

The New Me

Ephesians 4:17-24
September 18, 2016

Back in the day, I was a seal coater. It was good, honest work and I enjoyed it. It provided the extra income that Debbie and I needed early in our married life. Plus, it gave me an awesome tan! Seal coat is the stuff they apply to asphalt surfaces to protect and prolong their utility and to improve their appearance. We'd begin by sweeping and blowing off the entire driveway surface. Then we'd apply a petroleum adhesive sealant over any gas and oil stains because seal coat is gas and oil resistant. That's part of its value, it prevents future gas and oil spills from penetrating and ruining your asphalt driveway. We mixed silica sand into our seal coat to harden it but also to give it a bit of a sparkle. Once we were done applying the seal coat, we'd tell the customer to wait 24 hours for it to fully cure. Then, well, just enjoy your driveway. And be assured that it is now well protected for years to come. And you'll really like the sharp curbside appeal that it adds to your home and property.

Even though my sales lingo is accurate, don't be fooled into thinking that seal coat is always a clean and beautiful thing. For those of us on the crew, who worked up close with the product every day, it was a messy business. I ruined so many nice pairs of shoes walking around in that gunk. They looked something like this. And, they smelled really bad. Each day the shoes got worse and worse because each day added a new, slimy layer of sealer. By the end of a few weeks, I'd be an inch taller because of the crusty, built up layers on the soles of my shoes.



Can you imagine if I was still trying to wear those old shoes? What if I walked around in them every day because I just couldn't seem to part with my former life as a seal coater? There comes a time in life when we have to throw an old pair of shoes away; when we need a new pair; a pair like

my Brooks Glycerin G13s with Super DNA technology.

In our text this morning, God calls us to put off our old self and put on the new self. We need to choose whether we're going to live out our faith in an old pair of useless sneakers, or whether we're going to put on the amazing new person that God has created us to be.

In Ephesians 4:17 Paul tells the Ephesian believers, "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." We know from our earlier study in Ephesians, that most of the Christians at Ephesus were Gentiles!¹ So, it seems a little awkward, if not outright rude, that Paul would say something like this. But Paul is not making a racial slur here, rather he is using a metaphor. "As the Gentiles do" is simply his way of referring to their old way of life. These Christ-following Gentiles were still living in a society filled with a majority of other Gentiles who were not yet Christians. The Ephesian believers were still living in a world surrounded by sin, but Paul is insisting that they not live like those of the world.² Paul is essentially saying "Don't live like a not yet Christian!"

I prefer the phrase "not yet Christian" over the phrase "non-Christian." It's important for us to remember our mission to reach the people around us who are still lost; there is still time to reach them. It's also important for us to keep a humble perspective that all of us were at one time in our lives, not yet a Christian.

Ephesians 4:18 goes on to say, "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."³ Once again, Paul comes across as rather harsh. He says that their thinking is futile, their understanding is darkened, and there is ignorance in these not yet Christians. Ouch. But, Paul is actually not calling

¹ See Ephesians 1:13 and 2:11 and note in NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, 2011, p. 1986.

² In Jn. 17:14-15 Jesus prays for His disciples, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." Being a Christ-follower means living according to God's Word which is often not popular with the world around us. So even as Jesus prays for our protection from the evil one, He doesn't pray that we'll be taken out of this world nor does He pray that the world will begin to like us. When we choose to live God's way, it will become clear that we are not of this world.

³ 1 John 1:5-7 talks about how we should walk in the light as He is in the light.

them stupid. It's not really about their mental capacity at all. It's not so much a case of ignorance as it is a case of ignoring God. We know this, because Paul tells us, that this is all due to the hardening of their hearts. So this is a heart issue. This is about the fact that these Gentiles who have not yet said "yes" to Christ are separated from the life of God.⁴ They have not been transformed by God's Holy Spirit living inside of them.

And this explains why Paul goes on in Ephesians 4:19 to talk about moral issues, "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." "Having lost all sensitivity," is about having a calloused, hard heart. And it's out of this kind of heart condition that we find that these Gentiles have given themselves over to sensuality. There is a lack of self-constraint which leads to behavior that violates all boundaries of what is socially acceptable.⁵ Ultimately, Paul tells us that this led the non-believing Gentiles to greedily indulge in EVERY KIND of impurity.⁶ He doesn't go into detail here but we get the idea.

Now that Paul has painted a sobering picture of the way these non-believing Gentiles were living, he drops the hammer in Ephesians 4:20: "That, however, is not the way of life you learned." As Christ-followers, we shouldn't live the way that the Gentiles were living in vv. 17-19.

The "you" in v. 20 is emphatic here, so it's kind of like Paul is looking them straight in the eye and pointing his finger at them. Hey you, brothers and sisters in Christ, Live the way you were taught to live! The ESV translates v. 20 more exactly, "But that is not the way YOU learned Christ!" "Christ Himself is the content of the teaching which the readers [were taught]."⁷ Last week we talked about the fact that Doctrine Matters! And this still holds true. But, we aren't learning simply a set of intellectual facts from some dusty theology book. We are learning of the living Christ. "Learning Christ means welcoming him as a living person and being shaped by his teaching."⁸

In Ephesians 4:21, Paul reminds them of, "when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."⁹ There are two distinct pieces here: when they first heard about Christ and trusted Him for salvation AND when they "were taught" about Him over time. This is very important for us to note. Learning Christ as a disciple begins at our point of conversion, when we first say yes to the gift of salvation. But then, learning Christ continues in our ongoing journey of following Him.

