

Renewing the Heart by Renovating Our Behavior

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I'm Not Ok; You're Not Ok

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 4. There will be one more week in the series. At some point that's going to not work anymore. We're going to do one more week. Like the old Bugs Bunny routine, you remember Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck are arguing about who gets to lead the show or whatever and it's, "Next week, you can do it next week." Well, this week is not next week. Next week will be next week anyway. We'll start James 5 next week. That's right, Lord willing. Very good. Amen.

Well, Ephesians 4 is the passage we want to look at this morning and we are continuing to try to unpack the subject we've been looking at. We titled the series of messages in this is actually, I guess part 7, the title of the message series is "I'm Not Ok; You're Not Ok," kind of the biblical response to that very popular book in the sixties and seventies in America, "I'm Ok, You're Ok." Biblically the Scripture is clear, no, we are not okay. We are sinners. We need a Savior. So I'm not okay, you're not okay and then today's title, subtitle is "Renewing Your Heart by Renovating Your Behavior." Renewing your heart by renovating your behavior.

Occasionally I hear many of you talk about watching the show "Fixer Upper." That's the Chip and Joanna or whatever, right, who go into a house and then they try to help people, they sell people a house or buy a house and they fix it up. HGTV has got all kinds of shows like that, you know, where there is renovation happening. Buy an old house, tear things out, and then put new things in, and that this is, I mean it's amazing what can happen through that, isn't it? You watch that and you go, "Wow!" Who would think that instead of buying say a \$200,000 house, you can buy a house for \$80,000, put \$100,000 in and you have better than that \$200,000 house because of the stuff you tore out and the stuff you put in. But it's a lot of hard work. It doesn't come easy. Demolition has to happen. Then after the tearing out and the hard grunt work of pulling things out, then you have to replace the stuff. You've got to build and labor to put things back the way they should be and I think that's an analogy for part of how the Christian life is. The work of sanctification though it is all by grace, it's all through the finished work of Jesus Christ, we are to do it all in faith trusting in him at every moment for the resources that we have in our union with Christ. Though that is true in every area that it's about our union with Christ and trusting Christ, yet growing in holiness is going to require some grunt type work and the Bible tells us that in a number of places that ought to help us be delivered

from some of the things that sometimes are popularized because they are appealing. So the let go, let God mentality. All you've got to do is just let go and let God and he'll take care of everything and you're just kind of like, just open your sails up and let him take you to holiness. It's that easy. It's not that easy, not biblically. It is by faith but faith is sometimes a laborious clinging to God, an acting on what you know to be true even though everything around you testifies that it's not because you know that what is testifying that it's not is lying to you; that the one thing that you can trust is the word of the living God.

So it's grunt work, renovating, and what do we renovate? The Bible calls us to renovate our behavior. In a sense there is some irony here because if we think about what we're talking about in this whole series of messages, I'm not okay, you're not okay, what's the problem? Our hearts. God looks on the heart. Our problem is we tend to look on the outer man like 1 Samuel 16:7 says. Remember what God said to Samuel? "Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart." So God is all about the heart and we have noted this. This is our underlying basically biblical teaching is that we've been saying that the Bible is all about the heart. Remember what the heart is, it's the inner man. It's used synonymously with soul so that we could say that roughly speaking, heart equals soul equals spirit equals the inner man, and that the heart is made up of three constituent parts basically. We look at Scripture and we read through the Bible and we talked about this in previous messages, in fact, I just want to mention the word that is something that they worked really hard, Jess and Bethany worked really hard to get going, and that is our Providence Church app. You know, if they were not here, do you think we would have a Providence Church app? Not a chance. But we have this Providence Church app. If you don't have it, you can get it by going to the Google play store or the Apple Store or whatever, not the Apple Store, you know what I'm talking about on your phone. Go to the Apple Store, "I need an app." But the app, you can download and one of the really neat things about the app is that you can, there is a button on it that you click on and it gives you the messages for the last year and they have it by picture and title, every one of them, so you can look at, "Hey, I'm not okay," part seven, part six, part five. So if you want to go back, if you missed one, it's the best way to do it, to me. If you want to listen to one, use the app. Anyway, so if you've missed these, I would encourage you to go back and listen because we talked about the constitution of the heart, the design of the heart in one of the messages. But just to reiterate for a moment, three constituent parts to the heart the Bible says. Basically the Bible speaks of the heart as where man thinks. The mind is a part, a function of the heart biblically. So the word "heart" has a wide semantic range but basically it's the inner man. So the heart is where thinking happens. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. It's also the place, not just where he thinks but it's where he feels or wants. The heart thinks and the heart wants and the wanting is related to our emotions, our affections, our desires. That's all one part of the heart. Then the third area of the heart biblically is the area of the will where we choose and decide and make commitments. All three of these distinct functions are a function of that greater thing the Bible calls the heart.

