. It's like you're gathering up impurity. It says there in verse 19, Without God as the standard for our lives, the only standard here is sensuality.

It's the things that I feel right now. It's me. I'm the center of the universe. Paul says that is the existence of every non-believer. Now, at first, we feel this kind of awkwardness.

Isn't that a bit harsh? I know some nice non-Christians. I know some non-Christians that seem to do good things. But the point here is that sin, that the life without God is life without God.

[8 : 15] That's what sin is. Sin is life lived outside of God's rule. And it's there. Without Jesus, they're cut off from life. They're separated from God.

So people who don't know Jesus, this is the reality of their life. They are driven by their sensual desires. They're cut off from life. And they are just building up impurity. And they are on a path of futility.

But Paul says in verse 17, This is not okay anymore if you're following Jesus. This is what it used to be. This was your life. This is your evangelist story, if you like.

This is the path that you can't continue on anymore. You can't just live the same life with church attendance. The gospel, Jesus, as has been explained all through chapters 1 to 3, brings a new life. It brings a transformation. It brings something different. Look at verse 20. You, however, this is the contrast, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[9 : 26] 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. Paul says you now know Jesus. You now know what is true.

There's no hopelessness in your thinking anymore. You can't claim ignorance as an excuse for the sin in your life. You have been shown the truth. The mystery has been revealed in chapter 3.

And so for us, we're not ignorantly wallowing in the mud because we don't know any better. To continue in our old lifestyle is to willingly reject the gospel.

It's to willingly deny the headship and lordship of Jesus that was won on the cross. To continue in your life the same way as it was before Jesus is to reject the blood of Jesus which was shed for you so you might be forgiven.

A life worthy of the gospel must be different. A life worthy of what Jesus has done can't even be just a changed life.

[10 : 35] It's got to be a new life. Death is where we were before. Cut off from God. Cut off from life is our starting point. And so the life in Christ is so radically transformed that it is new.

It is unrecognizable. It is different. And so Paul calls the Ephesians in this passage and God is calling us today to put off the old life.

To leave the habits. To leave the sinful patterns. And to put off the old life. Because it is being corrupted. But there's something really interesting there.

What is it that's corrupting that old life? Have a look there in verse 22. Put off your old life, your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.

It's your deceitful desires that have corrupted your old life. Before you say, I was ignorant. I didn't know what I was doing. Human sinfulness is so ingrained that it is us that corrupts our life.

[11 : 39] It is us that cuts ourselves off from God. And to continue in that path, it is your desires that will try and drag you there. Your desires will wage war with this new life that the Spirit is working in you.

Your own sinful human nature will do everything to keep you rooted in that old life that you once existed in. That is unless you fight to put off the old self.

We significantly underestimate just how sinful we are. We think that sin is an issue, sure, but it's a small issue. In fact, we're so good at distorting the truth of sin that we can convince ourselves that when we're sinning, not only are we not doing the wrong thing, but we can even make it noble sometimes.

I was listening to a sermon recently and the preacher told a story about a man that he met at a conference and this man approached him and started speaking proudly of his wife and his girlfriend. And the preacher pushed back going, hang on a sec, what do you mean your wife and your girlfriend?

And so the man, without missing a beat, started explaining, well, my wife is quite cold and disconnected and our marriage wasn't really working, but now I have this woman who cares for my emotional needs and my physical needs and so it's saved my marriage.

[13 : 00] That's a true story. He had so twisted the truth that he convinced himself not only is adultery not wrong, it's a good idea.

It's the way to fix the problems in his marriage. He's convinced himself that it's wise and it sounds ridiculous because that's not our sin. But think of the ways that we daily convince ourselves that dishonesty is a good idea.

We can always find a noble outcome for dishonesty so that it's the right thing to do. Think of the way you convince yourself that speeding is a good idea so that you get to church on time because church is an important place to be.

So complete and so disgusting is our sinful nature that we can convince ourselves, we can justify ourselves to the point where sin is not a vice but a virtue.

