

The Gospel Should Change How We Live Every Day (Ephesians 4:21-28)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 25, 2012

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If you would take God's Word and turn to Ephesians 4, today we are going to look at a Scripture passage that can change your life. My goal today is nothing short of changed lives. This was God's goal when He inspired this text, that we would not walk away from this unchanged, but that we would walk with lives that are changed

Eph 4:17 *So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you **walk no longer** just as the Gentiles also walk ...*

Eph 4:21 *if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you **be renewed** in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and **put on the new self**, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.²⁵ Therefore, **laying aside** falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE** of you **WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another.²⁶ **BE ANGRY**, AND yet **DO NOT SIN**; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.²⁸ He who steals must steal **no longer**; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

Many truly saved people miss how the gospel should change how we live every day after we're saved. We left off last time with Rom. 12:2, gospel-transformation by renewing the mind.

Tim Chester has a book *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions* that begins with some examples of people he has counseled:

'Jack started having intense struggles with lust in his teens. Twenty years or so later he's still fighting [it]. He thought marriage would sort it all out, but it didn't. He's put in place regimens of spiritual discipline, all to no avail ...

You'd think Carla was a respectable Christian. She doesn't swear, steal, get drunk, commit adultery, or commit any of the sins by which we measure one another's godliness. But her Christian service has little joy. Often she's irritable, often complaining.

Colin's life was turned around when he converted. He left an adulterous relationship and stopped getting drunk. But a few years later, his Christian growth seems to have plateaued. Like Carla, he looks respectable enough. But those close to him know he has a temper. He's not someone you'd ever want to cross ...

Is there hope for these people? ... There is ... through Jesus. I know this because ... I know Jack, Carla, Colin ...

When Jack went through [this study] with me, he stopped acting out his lust almost overnight ... The struggle ... has continued, with some falls, but also with many victories. Every now and then he sends me a text message asking for prayer and suggesting I "ask the question" next time we see each other.

Carla has blossomed ... her attitude is radically different. She often expresses her delight in God and her amazement at his grace. She serves willingly, looks for opportunities, and takes the initiative. When she speaks of others' faults, it's with grief and love, accompanied by affirmation.

Colin has a ... growing delight in God. He still has occasions when he feels angry. But now he knows his anger reflects a desire for control. So he responds with repentance. He's learning to trust God's sovereignty in those moments.'¹

Ephesians 1:11 (NASB95) *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will ...*

...⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ...*

2:4-5 *But God ... even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

God is sovereign in salvation in the gospel and after the gospel in Eph 2:1-10, Paul says *remember* (v. 11-12). The gospel changes believers, too who realize/remember its depths:

- An elderly man here came to understand depths of depravity and grace and even faith is part of the gift in v. 8-9 and he read A.W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*; his wife said he's a changed man who is for the first time now really stepping up spiritually
- A mom told me how doctrines of grace are transforming her
- A dad shared with me how the same truths are changing him
- A single gal shared with me how learning of predestination and God's sovereignty in salvation has opened her eyes to so much more of God's grace and bigness and has changed her and given her joy, but she didn't have to tell me because I could already see it on her face
- The awakening we've experienced in v. 5 for a number in this room became a 2nd awakening when we understood its depths and the gospel changed us again as our minds were renewed to embrace sovereign grace in a Bible that seemed new and alive

Verses I'd read but missed or saw but resisted, I now rejoice in:

2:1 *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you **formerly walked** [we were dead men walking, like mummies] ...*

But God (v. 4) made us alive (v. 5) and in v. 10 God has re-created us in Christ Jesus for good works that God has for us to *walk in*. It is the same word *walk* in v. 1, the former walk, a death-walk, but in v. 10, it says now we're His new work, His new creation in Christ, *for good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to **walk**...*

4:1 *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called ...***

...¹⁷ *So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you **walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk** ... [same key word "walk"]*