So God says, "I'm interested in the heart. I'm interested in changing you from the inside out." And that's what he does when you come to faith and when you are saved. You are

born again, you are united to Christ like we saw testified about earlier. You are joined to Jesus and in being joined to Jesus, you come to have new life inside of you. You have a new heart. The prophecy of Ezekiel has been realized in your life. God has taken out the heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh, or as Ted read earlier from Hebrews 10 quoting Jeremiah's prophecy, "I will write my law upon your hearts." That's what's happened if you're born again. That is what has happened. Yet what we realize is that that new heart is at the center of our being but it is interlarded with a lot of areas of corruption.

I use that word advisedly because I want to give a report on the contest that I started last week. I asked you if you could use that in a sentence and I promised to pay five dollars and quickly I realized I needed to be like the radio station and say the first two callers basically can collect on that. So the results were I had an email waiting for me when I got home after lunch from Brandon G. that used the word "interlarded" in a sentence, and my daughter Maggie after we got home, she had eaten with my son and some other folks, not with us, and so she immediately used the phrase with me, though she as a part of the family, you're not qualified to win. You can't win the contest. I received an email Monday morning from Michael Z. who used the word in a sentence, and then Savannah F. took it to wide publication and used it in an email she sent out to all the folks interested in the Greek class, and I really liked that, a wide dispersion of the word. Then we have to give an honorable mention to Krista R., Chelsea said that you were using the word liberally through the week but I didn't hear of it directly, so honorable mention. Anyway, it's good to see we're making advances in our literary capabilities, isn't it?

No, he has changed our hearts on the inside. This has happened, God has changed us from the very inside of our being but we still have corruption in us and it's hard to discern where those things are, and so the renewing of the heart we started two weeks ago looking at Hebrews 4:11 and 12 and how in verse 12 particularly, it's heart surgery that we need to be renewed in the heart. Then last week, we talked about renewing the heart by transforming the mind. That part of the heart, remember three parts of the heart, the mind, the emotions and the will, Romans 12:2 says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind," that the way to the whole heart is through the mind and that is the predominant focus of Scripture. And we noted how even in God's perfect wisdom, how he has given us his word in such a way that as it comes to our minds, the incredible concentration of word pictures in the Bible, you know, metaphors, similes, figures of speech that capture the affections as we read the word, these things capture, it goes through the mind to the affections and the emotions, and that we can change our emotions through meditating on those word pictures. That was essentially what we said last time and it's interesting, I want to point out that basically the Bible does not address your emotions directly and there is great wisdom in that. I mean, it's like saying, "Stop being angry." You don't make a decision to get angry when you get angry, you don't say, "I'm going to get angry right now." I mean, think about the last time you really got angry. Did you stop and say, "I haven't gotten angry in a long time. I think it's time. I'm going to get angry." No, circumstances happened, it may have been a series of things and then finally something happened and, boy, the anger came out.

That's the way our emotions work and the Bible doesn't really basically address it. I mean, I can think of one example that it says stop doing something, it says, "Don't be anxious," but it doesn't say, "Start feeling peaceful." It says, "Don't be anxious, start praying." So he doesn't take a frontal assault on, "Hey, replace your wrong emotions with good emotions." It really doesn't come at the emotions directly. It comes at the emotions through the mind and I'm going to suggest to you today this is the point of this message, that your emotions will change not only by your thinking which we looked at last week, your emotions will change because of your actions and God has laid this out in his word, particularly in the passage that we're going to look at today but a number of places we could look at. So you could say that the biblical picture is feelings follow actions. That's essentially the theme of today's message. Last week you could have, I didn't give you this last week but it could have been feelings follow thoughts. Both are true. Feelings follow thoughts and feelings follow actions and I think you'll see that as we look at this more closely this morning, that we can renew our hearts, then, by renovating our behavior, by modifying our behavior.

