

Outline

Intro Self

Goodmorning City Church! So good to be with you all this morning. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here this weekend and open God's Word together.

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Intro:

We're going to be in Ephesians 4, starting in vs. 17 this morning. Grab a Bible or a phone. Let's do this thing.

I get the privilege of continuing a series you guys have been in for a little while now on the book of Ephesians. And I love the subtitle of this series - ***"How God Puts Things Back Together"***.

We serve and follow a King who is putting the world back together. A King that is making all things new and **what we're going to see in this text this morning is that that includes you and that includes me**. He has made us new, and He is continually making us new. **He is putting us back together into how we were designed to live and move in the world.**

And it's important to take time to study about what God is doing in the world and in our lives because there's a caricature floating around out there about Christians, I think especially those of us who were born and raised in the Bible-belt South. That what being a Christian is about is this one-time conversion experience, followed by a lifetime of hunkering down, reading Left Behind books, voting Republican, and just waiting for Jesus to come back. **That being a Christian is a decision you make, followed by not much of anything**. You walk an aisle, you pray a prayer, you make a decision at a revival, or a camp, or on a Sunday morning, you get baptized, and then you go about the rest of your life with your "get out of hell free" card in your back pocket.

And one thing that makes that caricature especially convincing, is that a lot of self-proclaimed 'Christians' really do operate that way. Maybe without the Left Behind and Republican part, but many people (and probably some of us) live like the only thing that really matters is the decision we made once upon a time to become a Christian. **If you were to do a side-by-side comparison of the rest of our life with the life of a non-Christian, there wouldn't be much noticeable difference.**

Well, this morning in Ephesians 4. Paul is about to shake up all of that up. He is going to emphatically show us that how we go about life as a Christian has a massive impact on our relationship with Jesus. He's going to say that in light of the grace of God, in light of what Jesus has done for us - if that truly takes root in our lives, if we are truly changed by the power of the Holy Spirit - that should make everything different.

The Gospel should change everything about how we live and move in the world. It should change everything about our lives, in the big things, but also in the small, everyday, mundane choices and decisions of life.

Let's look at it together. **Ephesians 4:17-24**

Ephesians 4:17-24 (ESV)

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do,

Right off the get go Paul is going to challenge their identity. He's saying "you're not gentiles anymore". **You are and you're not.** Now keep in mind this letter was written to the church at Ephesus, many of whom were Gentiles.

This would be like Paul writing to City Church and saying, "You must no longer live [That's what "walk" means here] as Americans live, you must no longer live like Knoxvilleians live." And you would read this and you would rightfully say, "Paul - here's the thing, **we are Americans. We are Knoxvilleians.**"

Paul's not minimizing or belittling their ethnicity or their heritage, what He is saying is that it's no longer the ultimate identity marker for them as a people. They don't identify first and foremost with being Gentiles and practicing Gentile things. Elsewhere he'll expound on this - **Colossians 3, where he'll say in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.** It doesn't mean those identity markers no longer exist - he's saying that's no longer your ultimate identity. For those who are in Christ you have a different primary identity.

Before you're a Knoxvilleian, or an American, or a Democrat or Republican, or a mom or a dad, or a teacher or a doctor, or a Volunteer or a Gamecock, you're a Christian, you're a follower of Christ.

And being a follower of Christ means your life should look radically different than the Knoxvilleian who lives next door. How should it look different?

Paul's actually going to give us three ways - three ways your life should be different because of Jesus, three ways that being a Christian should shape how you now live:

1. You join God in His work in the world

Keep reading Verse 17:

"You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds."

Futility - "aimlessness due to lacking purpose or any meaningful end"

Paul is asking for Christians - **is your life infused with ultimate purpose and meaning?**

You see what happens when Christians become known for being people who pray one prayer and then nothing about their lives is different is that **the world misses the beauty of a life with God-given purpose. With Jesus-driven purpose. With Spirit-empowered purpose.**

Broken Image Bearers

You see we all want purpose. We all want meaning. We all want lives that are headed somewhere, that have a goal, that have a meaningful end and I would argue that Christianity, being a Christian, following Jesus is what actually connects us to our true purpose as humans.

Let me show you what I mean - All of us, as humans, were created in what is called the “**Imago Dei**”, the “**Image of God**”, we were all made in God’s Image to reflect God, to be his little image bearers throughout the world. We were supposed to join God in His work in the world. That was the best thing for us as humans, to join God in the work He was doing in the world.