...²² *that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted** ...*

The Lord has called us to life, just as He called Lazarus to come forth from the tomb in John 11. Old dead Lazarus' body had been corrupting and decaying 4 days in the tomb, and there was a stench (NIV "a bad odor"; KJV "he stinketh"). But the sovereign effectual call came and v. 44 says (NIV) *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and **a cloth around his face**. Jesus said to them, "**Take off the grave clothes and let him go.**"*

He was alive but he couldn't walk very well all wrapped up in cloths over his face and strips bound around his arms and legs. So Jesus says "unbind him/take off the grave clothes and let him go." The Lord has called us from death to life as well (Eph 2:5) but we can't walk very well, see very well or move very well with layers of stinking corrupting rotting cloths from our old dead self binding us. And so Paul in Eph 4:22 tells them to take them off, to let them go. Christ has resurrected us but there are layers still to strip away:

- Eph 4:25 is the first layer: strip off old habit of lying
- Eph 4:26 is the next layer: strip off sinful anger
- Eph 4:28 is the next layer: strip off stealing
- Eph 4:29 is the next layer: strip off sinful communication

Last week: The Gospel Should Change How We Think Every day

Today: The Gospel Should Change How We Live Every day

Next week: The Gospel Should Change How We Speak (v. 25-29)

Resurrection Sunday: Special message on gospel in 2 Cor. 5:14-21

Week after: The Gospel and Anger (back in Eph 4, v. 26-31)

Week after that: The Gospel and Forgiveness (4:32-5:2)

How the Gospel Should Change How We Live Every Day:

- 1. Putting Off**
- 2. Putting On Renewed Thinking and Righteous Living**

We'll look at the details of lying, anger, etc., in future messages, but today I want us to see the big picture. Some initial observations:

- If you try to change, but one of those 3 steps is missing, it's not true biblical *renewal* or gospel-produced transformation
- We need to keep this in mind as parents, it's possible to get our kids to change outward behavior short-term, but our goal must be to shepherd their heart long-term to true inner change and to renewed ways of living from a renewed heart
- People can put off habits they don't like without the gospel, smoking habit, a drug addiction with a secular program, but if it's not based on the truth of Jesus in the gospel (v. 21), or if gospel truths are not renewing our thinking (v. 23), or if we're not putting on godliness in its place (v. 24), it's not true biblical transformation, it's only behavior modification
- Unbelievers can exchange one sin for another, but it's like rearranging furniture on the Titanic before it crashes/sinks
- This gospel is not about rearranging a few things in your life for self-improvement and smoother sailing. The gospel is about repenting of self, denying self, dying to self, and reversing course and reorienting your direction to Christ, while renewing and restructuring and replacing everything
- It's not about trying to get rid of bad habits so you can have a better life now before your boat crashes into an iceberg and goes down. It's about getting off that boat, putting on a lifejacket, getting in Christ the Life-boat with room for all
- And now that you're onboard with Christ your Captain on a new course, there are new rules for us who are "in Christ" and new expectations for what we're to throw overboard

In 1 Peter 2, Peter uses the same word “throw aside” for our sin. In 1 Peter 3, Peter uses the analogy of how God saved Noah and those with him in the ark through the flood when everyone else perished in God’s wrath, and then he parallels that with how Jesus saves all in Him as their ark of refuge. It is in Christ that we come to our new destination, notice last 2 words of Eph 4:21: *in Jesus*.

This is where we start and end. Our sanctification (transformation or change to become more like Christ) must be from and in Christ. Paul starts in v. 20 speaking of learning Christ, and then in v. 21 he speaks of hearing and being taught *in Him*, the truth that’s *in Jesus*.