Now it's important that we say something right up front. It's not merely behavior modification that the Bible is after but the Bible is after behavior modification. It's after behavior modification that reaches the heart and flows from the heart, then. It's not after an externalistic sort of behavior modification. I mean, that's what the Pharisees were into. Remember Jesus' metaphors that he used for them. Here are the metaphors, look at this again, "You guys are all about cleaning the outside of the cup," he said, "but the inside of the cup is filthy. Why would you work on just the outside of the cup, why not clean the inside too?" Or he says and he calls them in another place, "You are whitened sepulchers or you are whitewashed tombs," that would be another way to say it, another translation. "You Pharisees are whitewashed tombs. You cover the outside and you make the outside look good but inside you're full of dead men's bones." So the Bible is not about an externalistic religion. No, the Bible is about a transformation of the heart but God knows in the way that he made us, the way that he made us, just the complexity of how he has made us to be like him, that what we do really makes a difference in how we feel and in doing the right thing will over time change you, especially and it will transform you if you're looking to Jesus as you're doing it. If you're trusting in Jesus for the grace as you're doing it. If you're looking to who you are in Christ as you do it, that's where transformation comes, and we're going to see this because of the word picture here in this passage. Paul is going to say that essentially living the Christian life, part of what you've got to do to stop living the old way and live the new way, part of what you've got to do, then, to stop living in the former way of life and sinning and continuing in the habits that you have and transforming that, part of what you have to do is you have to lay aside the old activities and behaviors, lay them aside and you've got to put on new activities and behaviors, and I think that's a very interesting way to put it and it's something that's not just here, it's in other places too.

So let's read the text together and we're going to focus on verses 22 to 24 but I want you to see this in context so we'll start at verse 17 and look at what Paul is writing to believers. He spent the first three chapters telling them the wonder of all that Jesus Christ has done for them. He has unpacked the Gospel, the way of salvation, that we are saved

by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We're not saved because of what we've done, we are saved because of what Jesus has done as we heard testified earlier from our baptismal candidates. We are saved because of what he has done and Paul has unpacked that in the first three chapters and now in chapters 4 through 6, he's basically applying it. He's saying, "Now live this out. Live differently because of who you are in Christ." So verse 17 he says, Ephesians 4:17,

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

He says, "I want you no longer to live like that." Now that implies the possibility that you can as a Christian, you can slip back into living like that and he's trying to say, "This is so foreign to who you are now that you are a new creature in Christ. You're in Christ himself, you're seated with him in the heavenly places, you can't live like this. Inconsistent. Stop it." But even as you read those verses, you see the different parts of the heart. They are darkened in their understanding. Ignorance, you see that the mind, their thoughts are all wrong because of the hardness of their heart. Having become calloused, they have given themselves to sensuality for the practice, the will, the things they are doing, they are practicing these things, every kind of impurity with greediness. You see, the affections are all wrapped up in that. Now what he's basically saying is, "Look, you have been saved out of that. That's what you were before you were saved. When God saved you, he planted new life inside of you and now I want you to live differently."

So let's continue reading in verse 20,

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

So lay aside the old self, put on the new self. Lay aside the old practices, put on the new practices, and he's going to then now say, "Let's look at what this looks like in practice," verses 25 to 32,

25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have

something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that you might now through the power of your word open our hearts, transform us, renew us, make us like Jesus. We pray this in his name. Amen.

What we have here is he's basically saying, "Okay, I want you not to live the way you formerly lived." There is the possibility of living the way you formerly lived and you have ingrained patterns of thinking and wanting and choosing that though you are no longer a slave of, you still feel in your unredeemed parts because, remember, the corruption is still mixed together with our graces; the new man and the old man are there together and we have to no longer live as the old man, we have to live as the new man. And what he's basically saying is to do this, what you have to do is you have to make a determination to change your behavior. You have to start behaving by faith rather than behaving by feeling. You are to walk by faith, not by sight. You are to behave as you truly are, not as you may feel.

This is what he's saying and he uses this image, this word picture of taking off and laying aside and then putting on, and so you really have basically three points here and I'm going to mention these. We'll work through them and then we'll spend some time applying them. So there are three points that we are going to hit pretty quickly and then we're just going to talk about application, okay? The three, in a sense, practical steps that he gives us here in verses 22 to 24 and then shows us what it looks like in verses 25 to 32 of how we renovate our behavior and the first is: put off or lay aside in the NASB, the New American Standard that I'm reading. Verse 22, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self," or you put off the old man or the old self.

He's saying that what we need to do is lay it aside. The verb means "to place away from"; to place something, it's a combination of a preposition and a verb which means "to put or to place," and the preposition means "away from." Then not only that, it's in the middle voice. Verbs have voice. Remember, voice is active or passive normally and middle voice particularly in Greek, they have a lot of words in middle and passive voices as well. Active voice, the subject is doing the action. "I hit the ball," that's an active, and in Greek the word "hit" would have a certain ending. Now in English, hit is hit is hit no matter what voice it is. "I was hit," although you add the word "was" and you get the passive, right, but the word "hit" doesn't change. "I was hit," is passive. You see, the subject is receiving the action of the verb, so passive voice. Middle voice is the subject is receiving

the action and doing the action, that we are somehow doing the action and receiving the benefit of the action. It's like it's reflexive. "I hit myself," it would be something like that.