But something went wrong. The first image bearers, Adam and Eve, rebelled, they disobeyed God and sin entered the world. And now because of what is often called the “curse of sin”, all humans, every man and woman, are born as broken image bearers. We are still created in the image of God, but now, because of sin, we don’t reflect Him properly, we don’t naturally go towards joining Him in His redeeming work.

But God didn’t leave us on our own, God sent Jesus into the world to live the life we couldn’t live, die the death we deserved, and rise again to defeat Satan, sin and death. And now we again through faith and trust in Jesus have the renewed opportunity to join God in His work of redeeming, of bringing the world back to Himself.

Take a look with me at **2 Corinthians 5:17-18:**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

So you and I, all who believe in Christ - it says that we have been reconciled, we have been brought back to Christ, and now we have been given the **ministry of reconciliation**. You have been given the task of joining Jesus is bringing the world back to God. **You have been given the work of joining God in putting the world back together, putting the world back as it should be.**

THAT’S HUGE and THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING.

That means you are not just an **American**. You're not just a **knoxvillian**. You're not just a **teacher, a banker, a lawyer, a mom, a dad, a brother, a sister, a barista, a student** - You're a **RECONCILER**.

You're a reconciler who happens to have a job as a teacher. You're a reconciler who happens to work at Starbucks. You're a reconciler who happens to work at UT.

You don't just go to work to get some things done or to get a paycheck. **You go as one joining God in the restoration of all things. You go as one joining God in putting the world back together.** You go looking for opportunities to serve, to give of yourself, to be a part of God's common grace in the world. To see how you can help push back on darkness in the city and by the grace of God start pointing people and leading people to Jesus through how you love, and care, and serve, and live.

That's purpose. That's meaning. That's stepping into how you were designed to live!

1. **You join God in His work in the world**
2. **You have an abundance of life**

18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

"Alienated from the life of God"

Look at this, those who rebel, who turn away from God, who do not trust in Him, they are **alienated**, separated from, the **life** of God. They are separated from fullness of life, fullness of joy, abundance of joy - a life of deep peace and satisfaction, true purpose and meaning, true joy and contentment. **This means that those who don't know Jesus should glance inside the church and see the people of God and start scratching their heads because they see lives that are so different - so full of purpose and joy and peace and meaning.**

But too often those of us inside the church don't tell this story. Too often it looks reversed in our world. Too often we look bored, and scared, and lifeless and those outside the church look like they are having all of the fun - like they are enjoying all of the fullness of life.

My Story. I grew up as your pretty typical, white evangelical, southern Bible belt church kid in South Carolina. Claimed to have faith and got baptized at a pretty young age, but for most of my childhood and teen years I had this idea in the back of my head that I was missing out on something. **That being a Christian was holding me back from truly living.**

And it's tempting to think a life where we don't have to surrender to God, where we don't have to follow Him or obey His commands or worship Him would bring freedom right?

THEN we could truly live - we could do what we want, we can chase after the things that we want. We can shape our lives as we see fit.

But Paul here is saying - no, no. It is those who rebel against God, who turn away from Him that are alienated from the true life He offers.

You're invited to step into fullness of life. Not alienated from the life of God but walking in the life of God. Enjoying life with God in all of its abundance.

And abundance of life doesn't mean that everything always goes perfect for you. It doesn't mean that life is struggle free or pain free. It doesn't mean that you get everything you ever wanted. Abundance of life means that whatever comes your way - whatever pain or struggle, whatever grief or heartache, whatever joy and blessing - you have deep, lasting contentment and peace and joy in Jesus. You are filled day in and day out in the small moments of life with an awareness of God's presence and work.

1. **You join God in His work in the world**
2. **You have an abundance of life**
3. **You fight against sin**

19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Paul says not only have these people turned away from God but they've turned towards these other things. They haven't found freedom, they've only become enslaved to something else. They've given themselves up, they've pledged their allegiance to sensuality - **greedy** to practice every kind of impurity. They're addicted. They must have more and more.

But a life impacted by the Gospel, changed by belief in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit fights against sin. It fights against temptation. It doesn't mean you don't sin. It doesn't mean you don't struggle - but it means when you do fall into temptation, you confess to God and others and you repent, you turn away. It means your put barriers in place to protect yourself. It means you walk in the light and openly confess struggles with others. You become eager to do good, to do the things of God, rather than eager to pursue these other things.

