

New Life In Christ (Ephesians 4:17-32)

Introduction:

Ephesians 4:14 teaches us a very important lesson. If you are unequipped, if you don't have a good foundation, then you will be easily be tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. That makes sense. You can not defend yourself if you don't have the armour. You can't do something you don't know. That's why God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers to train and equip the church so that they don't get tossed to and fro. (Ephesians 4:12-14). One of the areas in the church that many Christians fail to have a clearer and deeper understanding, is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an essential part of the New Life in Christ. My prayer is that as we think more about this text we may be encouraged and strengthened to live the life that God has called us to.

3 points today:

- 1. The Old Spiritually Dead Life (v17-19)**
- 2. The New Life in Christ (v20-24)**
- 3. New life in Action (v25-32)**

Context:

If you remember from last week, 4:1-16 explains the unity that there is in Christ. Believers are those who have been united in Christ. It is to 1 body, 1 spirit, 1 lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism, 1 God, 1 Father of all. The idea is that the moment someone comes to faith, they have a new community. New relationships between everyone within the community of faith. They are united under the headship of Christ. Therefore, in light of this new relationship, and this new redeemed life, they are to 4:1, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit". This beginning verse in chapter 4 foreshadows what to expect in the rest of our letter. Not to oversimplify it, but you could take the first 3 chapters as the theology of the Redeemed life that Christ has purchased, and you could kind of see the last 3 chapters as the application or the necessary reality and consequence of what Christ does for the redeemed people.

When we come to 4:17-32, we are confronted with 2 contrasting lists. The old and the new life. The life alienated from God versus the Life renewed and given by God.

And what he has to say is a good reminder for us and can be quite challenging. (Paul's first section in verse 17-19 tells us about the)

Old Spiritually Dead Life (v17-19)

Verse 17: Paul now speaks on behalf and on the authority of God and tells them that they "must no longer walk as the gentiles do". This is an obvious consequence of all the truths in the previous verses. If Christians are by nature "dead in their sins", but God has made them alive in Christ by grace through faith. (Chapter 2) And if they are to glorify God by fulfilling their cosmic purpose which the church, the people of God are called to do. (Chapter 3) And if God has designed the church with every single person with different gifts and talents to serve in the church, in order that they build each other up (Ephesians 4), Then it makes sense that they no longer should walk like the gentiles. Their lives can no longer look exactly like the rest of the world. Their lives can't be the same. Their purpose and nature is completely different now. They need to live a life where they "Speak the truth in love" in order to grow in every way possible under the headship of Christ. (Ephesians 4:15-16).

So what Paul does in this section is he explains in detail what it means to be living a life apart from Christ. He gives a very strong and penetrating analysis of the human condition. He has already said a bit of it in Ephesians 2. But he has little more to say about it. If we want to live eternally meaningful lives, if we want our lives to be completely different, if we want deep changes in our relationships and practical affairs of our daily lives, then we need to know the diagnosis of the human condition. We can't change something we don't know about. We need to hear what God has to say about the human condition in 17b- 19. And Paul gives 3 truths about Gentiles. 3 truths about the Old Life.

1. 17b Their minds only achieve futility. Paul emphasizes a very important aspect of a life apart from Christ. Gentiles are unable to live eternally fruitful lives. They are unable to live life which is meaningful. Now that's a very strong position. It is a very politically incorrect statement. But Paul echoes what the book of Ecclesiastes says right? Anything under the sun, the pursuit of riches, honour, glory, wisdom, power etc. is just striving after the wind. It is just meaningless. It is vanity. What is the point if all those things if they will just perish. What is the point if all those things if they do not last. Even doing "good things" is futile if it isn't for the glory of God. Unbelievers are unable to see above the sun. They do not know Christ. They do not see the full picture. This means the way of thinking of believers is very different and should be different to those who can not see anything above the sun. Unlike unbelievers who are their own ultimate authority, who ultimately live life for themselves, believers

are those who know the true ultimate authority, King Jesus who reigns supreme. And so, one aspect of the Old Life is Intellectual Futility.

2. Our second truth comes in verse 18. 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*.” There is a darkness or blindness that stops them from seeing the beauty and glory of the gospel. It is an inability to see the light. Jesus talks about that in John 3:19b-20, when he says “the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” They are so darkened in their understanding that they can not see the light, in fact they are actively opposed to the light. Unless God shines bright in their lives, unless God shines in the heart of gentiles, there is no hope. Only darkness. Paul continues to explain that this darkness also equals to great “ignorance”. Their understanding is so darkened that they are unable to see the full picture. They are so blinded by the truth. This is due to the fact they their heart is “hardened”. And this is not something new. We saw that in Ephesians 2:1. It is the same as being “dead in trespasses and sins”. When we think about something being hardened, we think about being hard as rock. Can you imagine a heart which is rock hard and that it is immobile. It won’t change. It is not alive. A heart that is hardened chooses to reject spiritual truth. It does not want to change. What needs to happen is for God to change the heart of stone to a heart of flesh. A dead heart, a hardened heart is the root of sinful thinking and living. And therefore, that type of life can only mean a life which is “alienated from the life of God”. It is more than just being excluded from the “commonwealth of Israel” in 2:12. It leads to not having a relationship with the living God. It means ultimately facing eternal judgement. It means facing Eternal Death. A Hardness of Heart and darkened understanding is the second truth of the Old Life.
3. The third truth should not come as a surprise. Sinful and darkened thinking and hardened heart can only lead to sinful and darkened living. Verse 19 says ¹⁹“They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity”.