So it's middle voice. He's saying, "Put away from yourself the old man," and interestingly too, it's in the aorist tense. The aorist tense in Greek is the past tense but it doesn't really so much refer to past time. Here it doesn't at all and in general, tense in Greek is not about time, it's about the kind of action, not the time of the action, a kind of action. Aorist stresses punctiliar action or completed action or decisive action. Present tense stresses ongoing continuous action. So aorist is more like a period, and present is more like a line, okay, going indefinitely, continuing. Well, the first verb and the third verb and the first point and the third point are in the aorist tense. Put off and put on are in the aorist tense. So the first point, put off, to place away from. It's in the aorist tense because it's a definitive act. Place away from one's self the old man. And even the middle voice, it pictures you're taking off something that feels like you're taking off yourself. Place away from yourself your old self. This is what we are called to do.

Then he says what does this really look like, he's talking about specific behaviors. How do I know? Read verses 25 to 32. He expounds and explains what he means. Verse 25, what am I talking about? "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth." So what he's saying is an example, to lay aside the old man, to put off the old man is to lay aside lying or speaking falsehood. It's to stop doing it. It's to put it away from one's self.

Now you think about the ways that we lie, isn't it amazing how easy it is to lie? And some children, they, most every child picks it up naturally. They don't have to be taught. There are no classes in lying and we don't have any of those classes going on in the preschool area out there certainly, just how to lie. They don't need to learn from anybody, it's in the wiring, right? Some people are even better at it, though, than others and can lie in such a way with such a straight face, even little children. You're like, "There is no way what you're saying is true. You're saying something that is so ridiculous. If you could just see this. I know you're lying." And they say, "I didn't do it." Well, then as we get older we get a little more clever about it and we can tell white lies. We can say things like, you know, this used to be something that we might have been tempted to do, "Hey, I tried to call you." Remember in the old days, remember the thing called a busy signal? You young people don't even know what that is. "I tried to call you and couldn't get you." Nowadays if you said that, somebody just looks and they'd look at their call log and say, "No, you didn't try to call me. You must have dialed the wrong number." You can't use that little white lie, can you? Sometimes I was convicted and the Lord showed me, I had said I tried to call you when I just really had thought about calling. I need to call. I tried to call you. No, I really didn't and the Lord convicted me that's lying, and you can get really good at it and get comfortable at it and you get used to doing it, and some people are skilled at it because they've done it so much because what happens, the way God has made us is that we form habits very naturally. He made us this way. Habituation. It's something I'm really thinking more about as I'm trying to understand the way our souls, our hearts work, but it's just a fact. He's made us so that you do something and you do it again and you do it again and it becomes natural, and you do it almost unconsciously.

Now I want you to understand something: the Bible says that you're responsible for whatever you do and there is no way around that and that is right, you are and I am. No matter what it is. You feel like you're an alcoholic and you're struggling with alcoholism, ultimately you're responsible. It feels like a disease. Well, it's not a disease biblically. I know it feels like one and we have to understand that habituation is powerful and we should be gracious and helpful when we're trying to help someone who is struggling with something where they are strongly habituated, some kind of addictive problem. The world calls it an addiction, it's really a sin thing but we have to understand that the way God has made us, that habituation can be very difficult to break. That's why I think he says you are renovating your behavior. It's not let go and let God, it's tear out and place in. This is going to take some blood, sweat and tears, all along the way trusting in the grace of Jesus Christ, looking to him in faith, trusting that you are united to him, that it's his power that's giving you the ability to say no to ungodliness and worldly desires, as Titus 2:11 says. To put to death the old man. To take up your cross daily and follow me. The Christian life was never promised to be something easy. It's much more wonderful than that. It's much harder. Sure, we'd like it to be easy. We would like it to be Eden but this world is not Eden and you don't get Eden until heaven but you have the opportunity for something much more wonderful which is to labor with God in killing sin in you through the cross. Fighting it.

So habituation, listen, it's hard. Even let me explain the process of how we are responsible because it's just right. When someone becomes addicted, let's say, let's use alcohol is a very common one, drugs, you know, sex, sexual sin, these things can all feel very compelling and controlling. The same would be true for same-sex attraction and that sexual sin. It can feel very like bondage and the believer can feel like he's enslaved but ultimately you're not enslaved and you've got to believe that you're not enslaved and you've got to cling to Christ and you've got to fight day by day to walk in victory. But the reason God has made us so that we naturally habituate. I mean, think about your brain habituates to all kinds of things. I mean, it's just silly things like you'll notice people from up north who move down south, it takes a while to get acclimated to just the way you feel, doesn't it? It's like your blood is thicker or something. I don't know what the science of it is but your brain is used to things. If you lived in Minnesota, which I don't know why you would want to, but if you did, God called you there and you've got to go. I'm sorry. No, actually I've heard a lot of good things about that state. But anyway, if you did and you then move south, you feel different for a while. This humidity you're not used to. Then if we went from here to Minnesota, you would feel different. You would be extra cold. You'd be colder than the Minnesotans and sometimes it takes a while for that to wear off. I mean, I have some friends from the north that still are like wearing shorts in times I'm thinking, "How are you doing that?" Apparently they are really strongly habituated and not in a bad way. That's not a sinful way.