Last weekend we celebrated St. Patrick’s Day, who many don’t know was a missionary to the Irish who understood the union with Christ that Paul wrote about in Ephesians and how crucial it is. The “breastplate prayer” attributed to St. Patrick in the 5th century was:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
 Christ behind me, Christ before me,
 Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
 Christ to comfort and restore me.
 Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
 Christ in hearts of all that love me,
 Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.²

1,000 years later, a Puritan named William Marshall wrote a book that explains how essential our union with Christ is for true change in *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Its introduction explains: ‘all sanctification, indeed all spiritual life, is inseparable from spiritual union with Jesus Christ... Union with Christ became such an important doctrine to Paul that he mentioned it on nearly every page of his epistles. He uses such phrases as “in Christ” and “in the Lord” 164 times in his epistles – 16 times in Ephesians 1 alone. In Ephesians 1 Paul tells us that union with Christ is a vast, all-embracing truth for His people – a truth that runs from eternity past to eternity future and spans all the time between ...

Union with Christ is all-embracing because it encompasses all divine blessing in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul declares how all-embracing this really is, “... God hath blessed us with *all* spiritual blessings ... *in* Christ.” ... *He* is our wisdom, *He* is our strength, *He* is our compassion, *He* is our sanctification ... every spiritual blessing that He possesses He will share with us because we are by grace united with Him. That’s why it is important never to separate the benefits of Christ from His person.’³

And it’s important not to separate Christ from change. The gospel of John tells us apart from Christ we can do nothing [i.e., of lasting spiritual benefit] but as we abide in Christ and as His Word in the gospel abides in us, we can bear much fruit that remains (15:5ff). If we just try and put off sin without Christ, or if we try to put on new behaviors without Christ, or if our mind is not being renewed by Christ and His gospel, the transformation of Eph 4 isn’t happening. But because we’ve been made a new creation *in* Christ (2:10) and are together *with Christ* (2:6) we can change to be more *like Christ* by laying off things in our life inconsistent with His life (4:1, 22ff).

John Stott captures how Christ in v. 20-21 relates to this in v. 22:

‘Christ who is the substance of the teaching [in v. 20] (‘you learned Christ’) is himself also the teacher [v. 21] (‘you heard him’) ... Paul assumes that through the voice of their Christian teachers, they had actually heard Christ’s voice ... [in true gospel preaching] it may be said that Christ is teaching about Christ.

Thirdly, they had been *taught in him*. That is to say, Jesus Christ, in addition to being the teacher and the teaching, was also the context, even the atmosphere within which the teaching was given ... Jesus Christ is at once the subject, the object and the environment of the moral instruction being given [in v. 22ff] ...

To ‘learn Christ’ is to grasp the new creation which he has made possible, and the entirely new life which results from it. It is nothing less than putting off our old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on like clean clothing the new humanity recreated in God’s image [regeneration]...It is because we have already put off our old nature, in that decisive act of repentance called conversion, that we can logically be commanded to put away all the practices which belong to that old and rejected life ... That is, because [by grace] you did throw off your former self once and for all, you must now throw off all ... which belonged to your old life ... the metaphor (‘putting off/on’) is drawn from the way we dress ...

When prisoners are released from custody and become free people again (putting off one role and assuming another), they change what they are wearing (putting off prison garb and putting on ordinary clothes). Similarly, when a soldier leaves the army and becomes a civilian ... we must also put away the old standards and adopt new ones. Our new role will mean new clothing ...⁴

In the early church this actually became a symbolic part of baptism as the converts laid aside their old garments, symbolizing their old life and went into the water (signifying renewal) and then after the baptism they put on a new white robe, symbolizing their new life.

But not just at conversion or baptism, every day we’re to live it out as the gospel should continually change how we live every day, in:

1. Putting Off
2. Putting On Renewed Thinking and Righteous Living

Not always chronological but a logical order that before putting on there must be putting off, v. 22b says “*laying aside the old self...*”

Lev 16:23 says Aaron shall **take off** the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there

Same word used in the Greek OT for taking clothes off to leave there so he could be cleansed and washed to make a blood offering. In the NT we understand our regeneration and salvation is a once-for-all event based on the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb of God, but that gospel reality should continue to change our lives every day in light of it.

Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin,
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb ...
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? ...