They have become callous or have ceased to feel pain or cease to care about sin. They have been so numbed to sin. That they just give themselves up to all sorts of immorality. In fact, look at how he describes the type of impurity. He doesn’t just say they practice some impurity. He doesn’t say they practice a lot of impurity. No, they

are so “greedy”. When we think of someone who is greedy, we might think of someone who hoards a lot of things. Someone who lusts and desires after more and more. Imagine this picture with me. Imagine someone going to a buffet. All you can eat buffet. With all sorts of different foods. Lots of different entrees. The spring rolls. The chicken nuggets. Sushi. All sorts of Mains. Fried rice. Fried noodles. Chicken, beef, seafood, vegetarian stir fries. Pasta, Pizza, fresh seafood. The Desserts. 20 different flavoured ice cream. All the fruits you can imagine on such a hot day. The salad bars. You might be getting hungry now, but A greedy person would try and take as much as they can. They will dive straight in to all sorts of different foods. They will enjoy themselves. They will drown in the pleasures of the buffet. That’s why the buffet exists. It seduces the greedy. Might sound delicious. But imagine this, a buffet which served all sorts of impurity and immorality. The worse of the worse. Drunkenness, Stealing, murder, pornography, child pornography, rape, paedophilia, orgies etc. The picture Paul gives is a very strong one. Gentiles practice and look to seek every kind of impurity. That’s the condition of man apart from Christ. You don’t need to look far to see the reality of sin and evil in this world. If you were at the Advanced child safe training yesterday you would’ve heard real life examples, even within in the church.

What he is saying in the first 3 verses is that the old self is what we call the doctrine of being **Totally Depraved**. It doesn’t mean that everyone will do the worst of worst. But they are capable of doing it. It does mean that a life apart from Christ is futile regardless of how “good” your life is. It does mean that a life apart from Christ is a life alienated from him and darkened in understanding. It does mean that it is a life which pursues and enjoys all sorts of evil.

And what Paul says is DON’T. NO LONGER WALK LIKE THAT. NO LONGER LIVE LIKE THAT. You must no longer walk as the gentiles do. No longer live like your old self. Sadly, very often we do. Very often we continue to live as if Christ has not worked in our hearts. We live futile lives. We get blinded by the temptations of sin. We get blinded by the buffet of what sin can provide and dive straight in and enjoy it. We very often numb ourselves to the disgustingness of sin. And that’s why we need verse 20 -24. (to remind us of our...)

New life in Christ (v20-24)

Paul says straight up in verse 20.-21 ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—
²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him

The Old Life is not the ways of Christ. There is a strong contrast between the Old Spiritually dead life, and the New spiritually alive life in Christ. The readers are reminded of what they were taught concerning Christ, first in the initial proclamation of the gospel and secondly the continual teaching and instructions. We get this imagery of schooling. Believers are people who have heard the gospel of Christ and were equipped and trained in him. But Learning Christ, is not merely an intellectual exercise. Rather it is a Christ-centred transforming experience in which the Spirit of God works in a believer's heart, the word of God renews the mind and will convict believers of sin so that they can live an eternally purposeful life instead of a futile life. If you are a believer today, then stop living like before. Stop living life like those who do not know the truth in Jesus.

Because you have been taught. You know the truth. You have experienced the living God who reveals the truth who is Christ. Christ has set you free from ignorance and darkness. And what Christ does to saved believers, and what he teaches is in verse 22 "put off your old self". Believers are made new. Take Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me". No longer "live in your former manner of life". No longer pursue the "deceitful desires". Actively put off your old self. Instead verse 23-24 "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness". This echoes the idea in Colossians 2:2-4 "2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Live the redeemed life that God has saved you for. Actively put on the new self. Actively renew your minds through his word by the power of the spirit.

And what Paul alludes to in verse 24 is our original design. There is a connection to being made in the image of God. We were made to reflect God and give all glory to him. But we sinned and fell short of his glory and unable to do what God originally designed us for. But thanks be to God, by his grace and mercy, by the death and resurrection of Christ, we are now able to put on the new self and pursue a life in true righteousness and holiness. You need to conduct your lives in such a manner which reflect the mighty gospel change in your life. And it should be evident. Sanctification is necessary. Radical change is a must! By definition the Christian life can no longer be the same.

When God saved the Israelites from Egypt. The expectation of the Israelites was to no longer look back in their old lives. They were to put away their life of slavery and live

the freed life. They were to look forward to the promised land that God had for them. To whole heartedly and loyally serve their lord and saviour. But we get texts like Numbers 20:5 where the Israelites complain, and they look back. They look back to the days of slavery and say “why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no lace for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink”. They lost sight of the beauty there is in the promised land. They forsook the salvation that God had provided for them. They forgot what God did for them. They despised being freed from slavery. They forgot that God provided bread from heaven and water. They just wanted to go back. And that’s a continual story in the old testament. God saves, and the people of God look back.