This is why coming to church every Sunday is so important. It's why daily time in your Bible is vital. And, it's why being part of a weekly small group has such value. There is more for us to learn and understand about Jesus. Each day we learn Christ. We come to understand more about Him but we also come to know Him better through a daily, personal relationship with our living Lord.

This is also why teaching the younger generations is such an urgent mandate for our church. We want them to be taught "in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." Can you remember a key person who taught you about Jesus when you were younger? It was probably a Sunday School teacher, an Awana leader, a youth group volunteer, or a cabin leader at camp. I can think of several key men and women who invested in me. Praise God for the adults in our church who make this a priority for our young people. Thank you for setting aside time to serve on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. It's so very crucial.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul summarizes 3 key concepts for the Ephesian believers: "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."

All 3 of these concepts impact us today as Christ-followers in Bemidji:

⁴ See Ephesians 2:12, "at that time you were separate from Christ..."

⁵ ἀσέλγεια: Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 770). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁶ Consider Rev. 2:6, 14-15 which talks about the Ephesians church about 35 years later who hate the practices of the Nicolaitans.

⁷ O'Brien p. 324.

⁸ O'Brien p. 324.

⁹ The change from the title "Christ" to "Jesus" seems to be intentional in vv. 20-21, indicating that the historical Jesus Himself is "the embodiment of the truth." (See O'Brien p. 326. See also NIV text note on 4:21)

1. First of all, each of us needs “To put off the old me.” All of us have “an old self” living inside of us. Our sin nature is still there whether our past was very rough or rather more tame. It’s kind of like that pair of old shoes I mentioned earlier. If we were to be perfectly honest and we dug around in the shoe bin of our past, it wouldn’t take us very long to find some old beat up sneakers that should have been thrown away. But, until we get to heaven, we have a sinful human nature to contend with. We can’t get rid of it. That old self is still there (hiding in the shoe bin) and its trying its best to corrupt us “by its deceitful desires.” So we need to make a daily decision to put off the old me.

2. The 2nd thing Bemidji Christ-followers need is to “Embrace the new way of thinking.” Now, frankly, it surprised me that Paul stuck this one between the other two. It seemed to me like he should have kept “putting off the old me” right next to “putting on the new me.” But, he didn’t. He sandwiches it right in the middle. I wonder why?

This concept of “being made new in the attitude of my mind” is actually a very helpful corrective. You see, most of us have probably already begun to drift into thinking primarily about our past behaviors. It’s so easy, when we think of our old self, to get focused on our old actions and forget all about our old attitudes; our old ways of thinking. But remember, as we dug into vv. 17-19, it became clear that the root of the Gentiles’ sinful behavior was their darkened understanding and their hardened hearts. Therefore, we need to renew our way of thinking. Even as I put off the old me, I need to examine my heart for signs of recent callousing. It’s vital that I put off my old, futile ways of thinking, so that I don’t lose my sensitivity to sin. V. 22 just mentioned how the old me can be corrupted by “deceitful desires.” This forces me to think back to the old lies I used to believe. And, I recognize that I need to examine whether any of those lies from my old self have crept back in.¹⁰ We need to embrace the new way of thinking.

3. We also need to “To put on the new me.” This is the really fun and exciting part. God has designed a marvelous outcome for His people. This idea of a “new me” comes from God Himself. Ephesians 4:24 teaches us that we are “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”¹¹ This is an amazing reality for every Christ-follower! God has provided us with a new way to live and a new way to think. We are called to bring God glory as we walk in right and holy ways before Him. Thanks to His powerful and gracious work among us, we now have the privilege and pleasure of being like our Heavenly Father. God has created “the new me” to live differently than the world around us.

If you are a new or young Christian, now that you are following Christ, the way you live should change. You have been changed, not just in your future destination for heaven but also changed toward a right way of thinking and a right way of behaving. Don’t hold on to your old self. Embrace the new way of thinking and put on your new self.

If you have been a Christian for a long time: Don’t let your former ways sneak back in. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” Any one of us can feel pulled back to our old me.

Whether you are new to Christ or have been walking with Him for a long time, there are times in life when we are hurting, angry, lonely, or tired. These struggles can easily trigger old coping patterns. It might be drugs/alcohol or inappropriate sexual behavior or it could even be violent outbursts. For some of us, it’s self-harm or self-pity or actions that stem from a sense of entitlement. It might even be choosing to soothe ourselves through bad spending choices or old eating habits. The futility of our old way of thinking can creep in. Our hearts can begin to harden against God and lead us back into the dark places that God has rescued us from.

Worry, fear, and stress can cause us to doubt God. Can I really trust Him with my life? In a very unhealthy way, we begin to take back control of our own lives again. We set aside the lordship of Christ and put our ungodly, old self back on the throne of our lives again. And we fall into sin.

¹⁰ Renewing our minds is a lifelong process. Rom. 12:2 reminds us, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

¹¹ This creation idea is woven all throughout Ephesians including in Ephesians 1:4 where God, “...chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Ephesians 2:10 tells us believers were, “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

And sometimes we let shame feed us the lie that since we've blown it as a Christian, we've somehow lost our salvation or we have no way to get back on course. God's grace reaches very far. Get back on course today. Step one is always repentance; being honest before God about our sin.

Put off the old you, embrace the new way of thinking, and put on the new me; the one created by God for righteousness and holiness! Hebrews 12:1b-2a brings us this wonderful encouragement: Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

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