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? ...
 Are you fully trusting in His grace **this hour**? ...
 Are you **walking daily** by the Savior's side? ...
 Do you rest **each moment** in the Crucified?⁵

If our garments are not spotless and white as snow, we need to lay aside those garments stained with sin and be washed in the blood of the Lamb, and made pure, like those John saw in Rev. 7:14. We *have been* washed and sanctified at salvation (1 Cor. 6:11) but we must *continually be* as well, putting off sin, running from it (v. 18).

The Greek dictionaries say *lay aside* means 'put off, put away, throw off, cast off, to be done with, get rid of, get away from,' etc. The Ephesians that Paul is writing to, some of them actually threw things of their old life into a massive bonfire in Acts 19 when they repented, and Paul is saying we must do that continually with sins like lying (v. 25, same word *lay aside*), anger, stealing (26-31), etc.

It's the verb used of Herod who wanted to get rid and away from the presence and influence of John the Baptist so he cast him into prison (Matt. 14:3). It's used in Hebrews 12 of a runner throwing aside whatever clothing might entangle him or make it hard to run, and we could also apply it to Lazarus trying to walk all wrapped up.

Lazarus could still move around to some degree with grave clothes on, but Jesus didn't just call him to life, he called for the corrupting decaying rotting stinking garments of death to be left and laid aside and the same Lord who resurrected us in Eph 2 instructs us in 4:22. To run the race of faith we need proper clothing for the occasion.

The sins we're called to lay aside in v. 25-31 are a stench in God's nostrils, and they can also be pretty offensive to others. I think of when I'm wearing smelly sweaty clothes after running/b-ball and I want to hug Jaime; she loves me, but I need to *put off* and wash up! In v. 23, the washing or cleansing, the renewing is in our mind.
...be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self...

2. Putting On Renewed Thinking and Righteous Living

At the end of v. 22 there are corrupting deceiving lusts in our mind that must be repented of and renewed in the power of the gospel. Guilt over bad habits doesn't have transforming power, the gospel does. Fear of consequences or feeling bad isn't the key to change. Remorse over hurting others or resolutions to do better/try harder can't transform us; it takes a renewed heart and mind in the gospel

Horatius Bonar: 'Terror accomplishes no real obedience. Suspense brings forth no fruit unto holiness. No gloomy uncertainty as to God's favor can subdue one lust, or correct our crookedness of will. But the free pardon of the cross uproots sin, and withers all its branches. Only the certainty of love, forgiving love, can do this.'⁶

Notice how this chapter ends: ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be **put away from you [the put off]**, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, **just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.***

We need to preach the gospel to ourselves, remind ourselves we're sinners deserving death and hell but God turned away His anger and wrath from and forgave, in Christ, not on our basis or merits, so we can forgive and turn away our wrath and anger towards them who have committed far less sins against us than we have against God. The gospel is the power of the cross, Christ became sin for us and because we stand forgiven there we can forgive from there, too

Verse 31 is the putting off (bitterness, wrath, anger, etc.) and v. 31 is the putting on renewed thinking (*just as God...has forgiven you*). The mind, the motivation must be turned and transformed by a new way of thinking for us to truly biblically be putting off, putting on. The gospel provides both reason and resources to renew the mind. Again, this isn't behavior modification, it's a change of motivation.

²⁵ *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.***

... ²⁸ *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so **that he will have something to share with one who has need.*** [renewed thinking]

When is a thief no longer a thief? Many would say when he's no longer stealing. But that's not correct biblically. A thief can still be a thief at heart who may just not be stealing right now for lack of opportunity. He's still a thief, he's just between jobs at the moment

But biblically speaking a thief has truly changed when he is now working with his hands in a good profession with the motivation of working hard so that he will have resources to help others in need. His whole heart has changed from greed to generosity, from self to others, from taking advantage of others to wanting to bless others.