So complete is the rebellion in our old life that if we continue to walk in it, we reject the grace offered in the gospel.

[14 : 12] Paul is calling the Ephesians here having reminded them in those first three chapters of the incredible grace and love that God has shown them in Jesus. He calls them here to an active life change.

There is no possibility of being passive in this activity. In Christ they've been given knowledge, they've been given the freedom from the ignorance and the darkness and the hard-heartedness and the hopelessness and now they can choose to put off that old life that is dead.

Now we are actually released to choose what God has shown us is right but understand that this putting off will be a daily struggle until Jesus comes back.

It will be a daily struggle. The life worthy of the gospel of Jesus demands that there is an ongoing every minute of every day putting off of old habits that deny God and putting on holiness, righteousness and God-likeness.

That's what it says there in the passage. Verse 22 finishes, 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.

[15 : 38] What Paul is demanding here is that the Ephesians be recreated. That's what he's asking them to do. He's saying an old life goes and a new life begins and the only way a new life begins is creation and the only one who creates is God.

He is saying you need to swap death for life, darkness for light, unwise for wise and as a young kid I just couldn't understand that my old life was dead.

I couldn't see it as dead. I could see those evangelist lives as dead with the drugs and the guns and the whatever else. All I saw was good people and bad people. Bad people who met Jesus needed to change and good people like me who met Jesus needed to start going to church.

I couldn't grasp that to God my life was disgusting. That it was dead and rotting and decaying and even more so I didn't grasp the blinding light of the life that God was calling me to.

I didn't understand that following Jesus meant a recreation. It meant a whole new existence. It meant that there is nothing similar about my old life and my new life.

[16 : 51] God is calling us from one extreme of willful rebellion to wholehearted absolute unquestioned devotion.

Jesus is demanding change. Verse 23 again says, Be made new in the attitude of your minds and put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness exchanging impurity for righteousness futility for renewal sensuality for holiness the ultimate and complete transformation.

Now, I don't know about you but I often get uncomfortable when people, particularly non-Christians, make comments about how Christians are supposed to be the good people.

It usually comes in the context of a Christian who's stuffed up and they're letting us know that we've stuffed up but my response has always been, no, we're not supposed to be good, we're just forgiven. I usually walk away feeling kind of smug and look, that's kind of true but in this passage in Ephesians Paul is saying that a life worthy of the gospel does involve change, that there is a goodness, that there is a morality that should mark the people of God.

There should be a visible difference between those who are darkened in their understanding and hardened in their hearts and those who have been brought to know Jesus. Those who have been forgiven and cleansed and set free.

[18 : 24] And the scary part in this passage for me is that it feels like some of the responsibility sits with us. In verse 22, we were taught to put off the old self.

You put off the old self. In verse 24, you put on the new self. It's we who are to consciously and actively wrestle with sin in our lives.

We are to actively and consciously and desperately seek God-likeness, seek righteousness, seek holiness. There's this incredible list of examples in the verses that follow.

We're to stop stealing and instead be generous. We're to stop lying and instead speak truthfully.

We're to avoid sinning and anger and instead be forgiving and compassionate and gracious. We are to use our words to build others up and not tear down.

We're to forgive like Jesus did. We're to avoid sexual immorality. There's a list of what we must do.

There's a sense of responsibility there and we're called to take responsibility for our lives and for the

transformation that is demanded by the gospel.

[19 : 38] So the question is, how seriously do you take sin in your life? How regularly do you pray for things that you know don't honour God in your life?

How hard are you trying to grow in areas of godliness? Because the call is clear. Live a life worthy of the gospel.

The call is forceful in verse 17. I insist on it in the Lord. But I guess the question remains, what does it look like practically for you to put off and put on this week?

What will it look like for you to live this out? Look again at verse 20 and 21. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You did not come to know Christ that way. There's this hint of looking back to what Paul's been talking about for the first three chapters of this book. We're looking back to what's gone before to chapter one.

