

## PATTI

We're exploring the epistle to the Ephesians, and last week we left off on verse 24 where Paul talks about putting on the new self.

In today's passage, we have a number of subjects, one after the other. Honestly, it's a lot to take in. Paul is outlining for us THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE, so we can see how distinctively the children of God are supposed to live.

It's pretty clear that children learn almost everything by imitation. Babies mirror their parents' facial expressions and eventually repeat the sounds that adults make, getting better and better at it until the sounds become words.

Young children copy their parents' speech patterns, even when their parents wish they wouldn't. As they grow, they imitate the adults around them in more complex ways, often picking up some combination of their parents' habits, values, communication styles, and behaviors.

The imitation sometimes grows even stronger during adulthood. Most of us have said to ourselves at one point or another that, "I sound just like my mother!"

This letter to the Ephesians reminds us that we are children, not only of our parents, but of God. And just as children imitate their parents, sometimes intentionally and sometimes completely without noticing it, when we are in relationship with God, we begin to mirror God.

As we grow and mature in our faith, we increasingly embody the values and practices of God, so the person we see in the mirror *shows God* to those we meet.

The passage we read today, is all about helping us to understand what those values and practices are, so that we can

recognize them in ourselves as signs of our growth,  
and gain a clear picture of exactly what it is that we're supposed to be imitating.

Every verse here represents a major life principle that could  
be a sermon all by itself. So how do we really tackle all this?

I think we have to step back for a moment and ask,  
"What is unique about the Christian approach to morality?"

**JEFF**

Paul was talking to pagans here.  
And almost any ethical system in the world, including pagan ones  
will tell you not to lie,  
to control your anger.

They all tell you to guard your tongue and  
only say things that build people up.  
Almost every ethical system in the world  
will tell you that stealing is bad and  
that generosity is good.  
They all value hard work.

So isn't it true, then what a lot of people say?  
That all religions are alike?  
That they basically say the same thing?

Well no they don't, and it's easy in a passage like this  
to miss the forest for the trees.

Remember the context, the theme of chapter 4.  
Paul reminds us that as members of the church,  
everything about us must be different.

You're not just joining a club the way you join the Rotary club or a social club or something like that.

When you become part of the church,  
you are actually joined to Christ himself.  
You partake of the divine nature.  
The Holy Spirit comes into your life.

So after Paul finishes talking about the doctrine of the church and what it means to be part of the church, he says in verse 17, "**... you must no longer live as the Gentiles do ...**"

What he means is, "Because you have changed, because you're now united to Christ, that must affect every part of your life. It has to make a difference.

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Then he makes this radical statement that we read last week where He says, "**... put off your old self ... be made new in the attitude of your minds; and ... put on the new self**"

The only way to describe this is that it's a change of personality. People who don't understand Christianity may watch a friend or coworker undergo a conversion and get somewhat scared, because there is no way you can have a personality change without some kind of disorganization happening. There is a disorganization and a reorganization. Let's face it.

When you look at your house and say, "I just hate everything in here. I want the sofa over there. I want this chair over there. I want new curtains.

I can make this place a lot nicer,”

While that’s all in process, in the meantime, It looks terrible, right?

Somebody walks in and says, “What happened?

Oh goodness, you were burglarized.”

You say, “No, I’m changing the look. I’m putting it through a transformation.”

Well in the process there is disorganization.

If something like that doesn’t actually happen in your life, if there really isn’t any disorganization that at least makes some people begin to wonder about you, then maybe there’s not much change going on after all.

What does it mean to put off the old self?

Getting rid of the entire old way of doing things.

To put off the old self meant you live an examined life.

It means in every part of your life you look at, you say,

“Is this what Jesus wants?”

Christians can never say, “I live my life this way because that’s how people in my family, my ethnicity do things.”

Believers can never say, “I live like this because these are the values of my friends, my classmates, or my neighborhood.”

When you go to school or become part of the workforce, you become part of a new culture. It’s about not just about education or vocation, it’s also about socialization

**JEFF**

Yes, you’re constantly getting involved with groups where customs happen, where hair is cut in a certain way, money is spent in a certain way, and relationships go in a certain way. You tend to adopt it.

