

Ephesians 4:17-24
The Big Picture and the New Walk
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How you look at things will determine what you see when you look at things. It is the power of paradigm. It is the influence of your total view of reality on your perceptions. It is the power of the really big picture on your interpretation of the snapshot details of life.

Take, for example, the parable of the good Samaritan. The priest, the levite and the good Samaritan in the parable all saw the same thing objectively. They all saw a man waylaid by robbers lying on the side of the road helpless and dying. The priest and levite saw an inconvenience to be avoided. The Samaritan saw a fellow human being in critical need of help.

What we see is determined by more than the object before us. What we see is also determined by the eyes with which we look upon the object before us. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount,

Matthew 6:22-23

- 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.
- 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

The eye is how you see things. If the eye is bad, if you are looking at things the wrong way, all you will see is darkness. How we look upon things has important consequences. Our personal understanding of life's big picture is rooted either in reality or in fantasy. To the degree that our understanding of life is rooted in reality, we will understand life as life truly is and our decisions will be sound. To the degree that our understanding of life is rooted in fantasy, we will be self-deceived, we will live in a dream world, and our decisions will be unwise.

Our passage today is about the need to look at life and to live life in terms of the proper big picture. We can have the mind of Satan or the mind of Christ. We can look at the world and life through the eyes of Satan or through the eyes of Christ. What we see and the life we live will be radically affected by our choice. If we look at reality through Satan's eyes, then we will be morally blinded, our understanding will be darkened and our thinking will be futile or useless. If we look at the world through Christ's eyes, then our mind will be renewed and we will live as children of light.

Let's now examine our text for today. I don't have to come up with an outline for my sermon because the outline is spelled out for us in the text. The outline is three commands: be renewed, put off the old, put on the new.

We will begin with the command to be renewed. This is found in verse 23 where it says, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind." That is an interesting command. It is a passive

imperative. It is an imperative, so it is telling us something that we are responsible for, something that God will hold us accountable for. Yet it is in the passive voice. It is not something we can actively do, not something we can accomplish in a direct and straightforward sense.

Perhaps this will be clearer if I mention some other passive imperatives such as "be happy" or "be healthy." Happiness and health are not things that you can accomplish directly. You can't set your sights directly on them and make a bee line for them. You have to set your sights on other things which will result in happiness and health and make a bee line for them. Regarding happiness, you find your contentment in God, engage in meaningful pursuits, accept your limitations, and you will find happiness. Regarding health, you get on a healthy diet and a good exercise program and a reasonable schedule with adequate sleep, and your health will improve. But you can't pursue happiness and health directly as immediate goals. You pursue happiness and health indirectly through goals that lead to happiness and health. The same is true of spiritual renewal. You can't pursue it directly. You have to pursue it indirectly. You have to pursue something else which will result in spiritual renewal. And what is that? What should we pursue if we want to be renewed spiritually? The answer is a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. The answer is personal communion with Jesus Christ. The answer is heart dependence upon Jesus Christ.

Now there are things that you can do to strengthen and confirm your faith in Jesus. In a nutshell, they are the Word, sacraments and prayer. Seek out the faithful preaching of God's word.

Attend thereunto with diligence, preparation and prayer. Receive it with faith and love. Lay it up in your hearts. Practice it in your lives. Your faith will be strengthened and confirmed. Read your Bible regularly, consistently, frequently. Then meditate upon what you have read. Then pray about what you have read. Your faith will be strengthened and confirmed.

Partake of the Lord's Supper frequently. Partake as a renewal of your covenant commitment to Christ. Partake and remember Christ's death. Partake and anticipate Christ's return. Your faith will be strengthened and confirmed.

Spend time in prayer. Pray with the people of God in corporate prayer. Pray privately in your prayer closet. Be in communion and conversation with God in your heart at all times. Offer up your desires before God for things agreeable to His will in the name of Christ with confession of your sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies. Your faith will be strengthened and confirmed.