God has saved you from your sins by giving you his precious one and only Son Jesus. He suffered and died on the cross to take the punishment for your sins. He purchased for you New life. A new life with new morality and purpose. And so, you shouldn’t be like the Israelites who wanted to go back into slavery. But you should press on, looking forward at the beauty and glory of eternity with Jesus. You should live the New Life in Christ to the fullest.

So that’s why Paul begins verse 25, “therefore”. And he goes on to explain what the New Life looks like in action.

New Life in Action (v25-32)

When we look at verse 25-32, there is a lot of application. There is a lot of don’t do this but do that. And we can look at practical examples, but I think it might be helpful to summarise it like this. Putting the old self and putting on the new self is more than just not doing something. It is more than just actively rejecting. Paul has already spoken about it in Ephesians 4:2-3 and 15-16. We need to actively show love. We need put on love and patience to build up the church.

But I think a key verse in this section is in verse 30. I think if we understand and apply verse 30, we will be getting the overall principle correct. Ephesians 4:30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”.

Chapter 1 has already told us that the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our salvation and a seal that we are Christ’s possession. It is living in believers. The living God is actively working in the lives of those who have repented and believed. He knows first-hand when we don’t do something which pleases him. He knows when we actively reject him. What Paul is asking is, “Are you making the Holy Spirit smile or are you grieving him.”? Are you putting this new life into action and living life pleasing him.?

There are 4 concerns that Paul specifically mentions in this text.

1. V25- New life in action is a life free from lying. Instead live a life of honesty and truthfulness. There should not be lies especially in the church. This should hit home in our culture today. We have a culture which encourages white lies. It is okay to lie to get a job or to get out of something. The media constantly uses deception and manipulates truth to trick people. This culture has slowly crept in our church. It may not be that obvious but there is aspects of the church where dishonesty reigns. Paul makes it clear that you are not to lie especially within the church because we are members of one body, and the moment we lie, we make our ministry dysfunctional. I am sure many of us can recount incidents where because of someone's dishonesty, a ministry becomes ineffective and loses integrity.
2. V 26-27 New life in action is a life free from unholy anger I use unholy anger because there is times where being angry is right. Even within in the text it does say "be angry" but do not sin. It reminds us of Psalm 4:4 where the psalmist says, "Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.". If we are to be imitators of Christ, then we are to hate what God hates. We are to love what he loves. He hates sin. I love children. So, I must hate abortion. It makes me angry when small babies are murdered in the thousands. We have this app which tells me that my wife is 15 weeks and 1 day pregnant. And it tells me my baby is the size of an avocado. He moves. He has a heartbeat. He is alive. And it saddens and angers me there are more like him all around the world, even bigger being murdered for selfish reasons. And so, I think that is an example of where we can be angry. But the danger is, we must be very careful because very often anger can lead to sin. Do not give an opportunity to the devil. We must not let our anger explode. We must deal with our anger for the sake of the gospel, for the integrity of the church and very importantly our own soul.
3. V28- New life in action is a life free from theft. Instead it is a life full of honest work. Now that might sound surprising. But the reality is there are many who many who may struggle. In fact, there are so small "thefts" we may do. Dodging car park tickets to save a few dollars. Manipulating our finances to invade tax. But I think besides a life of integrity, there is a greater principle. It does not mean instead of stealing for selfish gain, work honestly for selfish gain. The greater principle is If you do honest work with your hands, you are to give abundantly to those in need. (v28b) The new life goes above and beyond than just a thief no longer stealing. An honest worker working for himself. But he works, and he gives.

4. V29- New life in action is a life free from filthy speech, and instead filled with Grace-filled words. The ESV says Corrupting words. NIV says unwholesome talk. It can mean, evil, rotten, useless, depraved. The idea is, don't let your speech put people down. Don't let it delight in their suffering. Do not let your words be poisonous. Such talk can't be among us. Instead words spoken should only be constructive and good for building up each other. And I understand it isn't always easy. This is probably one of the harder concerns out of the four. We do have a culture of gossip and looking down at others. And so we have to be careful to use our tongue to bring grace to those who hear.

Now this list is not exhaustive. There are more things which grieve the Holy Spirit. And so the principle behind this is to ask, Am I living grieving the Holy Spirit or is it going to please him. If we want a complete doctrine of the Holy Spirit and if we are to apply our Doctrine of the Spirit. Then this is what it looks like practically in our day to day lives.

Conclusion:

Paul summarises all he has said so far in a very practical way. verse 31-32 says ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Paul is very Christ-centred. Your new life is centred on the cross. "forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you". The reason why we put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice. The reason why we put on love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness. It is because of the new life in Christ. If you are ever struggle, look at the cross. If you are ever tempted by the buffet of sin, look at the cross. Look at the cross where Christ Jesus was nailed for your sins. Look at the cross and be reminded of the new life he purchased for you. And the Holy Spirit will be working in your hearts, reminding you, "don't do that, do this instead". Amen.