And what Paul is saying is that a Christian can never do so uncritically. A Christian asks, "Is this what God wants?"

Christians are radical because we have a standard that can stand over everything else.

No matter what political party you belong to,  
no matter what ideology is being taught,  
no matter what the trendy views are of  
the particular group you hang out with,  
you have a standard called the Bible  
by which you judge everything.

You examine every part of your life in order to align it with God's desires. To put off the old self means you re-orient your life. Everything you do you do now for a different purpose.

If you were a fisherman before you were a Christian, you'll still be a fisherman, but you'll fish differently, enjoying the creation and praising God for the beauty of what you see when you're out there knee-deep in the water in the beautiful morning and you see the sun coming up.

Once you're a Christian you fish differently, with a different mentality. Your motives are different. Your obedience to the game warden's laws is different. There are all sorts of ways in which being a Christian fisherman is different. To put of the old self means every area of your life is examined, and re-oriented.

**PATTI**

Then Paul says, "... be made new in the attitude of your minds;

This is a passive thing. You experience it. It's something God does.  
 You don't make yourself new.  
 You just put on the new self that is yours as a gift from Jesus,  
 over and over and over again.

When other kinds of morality say to you, "Don't lie." And you dare to ask  
 "Why?",  
 the answer will be "Because we said so. Because it's wrong. Because being  
 deceptive isn't kind."

Christianity says, **"You don't lie now because you know who you are."**  
 Christianity says, "Don't lie because you are not the same person you were.  
 You have a new identity. You are a child of God who is now your Father.  
 Because he is your Father and you know who he is and what he has done for you,  
 why would you lie to him? It disrupts the relationship.  
 He has been so truthful with you."

You're putting on the new self while God is busy  
 renewing the attitude of your mind.

If you're studying for a career, the reason you might do that before you became a  
 Christian might be because you want to become successful and make a lot of  
 money.

Or you want to be a professional and feel good about yourself.

But as a Christian you don't need to derive your identity from the usual measures  
 of success. You take your identity from who you are in Christ. You're already  
 accepted. The verdict is in. He loves you. He knows you. He honors you.

Now why do I want to have that career? Because it's a job that needs to be done  
 in your Father's world. Because God has gifted you for it, and you think you can  
 do it well. You have a passion for excellence, but not a pressure. It's not a fear that,  
 "If I don't do well at this, what good am I?" That's when you'll be tempted to  
 cheat on the test!

Every pagan ethic says, "Don't cheat." But only Christian faith tells you the real reason you don't have to.

Because you've put on the new self, because God is renewing your attitude concerning who you are moral demands will simply crush you.

The more you preach to yourself, "I am accepted," and as the Holy Spirit seals that truth to your heart, your anxiety decreases. defensiveness decreases Your courage and your ability to take criticism increase.

## **JEFF**

Do you see how important this is?

You're going to struggle with anger (a lot).

Why do you get angry?

There are as many different answers to that question as there are people in your life.

Let's take a scenario that seems to happen often.

A husband is extremely worried and nervous about money.

But his wife, not so much. They both work and they're both helping to raise their kids, but the man is far more worried about money than the wife, who's far more worried about the kids.

So when the finances are bad, the husband is on edge.

He blows. He is very touchy and irritable. And the wife is always saying, "Come on, settle down." If they're Christians the wife may even feel very superior saying, "We just have to trust God."

But what happens is if there is a problem with the children?

If one of the kids are acting up, getting bad grades or taking drugs, or whatever?

Now the wife is blowing up. She's so touchy and upset.

And now the husband feels superior, if he's a Christian. He's saying, "Honey, we just have to trust God with this."

What's really going on here?

Her self-image is much more tied up in how her kids turn out, and his self-image is much more tied up in whether or not he can provide financially for the family.

But there's a sense in which neither of them have put on the new self or had their mind renewed about this particular area. I'm not trying to stereotype people. But you'd be amazed how often this kind of thing happens.

Christian morality is unique in its approach to the truth. For believers, truth is not merely objective. It is a living thing.

"If you can attend worship and it doesn't make you feel uncomfortable or confront you with your sin or move you to praise, then it hasn't yet begun to change you.