Biblical change from discontentment is learned by mind renewal. Phil. 4:11 "*Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*" [he writes from prison]

How was his mind renewed so he wouldn't sin in discontentment? How is the mind renewed when it's tempted to fear or anxiety? ⁶ *Be anxious for nothing* [that's the putting off, anxiety], *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* [renewal] *let your requests be made known to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and **your minds** in Christ Jesus.* ⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell on these things.***

It's not enough to try and just put off anxious thoughts. Biblical change must prayerfully put on thanksgiving, re-orienting the mind to God's attributes and promises and thanking Him for them, and He will guard our heart and mind.

Our mind is renewed when we replace the unprofitable unedifying places our mind naturally goes, and we instead set are renewing our mind by choosing to set our mind on good, praiseworthy, excellent, true, and honorable things, and at the top of the list for all those adjectives would be the gospel.

Where our thoughts dwell can transform even a prison cell, as it did for Paul when he wrote this from one. He could rejoice in the Lord (v.4). Paul could do all things with a mind set on Christ who strengthened Him (v.13) and was sufficient for all His needs (v.19). This is a consistent NT pattern of biblical change: putting off, putting on renewed thinking/righteous living.

Col. 3:8 *But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, **since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,**¹⁰ **and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...***

You've put aside the old self and put on a new self, a new creation, and that gospel reality should affect how we live everyday. That happened at regeneration but the renewing is continual here and in Eph 4, as you're to continually put aside habits of your old bad self

² ***Set your mind on the things above...** [continual mind renewal] ...⁵ **Therefore consider** [mind renewal] **the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry** [take off the grave clothes!]*

Where's the 'Put on'? ¹²*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;* ¹³*bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*** [transformation by the gospel]...¹⁴ ***Beyond all these things put on love...***

This is the text and concept that transformed Augustine: Rom 13:12 *"The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us **lay aside** the deeds of darkness and **put on** the armor of light.¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.¹⁴ But **put on** the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."*

In 12:2 we put off conformity to the world and are transformed by the renewing of our mind, then to put on righteous living (v. 9ff).

6:6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with ...

...¹¹ ***Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*** ¹² ***Therefore do not let sin reign** in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,¹³ **and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but **present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness*****

The gospel (Rom 1-5) changes us as we put off the old dead self, put on renewed thinking, and put on righteous living in light of it. The gospel calls us from death to life and helps us live consistent with that life, by laying aside our grave clothes and dead works.

²¹ *Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death ... [Here's the gospel in v. 23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Is this just a Paul thing? No, the writer of Hebrews also uses the same language of putting off, as I read earlier. Book after that, James 1:21: *Therefore laying aside all filthiness and all that remains in wickedness, in humility receive the Word ...*

Same word for “putting off” and same concept of renewed mind from prideful anger in v. 20 to humility in v. 21, and putting on the righteous habit of receiving the Word and being a doer of it (v. 22).

1 Pet 1:25-2:3 applies the gospel this way: *“this word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Because of the gospel, the good news preached to you, you are to put off, and put on renewed thinking of your dependence on God like a newborn baby is dependent on milk, and with a renewed longing for the milk of the Word (and praying for that longing to grow so you can grow), put on renewed patterns of taking in the Word of God. Peter says this is how we grow spiritually as we taste and see the Lord is good, and our taste for sin will diminish which will in turn help us to lay it aside like old decaying food.

You are what you eat. And you are what you think, as Scripture says “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” This is why biblical transformation is by the renewing of the mind as we put off and put on, in reliance on Christ. Beware of any other sort of change or counsel that leaves out one of these elements. The gospel is the power of God that should change how we live everyday this way.

And next week we'll see how it should change how we speak, how the gospel helps us in our everyday communication. *Let's pray.*

¹ Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions*, p. 7-9.

² Cited by Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*, p. 143.

³ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999, intro by Joel Beeke), p. xviii-xix.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society : The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 179-180, 183.

⁵ “Are You Washed in the Blood?” by Elisha A. Hoffman

⁶ Horatius Bonar, *God's Way of Holiness*.