

Living for Christ

Ephesians 4:17-5:20

In the second part of living for Christ Paul gives the church of Ephesus instructions on how to remove any remaining rags of sin that remain after conversion. Ephesians 4:20-24 states "That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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." To remove the rags of unrighteousness Paul says is accomplished: 1) by focusing on the truth found in Jesus 2) by putting off the old self 3) and by having a new attitude in your mind about sin and righteousness. If one does these steps, then 4) one can live a holy life.

Step 1: Focus on the Truth Found in Jesus

A New Heart

Since Jesus Christ bought you at a price you should feel compelled to serve Him – and with your new heart of flesh you have no excuse not to do so! We had an incurable disease called sin. Sin can be defined as doing anything that does not please God. Since all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) we all deserve death (Romans 6:23). No matter how hard humanity tried we could not stop doing the things that pleased us rather than doing the things that pleased God. We were focused on the things of this world rather than living in His kingdom. No matter how hard we tried we always fell short of God's expectations. We needed a spiritual heart transplant! **Moses** - Deuteronomy 30:6 (NIV) - ⁶ The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. Moses understood that the children of Israel could not live holy without their hearts being circumcised by God. **Jeremiah** - Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV) ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jeremiah after pleading with God to not destroy Israel realized the only way that Israel could live a holy life is through a spiritual heart transplant. **Ezekiel** - Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV) ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was external and as such God was distant – they ignored Him! The new covenant was internal – God's spirit was with His people everywhere they went! We needed someone to pay the price of our sins and give us new life! Humanity was promised a heart transplant! In the USA a heart transplant costs approximately 1 million dollars! For Jesus our heart transplant costs Him his very life! John 3:16 states God gave His only Son Jesus to die on the cross so that through His death the wages of our sins might be paid in full. In other words, the condemnation that we deserved death was given to Jesus Christ who had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). In John 14:6 Jesus states He is the only way for our

relationship with God the Father in heaven to be restored. In 1 Corinthians 6:20 we are told we were bought at a price – Jesus’ own very life. This should compel us to serve HIM!

Righteousness is Better than Sacrifice

Just because Jesus paid the price for all our sins does not mean that we have a license to keep on sinning (Romans 6:1). God’s demands to be righteous and holy have never changed! He still is pure light (1 John 1:5) and such still has the expectation of holiness because there cannot be any darkness in Him! To the church of Rome this obviously was a temptation – to rely on grace to justify and perpetuate sin! If one has this kind of cheap grace attitude, then one is simply not saved!

The Spirit inside of us gives us the power to no longer sin! Now more than ever God has the expectation that His children will no longer sin! Following the laws is no longer a burden to a Christian because His Spirit enables us to obey! This does not mean that we will be sinless but does mean we are to strive to be righteous and holy. The provision for repentance (1 John 1:8-9) is meant to restore one’s relationship with God, not perpetuate sinning as if one never receives the heart transplant!

God has given you more and therefore expects more from you! This is why in John 14:12 Jesus says He expects you to do the works He did by 1) putting off the old self, 2) by obtaining a new attitude about sin and righteousness, and 3) by striving to live as righteous and holy.

Step 2: Putting off the old Self

Sanctification can either be positional or practical. Positional sanctification is found in 1 Corinthians 6:11 stating that when we are born again we are sanctified and washed by the Spirit so that we can be justified as God’s children. Practical side of sanctification is that it is a lifetime experience of surrendering our will to God’s will. A lifetime of acknowledging sin and through the power of the Spirit removing that sin. This is what Paul is referring to when he says put off the old self. The old way of life must be discarded completely because it was corrupted by deceitful desires. James 1:15 states the evil desires we have is what entices us to sin. These desires promise to provide pleasure but in the end lead to death ... they deceive us! For Paul these evil desires still exist even after one becomes born again. **In others words we still have rags! Let’s talk about the big ones that Paul identifies.**

Unwholesome Talk

Unwholesome talk can mean a lot of things to different people. In the context of this passage Paul specifically states to avoid coarse language (5:4), false witness (4:25) or slander (4:31).

Coarse language – Exodus 20:7 states we are not to use the Lord’s name in vain. In other words, to speak His name in the context of unholy attitude or speech. Often coarse

language is one in which Jesus Christ or God are thrown into a sentence that has nothing to do with Him, nor glorifies His name! Coarse language is most often used to demean another human being – to put them down in anger or bitterness. Any terms that demean a person should be avoided. James 3:9–10 (NIV) - ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Coarse language is a sin. It is simply wrong to speak the way the world does. Using language that glorifies evil is a sin – after all what does the light have to do with the darkness (5:11)?

False Witness or Slander – Gossip of any kind is a sin. When one has a problem with a person one should go face to face and discuss the issues (Matthew 18). When a person gossips they are not only disobeying Matthew 18 but also sharing data that is usually false. Who knows the thoughts and motives of another person but the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11)? Only God! Being false witness or lying of course is also a sin in God’s sight (Exodus 20:16), it creates dissension amongst people.

