

Ephesians 4:17-24 “Live the New Life”

Series Intro & CCH Sermon 23rd June 2019

1v3 ▲ I have told some of you the story of lady who was given financial paperwork from her boss. Didn't understand. Put them in desk drawer. Worth Millions. **Walt Disney's secretary.**

- That's the picture I use to sum up Ephesians- this letter from Paul to a church in Ephesus not long after Jesus left planet earth.
- Christians are spiritual millionaires- every spiritual blessing in Christ (1v3). But they don't always realise how spiritually rich they are.
- If you are a Christian you have been chosen for Jesus' team with the most amazing **blessings** of forgiveness, adoption, holiness,
 - and being brought into God's plan to bring all things under J
 - all by grace – a free gift, because of his kindness to us in rescuing us at the cross.
- And the **Church** is God's masterpiece- demonstrating God's amazing wisdom and power to the world
 - By bringing random different individuals who wouldn't normally be together: rich/poor/black/white/young/old
 - Demonstrating God's power and wisdom and plan for the universe to bring everyone and everything under KING JESUS!
- NO wonder Paul prays they see their privileges. See what millionaires!
 - So half way through book- prays: Eph 3:14-21
 - That they know what's in the desk!
- Last summer studied. We also moved into second practical half of book. 4:1 life worthy of the calling.
- Today start new series: carrying on in this second half of the book. And can sum up second half in this phrase; BE WHAT YOU ARE.
- Those who have turned to Jesus for rescue are a new creation, as Linda was reminding us. So over the next few weeks we are going to look at what that means for how we live.
- Paul will cover- family life/ work life/ sex life/ speech/ alcohol / church/ So hold onto your seats- it's going to be an exciting journey.
- And that lifestyle flows out of the privileges that we have.
- So I hope you are excited, as I am. But before we start, let's sing about the cross where those privileges flow from! **Oh to see dawn**

Sermon...

4v24

▲ Have you heard the expression “It's all starts in the mind”

- There's a whole world out there of positive thinking quotes, here are a few...
 - “Everything's in the mind, that's where it all starts, knowing what you want is the first step towards getting it” - Mae West.
 - “It all starts in the mind, first you think it, then you act it, do it long enough then you will become it”
 - And from a bodybuilder: “You can do anything, the problem is you keep telling yourself [you]can't. Being great starts with the mindset of you can!”
- Now I don't go in for all that positive thinking. Thinking positively doesn't mean that you day will go positively, you might be thinking really positively, and then run over the cat on your way out the door.
- But what these people have understood is how closely our thinking is linked to our **actions**. *It does all start in the mind.*
- The whole Cognitive Behavioural Therapy movement, which can be so helpful in mental health shows that when **negative** thoughts dominate we can spiral into negative perspectives and negative actions.
- So is the key simply to think **positive** thoughts?
- Sadly that it's not as simple as that.
- Well Paul agrees with that “it all starts in the mind”, this section is packed with “thinking language” but his solution is not positive thoughts, but thoughts about Christ- **Christian** thoughts.
- As we restart our series in Ephesians looking at how we should live, let's look together at this passage at how central the mind is in our actions, for good and for bad actions.

We're going to look at the **two paragraphs** in two halves: The Old self (v17-19) and the new self (v20-24). It's a contrast.

And Paul says it all starts in the mind.

1) THE OLD SELF (v17-19)

V17. Thinking!

- First Paul is talking about their old lives.
- Most of the church in Ephesus were from a **non-Jewish** background
- 2:11
- And while the Jewish lifestyle was typically moral and upright (though as we know- often still far from God), the Gentile lifestyle on the other hand was typically more outwardly immoral and permissive.
- He uses the phrase “gentile” (meaning non Jew), we might use the phrase “pagan” to generalise about a lifestyle that is marked by immorality and obvious sin.
- And Paul says it must be like that no longer.
- Do you see he uses the most strong language in v17.
- In fact he doesn’t just **tell them**. He **insists on it** in the Lord.
- And so Jesus is speaking to us through Paul today and insisting that must no longer live our old pre-Christian lives.

And it all goes back to our thinking. It all starts in the mind. Look at the three phrases that Paul uses to describe non-Christian thinking, they are quite shocking...