By God's grace, take advantage of the means of grace, and your faith will be strengthened and confirmed. And your faith is the measure of the intensity of your relationship with Jesus Christ. The stronger that relationship, the more you partake of the power of His saving work. The stronger your faith, the more Jesus enables you to die unto sin. The stronger your faith, the more Jesus enables you to live unto righteousness.

As your mind is renewed, you look upon life less and less through the eyes of Satan and you look upon life more and more through the eyes of Jesus. As a result, your life is transformed.

Romans 12:2

- 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

You see, how you look upon life, how you think about life, will determine how you live your life. Renew your mind and your life will be transformed.

Paul describes this transformed life both positively and negatively. Negatively, Paul says to put off the old man. Positively, Paul says to put on the new man. What Paul is here referring to are old and new biases and inclinations and perspectives and tendencies. Perhaps there is a bit of a word play here because the name Adam is also the Hebrew word for man. The old attitudes are associated with the old Adam, which is another way of saying the old man, and the new attitudes are associated with the new Adam or the new man, who is Jesus Christ.

When our forefather Adam fell into sin, we fell with him and sinned in him because he was the covenant head of the human race. As a consequence of Adam's first sin, the rebellious spirit of sin infected Adam's heart. Adam begot his offspring in his own fallen image and after his own fallen likeness. Thus we were all born with sinful biases and inclinations and perspectives and tendencies. These are what Paul refers to as the old man.

The story, however, does not end there, and thankfully so. From eternity past, God chose to deliver His people from their sin and misery through the work of a Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus was the Seed of Woman, born of a virgin without a human father. In some mysterious way, this enabled Him to be a genuine human yet without His being under the judgment that is upon the human race. He did not inherit Adam's corrupt heart. He was born holy, harmless and undefiled. Jesus replaces Adam as the new covenant head for all who believe in Him. As a part of salvation, He gives His people a new heart, a heart with new and righteous biases and inclinations and perspectives and tendencies. These are what Paul refers to as the new man.

Paul tells us that we should put off the old and put on the new like we take off dirty clothes and put on clean clothes. If we are going to play in the mud, we can put on dirty old clothes. If we are going to attend a banquet, we need to put on clean dress clothes. We put on the clothes which are appropriate for what we plan on doing. Paul says to take off the old which was appropriate for sinful living and to put on the new which is appropriate for righteous living.

Let's now look at what Paul says about putting off the old. Paul regards the old as involving both conduct and character, both practice and perspective, both activity and attitude. The old involves an outward walk which all can see and an inward disposition hidden in the depths of heart and mind.

Paul first deals with the outward walk and says that we are no longer to walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk. Paul means that a

person cannot really be a Christian and continue living the old pagan lifestyle. What we are will affect how we live life and what life we choose to live. If we are a thorn tree, we will produce thorns. If we are a grape vine, we will produce grapes. If we are a pagan at heart, we will live a pagan life. If we are a Christian at heart, we will live a Christian life.

Paul then gets down to the inner realities which are behind the pagan lifestyle. Basically the unconverted pagan is living out the lie of Satan. Back in the Garden of Eden, Satan told Adam and Eve that they could do whatever was right in their own eyes. God had said that if Adam and Eve ate the fruit which He had forbidden them to eat, they would surely die. Satan said that God was lying. Satan assured them that they could eat of the forbidden fruit and live. In essence, Satan promised them that they could safely and successfully be their own measure of good and evil, their own ultimate authorities, and that the consequences would be only good.

What Satan told our first parents in the garden was the biggest of all possible lies, the falsest of all possible falsehoods. Paradoxically the bigger the lie, the more deceptive it can be. A small lie only misrepresents a few facts and leaves enough truth intact so that one does have a way to measure the truthfulness of the lie. Satan's lie was so big that it misrepresented all of reality. Satan's big lie was a totally false big picture. Satan's lie distorted not only the facts but also the means of measuring truth. Once someone accepts Satan's false big picture, he can no longer recognize the falseness of Satan's lies or the truthfulness of God's truth.