And all of this is possible through Jesus:

20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!—

When knowledge of Christ and faith in the Gospel came to the Ephesians - it blew up everything about their lives. **They couldn't be the same anymore. They were completely changed.**

When the Gospel takes root somewhere, in the lives of a person or a people, it changes everything. As Kent said in week 1 - the way of Jesus is necessarily disruptive. It doesn't leave us the same. It changes everything about how we think, how we feel, how we believe, how we live.

And it all starts with - **“learning Christ”**. **It all starts with receiving Christ**.

You see with everything in the Christian life we have to start with the Gospel. The Gospel is our baseline.

The Gospel is why Christianity is different from all other religions.

The Gospel is the good news that verse 20 comes before verses 21-24. The Christian life starts with receiving Christ. It starts with learning Christ. Knowing Him, being changed and redeemed by Him. It's first - hey believe in Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins. Trust in Him to be made right with God. Trust in Him for a new heart, for new desires, for new beliefs, for new life. Trust in Jesus and His finished work on the cross for your salvation.

AND THEN work to put on the new self, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. You see it's not the other way around. It's not - hey put on the new self, work harder, do more and then receive Christ.

No, no. It's receive Christ and then by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the grace of God let's work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

If you're not there, forget everything else I'm saying or about to say. That's our biggest hope and prayer and desire - **we want you to know Jesus. We want you to take Christ. We want you to confess faith and begin a relationship with Him.**

21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Old Self vs. New Self

So Paul sets up a dichotomy between two “selves”. He says there is an old self, which we are to put off. And a new self, which we are to put on. And the “self” here is all-encompassing. It's all of you, it's all of your life, it's the whole you - how you think, what you believe, how you live, what you love.

An Invitation to a New Way of Living:

To put off the old and to put on the new is an invitation. It's an invitation to live out our true identity.

It's an invitation to **purpose** instead of futility.

It's an invitation to **abundance of life** rather than being alienated from the life God offers.

It's an invitation to **pursue Christ** rather than pursuing **sin**.

It's an invitation to daily more and more grow into who God has designed us to be. Live as Christ has called us to live. To more and more each and every day grow into Christ-likeness.

The word the Bible uses for growing into Christ-likeness is "sanctification".

Light Switch vs. Fire. We are often tempted to think of sanctification, or growing as a Christian, like a light switch. We want to do one thing, flip one switch, and suddenly be 100% exactly like Jesus. We want to show up to a gathering, or a night of Lifegroup, we want to open up our Bible one morning, or maybe we want to pray one prayer and suddenly boom - we're just like Jesus.

But Christian growth, sanctification is actually much more like tending to a fire. God starts the fire. He's the one that sets us aflame by the Holy Spirit. And then he calls us to a life of helping tend to the fire. To kindling the fire. A life of abiding in God, of putting off the old and putting on the new is a life of attending to the flame, of nurturing the flame more and more until it grows. You have to make small decisions moment by moment, little by little, to build the fire and grow the fire and care for the fire. It's not instantaneous. It's a series of small little things that grow up the fire.

- Choosing to read your Bible every day - that's kindling.
- Choosing to attend Lifegroup or a Gathering - that's kindling.
- Choosing to sing and be connected to worship on Sundays - that's kindling.
- Choosing to put software on your computer to help fight against porn is kindling.
- Choosing to turn off Netflix and engage with your neighbors or spouse or roommates - that's kindling.

Those are small, tiny, miniscule decisions that don't seem very important but are drastically shaping you into a particular kind of person. It affects you. It adds kindling to the fire.

You become shaped by it. What seem like tiny decisions that have no consequences can have dramatic impact on your life moving forward. And this can be for better or for worse.

David from LG. Started turning the TV off at 8:30 at night. Him and his wife decided to read one chapter from a Christian book together before they went to bed. Ask one question - Anything stick out to you? Talk about it. Go to sleep. DUDE IS GROWING LIKE CRAZY.

It's the small, everyday decisions and choices that shape us. That help us put off the old and put on the new.

So where do you find yourself this morning and what do you need to do to start putting off the old and putting on the new? What are the small steps you need to take to grow the fire of your love for Jesus?