1. **There’s an emptiness about their thinking** (v17). There’s an emptiness or meaninglessness about non-Christian thinking. That’s not to say you can’t benefit from the scientific expertise or strategic thinking of a non-Christian, but it’s not going to help you find real meaning or lasting significance, because there’s no correct thinking about Jesus, the reason for the universe, the one for whom all things exist.

2. **Then there’s a darkness about their thinking** (v18). There’s just an inability to process spiritual truth because of blindness. A mind that doesn’t get the realities of right and wrong, and so has a spiritual and moral blackout. Jesus said we naturally like darkness rather than light. As one writer put it, when people stop believing in Jesus, they don’t believe in nothing, they believe in anything.

3. **There’s an ignorance about their thinking** (v18b). Non Christian thinking lack the most wonderful foundation to the whole of their mindset, that Jesus Christ is Lord. And in fact there’s a bias away from that because v18 of the hardening of their hearts. There’s an obstinate coldness towards God that doesn’t want Jesus to be in charge over them.

And most tragic is that those who reject Jesus are v18 separated from the life of God. Be in no doubt that those who reject Jesus don’t go to heaven.

And gentile attitudes lead to gentile actions. That’s what we see in v19.

Non-Christian hearts have lost sensitivity, ▲like the smoker who simply can’t see the warnings on a packet of cigarettes however shocking they make them. There’s an addiction about sin which you can’t shake off...

And in terms of actions Paul mentions three things:

sensuality- uncontrolled behaviour following pleasure rather than God

impurity- the brakes have come off their morality

greed- what they have is never enough. It’s always “more more more”.

Now you might think that when Paul describes non-Christian thinking and actions like this, everyone who doesn’t follow Jesus must live a terrible and totally immoral lifestyle. Well most non- Christians don’t live terrible lives. It’s not that your non-Christian workmate or neighbour is as bad as they can possibly be. They are mainly law-abiding citizens with an outward morality that is quite impressive, and sadly sometimes puts Christians to shame. But because they don’t know Jesus, this is where their thinking is heading, and this is where their actions are heading.

And so dear friend who’s not a Christian this morning, (it’s great to have you here) do you know that you will never change deeply until your heart is changed by Jesus. I’m sorry if you find this offensive. But it’s the truth. We need to come to Jesus to be changed by him. It’s the same for all of us.

But actually Paul isn’t here pointing the finger at unbelievers. He’s addressing believers, and he says you can’t carry on living like you once did.

So in verse 20 he turns to the right-hand column and to a different kind of thinking... **2) The NEW SELF (v20-24)**

And he reminds them what was different for them.

V20-21

The first sentence is literally, *“But you did not come to learn Christ this way!”*

It’s a funny expression “learn Christ”, you don’t normally learn a person. Maybe that’s why the NIV has translated it like this. But learn and disciple are similar words in the original. Paul is talking about how discipleship is a learning process. We learn how wonderful Jesus is.

I’m so grateful for the people who disciplined me. They helped me learn about Jesus, and the lifestyle that is appropriate to following Jesus as Lord.

It was a teaching process. And this reminds us where we left the series last summer in the previous 2 paragraphs where (v11) the Word gifts are used to pastor and teach and evangelise the congregation in the so that the people are built up and each member of the church speaks the truth in love, and the whole church grows up into maturity and unity.

What was it we were taught? Well we were taught about Jesus- how wonderful he is. How truthful he is. How faithful he is. How kind he is. Who we are in him. Forgiven sinners who live IN CHRIST. And all those things change us, and change our actions.

When a person becomes a Christian a miracle happens. They discover how they have been living in rebellion against God, and have no power to change. They learn about Jesus, and he gives them a new heart. They are born again. As they hear about Jesus the Saviour, they trust him for rescue. As they hear about Jesus the Lord, they want to change their lives to follow him.

And so Christian thinking- *thinking about Jesus* - leads to Christian actions (and we’ll see some of them in v24).

But in verse 22 and 23 Paul encourages a bit of wardrobe switch...

▲ A few years back before I was married I was working in a small and not very well off church in South London. And one of the parishioners knitted me a jumper. Now a lot of love went into this jumper, but I have to say it wasn’t the greatest fashion item.

She used a combination of brown, green and pink wool, and you couldn’t quite tell whether the pattern was inside out or outside in.

I loved that jumper, and to my family’s horror wore it quite a lot. But it soon became rather old and moth eaten. Along with a few of my other jumpers I returned to the wardrobe one day to find the moths had eaten their way through some of my jumpers.

