



Series: Ephesians: Life In Christ

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Text: Ephesians 4:17-32: I Know I've Been Changed

INTRODUCTION

It was the year 1875 when the Fisk Jubilee Singers made famous a spiritual written by formerly enslaved people. That song was called "**The Angels Changed My Name.**"

According to theologians, this spiritual was written to rejoice that although life was hard for the formerly enslaved people, it was worth clinging to God because the heavenly host would know their names. Then, in the early 20th century, after many modifications, this song picked up a new cadence and a new name, which is now called *I Know I've*

Been Changed. Quickly, this song became an anthem to the African-American Church.

As a child, I remember growing up in church singing this song. Each time the song was sung, people would be dancing, shouting, and hollering. The reason why was that people were thankful for this glorious truth – *A glorious Savior has changed them!*

As beautiful as this was, I was always confused about what it meant when it talked about being changed. Have you ever wondered what it means to be changed by God? How do you get rid of your anger issues? How do you stop gossiping? How does one change? That's the question we are going to be exploring today.

In our text for this morning, **Ephesians 4:17-32**, Paul is reminding the church God has changed them, but although they have been changed, God requires some participation on their part. This leads me to my main point of the sermon for today, and what I want you to grasp is **God**

changes us from the inside out, and it takes “work” from you to work it out.

To give us a quick definition of **being changed by God is to reflect Jesus’s righteousness and holiness and to let that change in every area of our lives.**

This reminds me of a story about St. Augustine, a 4th-century African Church Father. **Before he got saved, St. Augustine was a sex addict. A few years into being a Christian, one day, one of his old mistresses came up to him after he became a Christian and tried to make an advance on him, but he did not respond. She was pondering why he did not take my advances. She screams out, “Augustine, it is I.” He responded to her, “I know, but it is not I.” Augustine was changed!**

You see, Augustine understood what Paul is presenting to us today, which is to *take off the old and put on the new person in Christ*. This is the tension we are handling today; after being changed, how do we grow into the people God created us to be? How do you scream to the world,

“I know, but it is not I.” That’s what we will explore today

To give a quick road map for today, we will explore who we were *before the change* and *how we change*, and then towards the end, we will see some *practice examples* from the scriptures and how that plays itself out. Verse 17

The Old Life: Before being changed (Ephesians 4:17-19)

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Paul, whose audience in this text is mostly Gentile audience. To be clear, he’s not attacking their race, but he’s attacking the old patterns of thinking and behaviors. *So what are those things?*

He says they are “futile in their thinking” and “darkened in their mind. To live futile is to live a pointless life, and to have a darkened mind is to have a lack of clarity.

Then, according to verse 18, that thinking naturally leads to an “ignorance” of God because they do not know God. **When someone does not know God and does not care about the things of God,** which Paul calls a lack of “sensitivity,” which leads to a hardened heart, the result is they “given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

What Paul is pointing out is that: **The old life without Christ lacks purpose, spiritual discernment, self-control, and the ability to repent.**

So, how does one change?

He reminds them of their former life, but he exhorts them to remember what change looks like. Verse 20, “That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to

your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Look at verse 20 again and circle the word “learned.” Most often, you use the word “learn.” You are learning an object like a *book or a lecture*, but he tells them to learn a person – Jesus. This brings me to my first point: **If God does change us from the inside out, the first work we have to do is to learn the person and work of Jesus.**

To learn Christ is more than learning abstract principles; it is learning him as a person and seeing what he did. As a person, he is to be loved and cherished because he’s beautiful.

As the psalmist says in Psalm 27:4, “I have asked one from the Lord; it what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking him in the temple. Let's see if I can make this make sense.

Those who know me know I like to cook, and my cooking is usually layered, and it is a 2-3 day process. My wife always jokes in our family that if we need dinner, she's the person. But if you want a meal, then I am your guy. But as always, after I am done cooking, the pots and pans that I cook with are impossible to clean at the moment. So what we do is we have this spray that is a mixture of soak and water, and we let that sit overnight. Then, when we come back in the morning, that dish that was once hard to clean goes a whole lot easier. Why? Because the dish was soaked in the solution.

With the help of that solution, those dishes become fully clean. That's what "learning Christ" looks like. It requires you to sit and soak before our savior. Religion says, "Scrape off the dirt." It tells us to apply elbow grease to fix a problem. The Gospel says, "Soak." Just let that solution sit for a while.

