

Ephesians Series

13. Put off the Old Self [Sermon Notes] Ephesians Eph 4:16-24

Recap - we are called to live to be worthy of the calling we have received

We are called to be like Christ - to be mature. To build up the body of Christ.

I said this part of Ephesians was practical - but you may think this is abstract. I've talked for the last two weeks about how God wants us to live like His children, to be mature - but haven't really spelt out what that means in reality for each of our lives.

Paul has come to the point where he spells it out to the Ephesians - blow by blow so that we understand exactly what being a Christian means.

Today we are going to see what we should NOT be like and then next week we are going to contrast those things the world thinks acceptable with what we should be like before looking at our relationships with one another.

So is Paul going to give us a set of rules and regulations. You know what I mean: "this is right, or this is wrong". "Do this", "don't do that"

In chapter 2 we saw how the gospel is one of grace. We have not received eternal life by doing good works, but by receiving - "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.."

So what is behind what Paul wrote. I think that verse 23 gives us the key to all this, and the key to how we should then live. I'll read from verse 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; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

We put off the old self and are made new in the attitude of our minds (or the spirit of our minds - means the same thing). It's an attitude thing.

A way the world works is we see doing things as what makes us holy. Or doing things bring us closer to God. Or doing things make us more fit to be in God's presence.

Did you know that all the church attendance in the world is not necessarily going to make you more pleasing and close to God? All the personal Bible studies you do might make you no more holy or bring you closer to God. All the good things you do for the Church may not make you more holy or bring you closer to God.

They might but there again they might not.

Going to Church may bring you closer to God if you come with a heart ready to receive
Bible study may bring you closer to Him if you are prepared to let Him minister to you through it and walk in obedience to Him - an obedience driven by love.
Doing good things may bring you close to God if you do them out of devotion to the Lord and out of love to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's what is at the core of what these verses are trying to tell us.

Paul says:

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, with a continual lust for more.

Don't be like the Gentiles. Who were they? The Ephesians were Gentiles, we are Gentiles. And he's referring to what they were like when they were not Christians.

Don't be like them.. *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.* Their life is futile because of their separation from God. They have no understanding of Him so life is futile - because it has no future. Works may be good but without God they have futility.

But it all sounds rather dark. Isn't Paul talking about the evils of their society? Yes. The Ephesians were pagans. So they followed a futile religion - the Greek god Artemis (Roman, Diana). But let's not get away with the idea that they were drunken revellers who were sexually lax and the rest of it.

Ephesus was a respectable city. People were respectable. It did well out of the temple of Artemis. People were prosperous and law-abiding. Yet Paul describes them in this way - because all the same they were pagans.

The same is true of Swaffham. You will find those in our society who find life futile - the unemployed, the struggling single mothers, the dysfunctional families, the drug addicts - people I shall talk about tonight. But for the most part they are respectable people, living in a prosperous town, behind well-manicured lawns and colourful flower beds. Like the Ephesians they are happy pagans.. Living without God and without hope, separated from the life of God.

And Paul says - don't be like them. Let's read on.

19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Yo! Stop there Mr Preacher - that's a bit strong for Swaffham isn't it. We're not all drug dealers, drunken revellers who go to all-night parties trying to wring out the pleasures of life.

That isn't what is being said of those without Christ here - don't forget, Ephesus was a respectable and prosperous town. What I think I could sum this verse up as is:

When you have only this life, you seek maximum pleasure in it.

And that pleasure need not be shallow party-going, drunkenness or drug-taking. Most people in Swaffham enjoy the pleasures of life, a nice environment, lovely houses, nice furniture.

And do you know what? There's nothing wrong with any of those. Except when the person who has them lives for them. And that was what Paul was referring to. When you have no hope, when your life is not in God, when your life is futile, you seek to please yourselves, please your senses.

You see, what is referred to here is one of ATTITUDE. It isn't a case of saying you mustn't do this thing or that thing. You mustn't possess this or that. Or it's wrong to be rich. Or it's wrong to want to have a nice house.

It's the ATTITUDE that controls your actions.

Don't be like the gentiles because their attitude is one of SELF. That's what we are being asked to avoid. Falling into the Gentile mindset. Falling into the attitudes of the world.

And what is that mindset. It's what people in Britain live in denial about these days. That is what our society is about. Self, acquire. I'm alright Jack! Let the devil take the hindmost!

And what happens when God's people live as the Gentiles do - and too many of them live with that attitude and mindset. Our actions and our desires show that. We run after ourselves and think of God when it conveniences us. And then blame Him when we don't have life as we wanted.

We live as the gentiles do - for themselves.

19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

And Paul says don't be like this, because our lives have a different perspective because we have a heavenly Father and we should be living for Him, having sensitivity to Him, given over to His will, to desire the holy things of God, and have a continual desire to please Him.

What sort of life do we have? One that pleases ourselves or one that pleases God. That's the issue for Paul and as one preacher put it.

How do we become useful in the kingdom of God when we' re too busy reclining in the kingdom of this world?

I don't now how you find this? Many Christians who are decent respectable members of society find this hard, even abusive. To suggest that they are anything other than blessed Christians is an outrage. Because we equate success, wealth with godliness.

But this is not the word of God. This is the challenge - who are we living for? Ourselves -or the One who gave His Son up so that we could have eternal life, forgiveness of sin?

20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him 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.

But we didn't come to know Christ that way. We put off our old life. Our old self is about self.

But Paul says put our new self on to be like God in true righteousness and holiness . What does God desire of use - to be like Him, to live according to the calling we have received, to be imitators of God. High standards - that is our calling.

It is easy to live in denial. Most people go through their own life in denial. They don't want to leave their comfort zone. For non-Christians they don't like to talk about matters of life and death - and suggest we are being offensive to tell them.

But we are scarcely better. We have received Christ. We have received forgiveness, sonship, eternal life. And God says - what about YOUR life - are you living for you or living for me. Get out of your comfort zone.

That threatens Christians. If you were at the House Groups this week you will have studied the story of Abraham. For him, it was a case of leaving his comfort zone in Ur for the wilds of Canaan. Where is God calling you. It may not be very far. But it will be out of your comfort zone.

Don't you just hate messages like this? Most people just blame the preacher, or say he has interpreted scripture wrongly. Another one of those Ministers with his head in the clouds.

Unfortunately this is the word of God. But let's read on...

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.

Frankly, you can't get God's word plainer than that! Attitude! Attitude! Attitude! Changed life, new attitude.

God wants us to change - out of the world's way of thinking into the new self. He wants us to look at our lives, how we think, what we have, what we do and be like Him.

Are you putting off the day? Are you wavering - maybe I'll think about it. Maybe next year. This is the word of God. We need to be right before our Father. We need to be living our lives - or what is left of them for Him.

The death of Eddie has brought back to use this week the transience of life. It's short. What of the rest of our lives - for God, or for ourselves.

But what of our life? My last church had a famous evangelist as its minister - a guy called Gordon Thomas. In the 1950s he was a co-worker with Tom Rees. He had a little phrase I want to leave you with this morning.

**Only one life - it'll soon be past
Only what's done for Jesus will last.**