When I started a relationship with Emma, I had a new fashion advisor. And she kitted me out with trendy new clothes, including more recently a rather nice blue hoodie.

Because of the new relationship, there is a new wardrobe. And it was time to put off the old and put on the new.

And that’s what Paul is saying here is what happened when we started a new relationship with Jesus.

V22.

We were taught to live for Jesus. He is the Lord now. We love him, we want to please him. We want to wear clothing that is appropriate to him.

And what’s more- v23, we have been made new in our minds. God has given us a new mindset- a Jesus mindset- we’re living for him now.

So out with the old, and in with the new.

Do you see what Paul is saying?

He’s saying don’t live any more in paragraph 1, with old thinking. It’s not impossible, but it’s not appropriate any more.

Get rid of the old, and live in the new. Paragraph 2.

Let me give you an example. It's not impossible for a Christian to watch pornography, but it's not appropriate. In a different church I worked in we had a guy who had been watching hard core porn since he was 15. And then he came to trust Jesus as a 20 year old, and though things got better, he still struggled. The old thinking and temptations came back.

Wonderfully he got help from the church and he has since been porn free, but it's didn't happen overnight. It was a real struggle, and I'm sure still is.

Paul is saying Live in that old life no longer. Put off the old, put on the new. Sin is not impossible, but it's not appropriate.

You have new thinking- you've learned about Jesus, something which non-Christians don't have. They can't change but you can. It takes time, you need help from other Christians. But take off the old and put on the new. Be who you are!

In verse 24 we have a few examples of the lovely new clothing. True Righteousness and Holiness.

So Christians live **righteous** lives, pleasing God. Doing what is right with God's help. And **Holy** lives. That's beautiful pure lives. Not goodie goodie, I'm holier than thou. But different like Jesus is.

And lives of **TRUE** righteousness and holiness. Speaking what is true, even when it hurts. Not bending the truth to make yourself look better. But saying it honestly to your kids or your boss, your girlfriend.

Let's finish with a what this might look like for a few made up people....

Let me introduce you to Fiona.

She's a young mum. And she has always grown up in a Christian home. So she's never known a time when she didn't follow Jesus. But she has always struggled with thoughts of whether she's valued. Maybe it's due to a string of worthless boyfriends or a very busy dad. And because most of the time she is being thrown up on by small children, she doesn't always feel valued. Old thoughts of worthlessness can creep in. But she has to remind herself of Ephesians when the old thinking creeps back in. The height, and depth and breadth and length of Christ's love. So high he left heaven, so low he sank to the cross for her, so wide that all her sins are paid for.

This is Gary.

He's a teenager, and only very has recently put his trust in Jesus. He heard about Jesus through a youth work in his town. But all his mates aren't Christians. And they expect him still to hang out with him in the summer holidays and get drunk and high. His old thinking tells him that he wants to fit in, to belong, to be valued. But He has learned Christ now, and his new thinking tells him that he belongs to Jesus. That he does belong that he is valued. So he still goes out with his mates, but when they pass around a can or a joint, he doesn't have a big go at them, he just says no thanks, and he knows that that's the help of the Holy Spirit. And they are beginning to notice the different.

This is Beryl.

She came to faith back in the 1750s (!!!) through a crusade in her town.

But she wasn't taught Christ properly. She never realised that she should put off her old self with its gossip and unkindness, and now she's playing catchup. The years that the locusts have eaten the Lord is wonderfully repaying. And she's on fire for the Lord now. Sometimes the old thinking comes back and she wants to hit back against her neighbours with an unkind word. But she's learned a bible song that she keeps singing to herself. "I am a new creation, no more in condemnation, here in the grace of God I stand". And the more she thinks about God's amazing grace to her in Jesus, the more she wants to live a kind life to others. So she's stopped slagging off the neighbours, and now takes them meals when they are feeling sick. It's a beautiful thing.

How do we change?

Not positive thinking but Christian thinking. **Come back to who Jesus is, and who I am in him.** Take off the old put on the new.

And we are going to see this Christian thinking worked out more in the coming weeks in our language, our private lives, our families and our workplaces.

But why don't we finish by reading the passage again all together, as a commitment in the coming weeks to work on our godliness. **Eph 4:17-24.**