## **PATTI**

The Christian faith always results in a visibly distinctive lifestyle. Here in chapter 4 Paul talks about communication, control of the emotions; reconciliation and forgiveness, sexuality, materialism, use of possessions, about humor; and the use of time.

Paul addresses at least that many ethical issues in chapter 5, and these are not exhaustive – they're just examples off the top of his head as he writes to his friends.

This is because there is not a single area of your life that Jesus doesn't have something to say about.



The other thing that's amazing is that living a distinctively Christian life doesn't depend on natural ability.

Sociologists and anthropologists claim that it's the middle and upper classes of any culture that are always the most moral and religious.

If you go to Greece or Asia or really any culture, you will find that the smarter, more cultured, more powerful people are the ones who are always talking about morality.

It seems to be almost exclusive to the upper crust.

And here's why:

Outside Christianity, every religion or philosophy says, "You have to live like this... so summon your strength and give it your best shot."

But what if you tried it and you failed?

What if you summoned up everything you have and you haven't been able to live a life the moral people of your society claim you should live? What is there to left to say

In most cultures you don't say anything.

You just sort of inch away from people who failed morally.

This is why morality and religion have always appealed to people who have pretty well-adjusted lives, plenty of resources, and the discipline to more or less pull their lives together.

Other religions and ethical systems have nothing to say to people who are failures.

But Christianity says, "You are the kinds of people God prefers."

**JEFF**

In Matthew 11 when John the Baptist asks Jesus, from prison...

*“How do we know you’re the one to come?”*

Jesus replies,

*“How can I prove I’m the Messiah?*

*Look at the people around me.*

*The blind see.*

*The lepers are cleansed.*

*The cripples walk.*

*And the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

*You can tell I’m the Messiah because I love the hard cases,  
and I work in their lives. They’re my people.*

*I love them because they’re the ones who  
realize the truth that without me you can do nothing.”*

Christianity is so different because it’s not based  
at all on your own natural ability.

None of us have not loved the Lord our God  
with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What is Jesus always saying to the Pharisees?

*“The prostitutes and the tax collectors are getting  
into the kingdom of God before you,”*

because at least they know that they have failed.

All your moral effort will actually get you further from God  
when it becomes a monument to your own ability  
rather than a response to His grace.

So Christianity is for failures.

And righteousness is not simply a matter of external behavior.  
It’s the transformation of your personality and your identity

Apart from this moral effort is cold and artificial...  
 a matter of going through the motions  
 instead of responding in gratitude to a loving God.

## **PATTI**

One Bible commentator notes that after the civil war,  
 former slaves were freed legally, but they needed to  
 learn to **act** like free people.

And the same is true for Christians.

We are no longer slaves to sin.

The old habits and attitudes that once mastered us will say,  
 “**I own you,**” but you need to remind those masters that  
 you belong to Jesus now. Because he paid the price for your freedom.

Finally, the motives for Christian moral behavior come from  
 humble gratitude, not pride.

Maybe you noticed that right in the middle of all of these rules about lying  
 and anger and stealing and hard work and generosity...  
 in the midst of a list that could be cut and pasted from  
 any other morality system in the world, is this

**v. 30 - “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for  
 the day of redemption.”**

You grieve over somebody only if you love them.

You only grieve over something that’s dear to you.

And when you sin, when you rebel, it grieves the heart of God.

When it sinks in, that truth will change you.

It will turn you into a person who is not just a Christian,  
 but who **lives** like a Christian.

When you sin God doesn't say, "You insubordinate punk."  
We have to say this carefully, because God is all-powerful,  
but emotions are bound up with you.

Now why should you not lie? Because it grieves  
the One who hung on a cross for you.

When you let that work on you,  
you will find yourself much more able to tell the truth,  
much more able to deal with your anger than anybody else  
who adheres to the same basic ethical list apart from Christ.

Don't grieve your friend. He loves you. That's the dynamic.  
Put off the old self. Be made new. Put on the new self.

PRAYER:

"Heavenly Father, let us be so aware of your love for us and your desire for us  
that we want to please you. By your Holy Spirit turn our duty into delight. Turn  
these teachings that used to burden us into opportunities to serve you.  
Help us to put on the new self, and continual renew our minds  
by your Holy Spirit. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.