But God has made us to habituate and so things like, just think about the way our bodies and our feelings and our actions are connected. Someone describes a lemon to you or lemonade, just hearing me say that, Sour Skittles. Can you almost feel that in your mouth happening? I can even as I say it. It's one of my favorite candies and I can feel my mouth preparing for Sour Skittles. Why is that? Well, apparently that's really good to help you

deal with that by getting prepared. God has wired it so that we get prepared for that and our body handles it better. That's just one example but it's like everything is like that and a favorite example for me is, this became really clear in teaching my kids to drive. I was talking to someone this week about this, how when you're teaching your children to drive, if you stop and think about what we do on a daily basis when you drive, we are taking in an amazing amount of information and making an incredible number of decisions just to drive five miles. I mean, if you could stop, if you had to write a report to graph every single decision that you made and every piece of data that you put in, I think it would be like a 30-page paper almost to describe a five-mile drive around here, especially if you're going to Sugarloaf or something like that. "There was a car here. I had to wait. Another car came by in that lane that changed." All that stuff. So then you take a teenager whose brains are still forming anyway, right? And you're like, "Okay, now learn all that stuff." And you and I because God has made our brains, he has made our brains so that we can do things and learn how to do them and we don't think about them anymore so that we can be about more important things. So when we drive, we don't think about all those things. We just naturally do them. We process data and we're not even thinking about it. We're having a conversation. I mean, some people can do three things at once. I can really only do things I'm strongly habituated to plus one. That's my limit. But driving, I can do other things because I'm habituated to it.

God has made us that way. He's made it so that you can do certain things every day and you do them automatically and you don't have to think about them. You don't have to think about every time you go to make a pot of coffee how do you make coffee. Think about if you had no habituation. That's what it would be like, "What do I do?" But you know without even thinking about it because God made you that way. The wonder of how he has made the complexity of the human heart. Now sin takes all of that beauty and corrupts it and twists it to our destruction. That's what sinful habituation is. So you take that drink and I will allow, I think it's definitely reality in that you are genetically disposed to these kind of things too. Yes, and that doesn't mean that you're not responsible. You know, they are showing, in fact, the genome project is showing what we really knew biblically all along. Your genes are not hardwired. Your genes are malleable. Yes, they impact you but they change. As you do things, you can affect them. So the reality is it's not 100%, I mean it's not just easy to change. No, it's hard. Your genetic wiring does have an impact on you. Yes, we're not saying it doesn't and ultimately we come into the world as descendants of Adam so we're sinners and it's an uphill battle the whole way. Yes, and we're guilty because of him. That's what God says and God is right.

So we need to have compassion with each other because we are struggling with things that we are habituated to that other people aren't habituated to and we can look down on what they are habituated to and think, "Well, why do you struggle with that?" Well, you've got your own issues. But doing something over and over and over again creates patterns in the brain, creates patterns in even the way we feel. I mean, if you stop doing something that you do all the time like you go off of coffee or caffeine, you certainly feel that. Your body is habituated to this certain level of caffeine in your system. Your body is habituated to certain diet and you change it and it takes a while to recalibrate. So when you become a Christian, you go from death to life. Your heart is transformed in the inner

part of your being but you still have these habituated parts, the corruption that's in you, and it's going to take time and God is glorified by calling you by the power of his Spirit, the power of his word with other Christians to labor together to put sin to death and to walk in holiness. That's the Christian life and it's not easy but it's better than that because he puts you in a situation where you need him so much that you pray, you get in his word, you confess your sins to one another and you ask people to pray for you, and little by little we help one another become like Jesus, and even in that we are glorifying him by being like him.

But putting off is putting off specific behaviors. He says stop lying. He says stop stealing. Stop exploding in anger. Put this aside. You start to feel the desire to do that, you have to make a decision to put that away from you. That's the first point. The second point is: be renewed. Verse 23, "and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind." He shows us that it's not just merely external behavior modification. You've got to be renewed in the spirit of your mind. He's saying here you have to be looking to the truth. You've got to be renewed in the truth. You've got to be looking at who you are in Christ. And he writes this, as I said, after the first, I mean this is in context, Paul has laid out in the first three chapters of Ephesians who you are in Christ. I mean, he said some amazing things: that you are accepted in the Beloved; you were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4. Accepted in the Beloved. You have in him the forgiveness of sins, redemption through his blood. You are seated with him in the heavenly places. Spiritually you are seated far above all rule and authority; that you actually spiritually your heart somehow the spiritual part of you is connected to him and you are far above all the forces of this world, but you have to walk in faith and apply that and believe that and walk in his word so that you live that and that's the mystery and that is agonizingly difficult.