When people accept Satan's big lie, their thinking becomes futile. They are living in a fantasy world. Their plans and strategies for life are useless. Their hopes and dreams will one day be shattered. They are destined to fail. Their life is a tragedy working its way out. They are traveling on a collision course with catastrophe. What they fail to take into account is that the God whom they rejected as their authority is also their source of life. They cannot survive a moment without Him. The only reason they continue even to exist in their rebellion is because God continues to uphold them. Yet they are happily unaware of the nature and depth of their problem. Their understanding is darkened. They are ignorant. They are living in an unrealistic fantasy world, and they don't know it. They are playing with fire, and they don't know it. They are courting disaster, and they don't know it. They are ignorant that they are ignorant, and that is the deepest ignorance possible. Their heart is hardened or calloused. Our ability to feel pain protects us from things that can harm us. When we touch something hot enough to burn us, we feel pain and quickly withdraw our hand. If we are calloused and feel no pain, we don't withdraw and are unaware that our flesh is being burned. A calloused heart does not feel emotional pain in the presence of sin and thus gives no warning about the harm that sin will do to us. The fallen heart still has some feeling due to the remnant of the image of God in fallen human nature. Yet as the pagan involves himself in sinful living, the conscience that is still there is progressively deadened. The result is that he engages in sinful activity which makes him morally unclean, and he is not aware of his filth and stench. He is like the person who has been around a bad smell so long that he has started both to smell bad and to become inured or insensitive to the smell.

Next Paul talks about putting on the new, but first he mentions an important qualification in verses 20 and 21:

20 But you have not so learned Christ,
21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

Paul tells us to put off the old, but he wants to make clear that this is not optional. Putting off the old is the Christian's responsibility, but it is also the inevitable fruit of a genuine faith relationship with Jesus. If a person professes to be a Christian but is still fully engaged in a worldly lifestyle, he is fooling himself. His assurance of salvation is a false assurance. He hasn't yet learned the real Jesus in the school of faith. If a person refuses to put off the old man and to abandon the sinful pagan lifestyle, then that person has not really heard and learned the truth as Jesus teaches it.

After giving this warning against "easy believism" and false assurance, Paul then discusses putting on the new man. We are to live more and more consistently with the reality of our salvation. When we are saved, God gives us both a new legal record and a new heart. As to the new legal record, our sins are forgiven and we are accepted as perfectly righteous in God's sight. We are forgiven because Jesus bore the punishment for our sins through His suffering, especially His suffering on the cross. We are accepted as righteous in God's sight because Jesus imputed to us the legal record of His own life lived in perfect righteousness. We get a new legal record, and we also get a new

heart. Jesus delivers us from the dominating power of sin. Rebelling against God and doing what is right in our own eyes are no longer our root tendency, our most basic desire. Jesus replaces that with a new aspiration, a new primal desire. We now want to please God. In the language of the new covenant, Jesus writes God's law on our hearts. Living in terms of God's law, living a life which pleases God, becomes our new most basic aspiration in life.

The old life tendency is still there. Sinful desires still exist in our hearts. There is a struggle. Yet the new desire is predominate, and we are to work toward strengthening the new and weakening the old. We are to seek daily to live in terms of the new and not the old. We are to do those things which build up and encourage the new, and we are to avoid doing those things which build up and encourage the old. We are to feed the fire of righteous living and starve the fire of sinful living. We are to seek out circumstances and environments and companionships which facilitate the new, and we are to avoid circumstances and environments and companionships which facilitate the old.

Salvation is like a good application of weed and feed fertilizer on a lawn. How do you know it is there? You can't see it. How do you know it is working? You know it is there and you know it is working because the weeds are getting browner and the grass is getting greener over time.

How do you know that you have learned the real Jesus in the school of faith? How do you know that you are really looking to

Jesus in faith? One evidence is that you are progressively putting off the old and you are progressively putting on the new. You can't see your faith in Christ, you can't see your new legal standing before God, and you can't see your new heart, but you can see the difference that your faith relationship with Jesus is making in the life you are living.