[20 : 47] How did the Ephesians come to know Jesus? How do we come to know Jesus as Christians? By hearing and learning the truth that is in Jesus. The truth of chapter one that tells us that we were chosen before the creation of the world, that we were predestined and adopted and forgiven and all that when we're included by Christ by faith.

That's what it looked like. That's how we came to know Christ, is by faith. In chapter two it's explicit, it's by grace. Our knowing Christ has nothing to do with you, it's by his grace and through faith and this is from God.

Paul makes it really clear, just to be sure you can't boast about this because God does it in Christ and you participate in it by grace and through faith. It's God's work in you by the Holy Spirit that opened your eyes to be able to choose what is right.

It's God's work that freed you from the ignorance and the futility and the hopelessness. And in verse 23, in amongst us putting off and us putting on, we are to be made new.

That doesn't say go make yourself new, it means be made new, it's something that God is doing, it's his work and the only one who has the power to create is God through Jesus.

[22 : 10] This transformation that is demanded and that is insisted on is only possible in the power of the gospel. It's only possible in the power of the Holy Spirit and it's something that God alone can do.

Now you might be feeling like I'm arguing in two directions here but let me show you. God in his infinite wisdom and power has so worked that he can say in the space of a couple of verses put off you do it.

Be made new, I'm doing it and put on you do it. His spirit works in such a way that it empowers you and it demands of you that you take responsibility.

God says your life must be transformed, must be different, must be recreated and he gives you the power to do it and in his power he gives you the responsibility to say I will wrestle with sin, I will put it off, I will seek godliness, I will put it on.

The Christian life is this journey from being redeemed in Christ to the final redemption when Christ comes back and because of the cross we are irreversibly rescued and forgiven.

[23 : 18] We have been given the new nature that is talked about here. We now know Christ, we are no longer that verse 17 to 19 bit, but you and I both know that so often we wander back into it.

We know what is right, we know what God wants but still we wander back into old habits. Still we continue in patterns of sin that we know to be wrong. We often pretend that we don't know what's right, let alone have the willpower to actually choose it.

But Paul says here, I insist in the Lord, don't settle for sin. Don't settle for not okay.

Don't become desensitized but daily put off your old life. Daily put on this new man, this new self that has been created.

Confess sin. Pray for strength to resist. Practice godliness. Encourage instead of tear down. Share rather than steal. Forgive rather than revenge.

[24 : 27] Are you growing to be more like Jesus? Because that is the new self that God has created in you. He is transforming you to be like Jesus.

What are you doing to actually make that part of your agenda? Do you have someone in your life who will regularly challenge you on areas that you're struggling in? do you have someone holding you accountable in an area that you're seeking to grow in?

Are you trying to memorize scripture that might shape your desires and your heart? How regularly do you confess sin in your life? Because it is a daily struggle to put off and to put on. How we live can't unsave us but that doesn't mean that it's not important. It still matters. This is what it looks like to be a Christian. There is a transformation to be more and more like Jesus. That's what the gospel looks like when it takes root in our life and shapes us. But the last question I have for this passage is why is it here?

[25 : 39] I mean I get it that the second half of Ephesians is practical but this book is about the church. This book is about the community of God's people. We just learnt in the section immediately before about gifts for building one another up.

So why does he take this apparent left turn and start talking about the life of the individuals? Why does he suddenly slap people around about their sinfulness and their failure to pursue godliness? Something that I like to do and that has been significant in my Christian life is having older godly men as mentors. And one particular guy who I won't name because that would make him particularly uncomfortable, I spent time with regularly over the course of about 18 months and this man for me was the godliest man I've ever met.

I have often referred to him slightly in jest as Jesus because he's the closest thing I've seen in my lifetime. He loves the scriptures in a way that I can only hope to get to.

He has boxes and boxes and boxes of memory verse cards and he knows them. We would meet together and he'd be carrying around this little wallet in his back pocket with sort of 10 15 memory verses that he had learnt, some new ones he was learning and some that he was revising from as long as 25 years ago and he'd go can you test me on them?