1. For some, you need to start reading your Bible and praying.

For some reason, we have this idea that growing in Christian maturity means we eventually move past the most basic spiritual disciplines. In your life as a Christian you will never move past reading your Bible and praying. Opening God's Word, reading what He has for you, and talking to God. That's basic Christianity 101, but you don't move past that.

One meal doesn't make or break a food diet - one day of skipping Bible reading or prayer doesn't break your ability to walk closely with the Lord - but morning after morning we have to make the decision - am I going to invest in my relationship with God? Am I going to seek him today? Am I going to pursue Him today? Am I going to put off the old and put on the new today?

It takes small steps of faithful obedience. Small steps of following Jesus. Small steps of choosing to read your Bible and to pray and to be with God.

Quick hit on pushback:

I don't feel like it - wouldn't that be ungentle or inauthentic or hypocritical?

→ You don't say this about anything else in your life.

Parenting - "I don't feel like feeding my kid today."

Work - "I don't feel like doing my job today."

"We live in what one writer has called the "age of sensation". We think that if we don't feel something there can be no authenticity in doing it. But the wisdom of God says something different: that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting. Worship is an act that develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God that is expressed in an act of worship."

- Eugene Peterson

1. Some of you need to start reading your Bible and praying

2. Some of you need to be encouraged to stay the course

Stay the course. Stay faithful. Keep fighting. Even if the growth seems slow, keep fighting the good fight. Your sacrifice is worth it. You're kindling the fire. You might not be seeing the fruit right now, but it's going to pay off. Maybe not in a week but a year from now, two years, 5 years, 10 years - you're going to be able to look back and see the beauty of how Christ has changed you and matured you and grown you.

And you might be in a season that feels dry or that feels dark. Maybe your times with the Lord seem empty.

[SLOW] Listen, keep fighting. Keep pressing in. God is faithful. He'll do it. He'll bring it to completion.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. - Philippians 1:6

Keep fighting the good fight. IT is not in VAIN. It's NOT. Keep persevering. Keep choosing Jesus.

It's WORTH IT. It's WORTH IT.

3. Lastly, those who aren't Christians - take Christ. Learn Christ

I hope you see the beautiful invitation Jesus has for you this morning. That Jesus has invited you to life and life as it was meant to be lived. Life joining God in the work He is doing in the world. Life fused with ultimate purpose and meaning.

A better way of moving and being in the world. The invitation to follow Christ is not just some invitation to affirm some set of ideas and then follow a list of rules until you die - the invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to **LIFE and LIFE as it was meant to be lived!**

To acknowledge what we all must acknowledge to follow Jesus - that we were created to be image bearers, reflectors of God - but we are broken and sinful and separated from Him. And yet Jesus, the only one who never sinned - died the death that we deserved, took the wrath and punishment of God upon Himself, was buried - but did not stay dead - 3 days later he got up out of the grave and now He lives and rules and reigns at the right hand of the throne of God.

And one day He is going to return. And he's going to make all things new. And He invites you to know Him and to walk with Him and to believe on Him for the forgiveness of your sins.

Close:

I want you to think about 20 year from now you. Maybe you're 40, 45, 50, 75, 80, or somewhere in between:

What do you want your walk with Jesus to look like?

- Vibrant? Full of energy and joy? Full of life?
- Do you see your life as being full of purpose and meaning - working with God in bringing all things back together?
- Do you see yourself leveraging your gifts and your talents and your abilities for God's Kingdom to spread through Knoxville?
- Do you see yourself as reflecting God better now than you did 20 years ago?
- Do you see yourself daily getting up and getting with Jesus, taking your concerns and requests to Him in prayer, sharing your faith, living life among non-believers, leading a Lifegroup, caring for other believers, serving.
- **WHAT DO YOU SEE?**
- So what's your plan?
- What decisions or steps are you going to take today to grow in godliness?
- What are some things you need to stop doing and what are some things you need to start doing so that 20 years from now you loves Jesus more and pursues Jesus more?
- What do you need to stop doing or start doing to put off the old self and put on the new? To start cultivating healthy habits?
- **Listen, there will be some big moments between now and 20 years from now.** There will be some crazy things that happen to you. And also, for the most part - what's going to shape you in 20 years is the small decisions and choices you make day in and day out that shape you into being who you are.
- And the small little decisions and choices that you make to follow Jesus, to put on the new self or stay in the old self - that will matter. Choose Christ. Each and every day, choose Christ.

Communion.