

Ephesians 4 ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² 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; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin" ¹: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. **5** ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

What does it really mean to be a Christian? How can we live a transformed life (we know how hard it is to keep New Year resolutions)

How can we change to become the people that God wants us to be?

The problem is the old self, our old selfish nature, seems to be very powerful and constantly pulls us back into bad old habits. So how do we change?

Paul begins this passage by reminding us why that old self is so destructive by setting out what we were like before we met Jesus:

Those without Jesus are:

1) darkened in their understanding - also *the futility of their thinking*

This might seem a bit harsh,

but generally if we are without Christ we are blinded by all sorts of lies:

- *more money and things are what will make you happy*
- *it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere*
- *we all have a right to do whatever we feel like and get what we want*

2) separated from the life of God Not only do those without Christ, have no living relationship with God, but they find it almost impossible to conceive that *anyone* has such a relationship.

3) hardened in their hearts - not necessarily lacking in compassion

but just as a workman's hands get harder and less & less able to feel pain or if something likely to cause harm - so someone hardened in their heart

- becomes oblivious to what God thinks
- less & less able to feel the promptings of their conscience
- and if they can feel anything they don't care

We see this in the headlines every day in stories of greed and corruption in promiscuity, in dishonesty, in road rage and child abuse

This hardening of the heart is the root cause of the problem. So is there any hope for us? Yes indeed: Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians,

How they were rescued? By v.20 *hearing about Christ and being taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*

What is this truth? Well clearly it is centred entirely on Jesus – mentioned 3 times in that verse. It is about who he is and what he taught: that to be rescued we need to change our clothes To be rescued we need a complete change of clothes – in fact a complete change of identity *in other words* to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; and to **put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

It's a bit like when you get married. You put off your old single identity and put on a new married identity. At first it might feel a bit strange but you learn to stop thinking just about I and think about WE instead.

This is what Jesus meant when he preached his message:

As he made clear in our gospel reading superficial external religious obedience is simply not enough. The Pharisees were past masters at that. But Jesus said: ²⁰ *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* Elsewhere, He preached that we had to die to our old self in order to live, to lose our life in order to find eternal life, that we have to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. He preached that we had to **repent** a word which means a complete change of heart and attitude of mind:

Imagine a down and out who has been living rough for years, he never takes a bath, his hair and beard are filthy and matted together.

His clothes are also filthy and falling apart and stink of b.o. vomit and stale alcohol. You know that if this man is not rescued soon, he will certainly die. He is without a doubt on the road to destruction.

Imagine the man's rich and loving father (from whom the down and out in a fit of proud rebellion had run away many years ago) finds the man.

*He takes him home, strips off all his filthy clothing, gives him a very long hot soapy bath, washes, cuts and combs his hair, shaves of his beard and gives him a new set of clothes. It is the same man but now he has in effect a completely new identity (to be sure his **true** identity) and a new life.*

That shows you the old self and the new self that Paul is talking about.

In **vv. 22 & 23** Paul contrasts the two selves:

The old self was corrupt – rotting, disintegrating, smelling

the new self is created to be like God

The old: dominated by desires (immediate appetites)

the new is righteous and holy i.e. wants

to do what is right and to be like Jesus

The old self: deceived (*this will make you feel good, fulfilled*)

the new is guided by the truth

Imagine this person back in the beautiful home of his loving family, with his new identity, and his new clothes. He has a choice:

he can either live according to his new identity: eating carefully, washing regularly, taking care of himself

or he can go back to his old ways, in which case he will begin to lose his new identity as he gets dirtier and dirtier and smellier and smellier.

For whilst our identity certainly affects the way we live, the way we live also affects our identity, our sense of who we are.

So Paul instructs his readers to make sure they have nothing to do with their old God-ignoring self-centred identity, their old way of life, but live in accordance with their new identity as followers of Christ and children of God. He deals with four major areas of behaviour: deceit, stealing, destructive talk and anger.

Deceit *put off falsehood and speak truthfully* v.25

Lies clearly wrong, but also all deception and dishonesty:

keeping quiet when something we know to be untrue is said
Not sharing the whole truth in order to mislead
By contrast we are called to speak the truth in love, just like Christ.

Stealing

Not just active theft but any fiddles, exaggerated expense accounts, deliberate misleading, short-changing on time. Instead, the follower of Christ is called to be generous, to look for ways to give, rather than to take

Destructive or unwholesome talk

This includes gossip, criticism behind peoples back or giving criticism in an unloving and destructive way.

Test: is what I am saying helpful, encouraging or up-building or not

Anger: there can be righteous anger e.g. Jesus at the temple

but v. easy for anger to stem from pride, impatience or even guilt

When we find ourselves tempted to lash out in anger, we need first to examine ourselves and our motives, very carefully

Anger can take many forms: Paul includes:

bitterness – anger in cold storage that can be taken out and reheated

rage & anger: explosive, uncontrolled sometimes triggered by the tiniest and most irrational thing.

If we allow anger to linger it can become a foothold for the devil enabling to destroy both our relationships and eventually even ourselves

So instead *be Kind (Chrestos) and compassionate* – like Christ, like God

- **Remember** who you are in Christ and act accordingly
- **Remember** too that the Holy Spirit of Jesus is in you and that when you go back to the old self in the way you used to behave how much you grieve Him.
- Finally, **remember** *that your new identity as a dearly loved child of God, who is called to live a life that reflects the love of Christ*

*Matthew 5*¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,’¹ and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister¹ will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’¹ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell