

## “Living the ‘After’ Life”

*Ephesians 4:17-32*

We’ve all seen those before and after ads that show how the person looked before they used the weight loss program, or wrinkle cream or exercise program and then the amazing changes ‘after’ they used these products or did these exercises. And we’re impressed by the change but had we been watching these people every day – or if we were trying to make changes in our lifestyle habits – we see very little change in the moment.

But of course, the ‘after’ picture won’t happen if you don’t change the way you think [I want to lose weight. I want to change eating/exercise habits] each day. You have to focus on who you want to be if you want to see change.

And we can use that analogy in the spiritual realm with a slight twist. In Ephesians 1-3 Paul has been teaching on what has changed for us now that we are in Christ. Paul uses that phrase to speak of our security in Christ. Sealed by the Spirit, predestined to be conformed to Christ, blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, received forgiveness, redeemed by the blood of Jesus all by God’s pleasure and for His glory. Instead of wanting this, we already have this. We already know what the after picture of being saved looks like. So instead of having a future goal that we hope to see that will result in changes now, Paul emphasizes the future complete you and I as our motive to live the ‘after’ life now. The afterlife means what life looks like after this life. For the believer, we know we’ll be perfectly complete and sinless in Christ. Therefore, Paul says here in Eph. 4, we should be working on living out what we actually are now ‘in Christ’ and ultimately will be in Christ.

In Ch.’s 1-3, Paul wanted to emphasize our security in Christ. When we know we are in Christ – confessed we are sinners separated from God’s glory and accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour – we are secure in our relationship and know that even when we blow it at times, we’re still forgiven and sealed by the Spirit and are always God’s adopted children. We are always new creations in Jesus because we are being renewed day by day into His image.

Paul emphasized that both Jewish and Gentile believers are united in Christ. Two groups of people that historically were divided. Paul finished this section with a great prayer in 3:14-21 asking that we would approach God confidently (v.12), asking that He would strengthen us with power so that the presence of Jesus would fill our hearts and that together we would ask God to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or imagine in Christ Jesus.

In Ch. 4 Paul reminds us Jesus has given us gifts of grace to help the whole body grow together in Christ (vv.1-16). The problem, now as we come to vv.17-32, is we still struggle with sin. We still see the before (sin-filled) life show up at times. Paul now calls us to leave behind the before we were saved life and live the ‘after’ we’ve been saved life. He uses the strongest language he can think of here in v.17. . .

*<sup>17</sup>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.*

If we are in Christ, Paul implores us,

## **Let's Stop Living the Before Christ Life** **[4:17-24]**

“You must no longer live this way” indicates some (and us) are still living as if Christ hasn't changed them. How did they used to live?

*that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> That, however, is not the way of life you learned.*

How should they – and us - stop living the old life?

### ***By developing a sensitive heart to God through knowledge (vv.17-20)***

Before knowing Christ all of us were ignorant about God and His ways and as a result insensitive to others and pursued selfish desires that hardened our hearts. Hard hearted towards the truth of God. Now that we've come to know Christ we have to keep growing in the knowledge of His Word so that our still existent sinful habits and thought processes hearts are revealed. If the key to sinful behaviour was ignorance, then the key to growth in Christ is the knowledge of God. The more we know about Him and what He expects from us and the more we obey, the more sensitive we'll be to God in doing His will.

He continues to focus on the mind as key to behaviour change in vv.21-24 when he writes,

*<sup>21</sup> Surely you heard of Him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> 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; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

If we're going to stop living our Before Christ life we obviously need to work at . . .

### ***Becoming more like Jesus through changed minds (vv.21-24)***

Paul uses the 'change your clothes' image as a word picture for changing the way we think. The old self followed the old way of thinking, following deceitful desires. Our new self is bmade new in the attitude of our minds. 2 Cor. 5:17 says we are new creations, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. This is how God is slowly conforming us into the image of Jesus.

We have to think new if we're to stop living the old way. Remove the old ways of thinking and put on the new way of thinking. We're saved. We're new in Christ. We're secure. So let's live like we are, Paul says. Directly, Paul was talking to Gentile believers, recently saved out of an extremely pagan lifestyle. It's going to take time. It takes time to change our life style habits. We have to think new ways. If we don't change the way we think we'll slip back into old sinful desires and habits. Vv. 17-24 is the general principle, now in vv.25-32 he gives specific examples. You can't just say 'I'm going to stop living like I used before I was saved, you have to replace it with a new way of living. If we're in Christ . . .

# Let's Show We're Living the 'After' Life

## [4:25-32]

Paul says you replace the old clothes with the new clothes. We have to **REMOVE** our sinful habits and **REPLACE** them with Christlike, God-glorifying habits. He shows what he means with 5 specific examples and gives us a reason why this needs to change.