[27 : 05] He'd hand them over and he'd get every one of them word perfect. He'd even progressed with his church through the various translations of the Bible. He had some of his verses in King James, some in RSV, some in NIV and he knew which ones were in which because they were so imprinted on his mind and his life that he couldn't forget them.

And spending time with this man was a significant encouragement to me. We wrestled with some specific issues, we occasionally talked about specific things but the most significant encouragement was just watching him follow Jesus.

Watching him love his wife through sickness. Watching him love his kids even as some of them strayed. His transformed life spurred me on to be transformed as well.

His living out of the gospel, his living a life worthy of the gospel pushed me to maturity, pushed me to growth. This sits perfectly in this chapter.

This is exactly the right place because yes the church is a unit but it's a unit made up of people, made up of individuals who are living lives, made up of relationships and a life worthy of the gospel is a life in relationship to God but it's a life in relationship to those who belong to God as well.

[28 : 33] What we need to understand is your life and the way you live impacts me directly and indirectly. My life and the way I live impacts you directly and indirectly.

The transformation or lack of transformation has an impact on you as my brothers and sisters that I'm in relationship with. Look back to verse 16 just before our passage.

Talking about the building up of the body it says, from him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Part of the work that each part must do is what follows in this passage. To be equipped to do the work you must be being transformed.

You must be growing to be more like Jesus because that is what the gospel does. It changes us. We need to take seriously the call to put off and wrestle with sin in our life and we need to take seriously the call to grow in godliness.

[29 : 47] It's not enough to just put off but as we are recreated our desires, our goals, our aspirations are shaped to line up with Christ that we might be created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

As you change and grow, that spurs and encourages the people around you to do the same. We're not all wrestling with the same sins but seeing you wrestle with sin in your life, seeing you make the decision to say that God's being obedient to God and his call on your life is more important than your sensual desires makes me want to do the same.

God's grace in your life gives me joy. God's work in your life gives me a vision for what he wants to do in my life and the life that you are living even in secret matters for the rest of us.

This passage is kind of heavy but it's kind of light at the same time. There are so many examples of stuff that we are all bad at. Speech, sexual impurity, anger but it's all driven by the gospel. Verse 20 to 24 it just unpacks the gospel. You did not come to know Christ that way. You heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You're being made new in the attitude of your mind.

[31 : 13] It's the coming to know Jesus by grace and through faith that frees us to live a transformed life. Frees us from futile ignorance and empowers us to choose Jesus.

So what's it going to look like for you to put on and put off this week? It's going to look exactly the same as it looked the first time you put off and put on.

That's what you did when you became a Christian. You left your old life behind and you took on a new one. And what did it look like then? It looked like you saying, God, please do this in me. God, I don't deserve it.

I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. Please do this in me. It looks like prayer. Humble, dependent, and desperate prayer.

Saying, God, change me. Pray for your holiness. Pray for my holiness. Pray for one another so that together we can live a life worthy of the gospel.

[32 : 16] so that together we can be the church that is pictured in these passages. So that together we might grow up and mature into the head that is Christ Jesus.

Humble, dependent, desperate prayer. That's what it looks like to put off and put on. Let's pray. Pray. Pray for God. Father, we want to acknowledge that there is so much in our lives that is not okay. That there is so much about the way we are living that we have become desensitized to. We have become comfortable with things that are disgusting to you. Father, we remember the forgiveness and the freedom that you have won for us in Jesus.

Please remind us of the work you have done. Lift our eyes to see the good that you would have us do in our lives. Show us the sins that you would have us deal with and wrestle with. Give us the strength to overcome them.

[33 : 23] Lord, keep us from settling with where we are now. Give us eyes to look to Jesus, to understand that you are transforming us from one degree of glory to another. That you are constantly by the power of your spirit cleansing us and shaping us.

That we might love what you love and hate what you hate. God, use each of our lives individually to be an encouragement and a joy to one another.

God, please transform us that our lives might reflect your gospel, might point to Jesus. Amen.