You have to be renewed in the spirit of your mind. This is actually in the present tense. Remember, I mentioned the first and the third point are in the aorist tense, punctiliar action. Put off, you make a definitive action to put off, but here "be renewed" is "being renewed." It literally says, "Be being renewed. Continually be being renewed. Start thinking about who you are in Christ and keep thinking of who you are in Christ."

We saw it in Romans 6, the passage we read earlier. In fact, that's one of the other passages I would mention to you that is just like this one. I read Romans 6:1 to 11 to talk about what baptism is, remember, that baptism, they were testifying that Jesus Christ died and was buried and rose again and that they and we who believe have been united to Christ so that we died, we are buried, and have been raised, and we now walk in newness of life and we are no longer slaves to sin because we are united. If we are united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall also be united in the likeness of his resurrection, which means we are going to walk in holiness. We have the power to walk in holiness. That's what the argument is. The next verse after what I quit reading earlier says, "Even so, consider yourselves dead to sin." So when you feel the desire to lie, to steal, to get angry, consider yourselves dead to sin, that's being renewed in the spirit of your mind. Count it so. Believe it so. In fact the word is *logizomai* there in Romans 6:12, I believe. He says, "Consider yourselves dead to sin." *Logizomai* is where we get the word "logic" from. So the idea is count; think; reason; look at everything; figure it out. When you add

up the evidence, what is true? When you add up the evidence and all the input that you have, what is true?

Now this is where faith becomes real. I mentioned it's hard to overcome habituation. Yes, it is, and there are areas where people, we struggle in ways and we all will struggle in ways at times in our life more than others. Things just come and God lets something happen and we are struggling with something that we didn't have to struggle with before. I mean, I mentioned the power of alcohol or drugs, the power of sexual sin, the power of same-sex attraction sexual sin. Let's give an example of that. If a person is having identity issues and this is obviously something very real today. Some of you may be struggling with issues related to your gender identity. The way the climate is, the world pressures around us, don't be conformed to this world, but we see, don't we see how that's happening all around us? Our children are growing up in an environment we didn't grow up in and so there is this pressure on people and so then there are things that happen to people. I mean, one of the ways that habituation happens, it can happen through doing something over and over and over and over again, but it can also happen through one traumatic event. You know, sexual abuse. Something wicked that someone does to an innocent child that the child then can be scarred by. The heart is scarred. God hates the sin and the child is not guilty for the sin that was committed but, listen, and be very clear on that, the child is not guilty for the sins committed and if sexual abuse happens, that's a job for the state to deal with. You call the police because the state has said, "We have an obligation to deal with that," and that's what God has appointed to deal with that. And for the Christian, or for the person who commits the sexual sin, the fact is that you need to let the state deal with you and then but of course we minister to them too. We call you to repent and place your faith in Christ, or if you're a Christian and you've been struggling with this, we call you to repent and follow Jesus and get over by God's grace, fight against this evil desire. The Gospel is the answer for you. The Gospel is also the answer for the person that has been abused. This is the thing that is so amazing about our hearts. I said they are so complex, right, and they really are, but there is this complexity that can be turned and twisted in a way that makes things very difficult, and what happens in the heart of the child who has been abused, yeah, they were innocent originally but it's the nature of our hearts that when we're sinned against, I mean, think about when you're sinned against. When I am sinned against in ways not like that, just in other ways, somebody says something unkind about me and I struggle with my own heart in responding to that in an ungodly way. Now, they did something to me. I didn't start it, maybe the situation hypothetically that I'm talking about, but my response can be sinful and that's what even can happen in the life, and you have to help a young person or an adult who has been abused in some way, raped.

It's such a delicate thing but the answer is the Gospel and really believing the truth and what I want to say is you can be habituated in the sense that you can feel like you have to feel a certain way because something traumatic happens. Like post-traumatic stress is another example of this, right? Something happens in a moment and now that person always feels like they have to feel a certain way in a certain moment, a very similar kind of compulsion to someone who is habituated through repetition and repetition and repetition and repetition. It feels like I can't control it. Well, the answer, though, is the

Gospel. The fact that it feels like that is not ultimately true. What you have to do is place your faith in the truth of God's word. So a person who feels their gender identity, let me give you an example, back to that example. A young lady who feels like a boy or a boy who feels like a girl, there may be all kinds of things that have contributed to that: the world system, lies, things people have said to them, things that have happened to them, and their feelings have become habituated so that they feel like this is reality. This is why they say, "I feel like I am what I'm telling you." Their feelings are real but what you have to help them see is that God says something different than their feelings say and this is, in reality, that's an extreme, more extreme kind of example but it's true of anything. You feel like you have to worry because the bottom line comes down to, are you going to believe what you feel or are you going to believe what God says about you?