This is how we allow change to happen to us! We soak ourselves in the word of God, and then we allow the Spirit of God to transform us. Maybe another way to say it: **Our change takes place in**

our lives when we see the glory of Christ and seek to be like Christ.

You see, Jesus came from a glorious, perfect life. He laid it aside and took on a weak and vulnerable human nature. He lost all beauty and glory and took on weakness so that we can shed our weakness and take on his beauty and glory.

So the work we do in our change isn't to white-knuckle our faith; it's to gaze and soak yourself in the glories of the Gospel. That's how it happens. **God changes us from the inside out, but it takes work from us to learn the person and work of Jesus.**

But there is another important thing we must do: not only should we learn Christ, but **We have to put in work to work out our new identity.** Let's look back at verses 22-24

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on

the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

So Paul tells them to “take off the old self, to be made new, and put on the new.” Both the activity of taking off the old self and being made new are God’s activities. Our movement is put on the new self because we have already been made new.

But to **“be made new”** is not a one-time thing. **It is an ongoing process.** The phrase “to be made new” is passive, which emphasizes that God is at work in us, and it is our responsibility to respond.

Let me make this plain: Most of us in this room have moved into a new house that someone else has lived in. Even though you own this house, the old owners who were there before might have been dirty, so there are stains everywhere, holes in the wall, and dirty carpets.

You see, the house might represent who they are, but now, since you are the owner of the house, you want it cleaned because you are a clean person. You are concerned about dirt, the walls, the floors, the yard. Because now you are there, this house

takes on a whole different appearance. So you cut the grass, paint the walls, clean the house. Why? Because a new person has moved into an old house.

Well, before you met Christ, there was an old person living in that house called your body. But now, Jesus has moved in; it’s the same body, but it has a new resident. This resident is holy, clean, pure, and righteous. So even though he’s living in that old house, he can make it look good.

Even though he’s living in that old house, we can clean it up.

Even though he’s living that old, he can paint it up.

Even though he’s living in that old house, he can drape it up!

He can fix those walls, that spotty yard, and straighten out what’s wrong in your life. Why? Not **because your body has changed but because somebody new has moved in.**

Family, I am here today to tell you that Christ has moved into your house. Our job is to join him on our restoration project. We have to stop keeping him from painting and fixing up that old place because he meant to dwell there. **We are “To be made new” – that’s our responsibility, but even in that, God is doing most of the work.**

18:00-But if this is true, is it our job to walk in that newness? What does that look like practically? Well, Paul gets specific in verses 25-32. But before we get there, I want to address why we struggle with this change. We rest in the fact that the old man is gone, and we have a new resident, but we struggle with putting on Christ because we put on *legalism, moralism, and mysticism*. Let’s look at them:

Legalism: *Legalism is all about duty.* At the heart of it is attempting to earn God’s favor through our activity. Legalists are very aware of their shortcomings. So, *instead of learning Christ and putting on the new self, they put on rules.* So, *instead of meeting with God out of joy, you do it out of duty and when you are inconsistent in your time with him.*

The legalists *put on shame and guilt instead of putting on the new self and reminding yourselves that you are a new creation and don’t need to prove yourselves to the Lord.* **He loved you despite your sin.** What then happens is *legalism leaves you with a joyless faith because you are doing all the right things with the wrong motives.* And in the end, **you won’t experience the change you desire.**

Moralism: Maybe you don’t struggle with legalism, but you may with moralism. With morality, you are **applauded for your moral standards.** Unlike the legalists, the moralists make their own rules and aren’t convinced of their pride. The moralists typically have an “I am better than you attitude.” They define Christianity by their terms, and they are the ones saying I do not need Christian community because I have Christian friends.

The moralist is a person who *avoids gossip, anger, and sexual sin, but none is from a deep love from being loved by God.* **It is for applause.** *And when applause is the motivation, you will never experience the lasting change you desire.* You see,

morality all by itself is beautiful. It is like a snowflake, intrinsic, beautiful but freezing. You see, the Gospel warms your heart, and because of its beauty, you are changed.

Mysticism: Lastly, this is when someone is a consumer of the Christian experience (camps, prayer nights, and powerful church services). Despite the excitement of powerful moments, your faith depends on these moments. During the space between these moments, you struggle to connect with God, and thus, you struggle to change.