*<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

### **#1 Remove dishonest words and replace them with honest words because we're God's family (v.25)**

Falsehood can mean lies or any type of deception in our speech. We deceive people sometimes with our words by making ourselves look better than we should. Sometimes we lie outright. We must speak more honestly and in humility 'not thinking we are higher than we ought' (Rom. 12:3). Maybe we're trying to impress someone and we exaggerated something. When doing business with someone we may not lie, but we might not tell them everything. Paul is especially talking about the words we use with other believers. Don't lie to God's family! Replace dishonest words with honest words. Why? Because we're family; the family of God.

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*<sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.*

People hurt us unfairly at times and the old sin nature gets annoyed. Paul knows we often initially get angry but he's saying we need to refrain from acting in anger.

### **#2 Remove hanging on to hurts, replacing it with forgiving hurts done to us. Why, because Satan loves discord (v.26)**

By the end of the day (if not sooner) let go of your anger when someone has hurt you unfairly. We can hang on to hurts for days, weeks, months and years. Paul says hours – minutes! We need to forgive what people do to us because Jesus commands us to. Peter approached Jesus and thought he was being magnanimous when he said 'How often should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to 7 times? (Matt. 18:21). Jesus said '70 x 7' or in other words, stop counting and start forgiving.

What if we actually counted our hurts? Let's say we're hurt once a week unfairly and we live for 80 years. That's 4160 times we've been hurt. Now, how often do we hurt Jesus? More than once a week? At least once a day? If we hurt Jesus once a day for 80 years that's 29,200 hurts – each. If 5% of Canadians are born again that's about 2 million Canadian disciples who hurt Jesus (if only once a day) 52 billion and 560 million hurts in our lifetimes. That's just Canadians – and we're the nice guys! Instead ...

*<sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Forgive that hurt you've been holding on to because if you don't all your doing is pleasing Satan and grieving the Holy Spirit. Satan loves discord in the body of Christ. How can we grow to be like Christ if we're refusing to act like Christ?

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The next example is in v.28,

*<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

**#3 Remove our 'take' mentality and replace it with a serve mentality to meet people's needs (v.28)**

Paul commanded some of these believers to stop stealing but instead get a job. Perhaps this was how some used to make a living and were still doing it. They needed food but stealing isn't the way. Find work, make money, meet your needs and meet the needs of others so no one else steals.

We may not be guilty of theft but we may be guilty of a take mentality. We want people to serve us. We want things to be done our way; at home, at work, at church. 'I want' language is a take mentality. Jesus came to serve not to be served and gave His life as a ransom for many. Instead of focusing on what you want/like, be like Jesus and start focusing on what others need. When we start serving others we'll find out we're less concerned about having things done our way.

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The next remove. replace pair comes in v.29 and Paul comes back to the way we use our words:

*<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

The take/serve couplet had to do with meeting people's physical needs. Here Paul says

**# 4 Remove discouraging words and replace them with encouraging words to build people up (v.29)**

The word unwholesome describes harmful, corrupt or offensive words. We're all guilty of this somewhat. How can we stop doing this? When tempted to say critical things that tear down, seek to speak words that strengthen and build up. Isn't this what you want to hear from others? Then let's all do this for others.

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The last replace, remove couplet is found in vv.31-32 and there's some overlap here

*<sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

**# 5 Remove a bitter spirit and replace it with a Christlike spirit because of God's grace in Jesus (vv.31-32)**

The word for 'get rid of' can mean kill or destroy. Paul's saying take drastic measures if you have a bitter spirit. This is what happens when we've let sin take hold of us. If we struggle with bitterness, rage, brawling or slander we've got some serious sin we need to get rid of. We need to let God make us more like Jesus. We have to treat people the exact opposite of what our sin nature wants to do. When tempted to be angry and bitter we need to show compassion and kindness. Notice he commands us to act kindly not just have good intentions about being kind.

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So Paul gives 5 examples, 5 couplets of take off/put on. If we're in Christ we need to stop living like we used to before Christ and keep living more and more each day of our 'afterlife'. None of the sins mentioned has any power over us. If we're bitter over a hurt, we choose to be bitter. If we're sarcastic and critical we choose to be that way. But when we choose to obey God's Word the Spirit empowers us to obey God's word.

Our February memory verse will help us apply Eph. 4. Paul said in Romans 6 that now that we're in Christ we have the power by God's Spirit to have victory over sin. Prior to being in Christ we only had our own will power. Now we have divine power. Let's work on memorizing Rom. 6:11-12.

*"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires." (Rom. 6:11-12)*

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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