Wholesome Talk – Only speak the words that builds the other person up and points them to Christ (4:29). Seek to know what the other person needs (through prayer) and instruct them in righteousness. Paul states unwholesome talk grieves the Holy Spirit who lives inside of you in whom you were sealed (4:30). Since no human being can tame the tongue (James 3:6) we must rely on the Spirit of God to keep our speech holy. **This is one of the hardest rags to be removed!**

Other Major Sins

Sexual Immorality - Ephesians 5:1–2 (NIV) - Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The opposite of self-sacrificial love is self-indulgent sensuality in the form of sex, impurity and greed. From the time we are able to see and understand we have been sold “physical sensuality” as the ultimate key to happiness. Nothing appeals to the senses as much as human contact – especially sex – does. From images on the TV and internet, in the world and sometimes inside the church Satan sells us SEX but getting people to dress in a way that shows off their bodies. While these images might not seem to affect us they certainly have a profound affect on how we think and live! 80 % of teens have lost their virginity by age 18 and the average number of sex partners a person has in their lifetime is 12 for men and 8 for women. The physical union of two bodies or minds is more grievous of a sin to Paul because we have been united with Christ through the Holy Spirit that dwells inside of us. To Paul even a hint of sexual thoughts or actions is a sin!

Greed or Coveting – Colossians 3:5 states greed is a form of idolatry. We as Christians should be thankful for what we have been received from God! God does good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). This does not mean that God fulfills the sensual desire in our hearts. James 4 states the evil desires in our hearts leads to quarrels, fights and even murder. We want what God has not given to us so we covet and try to obtain those things God has already said NO to.

We try to get the most money, fame, power, good looks and so on. We never ask God the true desires of our hearts because then He would question our motives ... greed. For Paul, to desire what other have more physical stuff than a proper relationship with God is the sin of idolatry. To want to be rich physically and not spiritually is that not a sin?

Impurity - As a catch all stance Paul states any impurity – darkness or sin – must be removed from a Christian's life. What does darkness have to do with light? If we love the things of this world, then the love of God is not inside of us (1 John 2:15). Our focus must be set on the things above (Colossians 3:2).

Practical sanctification is a life time process of removing the rags of darkness and then replacing them with the light.

Step 3: A New Attitude about Righteousness and Sin

Paul states in Ephesians 5:11-13 to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness – it is shameful to mention what the disobedient to in secret.

Battleground is in the Mind – Romans 7:25 states it is with the mind that we serve the Lord but not all thoughts are holy. We have more conflict within our own minds than we could ever experience from this world. This is why we have people go to bed tired and wake up tired. This is why we try with all our might to reach out to God only to be frustrated that we rarely hear His voice. How can one hear the voice of God with one foot in Satan's kingdom? 2 Corinthians 10:4 Paul states we have the power to inside of us – the Holy Spirit – to demolish strongholds of sin. When our minds become like prisons of evil, deceitful desires O how we need Jesus!

Fruitless Deeds – We know it is fruitless to chase after the things of this world and yet because of our evil desires we chase and chase but gain nothing. You can degrade as many people as you want to make yourself look good but at the judgment seat of Christ you will be held accountable (2 Corinthians 5:10). You can work towards having the best body in the world but what good is that when the body returns to the earth (Genesis 3:19)? You can get all the money in the world but how much will you take with you when you die (Matthew 6:19)? You can become the most powerful in the world but your plans will become nothing when you die (Psalms 146:3-4). Deeds focused on this earth are fruitless because they only last a short period of time.

Shame – It is not just that worldly deeds are fruitless that should compel us to obey God rather imitate this world, God wants us to hate evil (Psalms 97:10). Sin can be defined as doing anything that goes against God's desire for us. In the olden days most pastors preached hell and brimstone to get people into heaven. This turned many people off because it only portrayed God as a judge. For many He was unmerciful. In reaction to this one sided view we have gone to the opposite end of the spectrum and preach that God is only merciful. But is God not both? Does He not discipline those He loves (Hebrews 12:6) and yet offers mercy to sinners (John 3:16)? Yes, but God prefers obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). God wants us to stop sinning so that we might have a closer relationship with Him. Our attitude must be one in which we acknowledge that it is shameful to even mention much less glorify the sins of our old self!

Winning the Battle of the Mind. If we think about sin and its deceitful desires all the time – covet to get the short term happiness that comes with doing these sins – then we will never win the battle. Romans 12:2 commands us to no longer conform to the pattern of this world. The pattern of this world is to value those things seen more than those things unseen. To selfishly covet the gratification of one's own desires rather than thirsting for God's presence in one's life. To win the battle of the mind one must experience a renewal in one's mind from the world to His kingdom over and over again! You see this world pollutes us with thoughts and images of sin. Left unchallenged sin becomes routine acceptable behavior or habits and part of our character. Paul is inviting us to challenge our sinful habits with the truth of Jesus Christ: God is light and in Him there is no darkness. God loves us and wants a close relationship with us but not at the cost of cheap grace! Blessed are those who thirst for righteousness and value it above all other things in life (Matthew 5:6) because they will be filled with God's presence. In James 4:8 it states if you draw near to God He will draw near to you. Can it that simple? By thinking and thirsting after God He will in turn grant us the ability to get close to Him? YES it is that simple. But to have this thirst present in your life you must genuinely see holiness as the ultimate goal of your life.

In summary Paul is stating that not only do you need a spiritual heart transplant but also a transplant of the mind! We need to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24)! Without this kind of devotion, we will never surrender our freedom to choose (1 Corinthians 10:23) over to God so that He can renew and make us closer to Him.

Step 4: Living a Holy Life

Having put off the old self of sin and shame and having been armed with a renewed mind that thirsts for righteousness, Paul now states we are able to put on the new self – a fragrant offering and sacrifice (5:2) to God. Paul concludes with this passage on Christian Living in following statement: “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is” (5:15-17). For Paul taking every opportunity to remove the sins of the old self is critical to holy living. While confessed sin can be forgiven willfully sinning against God keeps us distant from He who is holy! I want to leave you with this concluding thought from Paul: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (5:8)

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