Don't get me wrong, we need these moments, but **how change happens is like coffee**. It is a slow drip of listening to the Holy Spirit and reading the Word of God to change us. The danger of mysticism is that it can become more a pursuit of experience than a pursuit of Christ. Change happens when you allow the spirit of God to illuminate the story of God to make the beauty of God come alive in your heart. - Shelton

13:00 - So we know what change does not look like, so what does it look like? We know that God

changes from the inside out, the work it takes is to learn Christ and walk in our new identity. How does it play itself out practically? The apostles help here in verses 25- 32 by putting some handles on some specific areas of our life that need transformation.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Our new identity changes how we speak to others. In our new identity in Christ, the Gospel tells us that we belong to God and one another. This means that a simple lie does not just harm you, but it harms others. Truthful speaking keeps unity and brings glory to God.

I believe that many of us struggle with truth because we are not resting in truth. We lie because we believe the "lie" that we have to *prove ourselves or defend ourselves*.

If we believe that our new self is secure in Christ's love, then we can be truthful even when it is hard. You can be transparent about sin and brokenness

because you know that the Spirit of God is transforming you. You are not your sin and will never be again!

26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Our new identity changes our emotions. If you notice here, the scriptures did not tell us not to be angry. That is moralism. But instead, it is said to be anger and not sin. One thing we need to know is that anger is a trait of God. If God did not have anger, there would be no justification for our sin. But the difference between his anger and ours is he’s angry about the right things, and most often, we are angry about the wrong things. So, the problem with our anger isn’t anger within itself. It is misdirected anger outside of our new identity.

So now, when someone offends you, instead of going to the old self who gets mad and retaliates, the new self forgives and seeks restoration. Why? Because God has forgiven us, he **absorbed his anger towards sin and gave us grace**. And if we don’t forgive in our anger, we will be consumed by

verse 27. Then that anger turns into resentment, and that resentment into hate. Family, you have been changed. As a changed person, you can repent of rage and let God be the judge.

28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Our new identity changes the way we work.

Most of us here view work as a necessary evil. We *work to pay our bills and for us to get to do the things that we do*. But can I let you in a little secret? **The Lord ordained work before sin came into the world**. So what this means is that we will always work in this life and the life to come. But the difference for the believer is that we no longer work for temporal things, but we work from our identity. Which says you are an **ambassador for the kingdom**.

This means the **gospel changes how you work**. You no longer steal from your employer by doing bad work, coming in late, and bending corners.

But you do God's work because you are an ambassador of God's kingdom.

Your work matters to God. You were not just created to evangelize your office; don't get me wrong, you should share Jesus, but you also were created to do good work to the glory of God. Not only that, your work, according to verse 28, is **meant to be for the greater good and the flourishing of all humanity.**

Q: Have you considered the question, *how does my work bring about greater flourishing for the good of others? How does it impact the poor and needy?* But we got to keep moving to the next point.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption

Our new identity changes the way we speak about others. If I could say an area of refinement

for us for the church is this area. Again, we have to remind ourselves that this passage flows from verses 1-16, which promotes the unity of the church, and one of **the greatest threats to the church is how we speak about others in the church.**

This is different from the first point. *The first point was about truthfulness, and this point is about gracefulness.* Since we are made new, our words are **meant to build up the body, not tear it down.** We are made after our Father, who spoke life in things. When the gospel changes us, it changes how we speak about others.

So, you need to ask yourself: *Are my words being used to impart grace to those who hear, or do they tear others down?* But we have to keep moving forward, last point.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Our new identity changes the way we treat another. Here, as the Gospel changes, it gives us compassion over bitterness. Our new identity changes the way we treat each other with the same love and compassion that Christ demonstrated towards us.

So, do you see what is happening here? Paul is showing at the core the very essence of what we are talking about all along: **God changes us from the inside out, and it takes “work” from you to work it out.** That work is not out of a response to guilt and shame but a response to grace.

Conclusion

As we close, I want to speak to two groups: those who *don't know Jesus and those who do*. First, I want to acknowledge those in the room who don't know Jesus. Maybe verses 17-19 describe your life – aimless and purposeless. You feel that you have done all the right things, but you still feel you haven't done enough. That's intentional because God designed you for so much more.

Here me out, you don't need good to be a good person. But do need him to be transformed. That

is what Paul is getting at in this whole passage. **Jesus did not come to make good people better; he came to make dead people alive.** *Would you consider Christ today?*

For the believer, let me encourage you not to fall into condemnation. **Jesus loves you; he died for you, but to live the life he desires you to live,** you have to repent and pray that the Spirit will continue to change.