When you put this in context, I would encourage you to look at Ephesians 2:1 to 3 later and I'll explain to you real quickly right now. He's telling them before he tells them what God has done in making them alive in Christ, he says, "Listen, you used to live, you were dead in trespasses and sins." This is what we were before we were saved, dead in trespasses and sins, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." You walked, you lived, your day-to-day doing was according to the course of this world. You were walking in the tracks of this world. You were a slave to lusts. You were controlled by the passions of the flesh. You were shaped by the prince of the power of the air. The course of this world that you've been walking in is governed by the prince of the power of the air who is a liar, who is constantly telling you things that are not true, and your flesh has been lying to you. Your wicked flesh and your sinful nature does not want God, it wants everything else than God, and so it has been feeding your feelings. The world system has been feeding your feelings. The devil has been directly lying to you. People have been lying to you. All of that has contributed to the habituated feelings that you have right now and those feelings feel so incredibly real. God says something else. You feel like you were not the sex that you are, God says you are what he made you. "You are fearfully and wonderfully made," and the Christian comes to say, "I am not going to trust what I feel. I am going to trust what God says about me." And that's where victory happens. I'm going to believe that I've been united to Jesus Christ, that I really have been set free from this slavery.

I feel like a slave. I mean, it's amazing how hard it is to fight sin, isn't it? I feel like I can't do this but Jesus says I am free, and so he says even though I feel like I need to view that pornography again, or I need to explode in anger again, the fact is, no, I don't. I can put it aside. I make a decision to put it off. That's not me. It feels like me. It's not me. That's the old man. I'm renewed in the spirit of my mind. I am a new creature in Christ. I start putting my mind on the things above, set my mind on the things above, not the things below. I believe who I am in Jesus. Jesus has set me free and not only that, I don't just stop there, you go the third step, to step three. You don't just say no to ungodliness, you put on righteousness. You don't just put off the old man, and the picture is like think of like you've been working outside all day and you know when you're gardening and you start getting your fingernails dirt all under them, you know when you get to the place where you're so dirty you can't wipe your face anymore and you're, "Oh no," and it's kind of like a little child almost. A little child comes to mom, "I need you to clean me up." It

feels like that. You're so dirty and filthy and you're sweaty and your clothes are grimy and you come into the house, your wife is like, "No, please don't sit down. You probably need to take that shirt off before you go upstairs and go upstairs, please, and put those things directly into the washing machine." Think about how good it is to put that away. Take a shower. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind is taking a shower, and then put on the new man, put on clean clothes.

That's what he's telling us to do, so you put off lying and it feels like you're taking away yourself. This is so natural for me to go ahead and throw out that white lie. It's so natural. No, I recognize it. "No, Lord, I know that I'm new in Christ and so I'm going to speak the truth. You know, I was going to tell you that I tried to call you, but I did not try to call you. I forgot. Would you pray for me? Not only that I'm forgetful but that I have a tendency to lie." You put on the truth and you start doing that and you do that and you do that, and do you know what happens? You start to feel more natural doing the truth. You start realizing, man, the truth does set you free. The same thing is true, listen, when you have been habituated for a longer time, it takes longer to get out, and that's how we have to learn to walk with each other down the long path out of these kind of bondage sin issues. We have to come beside each other and say, "I'm going to walk with you. I love you. You're just like me. Sure, we may struggle with different sins but you're just like me. There are things I struggle with that I don't understand and you're going to see them over time and you help me when you see it, you call it out and you help me walk out of it. Right now I'm going to help you."

God will give us the grace day by day but what we have to do, we put off, we be renewed in the spirit of the mind and we put on. You do the opposite. If you've been lying, you speak truth. If you steal, he doesn't say just give, he says work hard so that you can give. You don't have anything to give if you're stealing. What do you have to give? You'd better go to work but don't just go to work, go to work so that you can give. You're doing the opposite. In fact, this is a really important thing related to sexual sin that I think is important. If you look at Romans 1, sexual sin is not dealt with here, put off and put on, but I think Romans 1:18 to 32 gives a very helpful principle for sexual sin and any lust, including gluttony, okay? It's this, when you read Romans 1:18 to 32, what you see is he says, he recounts, remember the degradation of the sexual sin process. They start having unhealthy desires. God gives them over to unhealthy desires, then over to homosexuality, then over to a depraved mind, right? Where does it all start? That process of descent into immorality and a depraved mind starts when they do not give thanks. "Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks, therefore their foolish heart was darkened," and this cascading effect happens.

So how do you overcome lust? Give thanks. Stop lusting and start thanking. Thank God for where you are in your life and what he has given you. If you're single you don't have the ability to be married right now and you're struggling with sexual lust, you start thanking God for the fact that he has given you the opportunity to learn self-control and you're going to have to find other ways to satisfy your heart but it's in Christ. Ultimately he is the satisfaction of your souls. If you're married, part of that means you start thanking God for your spouse. You start delighting in your spouse. That's exactly what,

look at Proverbs 5:18 and following. It's amazing how good God is and just the way he deals with us the way life really is. He says in Proverbs 5:18, that whole chapter deals with sexual sin. It is a treasure trove if you're struggling with sexual sin. Read it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. But 5:18 he says, "Delight in the wife of your youth." Listen to what he says, "Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love." God is saying, if you really want to really overcome sexual sin, what you must do is delight in your spouse. What does that mean? It's putting off and putting on. Here you are, the world is telling you, you should be looking at other women, the world is telling this is the ideal woman or the ideal man, the world is telling you these things and what you say is the world is telling me that, I feel like the world is right because I grew up with this crazy depraved heart and I've been living in this crazy depraved world, but God says that the right person for me is my wife. Out of all the people in the universe, he picked my wife for me. That means that she's the ideal woman for me. You have to do the same thing. You have to say, "Well, I thought at one point in time," you might be as a man, people say things like, "I used to really like redheads." Well, if you're not married to a redhead, your type is not redheads. Your type is what you're married to right now and you start delighting in blonde hair or brown hair or gray hair, whatever it is. You delight in it because God commands you to delight in it, and you delight in the figure and form that your spouse has. For women, I know it's not always about the physical as much, it's the other stuff, delight in the character of your husband. "Well, I wish I had a man who was like this." Well, God didn't give you one like that. Delight in the one he gave you. God knew better, and it's applying the word and really living it out.

So what do you do? Rather than fantasize about something that you don't have and lust for something you don't have, thank God for what you do have and actively delight in it. What happens is the more you delight in your spouse, the more beautiful they become. You habituate yourself in a whole new way and do you know what you do? You are habituating yourself to truth. It's not a fantasy. No, the fantasy is the world's whole image of what sexuality is. That's a fantasy. That's the lie. God says one woman, one man for life. That is his perfect plan. That is paradise for the man and woman who are called to be married. If he calls you to be single, then paradise for you is singleness.

That is as simple as it is. I don't feel that way. Join the club. None of us feels the way that we ought to feel but we are going to renovate our lives by renovating our behavior. We are going to do what we know to do because we trust what God says more than we trust what we feel. This is the way. This is the way to victory. It's the way to true joy and contentment. It's the way to the glory of God and he is so much more glorified by changing us through things like, think about what an amazing testimony it is when somebody can say, "I have labored and fought and I'm winning victory over these sins," instead of just miraculously, if it was like sometimes the tv preaching you hear, you get saved and you're just magically delivered from everything. That's pretty cool, I guess, but it's not as impressive as needing to walk with God day by day, moment by moment clinging to him, praying to him, letting his word become so precious to you that you can say, "For me, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." I need it as my manna. God is glorified by faith and faith is when people

walk by faith and not by sight and the obvious. It's a much more glorious way. Yes, it's hard but, "Faithful is he who called you. He also will bring it to pass."

Let's pray.

Our Father, how grateful we are for your word, how it really speaks to every area of life. Lord, it's not made so that it's just obvious that anybody that picks it up and doesn't really care and doesn't want to submit to it is going to find it. You said, "You have to seek me. When you seek for wisdom as for treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord." Thank you for the beauty and perfection that you have made known to us in your Scriptures. You understand our hearts. You made us. You know us. You know how complex we are. You know how complex the problems that we have can be and you are not, Lord, you're never overwhelmed. Never overwhelmed. You're never even troubled, never concerned. Your way is being done. Your plan is always happening so when we have problems that overwhelm us, we can come to you, to the Rock that is higher than we and we can find in you strength, and as we learn to trust and to be like a little child just trusting what our Father tells us, our heavenly Father is trustworthy, so much more trustworthy than anything that we can feel or think, anything that we hear, and as we learn to just trust him, he transforms us little by little into the image of his Son and how grateful we are that as we trust you, we have the grace of Jesus Christ, the blood of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the power of the Spirit working in us and we pray these things in his name and for his glory. Amen.